

The Battle Within

Romans 7:21-25

C.S. Lewis once said, “No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good.”

Where have we been so far in this chapter? First, Paul has shown us we must die to the Law as the means to our justification and our sanctification. Instead, by faith we are joined to Christ so that we might bear fruit for God in the newness of the Spirit (7:1-6). We cannot trust in the law *and* in Christ for our sanctification.

Second, Paul explained that the problem was not with the law but with us. “**The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good**” (7:12). Through the law, sin becomes “**exceedingly sinful**” (7:13).

Third, starting in verse 14 Paul details the inward struggle with sin in the believer. Two things happen simultaneously in the Christian. He joyfully agrees with the law of God in his inner man (7:22). And at the same time, he practices what he does not want to do even while he desires to do what is right before God (7:15-16). He tells us this three times with slightly different emphasis in each and 21-25. Last time we studied the first two cycles of sin and defeat in verses 14-17 and 18-20. In both of these Paul concludes that the real problem is “**sin which dwells in me.**”

Now we come to the third time around this vicious circle. Our text today in Romans 7:21-25 follows the same outline as last week. First Paul gives a statement of his condition, then he gives the confirmation or proof of it, and finally he gives a conclusion.

Listen for the outline as I read Romans 7:21-25

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Condition (7:21): “**I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.**”

Confirmation (7:22-23): “**For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind**”

Conclusion (7:25): “**So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**”

In the last two lessons from this test we have interpreted some of the theological truths that Paul is teaching here. Today I want to kind of summarize his teaching by giving us five practical truths that will help you in your Christian walk.

1. Christians Struggle with Sin (7:21, 23, 25)

The first practical truth is this: Christians struggle with sin.

Over and over again, Paul, the mature, godly, believing apostle indicates that he still sins. In fact he says it is a law, a principle that is true in every believer.

See it in verse 21 he writes, **“I find then a law, evil is present with me.”** In verse 23 he says, **“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”** And in verse 25, he says, **“with the flesh (he serves) the law of sin.”**

Indwelling sin operates like a law, it wants to rule us and with authority tell us how to live. It promises rewards if we obey it: *“You’ll be happier and more fulfilled if you experience the pleasure of this sin.”* It threatens us with penalties if we do not obey it: *“You’ll miss out on all the fun if you don’t do what I say.”* So indwelling sin is powerful. It operates as a law, commanding us, threatening us, and enticing us.

That’s why the struggle is so real. One of the first things that I struggled with after I was saved—when I thought about my salvation—was this: “How in the world could I be saved, and I still sin? How can I be a new creation in Christ, and yet I find myself sometimes trapped, sometimes feeling as if I will never be able to break out of my sinful habits? I wonder whether I’m a Christian, since I’m struggling against this particular sin?”

Didn’t Paul say in chapter 6, **“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** Doesn’t 1 John 3 teach that **“Whoever has been born of God does not sin”**? Yes and yes. The truth is that a Christian cannot continue to live in sin the way he did before he came to Christ. We cannot continue to sin and be at peace with it.

The fact that you are struggling with sin is not a sign of spiritual deadness. It’s in fact a sign of spiritual life. If you are spiritually alive, the Holy Spirit is conducting an aggressive, offensive campaign against sin. And sin in your flesh is counter-attacking. The very fact that you’re struggling is a sign of life. Only a live man can struggle. Dead men just lie there, there’s no struggle. When you have peace with sin, you’ve got death. But the Holy Spirit won’t let you have peace with sin. He wars against sin.

This brings us to the second practical truth:

2. Christians Hate to Sin (7:24)

The fact that Christians still struggle with sin is not the whole story. Paul makes it clear that Christians hate to sin. Listen to how much he hates it as he cries out in verse 24, **“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

Back up in verse 15, Paul says, **“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.”** Christians still sin, but they hate it.

Christians can never be complacent in sin. The Christian is serious about sin. He knows that he sins. But he hates it. That's a mark of the change that God has worked in our lives.

3. Christians Long to Obey the Law (7:22)

Paul says in verse 22: **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."**

The Christian rejoices with God in what He has commanded. He shares the same sentiments about the law that God does! He does not complain about the law but finds it an inward delight. He and the Lord are on the same page when it comes to the law.

