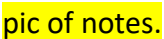


“The Life-Long Struggle” // Romans 7:1–25 // Romans #14

So far, this year we’ve seen **442 POF**. We have been asking God for 1K. If you have one, go to summitchurch.com/one (Or email their campus pastor)

- **It gives us the best stories...** One of our members told me his one is a lady at work he’s been sharing with for months.
- But she told him one day, **“I just don’t understand the Bible. It’s too confusing.”** So he recommended she start listening to *The Whole Story* sermon series.
- **After listening to 4–5 sermons**, she texted him: “Well, J.D. said I’m supposed to tell someone if I accepted Jesus. So, I’m telling you.”

Romans 7, in your journal, p. 46 . New standard!

In Romans 6 Paul began the discussion of why Christians still struggle so much with sin.

- **Do you ever wonder**, “If Jesus and his resurrection power really came inside of me, why do I still struggle so much with those same old temptations?”
- And why don’t I love God more?
- And why is prayer so hard for me?

Paul talks about his own struggle with this in Romans 7, and it’s one of the most **encouraging chapters** in the Bible, I think.

Works Consulted:

“War Between Your Selves,” Tim Keller

“What Is Wrong With Me?” Joby Martin

“Bearing Fruit and Fighting Sin,” Tony Merida

“The Bondage of Legalism (Romans 7:1–13)” and “The Battle Within (Romans 7:14–25),” Tony Evans

“Nature,” Colin Smith

Paul’s self-account here reminds me of a classic book I read many years ago by Robert Louis Stevenson called *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. (You know they say the definition of a “classic book” is a book everybody’s heard about but nobody’s actually read. This is one that is worth reading, because **Stevenson, who was a believer**, was certainly inspired by the struggle Paul describes in Romans 7.

In the story, this **Dr. Jekyll, a fine, upstanding citizen, is frustrated because it seems like inside of him there is a bad part and a good part**, and the bad part of him is always holding back the good part of him. **He calls himself an “incongruous compound”** of good and bad mixed together.

So, Dr. Jekyll, being a chemist, develops this potion that separates the two parts of him so that only the good part comes out by day--that’s Dr. Jekyll; and **only the bad part comes out at night**--“Mr. Hyde,” whose name derives from the word “hidden” or “hideous.” The two exist alone, with neither restraining the other.

The problem, as Stevenson tells the story, was that the evil part of Dr. Jekyll was far more evil than he had imagined. Mr. Hyde’s every thought was centered on himself. He was spiteful, angry, vengeful--he murders people. Dr. Jekyll said, “I was tenfold more wicked than I ever thought.”

And Robert Louis Stevenson, speaking through Dr. Jekyll, explains, “I discovered through this process that man is not truly one, but two... “It wasn’t that I was a hypocrite,” he said, “both sides of me were

completely sincere.¹

Does that **resonate with you**? It does me. I **feel like** an incongruous compound of completely opposite people.

There's a **part of me that wants to do the right thing** and another part that doesn't want to do it at all--and **both are really sincere**.

That's what Paul talks about in Romans 7, and he describes his experience **both pre-Christ and after being a Christian**.

Tim Keller says this chapter basically divides into 3 sections² and I think it's **helpful to read the chapter** that way:

- Vv. 7–13 describe the battle we can't win;
- Vv. 14–25 describe a battle we can't lose;
- And vv. 1–6 give us an analogy that shows us how to make the transition between the two.
 - I'm going to follow that general outline of the passage.

I'm going **to read verses 1–6 first**, simply because they come first in the chapter, but I'm **not really going to comment on them** until the end because they are really Paul's answer to his own dilemma.

(Now, let me warn you: These first verses are going to sound weird and random, but the analogy in them is **actually quite brilliant**, and I'll show you that at the end. I just **don't want you to worry** if in our first pass through this you're confused.)

7:1 Since I am speaking to those who know the law, brothers and sisters, don't you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives? ² For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. ³ So then, if she is married to another

man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then, if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress. (Everybody turn to their neighbor and say, "I have NO IDEA what point Paul is trying to make here.")

⁴ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. (OK, here's his point: **pre-Christ, we were married to the law**.

- The **law, he has explained in Romans**, is whatever standard you think proves your worth and gains acceptance.
- **You were married to that**--it was the **center** of your life. It was how you established your identity, what told you things were going to be ok in the future. It's how you established your worth.
- It could have been a religious law--you were a good enough Christian so God was going to take care of you; or it could have been that you were a good enough student, had enough talent, worked hard enough; or were a good mother, or a successful businessman, or whatever.)

