

Romans 7:14-25

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[0 : 00] Chapter 7, verse 14. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now, if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, 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.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? 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.

Now, last week I established for you some varying opinions about the perspective from which Paul is writing. There are those who believe that Paul is referring to a pre-conversion experience of his life.

And they take that from the little phrase that nothing good dwells within me. He clarified that for us later, what he means by that. He means nothing in my members is good.

[1 : 38] The fear, and I believe why some commentators want this to be a pre-conversion explanation of his life, is that we live then as Christians as defeatists.

If we believe that Paul is writing this from his current state as the writer of Romans, as he's sitting down to pen this letter, then there's a fear of these commentators that we live as defeatists.

But I don't believe we can understand the text in that way. The use of personal pronouns, the content where we are. I proved it a little bit more extensively last week.

Paul is writing of the Christian experience, the experience that he is having. J.I. Packer said, Paul's not saying that the Christian is as bad as he could be, just that he's not as good as he should be. So we're on this journey toward perfection, this process of sanctification that is fueled by faith.

[2 : 41] And that's where we've been in Romans that Paul has laid out and established for us in many ways that we're justified by faith, by grace, through faith in Christ.

And that is the only way that our relationship with God will be repaired. Third, we see then that we are also sanctified by faith. We don't begin by faith and are perfected then by our works.

We're both justified by faith and sanctified by faith. However, the faith for justification is a resting faith.

We place our faith in Jesus Christ and we lean on him and on his righteousness to make us right before God. But the faith for sanctification is not a resting faith.

The faith for sanctification is a working faith. It has action. There is movement. Active. We see in this text that there is a war that we will wage in our Christian living.

[3 : 47] Do you not feel his anguish? I don't do what I want, but this is what I want. I don't do it. I can't. Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to Jesus Christ, our Lord. This is our experience as Christians. Paul uses in verse 23 two phrases.

The law of the mind versus the law of sin. So we all then possess these laws within our members, within us.

We have the law of sin and the law of the mind, and they are battling, not in a dualistic way. We will have victory in the war. But in the battles, they're waging a war for what?

For the allegiance of our hearts. Your heart, as scripture refers to it, is not the muscle that pumps blood throughout your body. Your heart is the seat of your desires.

[4 : 49] It's what you want. And this may not be consistent with your experience, but you always do what you most desire to do.

Always. You have never done anything in your life that you didn't want to do. You have also never not done anything that you did not want to do.

Let me give you an example of that. When I was in college, every morning I had class, I rolled out of bed and said, don't want to go to class today. All evidence to the contrary, I went to class.

Why? Because I didn't want to deal with the consequences of not being a class. I didn't want to miss the notes. And if I missed the notes, I wouldn't do well in the test.

And I wouldn't do well in the class. I would fail. I didn't want to fail. So I chose to do the thing that I most desired to do, which is go to class. Even though I did so reluctantly.

[5 : 54] You always do what you most desire. And that's the battle going on within us, within all of us. We are called to holiness.

There's no doubt about that. A careful reader of the scriptures will see that as Christians, it is a requirement of us to be holy. Now, praise be to God through Jesus Christ.

His righteousness has been imputed, has been given to us. So as God sees us, we are holy. Now, all of you who have placed your faith in Jesus Christ are before God holy.

Which is what allows us access to him. Which is what justifies us. That was our term means in his sight. But we are also called to live holy lives.

So we've been justified. Now we're being sanctified. Leviticus 11.44 God says, be holy, for I am holy.

[7 : 00] Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2.15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God. Among those who are being saved. And among those who are perishing. We are the essence of Christ in this world.

The term Christian was first used in Antioch as a derogatory term. Little Christ. People were making fun of the Christians for being like Christ.

Our lives should be characterized by holiness. It doesn't mean that we're perfect. Will any of us be perfect this side of death? Absolutely not.

But our lives should be characterized by holiness. Listen to what J.C. Ryle wrote in his book Holiness. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background.