That is the normal attitude of the Christian toward the law of God. The Christian loves the law and desires to be conformed to it. God has changed our attitude about the law because He is changing our desires as He transforms us into the image of Christ. We want to do what is pleasing to God because we want to be like Christ in what we think, say, and do.

All would be perfect if we loved the law with our whole being. But this joyful agreement with the law is confined to **"the inward man."** What does he mean by "the inner man"? It is the regenerated man: that aspect of his being that lives on in eternity because the Holy Spirit applied the work of Christ to him. He distinguishes inner man from the body subject to decay. It stands in contrast to the "outer man" that is decaying while the "inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). It is that part of our renewed being that longs to be clothed with a glorified body that can never decay (2 Cor. 5:1-4). The inner man is that place where the believer is strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16).

This is why the struggle is there. Two laws are at work in us. The law of sin is at work in our flesh, our body of death, our members. The law of God in our inward man.

So Paul teaches us that Christians still sin. But Christians hate to sin. In fact, they long to obey the law of God. And so the Christian life is characterized by a struggle,

Is there any hope then for the Christian over his or her sin? This brings us to our final point.

4. Jesus Christ is Our Victory Over Sin (7:25)

In verse 24 Paul cries out, **"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"**

What does Paul mean by **"this body of death"**?

Paul is not saying that our bodies are evil in and of themselves. In 1 Corinthians 6:13 he said, **"Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."** The body is designed by the Lord for the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul says, **"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** Christ died to buy your body so that you could use it to glorify God. That is what the body is for.

He means our physical body that is subject to sin and death. Paul is saying that we still live in a body that is mortal. And sin often finds a willing partner in our bodies.

So what is Paul crying out for when he says in Romans 7:24, "**Who will set me free from the body of this death?**" He is not crying out for separation of body and spirit. He is crying out for deliverance from the body's temptations now and finally for the redemption of his body at the resurrection. Romans 8:11 goes on to say, "**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**" Your body is going to be raised. That's what he yearns for – a redeemed resurrection body.

Romans 8:23 says it: "**Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.**" Already, now we have the Holy Spirit. And already now our spirits are alive because of Christ's righteousness. But we still groan. Why? Because we must wait for our bodies to be redeemed. When will that happen? At the resurrection.

And the glorious answer is in verse 25: "**I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!**"

By his death on the cross, Jesus won our victory over sin. He paid the penalty—in full!—for all of our sin on the cross.

One day, when we see him face to face, we shall finally be delivered from the presence of sin in our lives. Until then, however, sin is still present in our lives. But Jesus Christ, by his death on the cross, has even broken the power of sin in our lives.

Victory is ours. The triumph of grace is assured, regardless of how badly we may think we are doing now or how near despair we may be due to the intensity or duration of the struggle. It is the very knowledge of Christ's victory over sin that enables us to struggle on.

Paul has made it clear the Christian must not look to the law to bring justification or sanctification. If we try to be made right with God by keeping commandments of God's law we always fail and the law always condemns us. It does not save us.

Instead the Christian looks to Jesus Christ. He depends on God's grace. He relies on the work of the Holy Spirit. He loves the law because it reflects the holiness of God and it convicts him of sin. It drives him to the cross where he finds forgiveness and grace.

Three Things That Will Help Us

What will help us in our struggle with sin? Paul suggests three things in verse 24. Understand that these are only the way to begin. We're going to discover more help in Romans 8. But this is where we must begin.

1. Be honest with God about your struggle. 24a

The reason many of us never grow as Christians that we have not come to own the truth of our own wretchedness. We deny the struggle. We deflect the truth of

God's word because the truth often hurts. Begin by honestly admitting your true condition.

2. Humbly admit you cannot do it alone. 24b

Honesty says "I am a wretched man" and humility says "I cannot save myself." There are only three things you can do with your sin. Number one, you can deny it. That simply buries the problem, it doesn't solve it. Number two, you can try to do better on your own. Try to follow all the rules. That doesn't work, God never meant for it to work. Or number three, you can admit it and turn to God and Jesus Christ and there find forgiveness.

3. Go to Jesus with your sin. 25

At the cross Jesus Christ provided the victory over sin. Through His resurrection He provided newness of life. Through His Holy Spirit He provides power in the struggle against sin. Just remember this. It's not a formula; it's a person. It is moment-by-moment dependence on Jesus Christ and realizing that His power is enough to rescue you.