When you became a Christian, you died to the law, which meant you died to your keeping of the law as the basis of your acceptance, and now you're married to him, **so...**

You (now) belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.

That's section 1, and we'll come back to at the end.

¹ I am summarizing his words here

² Tim Keller, Sermon on Romans 7:1–25, part 1, Redeemer Presbyterian, NYC. The opening illustration on Jekyll and Hyde also came from him.

But let's keep moving on to vs. 7, to discuss:

The Battle We Can't Win (vv. 7–13)

⁷ What should we say then? Is the law sin? (Paul here again picks up the objection that he knows his religious, Jewish readers would be raising: "Paul, you are hard on that law--

- saying that it 'arouses sinful passions' and that it "multiplies sin" and we need to 'die to it'--
- You really think the law is bad, don't you?)

Absolutely not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin if it were not for the law.

- The law's first purpose was to reveal how sinful we are.
- We've said it's like a mirror that shows us how far we fall short of God's standard of goodness.
 - Imagine if you had a full length mirror at home that had an outline of you at your ideal build and weight, so that every time you looked into it, you'd see the difference between what you should be and what you are. (I need to move some of these love handles to my biceps.)
- That's what the law does: Here's what you should be—now compare that to what your heart actually is.

For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, Do not covet.

- (Coveting, of course, is wanting what somebody else has and feeling like you can't be satisfied until you have it.)
- The law said, "The righteous heart, the healthy heart, is a heart that doesn't covet.

⁸ And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin is dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the

commandment came, sin sprang to life again ¹⁰ and I died. (Thus) The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me... ¹³ (so) sin... produced death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.

OK, what does he mean by all this?

- Well, when Paul says in vs. 9 that "once I was alive apart from the law," he means that before he had really considered 10th commandment about not coveting, he felt alive.
 - He looked at himself as a pretty good person. He knew the Ten Commandments, and thought, "I've never committed adultery. I don't steal. I've never killed. I care for my parents. I don't worship idols. I observe the Sabbath faithfully and tithe every dollar."
 - But then, something in the 10th commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," gripped him. (commandment came)
 - Because that command has nothing to do with external obedience--it focuses on the heart.
 - And Paul started to realize that even with all his external conformity to the other commandments, his heart chafed against this one--he was envious of others and wanted what they had.
 - And to make matters worse (as Martin Luther pointed out), this is the commandment behind all the other commandments which is why it comes last.
 - Why do we steal? Luther asked. You covet what someone else has.
 - Why do you lie? Quite often it is you want something but you can't get with the truth—
 - So, you exaggerate your accomplishments or minimize your faults to gain approval.
 - Or, you lie to obtain a position or an advantage you couldn't get with the truth.

- **Why commit adultery?** You covet sex with someone God hasn't given to you..
- So, Paul saw that he was **guilty of the heart of sin**--the **ROOT** in.
- **And then, here was the real twist:**
 - Paul started to see that even his zeal in religion was fueled by covetousness.
 - What made him zealous in religion was he wanted respect, and status, and distinction above others.
- So, **what do you do when you realize that one of your primary motivators in religion** is itself sinful?
- Well, you feel like you've died!
- And, that's when the **wheels came off**. Because that just made him **more insecure with God**, which made him even more zealous to show that he was better than others, and that made him even more of 10th-commandment breaker.
 - His **attempts to keep the commandment just made him worse!**
 - **That's what he means by:**
 - "Sin, through the commandment, produced (in me) coveting of every kind" (vs. 8)
 - "...when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again and I died." (vs. 9)
 - "sin... produced death in me through what is good, so that... sin might become sinful beyond measure." (vs. 13)
 - Let me go back to an **analogy I used a few weeks ago**: If you were in bed, sick with the flu, and I showed up in your room and started to give you commands...
 - **Thou shalt not "have a fever."** Feel weak. Have the chills. Cough. Have a headache. (All things a normal person would **do without a law**.)
 - But for each law I gave you, the more I'd just multiply the ways that you can't keep it. **You'd say, "I get it! I'm sick!"**
 - **And here's the irony:** the harder you tried to keep these laws, likely the worse you get. "Thou shalt not feel weak!"

And you jump up to act strong. You're just going to get worse.

