

## 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020 The War Within

**Read:** Romans 7:14-25

**Summary:** In this last section of Romans 7, Paul shares his personal ongoing struggle with sin. It is a struggle that we all will face until we pass from our earthly bodies to our heavenly home. Although we may have significant victory over sin, the battle will remain and the struggle will continue.

When I read Romans 7, it rings true to me about my own personal experience, and it rings true to me about the personal experience of people I see on a regular basis. When I read the text, I notice that Paul constantly says “I ... I ... I ... I.”

In verses 14-25, “I” is used twenty-four times, and when you add the times Paul uses “me,” “my,” or “myself,” it is another thirteen times. That comes to a total of thirty-seven times in these twelve verses that the apostle refers to himself in this one passage. It seems to me that what we have here is not Paul’s theory, but Paul’s actual experience of the Christian life as he lives it day by day, year after year. Though some of us would perhaps wish it were true, there is no escape from Romans 7 in the Christian life.

There is no real escape from our ongoing struggle with sin. But we must keep in mind that Romans 7 is not the whole story. Romans 7 is wedged between two chapters that lay the groundwork for the Christian’s triumph over sin in this life. Some might argue that Romans 7 describes a “sub-normal” Christian life where the battle with sin is mostly one of failure. They would suggest that mature Christians should get their lives out of Romans 7 and stick with Romans 6 and Romans 8.

But I believe that Paul is presenting a unified viewpoint of the Christian life of which Romans 6 is a part, Romans 7 is a part, and Romans 8 is a part. Romans 6 says that we have died to sin, and Romans 8 says that if we live by the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body. The fact that Romans 6 and Romans 8 talk about victory, that doesn’t mean that the Romans 7 struggle won’t be an ongoing one. If I could put in one word what Paul describes in Romans 7:14-25, I would use the word: struggle. Other words we could use are: conflict, or “A War Within”!

William Barclay entitles his commentary on this passage “*The Human Situation*” and he’s right, this is truly the human situation.

- We know the good, but we don’t do it.
- We know what’s wrong, and we fight against it and then we do it anyway.
- We say “I will”, and then we don’t.
- We say “I won’t”, and then we do.

Somebody once said that Paul must have been a golfer because a golfer can understand this principle. You say to yourself when you stand on the tee: “*There’s trouble to the left, so I am not going to hit the ball to the left, I am going to hit it to the right,*” but you end up hitting it where you didn’t want it to go. It’s the human situation, the universal human experience.

There are actually two snapshots of the struggle here, the first in verses 14-17, and the second in verses 18-20. And the two are almost identical. They each include a statement about our condition, a description of the conflict, and an explanation of the cause. Paul evidently repeats himself for emphasis. He wants to be sure we have a handle on this ongoing struggle.

### **The First Snapshot (Romans 7:14-17)**

#### **1. Our Condition (Romans 7:14)**

Romans 7:14. “*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.*” That’s my condition. I am carnal, made of flesh--weak, feeble, faltering, sinful. I don’t like it. I

wish it were different. But it's true. And I'm "sold under sin." There is in me, even as a believer, something that resists the will of God, that urges me to live independently of God, to go my own way and do my own thing.

That often comes as a shock to new believers. They find forgiveness and acceptance in Christ, and sometimes think that as a result they will automatically do what pleases God. But instead, they feel this powerful pull in the other direction, and it throws them. The more mature we grow in our relationship with Christ, the more convinced we become of this truth--that we are weak, and vulnerable, and impetuously inclined to sin. Like it or not, that's our condition. And that leads to the conflict.

## **2. The Conflict (Romans 7:15-16)**

Romans 7:15. *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do; but what I hate, I do."*

Paul is like a little boy who is asked why he disobeyed, and he just stands there with his head hanging down and says, "I don't know." He just can't understand how as a believer in Jesus Christ he can do some of the things he does. He knows what is right and he wants to do it, but he doesn't. He knows what is wrong and he hates it, but he goes right ahead and does it anyway. Does that describe your life? It sure describes mine.

You can probably think of a number of illustrations of it:

- Maybe it's a problem with temper. You know its sin to lose it. You know it's destroying your relationships with those you love and marring your Christian testimony. You don't want to do it, and yet there are times when you fly off the handle at the slightest provocation.
- Maybe it's a problem with lust. You know what Jesus said: that it's no different than adultery. And you know that goes for lusting over pictures, or videos, you feel guilty every time you do it, and yet you're drawn to it like a magnet. You keep going back.
- Maybe it's nothing more than an insidious form of pride. Where you insist on your own way, or feel you need greater recognition for what you do. You don't want to think that way, you hate it. And yet you draw people to yourself rather than to The Lord.
- I've had believers admit to me the hateful thoughts they have toward other Christians. "I just don't like that person. I don't want to be around him, and I don't even want to be nice to him". They know those thoughts displease the Lord. But they have them nevertheless.

I don't know what you struggle with. It may be lying, stealing, coveting, cursing, gossiping, drinking, taking drugs, or something else. But you're right there with Paul, and me, and every other Christian--failing to do the good things you want to do, doing the wrong things you hate.

