

Romans 7:14-25

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Date: 22 January 2012

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[0 : 00] So, we've been continuing our study through Romans, which has been a great joy and a challenge so far. Last week, I talked to you a bit about Paul's case that he's been building for us, justification by faith alone, and he's talked to us quite a bit about the law up to this point.

But mostly about what the law cannot do. The law cannot save us, he said in chapters 3 through 5. It cannot sanctify us, he said in chapter 6.

It can no longer condemn us, the first six verses of chapter 7. We are justified through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, forever. Praise God.

That our right standing before him is conditioned only on our belief in him. And that belief is a gift from him. Jesus sought me when a stranger.

We are now bound up with Jesus Christ. Last week, we talked about what the law can and does do. The purpose that it does in fact serve.

[1 : 09] And we saw from the text that it exposes, arouses, and reveals the magnitude of our sin. Those verses 7 through 13. And now we get back to what the law cannot do.

We get back to the fact that the law cannot sanctify us. So, we were saved by faith. We're not now being perfected by the law. We were saved by faith and we shall be perfected by faith.

That's the major point of the text that's before us. But I think for us to really properly understand this, to wrap our minds around it, to find the value in the text for us, we must first understand the vantage point that Paul is speaking from.

We have to know what it is that he means. There's varying opinions. Commentators say different things about who Paul is, what he's referring to as he says this. I do what I want, I don't do what I want.

Here's what's going on in me, this battle that's waging within me. There are those who think that Paul is giving us an account of him prior to conversion, before he places faith in Christ.

[2 : 18] There are those, the majority, church history would agree, I agree, that this is Paul as he sat down to write this letter. This is Paul, this is his present day experience that he's penning for us.

I want to show you why I believe that to be true before we continue our study together. Number one reason I believe this to be true, Paul's use of first person, present pronouns.

Not just first person, but first person, present pronouns. He uses I or me or my in the present tense 39 times in these verses.

I hope I counted them right. I did it this morning at 530, so I'm not sure, but I'm pretty sure I counted that right. It's a lot. A lot of times he uses these personal, present pronouns to speak of himself.

Second reason, Paul speaks of the law as only a Christian can. Verse 22, he says, For I delight in the law of God.

[3 : 27] I find great joy in the holiness of God. That's what he's saying. And not just that he has a mental assent to it, not just that he says, Yeah, that seems good to me.

But he delights in it in his inner being. He has an abiding delight in the law of God. An internal joy that only a Christian can have.

Third reason I believe he's speaking of his present condition is that Paul speaks of himself as only a Christian can. Look at verse 18.

He says, For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh. That is a man that has been broken over who he is.

That is a man that understands his fallen state, who knows that he was created in the image of God, but that it was completely destroyed by sin. He gets that weight.

[4 : 26] He's broken of spirit. But lest we misunderstand who he is, he clarifies, that is in my flesh. My body has fallen.

My spirit has been renewed. Paul gives us another example of a matured Christian also living in this way, having this present day struggle with sin.

in Galatians chapter 2, verse 11 through 13. I ask you to turn there with me. Galatians 2, verse 11. This event happens at the Council of Jerusalem.

And Paul starts verse 11 by saying, but when Cephas, now Cephas is the Greek word for rock, so it would have been the equivalent, the Greek equivalent of Peter's Hebrew name.

And you'll understand why in a second, why he calls him Cephas. But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles.

[5 : 41] But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically, hypocritically, excuse me, hypocritically, okay, reset, hypocritically, thank you, along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

You remember the life of Peter? Some of the first real account of his sinfulness was his denial of Jesus Christ. What was the sin that motivated that?

A man who believed, who had professed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Fear, which was hypocrisy. He feared who?

He feared the Jews. He feared those who were putting to death Jesus Christ. So here we see then the same sin cycling back up in the life of Peter.

This is present day experience. This is the life of every Christian. Paul now, at this point of writing Romans, has been a Christian for 20 years.

[6 : 53] And yet still he wages war against sin. We all experience that. You've placed your faith in Christ. You experience this.

You battle with your old self. It still exists. And that's why we must understand this text properly to wring the value out of it for our living.

The opposite view, the opposition that says this was pre-regeneration for Paul, primarily pulls that from verse 14 where he says, but I am of the flesh sold under sin.