The immense importance of adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. And making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and tempers. Has been far too much overlooked.

[8 : 06] Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that religious persons, so-called, are not so amiable and unselfish and good natures as others who make no profession of religion.

Yet sanctification in its place and proportion is quite as important as justification. Sound Protestant and evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life.

It is worse than useless. It does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sided and shrewd men of the world as an unreal and hollow thing and brings religion into contempt.

Isn't that where we find American Christianity? We say one thing and we do the opposite. There are those who don't claim to know Christ at all that really are much more amiable and generous than those who claim to be Christians.

A great example of this is Saturday night at any of the local restaurants versus Sunday afternoon.

You ask any server what their least favorite shift is Sunday afternoon.

[9 : 15] Christians, that should be the best shift of work. The most generous and lovely people to deal with who give in their tipping. The opposite seems to be true.

He refers to Titus 2.10 in that little quote I just read you, which reads, So that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

That means, I believe, what he's trying to say to Titus, what Paul is writing to Titus, is that we ought to, with our actions, highlight the attractiveness of the gospel.

Draw attention to how beautiful the gospel is. With our holy living. We come up so short in this area. And I believe that's because we stopped fighting. We've forgotten that this is the experience of the Christian. And that we must fight.

[10 : 16] So what is it that we fight against? In this text, Paul clearly shows us the indwelling nature of sin. Our flesh. We must, number one, fight against our flesh.

1 Corinthians 9.27, Paul says that he disciplines his body to keep it under control. And then in Colossians 3.5, he says we should put to death, therefore, what is earthly in us.

Number two, we must fight the world. The world to our flesh, to who we once were, is so attractive.

The temporal blessings of this world will lead us astray. And we must fight against it. James 4.4, James writes, 1 John 2.15, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 1 John 2.15, John writes, Do not love the world or the things in the world.

[11 : 19] If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. We must fight our flesh, we must fight the world, and we must fight the devil.

1 Peter 5.8, he writes, Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The devil's not messing around. He's won, so to speak, those who don't know Christ. Those of us who do, he is out to get us.

Our victory is sure in our war against him, but he wants to win battles. Ephesians 6.11, We're instructed to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

There's a battle being waged against Christians at all times. Even now, in this moment, you might be feeling distracted. Fight it, Christian.

[12 : 26] And the goal of that is to get us to be ineffective and non-victorious. So how is it then? I promised you last week we'd be practical today.

How is it that we're to have victory in these battles against sin? We get into Romans chapter 8, verse 4, and we see that as Christians, we're to walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

And we get to talk about that at length in coming weeks. But we have been given some munitions, some weapons to walk by the Spirit, to feed the law of our mind, that our desires will be right desires.

And I want to give you three of them this morning. So these are the three munitions for fighting the war on sin. Number one, meditating on Scripture.

Now, meditation on Scripture requires intimate knowledge of it. You cannot meditate on the Scriptures if you don't know them.

[13 : 32] In that beautiful chapter in Ephesians chapter 6 about the armor of God, verse 17, we're told to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Now, the Scriptures are a great grace to us in battling against sin. Look at the promises of Scripture.

In Matthew chapter 4, we see the temptation of Jesus. We see that He was led by the Spirit. In verse 1 of chapter 4, He was led by the Spirit for what reason into the wilderness? To be tempted. God allows His people to be tempted for our good. It's a process of discipline. He is teaching us what we ought to do.

He's teaching us our desperate need of Him. We see the picture of this in Job. Job goes to God and asks...

[14 : 31] I mean, excuse me, Satan goes to God and asks for permission to torment Job. And it's granted to him. God is not the author of sin.

He's not the creator of it. But He does allow it to happen. There's comfort in that. The temptations that you're experiencing are not unique to you.

They're given to you for a reason. We also see in Matthew chapter 4, the use of Scripture to battle the temptations of the devil.

We know Romans 8.28. I hope you know Romans 8.28. For we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

Your temptations are for your good. 1 Corinthians 10.13. Paul writes, No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. I read in the tone, stop whining.

