

THE BELIEVER AND SIN (PT. 3)
ROMANS 7:14-25

As I have told my wife (though she already knew), I am impatient. I want things done quickly.

- ✓ I want a 24-hour virus to go away in six hours.
- ✓ I want one-day dry cleaning done in four hours and one-hour dry-cleaning in 15 minutes.
- ✓ I want fast food to be *faster* food.
- ✓ I want to speed-read books (I have listened to some audio books at 1-1/4 or 1-1/2 speed to get through them more quickly).
- ✓ I want tomorrow's tasks to be done yesterday (though too often yesterday's tasks are done tomorrow).
- ✓ And I want the process of sanctification to be done. Today.

Most of us are impatient with sanctification. We want to be holy but we don't want to go through the hourly, daily, monthly, and yearly process of becoming holy. We want to be holy *now*. And that mindset has likely been part of what has generated some false teaching about sanctification, like a second act of grace and perfectionism.

But in his sovereign wisdom, God has mandated that the process of sanctification will take time. It will take the hourly and daily application of the word of God to hundreds of decisions and thoughts and actions we make each day and it will require those daily actions to be repeated for years and decades to cement and seal our sanctification. And no matter how mature we become, there will still always be remaining sin in us. And it is the reality of that remaining sin that Paul addresses in Romans 7:14-25.

In these verses, Paul says that like the battle a homeowner might have with an illegal squatter,

THE BELIEVER'S LIFE IS A BATTLE AGAINST REMAINING SIN.

We are looking at this passage now for the third time. We have seen two laments by the apostle Paul about the spiritual life and our battle with sin; and today we will see the believer's hope and the believer's reality.

- 1. The Believer's Lament: I DO What I HATE (vv. 14-17)**
- 2. The Believer's Lament: I DON'T Do What I LOVE (vv. 18-20)**
- 3. The Believer's Hope: JESUS Sets Us FREE (vv. 21-25a)**
- 4. The Believer's Reality: Loving GOD and Battling SIN (v. 25b)**

- While many take Paul to be talking in this passage about his life prior to Christ, we understand that Paul is speaking about himself as a believer — and even as a mature believer. While there are many reasons, one of the more compelling is that he has a new mind and heart that has changed his desires:
 - ✓ He hates the sin he does (vv. 15, 16, 20) — it grieves him that he periodically falls into sin.
 - ✓ He wants to do good (vv. 19, 21), which is indicative of a redeemed man — he yearns for the completion of his faith.
 - ✓ In a sense, this section is speaking about a believer's godly anxiety — his desire to be godly and his sorrow over remaining sin and its influence in his life.
- There are two primary laments (sources of grief) for Paul (and all believers):

1. The Believer's Lament: I DO What I HATE (vv. 14-17)

- Paul is ***sold into bondage to sin*** — “under sin” (v. 14) and the result is that he does what he hates (vv. 15, 16a). This is not just Paul's circumstance, but it is the life of every believer. Even when redeemed and justified, sin is still powerful and “hangs on and contaminates his living and frustrates his inner desire to obey the will of God.” [MacArthur]
- He agrees with the Law about his sin — he is condemned by the Law and agrees the Law is right (v. 16)
- What is the source of doing what he now hates to do? It's ***sin which dwells in me*** (v. 17). His problem is not that he is in sin, but that sin is still in him. This is the illegal squatter who has taken up residence in his life. Our problem is our bent toward sin. It's the unsanctified parts of our lives.
- This is the believer's first lament — I do what I hate. But our situation is more difficult than that...

2. The Believer's Lament: I DON'T Do What I LOVE (vv. 18-20)

- While there is overlap in what Paul says about what he does and doesn't do, the primary emphasis in this second lament is that because ***nothing good dwells in his flesh***, he doesn't do what he now desires and loves to do. His flesh is bent towards sin and only always does sin, keeping him from doing good.
- How do we know that the believer doesn't do what he desires? ***The doing of good is not*** (in him, 18b). He has a desire to do good. That desire is present. But he doesn't always do the good he wants.
- He restates the sentence in v. 19 — ***the good that I want, I do not do***. He desires good, but he does not do what he desires. He does not always fail. His failure is not continual. But it will be repeated. And it will be somewhere between occasional and frequent. He doesn't like it. But he does it.
- And where does this come from? From the ***sin which dwells in me*** (v. 20). It is remaining sin and indwelling sin that is the cause of sin in Paul's life. It's the flesh. When he trusted in Christ he received a new identity; so whenever he sins, that sin is not the result of that new identity. Christ is not the reason for his sin. Christ does not produce sin. Christ produces righteousness and freedom from sin.

