

## The Battles Fought in a War Already Won: Part 1

### Roman 7:13-25

*“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this **body of death**? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

**Introduction:** Music is powerful and has a way of making us think or feel a certain way. If you have swum in the ocean (or for some a swimming pool), you have heard the two note, low end, rhythmic repetition of a bass, followed by an intentional **counter-melody**, a foreboding, angular melody played on top of this rhythm by a solo tuba, creating a "high-and-low" texture that makes the music unsettling. In fact, the movie **Jaws** created a condition for many people to fear the ocean, and a Pavlovian response to hearing the theme itself. Watching a movie like *Jaws* *without* the music becomes tension free, almost boring, since there is no build-up to the final resolution.

I want you to listen to another example of **counter-melody** from the classic musical *Les Miserables* in the famous song “*One Day More*”, that signals the dramatic end of Act I. You do not have to know anything about music or the story itself to hear the point. The last minute of the song employs a **melody line**, one that is easy on the ears and makes sense, but then increases tension by introducing other melodies sung simultaneously, which creates some dissonance and perhaps confusion. The song longs for a **resolution**, which not only comes at the end of the story but the end of the song, where parts come together in unison for a completed melody. **Listen to the song now**

*Why do I point out these two songs?* These two are apt pictures of what we find in **Romans 7:13-25**, a much debated but nonetheless vivid picture of the battle that rages within us when it comes to dealing with sin. We are going to try to show you that this section is one of the most hopeful descriptions for the maturing Christian, since it is written by an Apostle who dealt with the **same struggles** of sin that we do today, and who came out the other side with hope, victory, and assurance. So let’s get into this section together. Romans **6-8** simultaneously arcs as a **melody ---- counter-melody ---- and resolution**. What we will find in the middle is the fact that dealing with sin is not clean, simple, easy, or without nuance...but there IS resolution for our groaning.

If you are new with us or getting caught up, it’s important to remember that Paul started with amazing clarity in the gospel for the first 5 chapters of Romans: sinful mankind, mired in rebellion and deserving of judgement, were **justified by faith alone through the finished, holy, and complete work of Jesus Christ**. Those who believe or put their faith in Jesus are *declared righteous* even though we are sinful (Rom. 3:23-24), because Jesus was treated the way WE should have been treated on the cross: as a sinner (Rom. 3:25). Jesus took our place, bearing the wrath of God stored up for OUR sin. This also meant that we were given a righteousness we did NOT earn, a foreign or alien righteousness, that was **counted** as righteousness (Rom. 4:5). In other words, by faith in Jesus, we not only are NOT condemned since Jesus took our place, but we are also GIVEN His righteousness, so that we can LIVE righteously. **BUT**, this again was not earned nor could we do it, so we now live a life in this world through the power of Christ’s righteousness and strive to obey Him in all areas, since He owns our life.

This lead to a beautiful **melody in chapter 6**, a simple but powerful refrain. Chapter 6 informed us that “*we have died to sin, so we should no longer live in it*” (v. 2), that our old self was crucified with Christ so we are **no longer enslaved to sin** (v. 6). We are now **free from sin** (v. 7), since sin no longer has any *dominion or mastery* over us (v. 14). It is true that we once WERE slaves to sin (17), but are now made to

be slaves of righteousness and God (v. 18, 22). This continued to culminate in the beginning of chapter 7 where we see that we have **died to the law**, which meant we BELONG to Christ so that we can actually bear fruit for God (7:4). This is quite a melody! Things are looking good for our life of walking with Christ and keeping His commands according to chapter 6. But there is the pesky reality that we all face, in the fact that we all still struggle with sin, in the **actions** of our outer man, the **desires** of the inner man, and **the sinfulness** of our flesh. It is this last part, the **counter melody** that is addressed in 7:13-25.

But before looking at that text, let us make one more observation in order to understand what Paul is talking about.

In **8 of the verses** of this section, Paul mentions the struggle of the inner man, flesh, or what dwells IN him. He is going to describe an invaluable part of our **discipleship experience with Christ**. We are those who *love the law of God, hate our sin, loves Jesus and knows Him as our deliverer*. We want to honor Him, treasure Him, and worship Him. But we also know that we do not do this perfectly, and though we are not as bad as we could be, we have not achieved a level of maturity that we should be. The Bible gives two important metaphors for discipleship: **growth/maturity AND war**. These are both seen in chapter 7. Maturity is demanded for a disciple, since it recognizes the finished work of Christ on the cross and the new life given to us. We have used the illustration before, but a baby wearing a diaper is cute, but someone who has lived for 30+ years who wears a diaper is tragic. Growth and maturity comes in the Christian life when we love Christ and hate our sin, moving away from our sin and ceasing to easily indulge the way we used to.