[15 : 35] What you're experiencing is not unique to you. Someone in this world has already dealt with the very same thing. You're not alone in this. The next sentence.

God is faithful. And He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

We have to know these things to battle against sin. So how do we read this book, the Bible, that's been given to us? First, I'd like to say to you, start now.

Many of you might be saying, but I don't really know much of the Bible. How can I gain the knowledge I need to fight sin? And you feel overwhelmed by that. A house never gets built if the ground doesn't get broken.

There's a first step to be taken in the work that has to be done. Don't be lazy. Start now. You have great opportunity.

[16:41] None of you are as busy as I am. I can with confidence say that. You have time in your day to read your scriptures. You ought to devote yourself to it now.

Read diligently. We don't always feel like reading our Bible. We often get distracted by the temporal things of this world. Sometimes TV is more attractive than reading our scriptures.

Read your Bible. Do it as often as you possibly can. If you even think in a moment, it might be a good thing to read my Bible. Notice that your desires are shifting.

God is granting you grace to do it. Do it. And read your Bible. What was the habit of George Mueller? And I've made a habit of my own.

Until your affections are turned toward Christ. If you want to know how I get up in the morning and what I do with the scriptures, I read until my affections are turned towards Christ.

[17:50] Which is sometimes chapters. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I do not feel like being up. I'm in a foul mood. And so I read until I am blown away by the goodness of God to me in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I read a verse and the same thing happens. Let me give you an example of that. Psalm 85.10. A couple of weeks ago, I was reading Psalm 85 in the morning.

And my attention was arrested on Psalm 85.10. And I didn't even really know why at first. But it simply reads this. It says, Steadfast love and faithfulness meet.

Righteousness and peace kiss each other. And just the beauty of the language stopped my attention. And I began to meditate on that.

And it took me most of the day to really get what I believe the psalmist was saying here. In that God is unchanging and is committed to us in his love and desire for us.

[19:01] So he's made a promise to be good to his people. But he loves to do it. And that in the work of Christ, the righteousness that he's given to me, I have been granted peace with God when I was an enemy.

And my affections were turned toward Christ. I'm so glad Wes sang that last song, which I'm not sure he was planning on doing. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in his wonderful face. I think I'm getting the words right. I may not be. And things of earth will grow strangely dim in a light of glory and grace. So true.

Turn your affections on Christ. That was number one. Meditating on the scriptures. Number one, munition. I'll start with M.

Wes and I went on a trip this week. And he helped me take notes in the car while we were driving. And he sent the notes to me. And he had made these M alliterations, which I appreciate. So thank you, Wes, for that.

[20:03] Number two. Making prayer a regular practice. Making prayer a regular practice. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus gives us a model for prayer.

A short prayer. And an important phrase in that is, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Christ set an example for us to pray that we might avoid evil in our lives.

Ephesians 6.18, Paul says, We should be praying at all times. This is the conclusion of that armor of God passage. We should be praying at all times of the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

Let me ask you a question. What if God answered all of your prayers? Would your life look any different than it does now?

Do you believe that God can and does, in fact, answer prayer? And if we pray things in His will, that He actually does what we've asked Him to do?

[21:11] Does our prayer life evidence that we believe that? Most of you probably went, yeah, of course. Yeah. Sure. But does our prayer life evidence that?

Do we actually believe that God has given to us as a grace prayer? That He uses the prayers of His people to accomplish His will? He's given that to us as a gift that we might go to Him and plead.

That we might have victory in the battles of sin. Do we actually believe that we answer those prayers? I can say to you, He can and He does do so.

A constant sin that I deal with, I think I will my entire life, is the sin of pride to seek the approval of men.

I believe anybody in any type of leadership position is going to do that. I get up here and I preach with the purest of motivations. And it seems that every week this pride creeps in from underneath.