- These are the laments of the believer. He does what he hates. And he doesn't do what he loves.
- Is there any hope? Is there any resolution to this dilemma? Paul said in chs. 5-6 that the believer doesn't have to sin. Is that true, or was that a false hope? There *is* hope.

3. The Believer's Hope: **JESUS Sets Us FREE (vv. 21-25a)**

- In verse 21, Paul reiterates what he has said twice already about indwelling sin: the reason for his wrestling is that sin is still living in him (vv. 17, 20).
 - ✓ And now he says he makes a discovery — ***I find*** is Paul's way of saying, "As I examined the facts and as I have lived the Christian life, this is the conclusion I've reached..."
 - ✓ And the conclusion Paul makes is that there is a principle of evil always ***present with me***. It is "laying alongside him." And as one commentator said, "This 'evil,' here personified, may be lying down, but is certainly not sleeping. It is pictured as if it were watching the apostle to see whether he is about to carry out a good intention. Whenever such a noble thought or suggestion enters Paul's heart, evil immediately interrupts in order to turn the good deed into its opposite." [Hendriksen.]
 - ✓ And actually, Paul says "the *law* of evil..." and by that he probably is talking about "the law of sin" (v. 23b) and the ***different law*** (v. 23a). This is a law that is different from the Law of God and opposed to the Law of God. And for Paul to identify ***evil*** and ***sin*** as a law is to infer that there is a part of sin that is compelling to the human being. Sin "dictates" action. The flesh doesn't just entice us to sin; the flesh pushes us to sin and manipulates us to sin. It is a controlling principle.
 - ✓ "Lingering sin does battle with every good thing a believer desires to do, every good thought, every good intention, every good motive, every good word, every good deed." [MacArthur]
- Yet also notice that Paul ***wants to do good***. We have noted this principle previously. The word ***wants*** is one of desire — it is "to will to do..." And this is a present tense, so it is an ongoing desire (not a one-time desire that goes away). His fundamental longings have changed. While he sins, sin is not his real desire. At the moment he sins, yes, he desires it (otherwise he wouldn't do it), but when he thinks and meditates and considers it, he really *does not* want to do the sin. He hates it.
 - ✓ Paul reiterates and emphasizes that his desire has changed in v. 22 — ***I joyfully concur...***
 - ✓ In verse 16 he already affirmed that the Law's evaluation and condemnation of him was right.
 - ✓ Now he says he is *joyful* with the Law. He is happily in agreement with the moral standard of the Law. He *loves* the Law. This is a repeated theme of the psalmists — **Ps. 1:2; 19:8; 119:14, 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92**. And Paul affirms that he has that same kind of love for God's Law and Word.
 - ✓ And notice also that this joy is ***in the inner man***. This is most likely a parallel thought to ***the law of my mind*** (vv. 23, 25) and refers to the inner transformation that God did at salvation (**6:6**; 2 Cor. 4:16; **Ezk. 36:26**).
 - ✓ This is *hopeful*. If you have an inward desire and longing to obey God, give thanks for His work.

- Paul comes back again to the same theme of the wrestling with the flesh in v. 23 — his delight in the Law of God is in contrast to **a different law in the members of my body**.
 - ✓ This “different law” is a law that is different from and opposed to God’s Law (v. 22). It is the same as the “law of evil” (v. 21) and the “law of sin” (vv. 23b, 25).
 - ✓ When Paul mentions “members” he is referring to his entire body and life. He is not saying that his body is evil (like the Gnostics), but he is saying that this different law — the law of sin (the compelling aspect of sin and the flesh) — is worked out throughout his body and life. It has many manifestations in what he sees, hears, tastes, touches/feels, and where he goes and what he does. Paul emphasizes this reality in **3:13-18**, mentioning throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, and eyes. There is virtually no limit to the manifestations of sin through the weakness of his body.
 - ✓ And that different law is also fighting for control of his mind — it is **waging war against the law of my mind**. The “law of his mind” is his renewed inner man (v. 22). It’s his agreement that God’s Law is right and God’s way is the best way. It’s his real identity as a new creation in Christ (**6:3ff**).
 - ✓ But the flesh continues to fight against and **war against** our new identity. It is a defeated foe that refuses to give up. It is still constantly fighting against us. And in fact, Paul says it is **making me a prisoner**. He is captured in a battle under spear point. He is subdued (e.g., **v. 14; 3:9**).
 - ✓ But that the flesh is fighting against Paul also infers that he is resisting it and fighting against it. Paul has not given up the fight against sin. Nor should we (**2 Cor. 10:3; 1 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pt. 1:11**). And perhaps the key passage is **Gal. 5:17-18** — the key to fighting against the flesh is through consciously living in the Spirit and being submissive to the Spirit.
 - ✓ Is it any wonder that the apostle almost explodes in what sounds like despair in v. 24 — **wretched man that I am!** The word “wretched” means “miserable” and “filled with anguish.” He feels that grief not because he is an unbeliever but because he *is* a believer and wants to know more transformation and less of the pull of the flesh in his life.
 - He feels this sense of wretchedness because he wants to be **set free from this body of death**. This is the same longing of **8:23** — he wants freedom from every aspect of remaining sin in him.
 - This clinging flesh is deadly to the believer. In fact, the Roman poet Virgil writes in a poem in the *Aeneid* of the dead body of a murdered man being strapped to the body of the murderer as a sentence against his crime until the murderer dies from the corruption of the dead body:

The living and the dead at his command
 Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand,
 Till, chok’d with stench, in loath’d embraces tied,
 The ling’ring wretches pin’d away and died.

- Perhaps it is that very idea that Paul has in mind here — “my flesh is a dead body that is strapped to me and corrupting and killing me.” And he yearns to be free from it.

- And as he looks around he wonders, **who will set me free?** No man can rescue him (and he is certainly incapable of rescuing himself)!
- It seems contrary to say that a believer can feel this way when he is in Christ and freed from Adam and sin — yet the more a believer grows in knowledge of God and the more he understands the holiness of God and the magnitude of an infinite righteousness, the more he sees not only what he does but also his perverse and ungodly desires and mixed motives, the more has this sense of the pervasiveness of sin and the resistance of the flesh to be put off and the more he might feel discouraged over his remaining sin.
- The irony is that he *is* growing and maturing, yet at the same time his awareness of his sin and sinful propensities is also growing.
- Kent Hughes is right when he says,

“Paul wants us to feel the emotion he experiences in trying to live up to God’s standards in his own strength....A believer who tries to please God in his or her own strength will always come to disheartening, aching frustration — *always!* Moreover, this will happen to ‘good Christians’ — even super-Christians. Paul was perhaps the greatest Christian ever, and this was his experience. He had more theology and passion in his little finger than more of us have in our entire life. Despite this, he sometimes tried to live up to God’s standard on his own. It would be naïve to say that after Paul came to an understanding of how sin defeats us through the Law, he never came under bondage again. I personally believe that with time he came less and less under bondage, but he never came to perfection.” [Hughes, *Romans*, 143-4.]

- So is there any hope for the believer? YES. As explosive as Paul’s lament, **wretched man** seems to be, his answer is even greater — **Thanks be to God...!**
 - ✓ There is a triumph and victory for the believer, but it is not in the believer. It is in God.
 - ✓ Paul is speaking in confidence and writing with authority. He knows that there is a time when sin *will* be left behind (8:24-25, 30). He knows that death will be gain for the one who lives for Christ (Phil. 1:21). He knows “sin will have been left behind forever. The conflict will have ended, never to return.” [Hendriksen] And he knows he is free from God’s wrath and condemnation (8:1).
 - ✓ And **God** alone is the reason for this confidence. There is no hope for Paul (or any other believer) to free himself from his bondage. Only God can free him and thus only God is worthy to receive thanks and gratitude for Paul’s release.
 - The believer has much for which he can express gratitude for his salvation!
 - Do I regularly thank God for my release from sin?
 - ✓ How has God accomplished this? **Through Jesus Christ our Lord.** Our liberty from sin is never accomplished by our own works, but only through the work of Christ. Jesus Christ is the means by which our freedom from sin’s penalty and power is secured (4:24; 5:1, 11, 21; 6:23; 8:39).
 - ✓ And notice that Paul says it is done through Christ, **our Lord.** It is his sovereign lordship as master of all things (including over sin and death) that frees us. We are under sin; He is over sin and death.

- ✓ So there is hope for the believer in this battle against sin — and it is in the work of Christ and the lordship of Christ that is authoritative over sin. How does the believer come to know this?
- I have always loved music and particularly the piano. I grew up listening to classical music and still listen to that style of music much of every day while I study. And I really wish I could play the piano. When I was young, my father offered to pay for lessons. Raye Jeanne and I owned a piano for about 15 years. I just never learned to play. If I sat down at the piano, I don't even know enough to play "Chopsticks." Now you could give me a very fine piano. You could pay to tune the piano. You could give me a very fine tuxedo to wear while I play the piano. You could buy me a variety of books and music to play. You could install excellent lighting. And I still wouldn't be able to even play "Chopsticks." Why? Because the problem isn't outside of me. The problem is inside of me. Now if the spirit of Fredrick Chopin or Van Cliburn could live in me, then you could give me Schroeder's toy piano and I could make it dance. And this is what happens for the believer when Christ comes to live in him — he is increasingly set free from sin's tyranny and has the ability to not sin. This is the emphasis of **Gal. 5:16-17** — victory over indwelling sin comes through the indwelling Spirit.
- This is the believer's hope — Jesus sets us free. *And yet*, there is still a reality...

