

### **Romans 7:13-25 (ESV)**

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

<sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

<sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

<sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

<sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

<sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

We are going through the book of Romans and we're now in the heart of the seventh chapter. I say we're in the heart of that chapter because the heart of the apostle really comes out in this passage.

Paul had been dealing with the weighty issues of justification by grace, the Law, sin and righteousness. Now he brings all of that home to his heart's desire.

Theology is more than just an intellectual pursuit. What you believe will always affect how you live your life. Your doctrine lays the foundation for Christian living.

But that does not mean that once you've got all your theological ducks in a row that everything is going to be smooth sailing. The battle with sin is just beginning.

Today we deal with the believer's desire to do what is right; the inevitability of doing what is wrong; and the hope of deliverance.

We're going to see that living the Christian life is a constant battle. It's not for quitters. It's not for the faint of heart. If you desire to live for the glory of God, you better be ready to do battle.

But we do so in faith. Our confidence is not in ourselves but in the Gospel of JESUS Christ. He is our strength. He is our hope. He is our victory.

We'll start the heart of Paul's desire. More than anything else Paul wants to do what is right and pleasing to God. We see that repeated over and over again in our passage.

**Romans 7:18 (ESV)**

...For I have the desire to do what is right...

**Romans 7:22 (ESV)**

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

Back in verse 12 he wrote that obedience to the law of God is the highest and most noble of aspirations.

**Romans 7:12 (ESV)**

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

**Romans 7:16 (ESV)**

(in spite of any inner conflict) ...I agree with the law, that it is good.

It's important to note the difference between Paul's view of the Law before he became a believer and after he became a Christian.

As a Pharisee, Saul (as he was known back then) was zealous for the Law. He followed the rules. He did what was required of him, and then some.

On top of that, he was extremely critical of those who didn't follow every jot and tittle of the Law. So much so that he was a part of the early persecution of the followers of the Way.

### **Philippians 3:4-6 (ESV)**

... If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:  
<sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

That wasn't hype. Saul followed the letter of the Law. He loved the Law in the sense that it was his identity. It defined who he was and how he saw the world.

The Law was also seen as the way Saul could justify himself before God.

He believed that it was through his efforts to obey the Law that the God of Abraham would say to Saul, "well done thou good and faithful servant."

That was the pre-conversion Saul. He loved the Law because it told him what to do and when to do it.

The post-conversion Apostle Paul had a different relationship with the Law. He said earlier in this chapter that he was no longer married to the Law.

In other words, the Law could not make him righteous. The Law could not change his heart. It is by grace we are saved, through faith. Believers are married to Christ.

**Our motivation to obey the law does a 180.** We desire to do what is right not to earn God's favor, but out of gratitude for it. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us.

That is something we could never achieve on our own. **Therefore the believer has a greater incentive to do what is right because it's motivated by the desire to honor Christ.**

Many of you have that desire. You know that your primary purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

You love God's Word and have hidden His Word in your heart that you might not sin against Him. The Law of God is not burdensome to you but is sweeter than honey.

You study and meditate on the Scriptures so that you may better understand how wide and long and how wide and deep is the love of Christ.

Like the hymn writer John Newton, you sing of God's amazing grace; that you were once lost, but now am found, you were blind, but now you can see.

"I am not the man I ought to be. I am not the man I wish to be, and I am not the man I hope to be. But by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be." John Newton

In Christ you know where you came from, and where you are headed. You would not go back to your former way of life for anything.

You desire to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Your mind is set on things above, not just on earthly things.

You hate your sin, and want nothing to do with the sinful desires of the old sinful nature.

The pagan lifestyles of the worldly are abhorrent to you and you grieve over the way our culture is becoming more and more crude and godless.

Your desire is to live by a different set of standards. You want to be a witness to the unsaved world; to live as a city on a hill. You want to share your faith with those who don't know Christ.

Your longing is to honor the LORD in every aspect of your life. In your family, in your work, in your speech, in your giving and generosity.

You've seen how materialism and the love for money can cause many to run after foolish gain. You don't want to go that route.

You want to live by Biblical principles and Godly priorities. Your desire is to live a disciplined life, demonstrating self-control and where necessary, self-denial.

The “what would JESUS do” slogan resonates with you. You don’t want to do anything that would dishonor the LORD in your public or private life.

Whether you eat, or drink, or in whatever you do, you desire to do it all for the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

That desire to do what is right is good and noble, if it is driven by the right motivation.

- You’re not trying to impress others with your piety.
- You’re not trying to make the LORD indebted to you because of all the sacrifices you’ve made for Him.

The desire to do what is right for the redeemed is a heartfelt response for all that JESUS did to bring you from death to life; from being spiritually dead to being born again as a child of God.

Every LORD’S Day when we gather together, we seek to reinforce that desire. That’s why we sing the hymns that we do.

*Take my life and let it be, consecrated LORD to Thee.*

*Be Thou my vision, O LORD of my heart.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise, Thou mine inheritance, now and always.  
Thou and thou only, first in my heart, High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.*

We love the LORD because He first loved us. Or as the psalmist put it:

**Psalm 116:1-2 (ESV)**

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. <sup>2</sup> Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

There is something deficient in your spiritual life if that kind of desire is not present.