[22 : 14] I really want you guys to like me and I want to be smart. And I want you to really respect my preaching. And it's sinful. It's utterly sinful. So, I take this pattern that we're given to in Romans.

Paul says, I love the law of God in verse 22. Verse 15, I hate what I just did. This emotion, this desire I have in me. Wretched man that I am who will set me free from this body of death.

In verse 24. And thanks be to God that victory will come through Jesus Christ. In verse 25. And I pray without ceasing. I think that's what Paul was meaning in 1 Thessalonians.

It's not something that I conquer and I move on in my life. And I just have this victory over this desire to be liked. But I do it constantly. I do it even sometimes as I'm talking.

I'm saying, God, please, please don't let me still glory from you. And so, I pray, Father, I know that nothing good is in me apart from Christ.

[23 : 15] I know that apart from Him, I can do no good thing. And as such, that means all glory and honor and praise belongs to Christ. How dare I get in the way?

Wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death. Jesus Christ. Praise Him. I turn my affections back towards Christ.

I get out of the way. That is this process. Without ceasing, guys. It's a battle. We must wage war.

Number three. We've got it. Number three, munition. We've got meditating on Scripture. Making prayer a regular practice. Number three. Membership in a local church.

Guys, we need one another. If we are going to win the battles of sin, we need one another.

[24 : 19] We need to open ourselves up to the criticism of other believers who we trust, which you can't have unless you're in a relationship, in a church, so that they can root out all of the sin that we're trying our hardest to hide, ignore, and forget.

The picture in my mind of rooting sin out of our lives are those pigs that look for truffles. Have you ever seen that? Truffles are just amazing. A little fungus that are supposed to be very, very good and expensive, and they grow underground.

And they take pigs out, and pigs can smell them, and they root them out. They're hidden, but these pigs can root them out and find them and expose them so that the collector can sell them.

I'm at market. That's the picture that comes to my mind. I need that in my life. I need people who are around me who I'm being open and honest with, who can look at me under a magnifying glass and expose the things in my life that do not belong.

We're growing up in a Christian culture, and we're all really good at playing the part. We've been rehearsing our whole lives. We know exactly what church people do.

[25 : 31] We know how to put it on. We know what to say, what clothes to wear. We've got it all down. We've got it all down. We've got it all down. Dress rehearsal for the first 20 years or how old you are of your life.

You've got to let people into the backstage. People have to know who you really are. We have a fiercely radical, individualistic mindset in America.

It's kind of ingrained in us. And it's not all bad. Many great things have been accomplished because of our individualism. But it has no place in the Christian life.

True Christian living does not happen apart from the context of a local congregation. We often only think of sin as the things we're told not to do.

Do you do that? I tend to. We often only think of sin as the things we're told not to do. But it is also sinful to neglect those things that we are told to do. There's two different types of sin.

[26 : 39] There's the sin of commission, doing something that you're told you shouldn't do. And there's the sin of omission, not doing something that you are told to do.

A careful reader of the Bible knows that we're commanded to do many things with and for and to one another. How can you do that if you're not committed to a group of people?

1 John, five times, love one another. Love one another. Love one another. And 1 John is written for the Christian to hold up their life to as a lens to see if they're even really saved.

How can you love people that you're not committed to? That you don't even know? Going to church does not mean walking in, sitting down, singing and listening and leaving.

Church is so much more than that. Everything I just said is important. It should take place. We need to do it. But it's not it. It's not it. So, what should you look for in a church?

[27 : 57] I don't care if you come here. Honestly. I don't know a lot of you in the room. I'm sure I would love you and love to have a relationship with you.

I want you to come. But my goal is not in this, this point, is not to say to you, please help me build Christ Family Church. That's not the point of what I'm saying.

The point of what I'm saying is, for you to have a victorious life, to honor Christ, you need to get involved and committed to a church because you're sinning if you don't.

It would be unloving of me to sugarcoat this for you in any way. You can't wiggle out from what I'm trying to say to you. So, as you're looking for a church, what should you be looking for in a church? I've got six of them for you. Number one. Substantive, verse by verse, expositional preaching.