The idea of bond servanthood to sin. But he clarifies that in verse 23. He says, the sin that dwells in his members, in that old self.

So I think it's a very simple understanding of that that we can get around that with. J.I. Packer, in an article defending the view that I'm presenting to you on this text, wrote this, Paul is not telling us that the life of the wretched man is as bad as it could be, only that it is not as good as it should be.

[8 : 08] And that because the man delights the law and longs to keep it perfectly, his continued inability to do so troubles him acutely. The wretched man is Paul himself, spontaneously voicing his distress at not being a better Christian than he is.

So you see that? Part of the fear that comes from the opposing view that this is Paul pre-regeneration, pre-conversion, is that this gives us some sort of license.

Gives us an air of defeatism. Well, I can't have victory over sin. Look at Paul. This is Paul. He's been a Christian for 20 years. Amazing man of faith. And yet, he still struggles.

How can I possibly have victory in all of this? He gives us the answer so clearly at the end of this text about how we will have victory in this.

And we'll certainly get there together. So what is it that Paul desires us to learn? We have a proper perspective of it. What is it that Paul desires to teach us, at least in part, today?

[9 : 14] Firstly, he's arguing for the goodness and spirituality of the law of God. Verse 13, he says, Did that which is good then bring death to me?

By no means. Verse 12, So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. He's continuing that argument. So, firstly, he's arguing for the goodness and spirituality of the law of God.

Secondly, he's arguing for the reality of what he calls indwelling sin. Indwelling sin. To explain why Christians are not perfect and don't measure up to our own high standards.

is presenting this idea of indwelling sin. And I want to show you these two things. The affirmation of the law, his esteem for the law, and his acknowledgement of indwelling sin in four pairs of statements here in our text.

Okay? So, pair number one, Romans 7, 14a, the first part of it, his esteem for the law, for we know that the law is spiritual. The law is from God.

[10:19] The second part of 14, acknowledgement of indwelling sin. But I, am of flesh, sold under sin. Second pair, Romans 7, 16, his esteem for the law.

Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. His acknowledgement of indwelling sin, Romans 7, 17.

So, now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. And this is where we get that phrase. Here's that indwelling sin term. You can see it again in verse 20.

And if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Same phrasing there. Pair number three is the theme for the law.

Verse 22, For I delight in the law of God and my inner being. Verse 23, his acknowledgement of indwelling sin, 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.

[11:24] Pair number four, the middle part of verse 25, his esteem for the law, so that I myself serve the law of God with my mind and in his acknowledgement of indwelling sin, the last part of verse 25, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

So you can see this battle going on within him. Now I'm just going to take a quick aside here just in case your mind is going this way.

I am not a dualist. No one who is a member of Christ's family church here is a dualist and dualism is the idea of the little devil and the little angel on your shoulder debating it out with you and you don't know who's going to win.

We know who's going to win. I am not a dualist but yet there's still a war going on within us. You see that in verse 22, the law of sin versus the law of the mind or our new being is this war that I'm referring to.

So there's two practical points for this morning. We see that this is the experience of all of us. Those of us who are in Christ still deal with the burden of our flesh.

[12:44] Paul says, Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Where Paul was from there was an ancient tribe that used to strap dead people onto people's backs if they committed murder.

The person they murdered would be strapped onto their back and the punishment would be that this person rotted and their rot spread to the living person and killed them. This could be what Paul had in mind.

He used this phrasing. Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? It's killing me. Praise be to Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Point one is, we must fight. There is a war. We must fight. If you are a Christian, you must wage war against your sin.

Clay shared with me a great analogy, which I am making my own, but I want to give him credit for it. I had a friend in high school named Josh that I used to slap box with. Most of the guys in here will probably get this, ladies.

[13:48] I will try to explain how this goes down. We would slap box and the idea is that you don't hurt each other. It's not quite like close-fisted boxing, but it still hurts.

And I'm not saying that I'm a good slap boxer, but I usually won. So probably that means that Josh was a poor slap boxer, but occasionally I'd get a really good shot in on him and it would make him very mad at me.

And guys, you've all experienced this, that moment where you took it just a little too far, my handprint would be left on his cheek and he'd get mad. And he would come after me. He was ready to kill me.

He was mad. What was my response? We were playing a game, so I continued to have fun with him. I continued to bob and weave and slap him and knock him down and do those things until he would calm down.

