



“The Christian Battle”¹

Romans 7:13-25, part 2

Last week, I preached a message on the end of Romans 7; and today, I’m going to preach a message on the end of Romans 7. I am taking two weeks to preach on this text because of the debate amongst Christians over whether or not Paul is saying this text is referring to himself as a Christian, a non-Christian, a carnal Christian. Or, some believe Paul isn’t even concerned about whether or not he’s a Christian.

Last week, I gave my reasons as to why I believe Paul is speaking here as a Christian. If you do not believe that viewpoint and you missed the sermon last week, I would encourage you to listen to that message sometime this week. But even as we approach this text again this week, I want to ensure that you know that I don’t believe Paul is saying that the end of Romans 7 is the whole of the Christian experience. Some people look at Romans 7 and say, “Yep, that’s all the Christian life is about! Woe is me. I’m awful. I do nothing that matters for God’s glory. My life is only one of continuous failing!” If that’s your view of the Christian life, you’ve negated Romans 6, and you have clearly erased Romans 8 from your thinking. The end of Romans 7 is giving one part of the Christian experience, not the whole of the Christian experience. Remember that the chapter divisions between Romans 6, 7 and 8 were made by men. There are no divisions in Paul’s writing. That means, all of this must come together.

There was actually a Christian who lived about 500 years ago that had a phrase for the tension we see between these chapters. The man’s name was Martin Luther. You may be familiar with that name. He sparked the Protestant Reformation. Luther coined a latin phrase to describe the Christian’s experience. The phrase is “simul justus et peccator.” This phrase means “simultaneously just and sinful.” Now, Luther didn’t mean that Christians are in the same way just and sinful. He would say that those who go to Christ for forgiveness and reconciliation with God are given Jesus’ righteousness like a robe covering them. This is their identity. God, in his courtroom, decrees us as righteous! We are perfectly righteous from that perspective. But, from another perspective, we’re still sinful. If you look at our actions, you still see we fall short of the glory of God. We sin. And, in that sense, we’re sinful.

This is what I stated at the end of the sermon last week. I believe the end of Romans 7 is simply a greater exposition of Romans 3:22-24: ²² **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all [who believe] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift. . . .²** Do you see this? All who believe fall short of God’s glory. They are sinful in that sense. But Paul says “and.” There’s more to the story. There’s a greater reality. And those who believe are justified. *Simul Justus et peccator.*

¹ This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 3:22–24.

Do you praise God for his grace? Christian, do you realize you don't deserve the status of just? Do you realize that you, even today as a Christian, do not merit God's kindness? Yet God has lavished his love and grace on you! This is one of the reasons why I love the end of Romans 7 so much. It's because Paul highlights our sinfulness, but in doing so, he highlights that God who loves us unconditionally. The God who will not leave us, but perseveres with us in forgiving sanctifying grace. The God who says that my salvation isn't dependent on me, but it's ultimately dependent on him! Romans 7 teaches us these truths. So, let's turn to Romans 7, and after we pray, I'll read verses 13-25 for us (Pray for Gerths and Calvary Baptist).

¹³ 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. ³

Before preaching the text, there are a few things I need to make clear. First, the already-not-yet of these verses. Paul highlights the truths of delighting in God's Law and yet also wanting sin. He is already righteous, but not yet. This feeling of dividedness is brought up by Paul in verse 25. Look with me again there. His conclusion is that until Jesus comes, he serves the Law of God with his mind, but with his flesh, he serves the law of sin. This is actually an important point because last week I mentioned that Paul qualifies the words "me, myself and I." Sometimes in these verses, when he says "I," he's referring to his flesh. That part of himself that wants sin. But sometimes, when Paul uses the phrase "I," he's referring to that part of him that serves the law of God. Now, I'm going to talk more on this, but keep in mind that even in this text, Paul emphasizes that as a Christian, that part that wants the Law of God is actually is true self and ultimate identity. But that doesn't negate that there's a real part of himself that *wants* sin.