- **Paul is saying, "This is similar to what happened to me spiritually.** The harder I tried to keep the law to prove I was a good and worthy person, the more my coveting, and insecurity and jealousy flared. My **insecurity in religion** turned me into an awful person.
- *And then I started to realize I needed a different solution than the law."*
- (BTW, when Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus (we find this story in Acts 9), he makes a strange little passing comment, "Saul, Saul, it is hard for you to kick against the goads." (Goads were...) This is what Jesus was talking about. One of the goads was the conviction Paul felt from the 10th commandment and his inability to keep it.)

So, this was the battle that he couldn't--that none of us can--win. So, now, in vv. 14–25, he **shifts to:**

The Battle We Can't Lose (vv. 14–25)

Paul in these verses subtly shifts the discussion from his pre-Christ days to himself now, as a **mature Christian and an Apostle**: ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave to sin. (notice all the present tense verses.) ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. *I hate sin, but I still do it. I want to do righteousness, but I find so much in me opposing that.* ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it (i.e. the sin), but it is sin living in me.

- *"I am no longer the one doing the sin"--Paul is talking about a new "me," a new "I."*
- **The redeemed man**, the part Christ has taken over.
- But there's still these sinful desires in my body.

- Remember last week how I used the analogy of the Allied powers taking over Berlin? The **capital has been taken**, but there are still enemy forces afoot in the land.

Watch how **Paul turns the dial up** in the next verse. This is a **truly staggering** verse: ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.

- **Now, what is your flesh?** Well, don't just think "*my epidermis, muscles, bones, cartilage--that is all bad*" as if body is all bad and your soul is good.
- **A lot of your worst sinful desires** have nothing to do with the cravings of your physical body--things like pride and hatred are sins of your spirit, but Paul still refers to those sins of the flesh.
- **So, flesh means you, all of you**—mind, body, and spirit apart from Jesus.) It's the **totality of our sinful nature**.

Apart from Jesus, how much good is in this flesh? NONE. None.

- **As we saw in Romans 3**, this was not to say that we couldn't ever do kind or noble things, just that apart from Christ our hearts are so corrupted, so curved inward on themselves away from God, you can't call them "good."

And **now that I'm a Christian**, Paul says, **I have both natures existing in me.**

- **There's the new me, the real me**, saved by Christ and resurrected with him, and that guy wants to please God and do what's right.
- And **there's this other nature** in there, the sin nature (the "old man" I've heard it called)--that guy doesn't ever want to do what's right; he only wants to please himself.
- Like a UNC and Duke fan sitting next to each other during a game, they don't even want to look at each other. They cheer at different times. They jeer each other, secretly fantasizing about the other one's untimely demise.

For the desire to do what is good is with me (I'm saved, right?), but there is no ability to do it. (IOW, I **want to serve Jesus**, but my flesh is like "nope." Francis of Assisi called his body, "Brother Ass." I want to be generous/do my quiet time and my flesh is like...)

¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I (end up) practice (-ing) the evil that I do not want to do.

²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me.

²¹ So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. (If I were honest, I think this would be my life verse--so many good intentions, such little progress)

²² For in my inner self I delight in God's law, (If you're saved, this is the **redeemed man** speaking—I've repented. I've acknowledged Jesus as Lord. I want to do God's law. **Unbelievers would never say this--**) ²³ but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (And just in case you didn't get it, he concludes again) So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God (present tense), but with my flesh, the law of sin.

Let me boil this section down into **2 main insights**. Here we go:

Insight 1: Believers have a constant war going on inside of them

- That's the **point of this passage**.

- BTW, Paul teaches this repeatedly throughout his epistles:
 - In Galatians, Paul summarizes all of Romans 7 in just 1 verse: ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **Galatians 5:17**
 - In Colossians 3 Paul he describes it in terms of 2 different selves, an old and a new: “Put off the old self with its practices and... put on the new self.” **Colossians 3:9–10**. He calls them *both* “selves.” They are both “us,” in one sense, even though one is dead.
- These 2 selves are both in you, working against each other.
- Listen. This is what most people don’t understand: *When you become a Christian, the old self doesn’t go away, and it doesn’t really even lose its strength.*
 - Many Christians think of the Christian life like their heart is this pot of water. And before Christ, it’s ice cold, and when Christ comes in, he is like the stove that slowly starts to heat up the water. And when you get out of church it’s like turning down the stove, and sin it’s like dropping ice cubes in the water.
 - But that’s not the best analogy for the Christian’s heart. Really, what you have in your heart is a new nature in Christ, in the Spirit, AND the old nature of the flesh in there--with all its old strength and corruption.
- You’ve got a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and if you cater to that old nature he’s going to move back in and ruin you. He’s the same vengeful predator he always was.
- Be killing sin, or it will be killing you!