The problem isn't God's law. Romans 7:16. *"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good."* The very fact that I as a new person in Christ want to measure up to God's high and holy standard testifies to the fact that the standard is good. But I have a problem, and that problem is summed up in the next verse.

## **3. The Cause (Romans 7:17)**

Romans 7:17. *"As it is no longer I myself who do it, but sin living in me."* There's Paul again, and you, and me as believers in Jesus Christ. The "I" in the verse refers to who we are as new creatures in Christ. I don't want to sin. I loathe my sin. Yet I still do it. And the cause of it is my sinful human nature--the sin that dwells in me.

Paul is not trying to excuse his sin and relieve himself of the responsibility, blaming it on some nebulous intruder called sin. That old sinful human nature was part of who he was, and he was responsible for his choices. We'd all like to blame our sin on somebody else--our genes, our parents, our environment, our circumstances. We'd even blame it on God if we thought we could get away with it.

Like the overweight guy on a diet who prayed, "Lord, if it's your will for me to stop at the donut shop, you provide a parking place in front." And sure enough, on the 12th time around the block, there it was!

But the fact remains, the enemy with whom we struggle, the one who causes our downfall, is the sinful nature that dwells in us. And we all have one. It's part of being human.

### **The Second Snapshot (Romans 7:18-20)**

And this one follows the same pattern as the first one.

#### **1. Our Condition (Romans 7:18)**

Romans 7:18. *"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out"*.

Remember, Paul is writing that as a Christian. He still has his "flesh," that is, his weak human nature with its inclination to sin. And there isn't anything whatsoever in his flesh to commend him to God. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! Most of us don't like to admit that.

Our pride keeps us from it. But only when we acknowledge that in our fleshly human nature there is nothing good will we begin to taste victory over sin. Most of us think we're pretty good, Paul didn't. He understood his true condition--And that led to the conflict.

#### **2. The Conflict (Romans 7:19)**

He describes it almost exactly as he did before (Romans 7:15). v19. *"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing"*.

It's hard for us as believers to come to grips with what Paul is saying here. We try to come up with spiritual formulas that get us out of Romans 7. "Do 'A' and 'B' and 'C' and then you will never sin again," but I don't see anything like that in the text. What I see is that we've got to face the reality of Romans 7 or we'll never get to Romans 8 or 6. We've got to come to grips with repeated personal failure. The first step in healing is to admit that you are sick. Healthy people don't go to doctors. Only sick people do. The people who are made better by the power of God are the people who are not ashamed to admit the weakness and the failure and the struggle that they are undergoing in their own personal lives. And that again is the cause.

#### **3. The Cause (Romans 7:20)**

*"Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."* As in Romans 7:17, he likens himself to a house in which sin dwells. And it occupies every room of the house, affecting everything he tries to do. Is it any wonder that we are involved in a massive struggle that goes on and on?

### **The Principle Behind the Struggle: v21-25)**

Paul has painted a graphic picture of that struggle to help us grasp it. But after the picture, he explains the principle behind the struggle.

v21. *"So, I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me"*.

The "law" here is not the Old Testament Mosaic law. It's a *principle* that Paul has discovered operating in his life. He's come to this conclusion after years of careful observation, and now he records it for us by inspiration of God's Spirit.

It's a true principle that no honest Christian can deny. Simply stated it is this: While we want to do what is right, evil is present with us. Paul describes evil almost as though it were a person, watching to see when we we're about to do some good thing, then springing into action to divert our attention and lead us into sin instead.

V22-25 The Message: *"I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who*

*can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different".*

If you have been struggling with this "War Within", you are not alone. But, don't just resign your self to it. If you do, you're going to find yourself on the wrong side of the war, contributing to your own pain and suffering, and to that of the people you love. It is far better to own your struggle and then grow in your faith in Christ.

As we close, I highlight three things that will help us in our ongoing struggle:

- 1) HONESTY. Paul admits: *"What a wretched man I am."* The truth about ourselves can hurt, but unless we deal with the truth, there is no help. The second thing that helps is
- 2) HUMILITY. a. Paul asks, *"Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* Honesty says *"I am a wretched man,"* but humility says *"I cannot save myself."* Satan smiles when a Christian tries to win the battle alone without God, without others, in their own strength. The third thing that helps is
- 3) HOPE. Paul concludes, *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Our hope is through God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy spirit. Victory in and over sin comes from above – from God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Complete dependence on God for mercy and strength is our only hope.

You will remember that Peter walked on water as long as his eyes were on Jesus – likewise, we must keep our focus on Jesus or we will be sunk!

Let's cling to the cross of Christ for forgiveness and hold on to Christ for our help. Forgiveness is the promise of 1 John 1:9 is: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness".*

Help is the promise of Hebrews 4:15-16: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need".*

**Prayer:** Oh, Father, we confess that we still have this "I" problem that Paul refers to. Help us to die daily to our ego, to abandon our self-centred, self-sufficient, self-promoting attitude. Thank You for Your truth, that while we were yet sinners, You died for us in the Person of Your Son. What love! What matchless, amazing love! Help us to face our ongoing struggle against sin by holding on to this HOPE with HONESTY and HUMILITY, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.