[28 : 56] Substantive, verse by verse, expositional preaching. Look for a church that preaches the whole counsel of God. Not a church that jumps around to the pastor's favorite topics.

But that preaches the whole counsel of God. We're committed here to verse by verse, expositional preaching for that reason. There are some texts that I would so gladly skip.

There are some Sundays that I pray that I'll get to. God, major accident, broken leg in the hospital. Any chance someone else can pick this one up? It's painful. It's painful for me to preach some things.

It's exposing to my life. There's some things that I don't understand. I'm not all that intelligent. And I have to study and study and study to get what the writers are saying. If I wasn't committed to preaching this way, I would skip texts.

But our preaching should also be substantive. It should say something. Not a couple of little points to make your life a better life. Our preaching should be gospel-centered. It should draw your attention to Christ.

[29 : 58] It should call you into holier living. So look for substantive, substantive, verse by verse, I suppose you're preaching. Number two, look for a church that is missional.

Many churches, everything they do, and I think even those that aren't intending to do this, struggle with it. Everything they do is about bringing people to a building.

New splash. This is not the church. Right? This building burns to the ground. This property gets swallowed up into a sinkhole.

And Christ Family Church no longer owns property meet-on. Are we still Christ Family Church? Absolutely. There's no question in my mind. We just don't have a place to meet any longer.

We'll have to find a new one. A missional church is a church that recognizes that it's here for a purpose. And that is to take church to the world.

[30 : 55] To carry Jesus Christ. To be that aroma for those who are being saved to the world. So look for a church that understands that we're called on a mission.

Number three. Look for a church that has covenant membership and biblical discipline. Covenant membership is just our way of saying a deeper commitment than you show up on a Sunday morning.

And I give an invitation. And you say, hey, that was a pretty good experience. I'd like to join up. And we write your name on a card and put you on a roster. And then expect giving of you. Right?

Sad, sad membership goes on in many of our churches. The statistics, which I didn't take the time to research in any of them, of Georgia Baptist churches. How many names are on rosters and how many people actually are going to church is shocking.

I would love to get all of that data and compare and see how many people are on rosters at multiple churches. I bet that would be a stagnant statistic. I've signed up and then off they go.

[32 : 05] And then signed up and then off they go. And then signed up and then off they go. Church is not fast food, people. You should go to every fast food restaurant out there.

You definitely should do that. Please don't be a person that goes to one fast food restaurant and gets one meal all the time. What a boring existence. But a lot of you treat church like fast food.

What am I in the mood for? This morning. I'm going to go to that church. They're a little more charismatic. I'm going to go to this church. They're a little more somber. I like the preaching here. I prefer the music over here. And you bop around for the flavor of the week.

It's sin. And don't go to a church that will let you become a member with that kind of premise. Also need a church that understands biblical discipline.

You want that in your life. You want that kind of exposure. And if you're going to persist in sin, you want the kind of church that's willing to kick you out because they so love the work of Christ.

[33 : 09] They're not willing to let you shame them. And Christ. With a habitual sin in your life that you're not willing to work on. Look for that.

Number. These are lettered. So I'm happy to do the numbers in my head. Number four. It's really bad. Biblically qualified leadership. I would suggest to you that you look for a church that has a plurality leadership.

I don't care the titles that those men have, but a group of men that share the responsibilities of the church. And who are biblically qualified. Get to know the men who are leading a congregation before you join.

Number five. Content driven music. Content driven music. Young people.

Your generation tends to look for experience when you go to church. Experience. You want to show up and be moved by music.

[34 : 18] It's good for us to be moved. When we sing songs. But we ought to be moved by the truth of the gospel. Not by a particular crescendo in the music.

I go to lots of conferences. I see lots of music sets being put on. And the practice for these sets makes me want to vomit. Because every little bit of it is rehearsed perfectly.