Insight 2: Knowing I have ultimate victory changes my disposition in the fight

- Even though I wrestle with the same sinful flesh, I have a different disposition:

- First, (A) I know my sinful cravings are not the true ‘me’ anymore.
 - It’s the old me; the dead me. Not the renewed me in Christ--the me of the future.
 - And here’s why that change of thinking is important: Suppose in your old life you had this sinful habit you didn’t like. But you’d fall into it, then feel bad about that, beat yourself up, get better for a while, only then to fall back into it again.
 - And then, you become a Christian, but you still struggle with it. You fall back into it just like you used to. (& hey, this happens!)
 - And so, you start saying, say, “See, nothing is changed.”
 - You still feel like you’re in a battle you can’t win.
 - But that’s wrong.
 - You’re now in a battle you can’t lose. You may still struggle (and I’ll tell you why he lets you in a minute), but the ultimate outcome is determined.
 - And, as you continue to believe this, I guarantee you’ll find yourself saying, “Why doesn’t this sin taste as good as it used to? Why doesn’t it satisfy me--or sort of satisfy me--the way it used to?”
 - That’s because it’s no longer expressive of your real self.
 - “In your innermost being, you delight in the law of God.”
 - Those sinful habits are like Lazarus’ grave clothes. They just don’t suit you anymore.
 - I knew a guy once who was an undertaker... if they didn’t have a suit they wanted to be buried in, the funeral home would provide one: half-suit (covering only the front)... (Imagine wearing that around. Hey, you shouldn’t be showing that. That’s not what living people do.)
 - When sin tempts you, you know it’s just not you! Illus. Man approached by old lover...

- **Another way that knowing I have ultimate victory changes my disposition in the fight (B) I can be confident even in the most discouraging of seasons**
 - **December 1941 was a dark time for England.** The war was not going well. But on the morning of Sunday, Dec 7, when Winston Churchill heard about **the Japanese attack** on Pearl Harbor, he walked into his office, **called FDR**, and FDR told him, “Well, we are all in the same boat now”. Churchill **later wrote** in his memoir, “No American will think it wrong of me to proclaim that hearing the U.S. was on our side was the greatest joy to me. England would live. Britain would live. The rest of the war was simply proper application of overwhelming force. I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and the thankful.”
 - **“Overwhelming force,”** transformed Churchill’s attitude from helplessness to hopefulness.
 - **Nothing tangibly** had changed: Hitler still on the offensive
 - **In the Christian life, the HOLY SPIRIT is that “overwhelming force.”** His presence in us assures us of victory. And that means **even on the darkest of days** I can find encouragement. It may look like my internal Nazis as wreaking havoc, but their **defeat is insured.**
 - **Sometimes I look at my heart, y’all, and I get so discouraged (If you read my journal, you’d read...)**
 - Why do I still struggle so much with self-control?
 - Why does pride still pop up in my heart so quickly and easily? (Me to V: “great man?”)
 - Why do I feel jealousy and resentment toward people so much more quickly than love?
 - Why do I so often delight in the misfortune of others?
 - Why do I secretly kind of like it sometimes when some big-name pastor falls, because it thinks it makes me look good?

- Why do I almost never give people (instinctively) the benefit of the doubt? Why is my first impulse always to assume the worst about them and gossip?
- Why is generosity so hard for me?
 - I remember one year when we were getting ready to go into one of our generosity initiatives, I told Veronica--well, we should maybe go ahead and spend that money now, because if not we might convicted about it during the series and feel like we should give it away. But, if we go ahead and spend it now, that’s not an option. What’s wrong with your pastor’s heart?
- **Or, even more fundamental:** Why are my affections for God so cold? Why is even my desire for repentance so weak?
 - Sometimes I’m like, ‘Lord, it’s not that I love you so much and just can’t make myself obey your commands. Sometimes I don’t even feel love for you.’
 - It’s not that I want to do good but get tripped up. I **don’t even want** to do good sometimes: My ‘wanter’ is broke.
- But friend, **God hears even that cry of desperation.** The broken and contrite he will not despise.
- Because, **deep down**, I’ve made a decision to seek God. I want to change. I want to want God more. And that’s **what repentance is.**
- And so I **call out to God** on behalf of my broken, cold heart: **²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?** (seminary didn’t; becoming a pastor didn’t). **²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**
- Which leads me to one more way knowing I have ultimate victory changes my disposition in the fight:

(C) I know God uses my ongoing struggle to grow my appreciation of grace.