But the analogy Paul uses in chapter 7 is that of **a war fought in different battles**. That war is waged and fought *against us* and *in us*. It is true that we have been given a new, fleshly heart (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-28) that is controlled by Christ (2 Cor. 5:14), but there is a part of us that is still un-sanctified, that still holds onto the *old man* or old way. This is described in various passages of Scripture:

**1 Peter 2:11** *“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”*

**Galatians 5:17** *“For 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”*

**James 4:1** *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”*

The war is going on through battles IN OUR FLESH, that part of us that will one day be made new. It is the part that our enemy pounces on, deceives, and tempts. It is why the Bible uses *positive* war language to fight in this battle:

**1 Timothy 1:18** *“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience” (cf. 6:12 – “fight the good fight of faith”)*

We have certainly been freed from the **penalty of sin** by being justified in Christ, have the **power to overcome sin** by dying and rising with Christ, but we are still plagued by the **presence of sin** in our daily lives. There are two extremes we must avoid as we venture into this battle of the presence of sin, and everyone in here is prone to one side or the other (or maybe both if you are really special!). We can

either live a life that is **HYPOCRITICAL** or **HYPERCRITICAL**. Both are out of balance with the gospel and living out of tension in the battle of sin.

### **HYPOCRITICAL:**

This is living in contradiction to what the gospel calls us to or what we say we believe. I want to take this one level lower than the hypocrisy that takes place on the public stage and actually invades our hearts here. A hypocritical view of ourselves in the gospel looks like one who **never acknowledges, struggles with, or wrestles with their own sin**. It is someone who can point out the sins of others, gives into judgmentalism, and lives in the fools paradise of artificial perfectionism. This is the church-goer who wears the plastic smile in corporate gatherings, either unaware or unwilling to deal with the muck that goes on in his heart. It is marked by thinking holiness is only skin deep, looking at the external keeping of the law or mere morality for goodness and maturity. But this person MISSES the fact that sin is at war in the inner man, in the desires, attitudes, and motives that are unseen.

In his excellent book called *“Respectable Sins: Confronting the sins we tolerate”*, Jerry Bridges addresses this inability to recognize the need to fight against sin (an excellent book to do with a small group or shepherding group --- just fyi). He said:

*“Sin, however, is must more than wrong actions, unkind words, or even those evil thoughts that we never express. **Sin is a principle or moral force in our heart, our inner being.** Our sinful actions, words, and thoughts are simply expressions of the principle of sin **residing within us**, even in those of us whose hearts have been renewed. The apostle Paul calls this principle **the flesh** (or ‘sinful nature’ in some Bible translations). This principle, called the flesh, is such a reality that Paul sometimes personified it (giving Romans 7 as an example)”<sup>1</sup>*

Bridges went on to unpack the idea that failure to see the reality of sin that lies in EVERY heart creates fertile soil for “respectable” or “acceptable” sins to grow, especially if merely evaluate our own lives and hearts by the culture around us, rather than what the Bible says. We can easily point out the **adultery, greed, or harsh words** of others, but we often miss the array of sin that festers in our own hearts. The rest of the book picks out a list of often overlooked, justified, or ignored sins in the life of a believer:

- **Ungodliness:** Living life without daily reference to God or His will. (James 4:13-15)
- **Anxiety and Frustration:** Not trusting God’s providence; anxiety is often mislabeled as a personality trait rather than a sin.
- **Discontentment:** Unthankfulness for one’s circumstances, often leading to grumbling.
- **Pride:** Including moral self-righteousness, pride of doctrine, and an independent spirit.
- **Selfishness:** Inconsiderateness of others regarding time, money, and interests.
- **Impatience and Irritability:** Lacking self-control, especially in relationships.
- **Anger and its "Weeds":** Resentment, bitterness, hostility, and anger.
- **Judgmentalism:** A critical spirit, particularly over differing convictions or doctrine.
- **Gossip and Slander:** Often masked as sharing concerns or prayer requests.
- **Worldliness:** Being engrossed with the temporal life, including a worldly view of money.

<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bridges, *“Respectable Sins”*, p. 24.

This is NOT a complete list, but it is indicative of our struggle with sin. When we realize the pervasiveness of sin we begin to understand that NONE of us is immune to the battle of sin, and it should motivate us to engage in the fight, as well as have grace on others in the fight.

### HYPERCRITICAL:

Was Paul just being too hard on himself? Was he treating his life with a magnifying glass, always finding something wrong. Was he the one who builds a new house or buys a new car but consistently finds something off, not level, or scratched? There are people that treat the new life in Christ as if His blood shed on the cross was not enough, that they are too bad or that they do not deserve joy. Hypercritical people are far too willing to focus on their sin, and yours, but without any kind of victory, joy, or hope. This is someone who lives in the dissonance of the song, in the confusion, but never tastes the sweet air of true forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation. The mantra of the hypercritical is “I’m a wretch, and there is no rescue for me”, instead of looking to Jesus as a deliverer. The reality is that this person actually is prideful, not humble, since they think they are TOO BAD for Jesus, and paint a narrow, hopeless picture of the gospel for others.

So we want to keep out of these two camps as we look at how sin wages war on the inner man. Let’s look now at the text, which will most likely take us this and next week, as we look at the point Paul is making and the practical outflow from which we take encouragement.

