

The Battles Fought in a War Already Won: *Part 2*

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: TENSION. It can cause headaches, silent treatment among couples, or knots in your back. Often when there is tension in a relationship we want to address it so it does not fester. But there is a positive side of tension. One cannot build muscle or train their body without resistance, forcing muscle fibers to break down and build back stronger. Many of our students are gearing up for AP testing or finals, and it puts them in the pressure cooker of tension between what they’ve learned and what they can recall, but this challenge can move performance along. Engineers have learned that tension in structures can create surprising strength, like the Golden Gate Bridge which spans part of the San Francisco Bay through a series of cables under tension, and held up better than the Bay Bridge during the 1989 earthquake (though people got a shaky ride).

This second kind of tension is what we often face in life, but especially in a life that seeks to love, obey, abide in, and worship God in Jesus Christ. Take **money** and **finances** as a believer. We know that the *love of money is the root of all kinds of evil* (1 Tim. 6:10) and even has been the source of some wandering away from the faith. We know we should be content with food and clothing (1 Tim. 6:8) and NOT desire to be rich. So how much should we save and spend? How much should we give? On top of this, **Proverbs 30:7-9** says this:

Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:

*⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying; **give me neither poverty nor riches;**
feed me with the food that is needful for me,*

*⁹ **lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God***

Proverbial wisdom demands that we stay in **tension** when it comes to money, since we are so easily swayed to deny or profane God. **Marriage** is another tension, but maybe not in the way you are thinking. Paul recommended single men and women to stay as they were so that they could be free from anxieties and secure undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32, 35), since marriage brings anxieties and tension, with a spouse trying to please his spouse AND the Lord. Or we can look at the **life** of Paul or how our good friend Daniel Smith approached death. A pending death sentence brought excitement to be with Christ (which Paul said was far better – Phil. 1:23), but also a desire to remain on earth to continue working for his loved ones’ progress and joy in the faith (Phil. 1:25). There was real tension between the two, since one was desired and the other was necessary.

Romans 7 describes tension that a redeemed, justified, and forgiven believer faces when it comes to sin and the law. We know that in the New Covenant, we get a new heart, new desires, forgiveness from all our sin, and the Holy Spirit. Romans 6 tells us that we have died to sin, that it has no dominion over us, and we are no longer slaves to it since we are now slaves of God and righteousness (6:2, 14, 16, 18, 20). These are ALL true and precious realities that we cling to. BUT, even though the penalty of sin was paid for and the power of sin broken at the cross, we still deal with the **presence of sin in our lives**. Romans 7 is the **counter melody** of our experience, a dissonant time where we long for resolution. But it is in this tension that we **fight, by faith and repentance, to cling to Christ, deepening our love, understanding,**

and appreciation for all that we have in the gospel. To say it another way, the tension we face as we battle our indwelling sin of the flesh, we actually are on a path of maturation, since we learn how to depend on Christ more and more.

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**.¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the **flesh**, sold under sin.¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, **but sin that dwells within me**.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, **but sin that dwells within me**.²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.²² For I delight in the law of God, in **my inner being**,²³ 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**.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this **body of death**?²⁵ 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 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.

The flesh is not our physical body but that which makes up our human nature in the inner man, which is plagued by the flesh, the part of our life that is still battling the reality and presence of sin. We looked at **1 Pet. 2:11**, where Peter we *abstain from the **passions of the flesh which wage WAR against our soul***, and **Galatians 5:17** where Paul states that the *desires* of the flesh and Spirit are opposed to each other. **Ephesian 6:12** says that our battle is not against *physical forces*, but against spiritual forces that know how to wage war against our nature (thus we need the armor of God), and finally that we wage war by **holding faith and a good conscience** (1 Tim. 1:19; 6:12)

- 3) **The Tension of Engaging in the Fight Against our Sin** (Rom. 7:14-20)

Look at verse 14, which is perhaps one of the strongest cases of whether Paul was referring to his pre-conversion or post-conversion state. In verse 14 he refers to himself as being *“of the flesh”* or *“fleshly”* and sold under sin. Back in 6:16, being a slave to sin was a mark of an unregenerate, unsaved, unjustified person. But if we see how this argument plays out in the text, we will see that what he is fighting against is **not returning to his old slave master, putting the shackles back on because they feel so familiar**. It is much like the foolish person in **Proverbs 26:11**, who is compared to a dog returning to his OWN vomit --- a dog is either forgetful or so programmed to eat edible food that it is willing to eat nastiness. That is the bent and nature of our flesh --- it makes us stupid and do stupid things. That is

what Paul works out in this section. Let's break it down by *positive statement, the negative response, and reason for the tension*:

- 1) **His positive DESIRE** – He does not want to sin and even hates it (v. 15); I have the desire to do what is right (18); I want to do good (19);
- 2) **His negative RESPONSE** – He actually does what he hates (v. 15); I fail to do the good I want to (19, 20)
- 3) **The REASON for the TENSION** – I do not understand my own actions (15); I agree with the law, that it is good, since it reveals my sin (16); I operate at times from the **sin that dwells in me** (17); My flesh, that part of me that is still unredeemed, has nothing good in it (18); I do what is evil because my flesh still dogs me (19); Sin is still active in me (20).

