Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer and Indwelling Sin, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 7:18-25
Code: 45-53

Romans chapter 7, and we are studying verses 14 through 25. And we'll read those in just a moment so that you'll have the flow of this particular important text. A rather flippant sort of scoffing young man asked a preacher in a mocking fashion, "You say that unsaved people carry a great weight sin. Frankly," he said, "I feel nothing. How heavy is sin? Ten pounds? Fifty pounds? Eighty pounds? A hundred pounds?" The preacher thought for a moment and gently replied, "If you laid a 400 pound weight on a corpse, would it feel the load?" The young man was quick to say, "Of course not, it's dead." To which the preacher replied in driving home the point, "The spirit that knows not Christ is equally dead. And though the load is great, he feels none of it."

But may I suggest to you that the believer is not so indifferent to the weight of sin as the unbeliever is? But rather on the other hand, the believer is hyper sensitive to sin. And having come to Jesus Christ, his senses are awakened to the reality of sin. Such awakening began in his very salvation and is not lessened since he has been redeemed, but rather continues to become intense as he grows and matures.

Such sensitivity prompted a saint as great as Chrysostom to say, "I fear nothing but sin." An unbeliever, when confronted of the message of salvation by grace, free in Christ, said, "If I believe that doctrine, that salvation was free and gracious and it was only a matter of faith, if I could be sure that I could be so easily converted, I would believe and then take my fill of sin." To which the gospel messenger replied, "How much sin do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to satisfaction?" The answer to that is just a little bit is more than we can stand.

Coming to Jesus Christ brings the sense of sin to the heart and mind. And I believe that a true Christian feels that weight of sin in a way that an unbeliever does not feel at all. And in case you wonder whether, in fact, they are dead to that weight, remind yourselves of Ephesians 2:1, "And you *hath He made alive* who were dead in trespasses and sins."

But a true Christian feels sensitive to sin, hates the evil that is in him, seeks not to fill up his life with sin under grace, but rather seeks to empty his life of sin, so distasteful to him is it.

Now when you look at the New Testament, of course the believer becomes more sensitized to that. We find, for example, in Ephesians 4:30 that when we sin the Holy Spirit is grieved. And we seek not to grieve the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, we find that when we are involved in sin, our life

becomes powerless. That's what made Paul say that I have this tremendous fear that in preaching to others I myself would become a castaway, or useless.

And even the Psalmist said, "Praise is fitting for the upright." Consequently when in sin, we find that we are even unacceptable in our praise to God. And none of us wishes to have unacceptable praise. Jeremiah added in Jeremiah 5:25 these very poignant words. "Your sins have withheld good *things* from you." And no Christian would choose to have the blessing of God withheld, if really given the opportunity and the concentration to think about it.

And further, the Psalmist in Psalm 51, when confronted with his own sin asked God to restore to him the - what? - the joy of his salvation. In Hebrews chapter 12 we find that when a believer sins, he is chastened by God. In 1 Corinthians 3 we find that when a believer sins, he is hindered in his spiritual growth so that the apostle says, "I can't feed you what I'd like to feed you because you're so fleshly." In 2 Timothy 2:21, Paul says we must have pure lives in order to be vessels fit for the Master's use. And so, when sin is there in our lives, it renders our service limited and useless. In 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 we find that sin in the life of a believer pollutes the fellowship. And that's why the apostle says, "Before you come to the Lord's table, make sure you cleanse your own heart before God."

We also find that in 1 Corinthians 11:30, and in 1 John 5:16, and I think also in James chapter 1, the indication is made there that a believer in sin is in danger of losing his life. To say nothing of the fact, the supreme fact of all facts that 1 Corinthians 6 says, "Don't you know that your body is the temple of God?" In other words, if you bring your body into contact with sin, you are dishonoring God.

Which of us chooses to grieve the Holy Spirit? Which of us deep down in our hearts as believers really wants to grieve the Holy Spirit? Or wants to have unanswered prayer? Or desires to have a powerless life? