

### **Romans 7:21-25 (ESV)**

<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.

### **Romans 8:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

<sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

<sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

<sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

<sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Since August of last year we've been going through the book of Romans. This is the Apostle Paul's magnum opus, his most thorough treatise of the Christian faith.

Augustine, Luther and Wesley all credit the book of Romans as being instrumental in their conversion. Some of the great teachers and expositors of the faith would spend years and years going through this profound epistle.

We have reached the pinnacle of this great book in the eighth chapter. Today we'll back up a few verses in chapter 7 and then be in chapter 8 until Easter.

To review where we've been the book of Romans is dealing with the core of the Gospel. The Gospel from Genesis to Revelation is a comprehensive narrative of:

- What's gone wrong in this world?
- What God has done about it.
- How it's going to work out in the end.

So right at the beginning of the book Paul states boldly, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

The Gospel is front and center in Romans. It does not shy away from calling out the sinfulness of sin, and the need for a righteousness from outside of ourselves.

In Romans Paul doesn't just point to the sinfulness of pagans. He speaks of his own people, the religious and pious Hebrews. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ JESUS our LORD. That gift is given by grace through faith to all who believe.

But our battle with sin doesn't end once we become a believer, in fact, it's just beginning. In chapter seven Paul talks about his desire to do right, but the struggle that he has when he does what he knows is wrong.

### **Romans 7:18-19 (ESV)**

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.

The Gospel speaks to everybody.

- To the unbelieving pagan the message is clear: repent of your sin and be reconciled to God.

You have no excuse to continue in your rebellion. You have made the things of this world your object of worship. Claiming to be wise, you have become a fool. What can be known about God is clearly perceived in the created order and most explicitly through Christ.

- To those who seek to follow the letter of the Law the message is this: the Law cannot save you. It might regulate your behavior, but it cannot change your heart. Repent of your self-righteousness and trust Christ for your salvation.

Your outwardly moral life doesn't fool anybody. Your sins may be more subtle in the eyes of men, but God knows your heart. Stop trying to make God indebted to you. Place your trust not in your own efforts, but in the righteousness of Christ.

To those who are believers; the message is also clear. Live in the freedom that you have in Christ.

The Gospel is the good news that you are justified by faith. You don't earn God's favor; it's by grace you have been saved. Grace is more powerful than the Law.

As sinful human beings, we can always find loopholes in the Law to get around the parts we don't like. Grace disarms you. You're getting something you don't deserve.

If there are areas in your life that need to change, and you want to see real growth, it will be grace, not the Law that will bring about real change within you.

The Law will tell you where you've gone wrong, but it will be grace that will change your heart.

All of us are sinners. We do things that we shouldn't do. In some place or another, our behavior needs to change. (Picture) But that's the tip of the iceberg. It's your heart more than anything else that needs to be changed.

If you are a believer; if you have placed your faith in the work of JESUS Christ on the cross, you have been reconciled with God. The Holy Spirit is within you. The Spirit of God will lead you to Christ. That's where the change will take place.

At the end of chapter seven Paul talks about the “wretched man.” Who’s he talking about here? It could be you. It could be me. It certainly was the apostle Paul.

The wretched man is any believer who understands the depth of their sin.

It seems counterintuitive to think that those who know of God’s grace would describe themselves as wretched.

We’re sinners, but we are forgiven. We’re not under law, but under grace. Our debt has been paid. Why is Paul so hard on himself?

Two points here:

1. The depravity of sin

2. The righteousness of God

When Paul said, “Oh wretched man that I am,” he was seeing the side of his nature that nobody wants to be exposed to the light of day.

Sin has been described as the underbelly of the human soul. The ugliest part of sin is not the outward display of our sinful actions, but the inner motives that prompted those actions.

Selfish desires. Prideful arrogance. Greedy intentions. Lustful cravings. Hateful attitudes. Harden hearts. Deceitful and cunning intents.

Most of all, sin is a rejection of God’s authority and rule. That’s the type of disposition that you would expect from an unbeliever. It’s especially disappointing when it is displayed in those who know the grace of God.

In Christ the penalty of our sin has been paid for. As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sin from us. But our old nature is stubborn. It doesn’t want to let go.

(picture)



The depravity of sin leaves a residue that's like a toxic waste dump. You can't just throw a little grass seed on it and plant some flowers to make it look nice. The poison runs deep.

The depravity of sin can only be understood in the light of God's righteousness. Only a sovereign God can evoke the kind of response that Paul gives here "Oh wretched man that I am."

When the prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of the righteousness of God, he cried out:

#### **Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)**

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

When the apostle Peter saw in JESUS the righteousness of God, he had that same response.