The capo being moved. That careful capo movement. And the prayer that accompanies it. Is a cover up for the capo movement. So we can move smoothly from one song to the next.

And keep people moving along. And the experience. Worship. Congregational singing. Is about encouraging one another in the truth.

Right? If we ever come in here and all the lights are off. So that you can have your own little personal little worship bubble. You should go someplace else. I love the acoustics in this room.

[35 : 21] Because I can stand at the back of this room. And even though the speakers are loud. I can hear your voices reverberate out of this corner. It's awesome. It's really cool. If you're a front row person here.

I love you. Thank you for sitting in the front. Someday. Sit in the back. Just to experience that noise. That comes out of the room. It is such an encouragement to my soul. To press on.

In these battles of sin. When I hear people joyfully singing the truth of God. Content driven music. On the flip side.

Some of the older folks amongst us. Can tend toward tradition. I recently went to an old people meeting.

I'm just going to leave it at that. For some travel we had to do. And they sang a song that I just abhor. Give me that old time religion.

[36 : 23] Give me that old time religion. Give me that old time religion. That's good enough for me. What does that song even mean? What does that mean?

That's idolatry. Do it the way I used to always do it. Because I don't want any of this new. New song. Get these new songs out of here. Right? The war between old songs and contemporary songs.

So stupid. Because every song was a contemporary song at some point. Right? Except for maybe the songs. But anyway.

I digress. All right. Number six. Look for a church that is about the work of building healthy families. Of charging fathers to be the pastors of their homes.

And not subliminally undermining the family. Many churches are doing this. And they're not doing it on purpose. I don't think that there's any church in America who says, We don't like the family.

[37 : 28] So therefore we're going to separate them to all separate parts of our campus on a Sunday morning. And we're not going to allow them to interact. And we're going to destroy the family as a result. None of their goal is that.

But they're overtly doing that very thing. I'm not saying that you have to go to a church that is family integrated. I'm not saying that you have to be family integrated to be a godly church.

Right? But the leadership, the men of a church ought to be encouraging the other men of the church. Edifying one another towards being the pastors of their homes. That is a responsibility and a charge given to fathers.

It's not given to anybody else in the scripture. It's given to fathers. It's not given to a children's pastor. Or we'll call them a children's minister if they're a girl just so we can skate around. That whole issue.

It's not given to a youth pastor. It's not their responsibility. It's the father's responsibility. And a lot of churches are castrating the men in the way they operate.

[38 : 36] So look for these six things and become a member. Commit the church. College students, I know that your life is weird right now because you live three quarters of a year in one

place and another quarter of the year in another place.

I would encourage you to be a member of a church in the place you live most. You have moved out of the house. And that's a good thing. You're adults now. It's good to not be in the house.

It might be a good thing for you to never go back to live in your parents' house. I did. Plant yourself. My parents are here.

Yeah. I know. I know. As God instructed his people when they're in Babylonian captivity, he instructed them to build homes and plant gardens and make a life where they were.

You're going to squander a rape four years of your life because you don't feel like you're in the place you're going to be. Right? Right? You are. God puts you in a place.

[39 : 47] Put down some roots. Although temporary, I understand. Put down some roots. Be involved in a church in the place that you live most. Again, I'm not saying Christ family church needs to be your church.

Although I think that we do these things. And we're trying to do them to the very best of our ability. So, we see in our text, back in Romans 14 through 25, that this is our common experience, that we battle with sin.

There's a war going on within us. Let me say to you again, we are not dualistic. The picture of dualism is that on one shoulder, you have the little angel version of Nathan.

On the other shoulder, you have the little devil version of Nathan. And we just don't know who's going to win out in my life. Jesus Christ wins. There's no doubt about that. The war is sure.

If you are a Christian, you are being moved towards perfection. And one day, you will be finally perfected. Okay? However, there are many battles to fight.

[40 : 59] And I pray that we're a people that are having victory in those battles. And that our lives are characterized by holiness. Let's pray together.