**Romans 7:13-25** *“Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become **sinful beyond measure**.<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the **flesh**, sold under sin.<sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.<sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.<sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, **but sin that dwells within me**.<sup>18</sup> For I know that **nothing good dwells in me**, that is, in **my flesh**. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.<sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.<sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, **but sin that dwells within me**.<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in **my inner being**,<sup>23</sup> 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**.<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this **body of death**?<sup>25</sup> 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”*

### **The Transition:**

Look at verse 13, which functions as a bridge, drawing a conclusion from the previous section and transitioning to the final one. Paul was committed to the fact that the Law, all that God has commanded and expects, is GOOD, and holy and righteous (12). The premise of his point is NOT that the law was somehow to blame for our sin, nor for the proliferation of it. No, the law simply revealed and aroused (7:6) that which was ALREADY in me. The problem of our sin is not the law, it is that we are SINFUL. Again, not just what we do or feel, which are tainted by sin, but the lower level that we find our ground level sinfulness. We are seen to be sinful **beyond measure**, surpassing comparison. It’s the word similar to *hyperbole* in English, which means an **extravagant exaggeration**. Since the law was not the main problem in our sin, it is also NOT the primary solution for it either.

### The Problem with Sin Beyond Measure:

I told you earlier that I believe Paul is speaking in terms of his **POST-CONVERSION** experience. This is important because if that is true, it helps shed hopeful light on our life today in the battle of sin. But admittedly, smart, intelligent, and well-versed believers have also believed this speaks of a **PRE-CONVERSION** life of Paul, one that cannot fight total victory over sin. We will spend the rest of our time this morning and next week looking at why we believe it was Paul's experience of sanctification, and why it absolutely matters to us.

- 1) **Paul's use of a personal pronoun in the present** – In verses 7-13, there are 9 past tense verbs used as he described his experience with the law. But look at this section again and I want you all to scan it. *What do you notice?* There are two things that stand out loudly. First, Paul uses **38** personal pronouns (I, me, my) which is highly compacted and not typically his style so far in Romans. This was a **PERSONAL** explanation of how the law and sin affect him. But in this section, Paul also uses the **present tense** of verbs, meaning the ongoing effects of sin on him. This was not theory or a description of a general experience, but an intensely personal journey that he himself experienced. This is one of the most hopeful principles of the text, since Paul was the best of Christianity, the most seasoned missionary, a faithful pastor and friend who **BATTLED** his sin like crazy, sometimes *FEELING* like he was not winning! Paul knew the answers too, but he too found living the Christian life to be a battle. And praise the Lord for it, since that is the most relatable of lives for us to emulate.
- 2) **Paul's understanding and struggle in the INNER MAN** – Before Paul was converted, his view of life and following the law was one that was black and white, definitive, and clear:

**Philippians 3:4b-6** *"If anyone else thinks he has reason **for confidence in the flesh**, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; **as to righteousness under the law, blameless.**"*

No angst in his language or heart in NOT being able to keep the law. Pre-conversion Paul thought he had it wired, believed he had earned a good standing before the Lord, and was willing to compare lives to prove it. But not only did Paul believe all of this to be **TRASH** in comparison to knowing Jesus, it does NOT measure up to his description in Romans 7. Let's scan through the text together:

- V. 14 – *"I am of the **flesh**, sold under sin"*
- V. 17 – *"Sin that **dwells** within me"* – The word **dwells** here means 'resides in', 'lives', or 'is housed in'. He recognized that sin is still him because it always has been
- V. 18 - *"Nothing good **dwells** in me, that is, in my **flesh**"* – though he had the desire to carry out what was good and right, he knew there was nothing **IN HIM** capable of it.
- V. 20 – *"Sin that **dwells** within me"* – sin causes me to do what I do not want
- V. 23 – *"law is waging war and making me captive to the law of sin that **dwells** in my members"* – sin is pervasive in his body, effecting every part of him
- v. 25 – *"in my mind, I serve the law of God, but in my **flesh**, I serve the law of sin"* – One can feel the tension of his fight against the law he wanted to keep and the sin that he committed.

Now, all of this paints a picture NOT of a man self-satisfied with his keeping the law blamelessly, but of a justified, freed, and saved believer who struggled with the sin raging in his body, heart, and mind. ***How is this comforting and encouraging to us, you might ask?*** Verse 24 has always been a glimmer of hope in the midst of a battle: Paul simply cried out, “WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM! WHO WILL DELIVER ME FROM THIS BODY OF DEATH!!!”

There was a legend in Tarsus where Paul grew up of a punishment for those that murdered someone. They would take the murdered body and tie or chain it to the one who murdered it, leaving it exposed on the outside of the city. The decay of the dead body would either cause wild animals to come or would simply hasten the death of the murderer through decomposition. This is (possibly) how Paul saw his flesh. It was dead, but dragging him down. It was dead, but still smelling and wreaking havoc. It was dead, but still effecting him in a maddening way. In his frustration, he simply cried out in light of the struggle...and then **came to words of hope:**

Where would a deliverer be found???! ***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** He is the answer, the hope, and the possibility. Jesus already won the WAR on the cross, but we are left with the battles, but we know even if we lose some (which we will), we will not be lost.

So my question today as we anticipate next week: **ARE YOU IN THE FIGHT! Are you battling your sin? Are you looking to Christ? Is He your deliverer? Thanks be to God!**