4. The Believer's Reality: Loving **GOD** and Battling **SIN** (v. 25b)

- Even while affirming the hope of Christ's power, Paul points to the reality of the believer's circumstance.
- Even while Christ has freed him from Adam, even while Christ has freed him from the penalty of sin, and even while Christ has liberated him from the authority of sin and death, he still has indwelling sin.
- So Paul points to two opposing realities in the life of the believer:
 - ✓ ***I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God.*** This is the position of the believer in Christ. He has been transformed and renewed and given a heart of flesh with new desires to obey God. He loves God and loves to obey God. He has a new longing from being made a new creation and being given a new inner man. The old man is gone; he is entirely a new creature.
 - ✓ ***But on the other with the flesh the law of sin.*** Even while he is a new creation, there is still remaining sin. And when he sins, he is operating by the flesh and he is at that moment obeying the law of sin and placing himself in submission to sin, even though sin is no longer his master.
 - ✓ This is the reality for every believer. *Every* believer.

Verse 25 does not end with crushing defeat but rather with continuing battle. We have died to the old realm, the old self; it has been nullified, and we have been set free (6:1–7). Yet sin is not yet destroyed, and it returns as an invading army from that realm and lays siege to us. Using the twin weapons of temptation and the flesh (our sinful nature), it can once more dominate our lives when we fail to depend on Christ and the Spirit.

That is the point of verse 25. The first half provides the solution for attaining victory over the flesh and sin. The second half reminds us that the battle is ongoing... [Osborne, *Romans Verse by Verse*.]

CONCLUSION: Some applicational thoughts and principles:

1. *If you don't feel this tension and wrestling with sin, it may be because you are not a believer.* And if that is your situation, you must repent and trust in Christ as your Savior from sin. Believe that He can free you from sin and believe that living for Him is better than living for sin.
2. *The one who struggles with sin is generally giving indication of salvation.* Only a believer hates sin. Only a believer desires to do good for the glory of God. As one pastor tweeted a couple of days ago, "A Christian may feel so low he feels very near hell...Yet he will never go there. Likewise...A self-righteous person may feel so exalted he feels close to heaven... Yet he will never go there." [Jesse Johnson]
3. *The battle against sin in the life of the believer is not unusual. It's the norm.* Yes, we have Christ, but we also have remaining sin. Nothing unusual has happened to you if you are battling. That's reality for every believer. (And it is not a sign that you are weaker than some "super Christian.") Every growing and mature believer you see is a battling believer; there are no mature, unfighting believers.
4. *The spiritual life is a process, not an event.* There is no shortcut to spiritual maturity. It will take time and not all sin will be completely removed from your life, yet there is also some victory in the fight.
 - ✓ While not all sin will be removed, there will be seasons when you go for periods — even long periods — without sinning in some areas or even feeling the pull of temptation.
 - ✓ That there is still some remaining sin is a kind of grace in our lives, because it makes us dependent on Christ and stimulates us to turn to him for help. How will I ever know the sufficiency of His grace except that I have need of that grace every day in my fight against sin?
5. *While it is a struggle to fight against sin, fight against sin.* Don't give up in the struggle. It's worth the struggle. It's worth the fight. No one will stand before God's throne and regret one sin he gave up; no one will regret one ounce of energy expended against sin and temptation.
6. *Always remind yourself of the devastation of sin.* Sin is never for your benefit; sin is always to your detriment and sorrow and destruction. Remember these two verses: **Gen. 4:7; 1 Pt. 5:8-9.**
7. *Your battle against sin is more than a battle against what you do. It is a battle for the mind* (v. 23). The flesh is warring against what is in the inner man. And if we are going to win the war against sin, it is going to require that our minds are changed and that our affections are redirected toward submission to Christ. Fight against sin by putting godly structures in place. But even more, fight against sin by addressing sin at the level of your desires and longings and places of refuge. If you will win against sin, your desire for satisfying Christ is going to have to defeat your desire for indulgence.

BENEDICTION: **Romans 8:37-39**

First Service — Be sure to take advantage of the hospitality area. Find some physical refreshment and even more look for an opportunity to give spiritual refreshment: get to know someone you don't know; give a word of encouragement to someone who needs help and hope; pray with anyone who has a need.