#### **Luke 5:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

We began our worship this morning with a hymn that proclaimed the holiness of God. Its Biblical text is taken from the book of Revelation describing a heavenly scene.

#### **Revelation 4:8 (ESV)**

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

Unbelievers may have deep regrets and remorse over their actions. They may have a guilty conscience that bothers them. But only a believer puts their sin in the context of the righteousness of God.

As we come to the LORD'S Table this morning, we are urged to examine our hearts. Do you take your sin lightly? Are you just comparing yourself to those around you?

### **Romans 7:24 (ESV)**

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

The problem with many evangelicals today is that they view their sin in a therapeutic rather than a theological perspective. We focus on how sin affects us.

Sin is seen as that which brings about the phobias, obsessions and disruptions in our lives. Our lives would be so much more peaceful and productive if we sinned less.

While that may be true, it completely misses the point. Sin is an offense against the only true God who is absolutely holy.

The God of the Bible is not tolerant of sin, He judges it. He condemns sin. Sin is abhorrent to God.

The most dramatic display of that is when JESUS took upon himself the sin of the world on the cross. (picture)

So repulsive was that sin that the Father turned away from it prompting JESUS to cry out: "MY God, MY God, why have you forsaken me."

The wretched man knows that it was their sin that put JESUS on that cross. That's why we sang:

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Did that hymn resonate with you this morning? It's in that spirit that Paul wrote:

### **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!

If you understand the wretchedness of your sin, then you are ready to hear the good news of the Gospel. Chapter eight begins with these glorious words:

### **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What a difference between the wretched man of chapter seven, and those who have no condemnation in chapter eight. That's what we'll be dealing with for the next month.

The wretched man is dealing with his sinful nature, and it's painful. But he deals with his sin in light of the Gospel, where there is no condemnation.

Many of us believe that, but we live under the burden of condemnation. Let me give a few examples. Are you one who:

- Constantly feel like a failure
- Live with sense of guilt for not measuring up
- Can't handle criticism
- Always have to prove your worth

- Dependent upon the approval of others

I think I can identify with all of those traits. In Christ, there is no condemnation. In my flesh, I live in the shadow of condemnation.

The wretched man of chapter seven understands that they have sin problem that goes way over their heads. They cannot fix what's broken. That's why they place their trust in Christ.

But that trust has to be complete. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ JESUS. Think of how your life would be different if you fully embraced that.

You could be more **transparent**, not having to worry so much about what others thought of you and if you're meeting their expectations.

You could be more **genuine**, not always trying to tell people what you think they want to hear and thus winning their approval, at least for the moment.

You'd be more open to **correction**, not feeling that your worth is under attack if someone points out a flaw that you have. Neither will be devastated if somebody doesn't like you as much as you think they should.

And most importantly you'd be **less fearful**, because you know that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ JESUS our LORD.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Are you living in that freedom?

Chapter eight in Romans begins with no condemnation. The end of the chapter that we'll get to on Easter says that there is no separation.

**What is it that separates people from one another? What is it that separates people from God? It is condemnation. It is guilt, and judgment that brings about estrangement.**

Think of the barriers that have been built up between those who ought to love one another.



Think of the unresolved issues that linger on forever because of blame and mistrust.

Think of how you have kept God at a distance because you don't want Him to get too close to where your heart is at.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ JESUS. You only experience that as you live in the Spirit of life.

### **Romans 8:2-4 (ESV)**

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

<sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

We will start to flesh that out next week. For now, as we prepare for the LORD'S Supper, consider this:

The Spirit of Life gives you the freedom to come before the throne of grace just as you are. There is no need to pretend that you're something that you're not.

You're a sinner in need of grace. We come to the table of the LORD this morning as beggars in need of bread. We are not self-sufficient. We hunger and thirst for a righteousness that can only come from Christ.

Have you ever attended a dinner engagement and found out as you arrived that you were dressed inappropriately? Back in 2010 we visited our daughter and son-in-law in Edinburgh Scotland.

(2 pictures)

Our trip home was delayed for a day so I was able to attend the opening session of the General Assembly for the Free Church of Scotland. Afterwards I was invited to the formal dinner for the delegates (terribly under-dressed) Yet I was welcomed. (Live in that freedom!)

The Spirit of Life gives you the desire to renounce your sin which no longer has dominion over you.

In our flesh we can grieve the Spirit of God. We can harden our hearts and say that we're the ones who will call the shots. But you will not find real peace in that.

In the flesh you will be the wretched man of chapter seven. The hounds of heaven will haunt you, and your spirit will not rest until it finds its rest in Christ.

When the Spirit of life brings you to the cross, you will see your sin for what it is. You will hate your sin because it separates you from the God who loves you.

Come to the table of the LORD this morning. Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God, for in due time He will lift you up. He will feed your soul. He will set you free.