That's how we are with our sin as Christians often. We're very goofy with it. We have fun. We're cavalier even with it. Your sin is trying to kill you.

[14:52] It should be taken seriously. If I actually thought Joshua was trying to kill me, I would have acted much differently. We must make war against our sin.

A lot of us complain about it. A lot of us are unhappy. We lament the sin in our life. But we do nothing about it. We must make war.

I started reading a book this week by J.C. Ryle called Holiness. It's Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots. It's been a fantastic read so far. He said this in that book.

The true Christian is called to be a soldier and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of religious ease, indolence, and security.

He must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and doze along away to heaven, like one traveling in an easy carriage. If he takes his standard of Christianity from the children of this world, he may be content with such notions, but he will find no countenance for them in the word of God.

[15 : 55] If the Bible is the rule of his faith and practice, he will find his course laid down very plainly in this matter. He must fight. Number two, our victory is sure.

I love that we serve the sovereign God. I love that I have come to understand him in that way. I know that our God is totally in control.

Our victory is sure. We have been bought. That is finished. What a motivation to fight. I don't have to be put down by these temporary setbacks and my failures.

I can continue to wage war even when I lose a battle. Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6.12, Fight the good fight of the faith.

The article in front of faith that's in the ESV doesn't actually exist in the original text. The fight of faith is what Paul is saying.

[17 : 07] It's a fight that we fight in light of this victory. It's a fight that we fight out of dependency on Christ.

Our salvation, our justification was bought by faith. So is our sanctification. In believing in the promises of God, he will get us through.

But isn't it interesting in that verse that we're told Paul's commanding Timothy, it's the imperative form, fight. Be active.

Right? Nobody who's ever fought in a war just sat in the trenches and it was said of them that they fought. You've got to be active. You've got to be advancing to fight.

So we see that we play a part. There's a responsibility on our part to fight. Isn't it interesting? All throughout scripture that happens.

[18 : 10] You see those two truths taught. That we are to work ourselves, but yet it's God who provides the ability to do so. What does that mean for us?

If you're a Christian who doesn't wage war against sin, what do you do? Do you sit around and wait for the motivation for it to happen? You suddenly find that you get up off the couch and you walk to your desk and you open your Bible and you say, what is happening to me?

I don't know. God must be providing you with power to do so. You'll find in the very recognition the things that you should be doing to wage war against sin, the hand of God moving in your life.

Be obedient. Do what you're told to do. And when you do, you will see the hand of God in your life. God pushing you on to where you must go.

I love having a toddler now. I am continually understanding God's grace to me with a one and a half year old. Because when I want Cade to go someplace, Cade is utterly sinful right now.

[19 : 23] And however he feels, he acts out on it. We tend to mask the way we feel. We logic it away. We come up with excuses. Cade does exactly what he's thinking.

So I want him to come. He doesn't want to. He just doesn't come. He ignores me. He'll lay down on the ground, throw temper tantrums. What I do is his father.

I go and I get him and I pick him up and I hold him by the hand and I walk him to where I want him to go. So is Cade walking? Yes. Is there an external force taking him to where he should be?

Yes. Absolutely. The very end of the text, verse 25, Paul says, Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, who will deliver me from this body of flesh.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And here's the model he gives us of repentance and belief our salvation began that way, turning from our sin and turning toward God.

[20 : 35] But the Christian life is a life of repentance and belief, turning from sin and turning toward God, turning from sin and turning toward moment by moment, day by day, turning from our sin and turning toward God.

This is the model of repentance that Paul gives us here. Number one, I love the law of God. Verse 22, I love the law of God. Verse 2, I hate what I just did.

Sorry, not verse 2, number 2. Verse 15, I hate what I just did. Number 3, verse 24, wretched man that I am who will set me free from this body of death.

Number 4, thanks be to God, the victory will come through Jesus Christ my Lord. That is this model set for us of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

We just sang a wonderful song that I love and it's such an encouragement to me. I know you guys weren't singing for me, but it served me this morning. Oh, that day when freed from sinning, I shall see his lovely face clothed then in blood washed of linen, how I'll sing his sovereign grace.

[21 : 50] That is what we look forward to as Christians when we can be unfettered by our flesh. When it's no longer an object of obstacle in our lives to praising Christ our Lord.

Our victory in that is sure and therefore we must fight. Let's pray together.