Now, let's get to the context of these verses. Remember that in chapter 5, Paul said that where sin abounds, grace superabounds. God's grace is greater than all our sin, and God saves us on the basis of his mercy not our merits. But, in saying this, Paul then projects questions that will be asked of him. In 6:1 he asks, "If grace superabounds because of our sin, then grace must be dependent on our sinning. So, should we just continue in sin that grace can superabound?" Then in 6:15, Paul essentially asks, "If we're

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:13–25.

no longer under the law, is sin now tolerable?” After Paul answers an adamant “no” to both of these questions, Paul projects that people think Paul’s anti-Law. So, in chapter 7, Paul gives another question: “Is the Law sin?” Paul again says “May it never be!” It’s our sinfulness that is sinful. But sin does use the law to jump into greater sin. And now we come to one final question in verse 13: “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?” Did the good Law bring death to me?

If you take a step back and look at all of these questions, you actually can see that every question seems to come from the mindset that humans aren’t born sinful. Should we continue in sin? Paul’s response is that the only we cannot sin is by Jesus saving us! Is sin tolerable now? Paul’s response is that you only sinned before coming to Christ! Is the Law sin? Paul says, “No, you’re sinful!” Now we come to hear, “Did the Law bring death to me?” And here, Paul says, “No. your sin brings death!” Oh, and by the way, it still brings deadliness even in the Christian experience. So, the big idea of verses 13-25 is that **Only God through Jesus, not the Law, can justify, sanctify and glorify people.**

We humans really don’t like dealing with the reality of how utterly lost we are apart from God. And we love to think we’re better than we really are. Even as Christians, we’re quick to think we’re “better.” You can tell yourself that you’re righteous in Christ and then shove all your sin under the rug as though it doesn’t matter. Or, you say to yourself, “But I’m really disciplined! And so, of course, I’m good with God.” But Paul shows us here that if you, Christian, were judged by the Law, you’d be condemned. The Law alone cannot make you righteous. And, the Law alone, cannot make you holy. It still judges. Only God the Father, because of the work of the Son, through the power of the Spirit, can change us and mold us into his image. So here in this text, Paul answers the question of verse 13. Did the Law bring death to me? May it never be! But now as a Christian, I agree with the Law that my sinfulness is utterly sinful. And, as a Christian, my recourse for hope is not the Law, but in God through Christ! Christian, do you see this? If you try to shove your sin under a rug, I believe you’re truly missing out on greater joy.

When we get to the end of chapter 7, there’s rejoicing. And chapter 7 serves as the backdrop for the great joy of Romans 8. So, listen carefully. You will not know the joys of Romans 8 if you don’t also know the struggle of Romans 7. God, and God alone, is our Savior. Our rescue is all of super-abounding grace! Now, we can get into the text more fully. And there we see that:

1. The Law cannot save anyone.

Does the good Law bring death? No. Paul says that when the Law highlights sin in our lives, sin will then spring into action. Then the Law highlights that, and sin ends up becoming to us as exceedingly sinful. I think we can also agree to having experiences like this. When our sin was hidden and only we knew about it, it didn’t seem that bad. But when others highlighted it. When we were confronted or when it became public, the shame and guilt increased. Then we tried to stop, but the desires ran rampant. Sin became exceedingly sinful!

But the Law couldn’t save us from all these desires. Why? Why can’t the Law save us? Well, beginning in verse 14, Paul reveals two reasons why: our sin and the flesh. I’m going to jump around with verses to emphasize these two points. But let’s first talk about our sin.

Why? Our sin.

Look at verses 14-15 with me first. ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing

I hate.⁴ Then read verse 17: ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.⁵ And now, verse 20: ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ⁶

These verses can sound very confusing, but if you've ever been tempted with sin and if you have ever given into the same sin on multiple occasions, you can feel like a crazy person and you can feel filled with shame. You can ask, "Why do I do this?" And in these verses, Paul shows us this reality of having sin in us while at the same time hating sin. In verse 14, he says that he is of the flesh. He is sold under sin. Last week, I commented on how this verse is used by people to say, "See, Paul can't be a Christian here. Romans 6 says that sin is not our master!" But my response to that was that in Romans 6, Paul also says "Don't let sin reign over you." Here's the already-not-yet. Sin, ultimately, isn't our master. But at times, we can treat it as though it is. We can give it the sense of rule. In addition, verse 14 has to be understood in the context. Paul says there are two "I's" and "me's" in these verses. There's the "I" that is the flesh. There's the "I" who loves God's Law. So, in verse 14, Paul says this "I" of the flesh is sold under sin.

Christian, there is a real part of you that still exists in you that loves and wants sin. No matter how hard you try, that part will be there until the day you die. Paul says that this sin dwells within us. It lives with us. And then in verse 21, Paul says this evil lies close at hand. Sin is always near us. Always trying us. One of the greatest American theologians, Jonathan Edwards, once wrote this: **"The godly man carries his indwelling sin, as his daily and greatest burden, because he loathes it, and longs to get rid of it; he would fain be at a great distance from it, and have nothing more to do with it. . ."**

Now, as Paul speaks here and says "it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me," Paul's not saying he's not to blame for sin. But instead, if we understand that there are two "me's" that he's talking about here, then we simply read that Paul is saying that his new person in Christ does not want the sin. His new identity of righteousness does not do unrighteousness. However, his flesh does. Please don't hear Paul not taking personal responsibility. More-so what Paul is doing here is showing how he can be both sinful and righteous.

But even in the Christian, sin hijacks. Sin remains with us. It indwells us. It resides within. And when we're tempted, sin says "yes." It's Galatians 5:17: 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.** ⁷

So, when we're tempted to sin and then the Law says to us "Don't do it." Is the Law enough motivation for the Christian to change? Can the Law itself alone save us? No. Why? Because sin lies close at hand in us. And then Paul gives the other reason why the Law isn't enough:

Our flesh. The flesh is the base for our remaining sinfulness. As I've said in previous weeks, the "flesh" refers to that which has suffered the effects of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. It's the fallenness of every human, and in a Christian, it's that part of ourselves that still suffers the effects of the fall. The flesh *only* contains within it sinfulness and sin. And so, the flesh is utterly weak. Meaning, the flesh *cannot* please or serve God.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:14–15.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:17.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:20.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ga 5:17.

Read verses 18-19: ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.⁸ Nothing good dwells in the flesh. Only sin resides in the flesh.

Now look at verses 23-25: ²³but 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. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks 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.⁹

I think the “body of death” is the same as the flesh. Within us is dead weight. How can I run with endurance the race before me when death is hanging on me? How can I move forward when death wrecks even in my best deeds? Paul says at the same time, he serves God’s Law with his mind and also with his flesh the law of sin.

Let’s put all of this together. When you as a Christian ask, “How can I, a righteous person, sin?” The reason is that there’s a flesh that still resides in you. And all the flesh can do is sin. Yet, here’s what we do sometimes. We’re tempted to sin. Sin in ourselves says “yes.” And then we say, “But God says don’t. So, I won’t! I’ll show God and myself that I can do this.” Then, in the strength of our flesh, we fight against temptation. Hold on. Can the flesh fight against sin? No. It’s weak.

Now, think about the bigger context Paul’s trying to communicate here. Paul’s talking about how the Law cannot save us. The Law cannot make us grow in holiness either. Yet, even in the Christian, sin deceives us. We think that we can follow God in our own strength. Years ago, I remember a friend of mine sharing a quote with me that he thought was really clever. It was this: **“Pray as though it all depends on God. Act as though it all depends on you.”** I immediately recoiled at that. I tried to explain to my friend why I hated that quote. In essence, this quote defies what the Scriptures say. The Bible says we are to live by faith! We are to live in dependence on God, not us! If I live as though it all depends on me, then who’s glory am I living for? When I do good, I’m going to say, “Look at me and what I did for God!” That’s awful! That’s glory-stealing. That’s sin! That’s living in the flesh. That’s living like the Rich Young Ruler who boasted that he kept the Law, not realizing his idolatry in his heart.

If we live in the flesh, we’re living in sin. Once we realize this, we see our weakness. But then we might wonder to ourselves, “But I tried. I told myself what God requires by quoting Bible verses to myself. And yet I failed! The Law isn’t bad, is it!” No, it’s not the Law that’s bad. It’s our sinfulness and our flesh that’s bad. And, we need to stop fighting in the flesh.

Ventura, we need to take this to heart, and actually, this is where Paul goes in Romans 8. This flesh that remains. This indwelling sin. This evil that lies close at hand, we should never make peace with it because it’s sold under sin. And yet, we are not sold under sin. Sin is no longer our master. So, recognize that when you sin, it’s because you wanted it. When you sin, you trusted yourself to fight against it. When you sinned, you forgot you were needy to depend on God for his strength. When you sinned, you did it because the *you* of your flesh wanted it and you thought the Law was enough.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:18–19.

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:23–25.

So, what's the answer? What ought we to do when we're battling against temptations? Of course, this question will be more fully answered over the next few weeks, but the ultimate answer is to look to God who alone can save us.

2. Only God, through Jesus, can save us.

Now, Paul has been emphasizing this from chapter 1. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. This word "salvation" doesn't simply mean that God declares you righteous. The term salvation includes all the blessings of reconciliation with God, and it includes within it justification, sanctification and glorification. Justification is being declared righteous. Sanctification is growing in holiness. Glorification is when we finally are fully set free and secure with God forever.

Only God can do this work. But you might be like me and think, "But doesn't the Bible itself say that the Law revives the soul?" Does the Bible talk about the Law's ability to change us? Those are interesting phrases, but we have to take all of them in context. I've been reading through Psalm 119, which is David's praise of God's Word. And there, David ultimately prays that the Lord takes the Law and applies it to his heart. If God doesn't change David's heart, the Law doesn't matter.

So, who saves? Does the Law save or God? God does. And Paul has already showed us how. First, **through the gift of righteousness**. God declares us righteous not on the basis of our works, but because of Jesus. Jesus lived the perfect life we could never live, and Jesus, on the cross, then took the condemnation we deserved to take. Now, if you've trusted the Lord, you have his righteousness as a gift. In addition, God then changes us from the inside-out. He gives us new desires – desires to *want* God. Even if these desires are small and faint, they're new and beating within us. These desires come from the new identity we have in Christ.

And, this new identity is even express in Romans 7. In the midst of the tug-of-war with our sinfulness, Paul shows the new self that is within us. We first see that God saves us by giving us **new hearts that agree with the Law**. Verse 16 says, "16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good."¹⁰ First, Paul emphasizes that he doesn't want to do certain things. And then he says he also agrees that the Law is good. Who agrees that God's Law is good? Yes, this could be a pharisaic agreement that it's good. But I think this is deeper. This isn't a person justifying the sinfulness on the inside. This is a person saying, "God, you are just and right. Your Law is good."

Then, in these verses, Paul continually says things like "it is no longer I who do it." Or, I'm doing things I hate. Here's the duality of the words "I." One part wants. Another part doesn't want sin, but righteousness. What is this part that wants to do righteousness? Verse 22 is the answer: ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being. . .¹¹ Last week I stated that this phrase "inner being," is translated by some as "true self." Even though there could be a part of myself that wants and longs for sin, that doesn't change the reality of who I am truly, as a Christian. My true self delights in the law of God.

¹⁰ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:16.

¹¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:21–22.

I truly love God's law. I meditate on it day and night. I love God's Word! Oh, if you love God's Word, praise God! He's changed, and is changing, your heart. And, with this new "true self," we war against the flesh.

So, let's see how the flesh fails with the Law, but how the true self succeeds with the Law. When we depend on ourselves and try to fight sin in our strength, we fall into sin because that's all it can do. But you could then say, "Well then how am I to think about the Law?" With our true self. "What does that mean?" Well, first, we shouldn't hate the Law. I have felt at times that some Christians have hated the Law because they simply say, "I don't want to be legalistic." Or they say things like, "God doesn't give us rules anymore. They're just requests." That's not true, and that makes light of God's rules. God's Law is good! The problem is us and our sinfulness.

God reaches into our lives, saves us and then gives us newness within. This inner man doesn't spurn the Law. The inner man begins to delight in the Law of God. This Law reveals God's character and goodness to us. But this inner man also is quick to say, "You can't obey this Law in your strength. You must always depend on the Lord." Listen carefully, Christian, we don't fight sin by first declaring we're going to be victorious and then pulling up our bootstraps and trying real hard to resist temptation. God's goal is to grow us in our dependence on him. Faith is a relational term, and God designs for us to want him supremely and to glory in him most!

A man by the name of J.I. Packer once wrote this: **Grace is God drawing us sinners closer and closer to Himself. How does God in grace prosecute this purpose? Not by shielding us from assault by the world, the flesh, and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstances, nor yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology; but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to Him more closely."**

This is exactly what Paul is talking about here in Romans 7. God doesn't shield us from the flesh. Instead, through temptations and failings, God doesn't leave us. Instead, he shows us how much we need him. And this inner man, this true self, agrees! Before moving into chapter 8, Paul shows us the cry of the inner man: ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹²

Do you see? The first step of fighting is **the cry of faith**. The inner man, our true self, agrees with the Law. When we sin, we agree that the Law is right in saying we're wretched. We are sinful because we've sinned and we have this flesh! But our inner man doesn't stop there. The inner man cries out to the Lord and trusts the Lord. Do you see this as a good thing? Many times, it seems Christians think that to recognize how needy we are is failure. But God says that's victory because that means we're drawing closer to him!

John Newton, the 18th century pastor who had been a slave-trader before coming to faith in Christ, once wrote this poem that I think fits Romans 7. I'm going to read all of it and you can follow on the slides:

**I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,**

¹² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:23–25.

And seek more earnestly His face.

**I hoped that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.**

**Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.**

**Yea more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Cross all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.**

**'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried,
'Wilt thou pursue Thy worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for grace and faith.**

**These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in me.'**

God works even through the inward trials of our own sin to break us of self and pride and set us free. The inner man sees this! The inner man agrees with the Law and laments sinfulness. But the inner man also goes on and recognizes God's design. In Romans 7:24, the inner man moves on to preach the gospel to ourselves. Oh, Ventura, I hope you get this. There are some here who consistently, continually feel the weight of your own sinfulness and you stop at "Wretched man that I am." Don't stop there. You can't stop there! The inner man urges us to move to the glorious news that although we fall short of the glory of God, we are justified. And not only that, because of God, we will be delivered from this stinking, rank, wretched body of death!

Paul moves into verse 25 with a shout of gratitude! Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Even my sin doesn't keep God from persevering in his faithfulness towards me. Your sin doesn't hinder God. No. He has implanted his Word within us so that we delight in God and his ways and we turn to him in faith. And, it's only through dependence on the Lord that we live and breathe every day.

In light of God and his promises, we are confident we won't always live in defeat. In light of God and his promises, we know that he will grow us more in holiness. In light of God and his promises, we know that Jesus will return someday. And even though we might groan. Even though we have a wretched body of death today, we know someday, it will be all taken away.

Until that time, Paul says in verse 26, “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”¹³ Again, as I said last week, this “therefore” statement is qualifying all the verses before. After Paul declares his hope in the gospel, he says he serves the law of God with his mind and serves the flesh with this principle of sin that is still within.

If he were judged by the Law, he’d be condemned! The good Law would declare death over us! But Christian, we’re not judged by the Law. That’s how Paul can go into Romans 8 and say, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!” No condemnation! And then, Paul goes on further into chapter 8 and then shows us how this new true self who delights in the law of God actually grows by the strength of the Spirit. Defeat is not our destiny even though we battle with it daily.

God has secured our justification. He has promised our sanctification. He has guaranteed our glorification! Who will deliver us from this body of death? God, through Jesus, not the Law. Look to him!

And now together, let’s celebrate communion.

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¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ro 7:25.