There is something lacking in the life of a congregation if those sentiments are not emphasized.

Holiness. Purity. Zeal for the Kingdom of God. That ought to be in the DNA of every believer.

Shame on those denominations who say that the church has to accommodate to the changing times.

Shame on those who teach that the spirit of the age will determine lifestyle issues and sexual ethics.

Shame on anyone who claims to be a believer but doesn't really care about how they live their lives.

But before we begin to work ourselves up into a righteous indignation, we need to read the rest of today's passage.

Paul has the desire to do what is right, but there is the inevitability of doing wrong.

### **Romans 7:15-19 (ESV)**

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Herein lies the battle with sin. Before conversion, most of us simply do what comes naturally.

Not that an unbeliever has no ethics or standards to live by. All of us probably know those who are not Christian in the evangelical sense, but they are highly principled people.

The battle with sin is a battle between a regenerate person who is seeking to honor God, and their sinful nature.

The unregenerate is dead in their transgressions and sins. By common grace they may be highly ethical people, but they are not dealing with matters of sanctification.

Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit that renews our minds in the image of Christ, and enables us more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Some believe that this passage in Romans 7 can't be the testimony of a believer because they seemed to be lost in their sin. Paul must be referring to his pre-conversion self.

But most scholars, commentators and Bible teachers in our heritage don't think that that's the case.

Calvin, Luther and the Reformers see this inevitability of doing wrong as our ongoing battle with sin. Until we are glorified, there is a spiritual tug of war going on in our hearts.

We know who we belong to, but we also know that the lust of the eyes, the desires of the flesh, and the pride of life are joined with the devil to bring us to spiritual ruin.

Let me give an analogy not a political statement. In November of last year a new President was elected. He didn't get a majority of the popular vote, but he got the electoral vote to win the election.

There is a significant segment of the public that has never accepted the results of that election. They are doing everything possible to delegitimize this President and they have plenty of allies in the entertainment world and news media.

It is perfectly legitimate in our political system to protest and voice your opinion. That is healthy and good. But gone are the days of the loyal opposition (with an emphasis on the loyal).

Whether you like our current President or not, he is our President. Believers especially should voice whatever opposition they have in respectful ways.

But that's not the tone of political dissent today. The opposition is out to destroy.

When you become a believer, you are not your own. You were bought at a price. You belong not to this world, but to the Kingdom of God.

But from day one there will be forces that will try to delegitimize your Christian life.

### **1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)**

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The world, the flesh and the devil are all opposed to your desire to do what is right. The battle is external, but more troubling, it is intensely internal.

**This is the battle: who or what is going to control your will, desires and actions?**

You have a desire to do what is right, but there's a push back. The old nature in us doesn't want to give up any of its turf.

{image}

It's been said that the strongest show of human will power is demonstrated in the first three hours of a new diet.

Your resolve is strong, your determination is resolute and you've got your appetite firmly under control. You are totally under new management.

A good number of us made New Year's resolutions. But that was in January. This is February 19<sup>th</sup>.

We can make lofty intentions and noble goals. Our aims can be honorable, and our plans solid.

But there is going to be the realization that you've fallen short, and you've ended up doing just the opposite of what you intended. Where there's a battle, there's going to be casualties.

Let me give you three points to remember.

**1. The problem is not the desire to do good, but the unwillingness to fight for it.**

The flesh will fight you every step of the way. Of course you're going to fall or get knocked down. Get up.

Of course there's going to be set backs and disappointments. You're in a battle. What did you expect? That battle will continue until the LORD returns or calls you home.

**2 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV)**

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Expect a fight. Don't give up.

**2. Do not let your sin define who you are.**

**Romans 7:20 (ESV)**

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Paul is not excusing himself from his responsibility to do battle with sin. But he knows who he belongs to, and it isn't his sinful nature.

In today's culture, people are defining themselves by their preferences.

In other words their erotic inclinations determines their identity. "I'm gay. I'm transgender. I'm bi-sexual" as if that defines who they are as a person.

As fallen creatures we have conflicting desires, some are noble, some are not.

Your identity is not found in your preferences or in your sin but in JESUS Christ as a child of God. Do not let your fallen nature define who you are.

### 3. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

Paul's battle with sin is no different from your battle. It's a struggle and it's a fight you face every day. But we have reason for hope.

#### Romans 7:24-25 (ESV)

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

In the next two weeks we'll focus on the reason for our hope, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ JESUS.

But we close today with the battle of the mind and heart verses the flesh or the sinful nature.

The mind or the heart is the seat of our desires. The flesh is that part of our being that fights against our new nature.

There are times when it will appear that the flesh has the upper hand. We give in. We yield ground. We get complacent. We let our guard down.

The strongest desire will win the day. We will eventually always go towards that which promises the most reward.

What does the flesh promise you? Momentary pleasure. Temporary satisfaction. Passing fulfillment.

What does JESUS promise you? Himself. He will never leave or forsake those who look to Him in faith.

In your next battle with sin, think of it in those terms. Do I want what the flesh demands of me, or do I want what JESUS gives to me?