Now, we remember a couple of things. Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ and never disqualified himself, so he was NOT battling overt sins. However, it is clear he was aware of the battle in his nature that fought against his desires, motives, and intentions. This is an active battleground in the life of a believer. Remember, the law reveals these areas, particularly if we are **loving God with all that we have and are, whether we are worshipping idols, and if we are loving our neighbor**. Paul is NOT EXCUSING sin in any way, but acknowledging that in his flesh, in his inner man, he still struggles to uphold the righteousness stated in the law. Now, far from being a **disqualifying issue**, it seems clear that this battling of sin is actually a **sign of faith and maturation**. A mature believer knows the sinfulness of his sin, and knows the battle is NOT just outside of him but inside. If I ever meet someone who cannot understand or identify sin that exists in his flesh or inner man, I know that this person has not worked out the reality of the gospel in everyday life.

A word about culture here at Grace. I believe that if this church continues to **mature in Christ** this way, by holding fast to the gospel truth that we have died to sin, yet still battle sin every day, it will mean this is a place of **active worship, gracious responses to each other, much prayer, and a recognition that we need each other**. I've been reading a book called "*The Way of Repentance: Embracing God's Gift for a Transformed Life*"¹ (which is *excellent!*), and it reminded that one of the ways to actively repent of sin daily is to engage with the **ordinary means of grace**, particularly the ministry of the **Word of God, Fellowship, or shared life in Christ, corporate worship that involves baptism and the Lord's Supper, and Prayer**.

How do we know we are sinful and what needs to change? Not by comparing ourselves with the world or others, but by using the Word as a mirror into our own soul and being confronted with the **glory and holiness of God**. Where do we find encouragement in the fight? *With each other, regularly, sharing not just news of the weather or sports, but life giving encouragement to keep going*. How are we regularly reminded of the gospel, Christ's work, holiness, greatness, glory, and sovereignty, lifting my head from myself to worshipping Someone outside of myself? By gathering regularly to hear the Word proclaimed, seeing the public commitment to Christ in baptism and reminded that we are forgiven in Communion. How do we rightly thank God, adore Him, confess our sin, and boldly come before His throne of grace? We need to pray, individually, privately, together, publically, silently, loudly, and corporately.

Our battle with sin means we are motivated to acknowledge, confess, and repent of our sin, knowing that we have an **advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. HE IS the propitiation for our sins**, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). This is the power of the

¹ Chris Brauns, "The Way of Repentance: Embracing God's Gift for a Transformed Life", p. 100-102.

gospel, that when we sin, or when we recognize our sin, we turn to our savior, NOT waiting until we FEEL like we are worthy, but exactly when we do not. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (1 John 1:9), which frees us to live in joy and obedience, even as we fail in the battles.

4) The Tension of Dualities (21-25)

The last section is Paul dealing with four sets of dual realities, which highlight or summarize the same tension he just laid out:

- **Two Egos** – The one wants to do good, but the other is dominated by evil (21)
- **Two laws** – Paul delights in the law of God (something an unbeliever would NOT do) on one hand, but on the other, his members (material and immaterial parts of him) betray him and keep the law of his mind (22-23)
- **Two cries** – There is the cry of desperation and ache for deliverance, and the cry of joy (24-25a)
- **Two kinds of servitude** – There is still the tension of serving the law of God and giving over to the flesh and serving the law of sin (25b).

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.

Paul ends the chapter NOT in triumph over sin, but the tension of part of himself serving sin. To be honest, kind of a bummer. But this ache he feels and experiences is the same one WE FEEL sometimes, and it yearns for hope and victory. That is where the restatement of the gospel in chapter 8:1 comes in, and we are ready for it. So I will ask again this week just like last: **are you in the fight?! Are you battling your sin by repenting of your sin and clinging to Christ?** Are we doing that together? This is NOT opposed to making disciples and reaching the nations with the gospel, IT IS ESSENTIAL – since the gospel that works out in us is the same gospel we proclaim. May the gospel we believe transform us as we call others to do the same.