- **That's what we see happening here with Paul at the end of this chapter.** It's like he collapses in worship: **24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**
- **One of my favorite books in my library are the Letters of John Newton:** On growing in grace. At 83 years old...
 - **He concluded:** We think growing in grace means getting to a place where we don't need grace any more.
 - But growing in grace on this side of the resurrection often means growing in our awareness of our need for grace.
 - **Write this down:** Growth in grace means growing in your awareness of your need of it, not getting to a place where you feel like it's no longer necessary.
 - *Falling down in worship like (Romans 7:24–25)*
 - **C.S. Lewis: Sometimes God leaves smaller sins** in tact to keep us from a bigger one—pride

So, here's what you've got in Romans 7.

- *You have Paul's description of himself as a religious person, where his conscience submitted to the law of God, but his heart chafed against it.*
- **And so Paul turned in desperation to God's grace in Christ.** *He needed forgiveness for where he couldn't keep the law, and he needed Christ to change him in his heart so that he'd love the law.*
- *But even after accepting Christ, he still struggled with his sinful heart, so he wants to know how to change!*

Which is what makes his analogy in verses 1–6, with all that strange stuff about the woman and about the husband, such a perfect and brilliant illustration, because it shows us how we can learn to love God's law again.

- **Before we met Christ in the gospel,** Paul said, we are married to the law. The law was the way we sought to establish our worth--the code we kept prove to ourselves and others we were worth accepting.

- All that produced was frustration, insecurity, doubt, and jealousy/covetousness.
- **But when you become a Christian, you died to the law**—you died to your use of the law as a means to elevate yourself in the eyes of God and others--and you were saved instead by a free gift of Jesus--you got married to him.
- **And understanding that--receiving his love in the gospel--is what produces love in your heart.**
- **1 John 4:19.**
 - Love for God grows in us in **response to the love of God for us.**
 - **Remember: Luther and the dilemma of the Great Commandment?** That kind of love can't be produced by exhortation. It can only be produced by revelation.
 - The love of God does what the law could not do! **When you were married to the law, it was a way to gain acceptance** from God, but now that you have been saved by Christ--given acceptance as a gift--the law is a way to please the one who saved you.
 - You **obey the law not to gain acceptance by God, but because you have it.**
 - You are no longer motivated by fear, you are motivated by love.
- **Tony Evans** says when you walk into a house you can always tell the difference between a grace dog, and a law dog. A law dog always has its tail tucked underneath. It's intimidated by its master; afraid of its master. The master says, 'Do this or I'm goin' spank you with the paper'. It is a **miserable dog.** But a grace dog's tail is wagging when its master comes home because there's a relationship there--the dog just wants to be with you and make you happy.
- **(There is no corollary in the cat world.)**
- **God wants grace dogs, not law dogs.**
- **New kind of obedience**

MUSIC

Because here's what happens when you are married to Jesus: ⁴You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death.

As we fellowship with our crucified and risen Savior, we start to bear the fruit of change.

- It's like physical fruit... GIVE ANALOGY
- When we were married to the law, we only yielded the fruits of frustration, insecurity, resentment, jealousy and hatred. **And EXHAUSTION** (*Illus. plate spinner*)
- **But as we rejoice in, rest in, revel in the love of God,** true spiritual fruits are produced.
- **As we experience the freedom** of knowing that **God accepts us** not because we can make our flesh act rightly, but as a free act of

grace based on what Jesus did, we **actually receive the strength** to begin to act righteously.

- **The irony of the Christian life is that the only ones who get better are those who understand that their acceptance by God is not conditioned on their getting better.**
- God's acceptance is the power that liberates us from sin; not the reward for having liberated ourselves

Invitation

- Starts with **receiving gift**: pray to receive it?
- Ready to **lay down your focus on all your self-efforts** and say, "I can't do this; Christ, you have to do it through me." Will you do that?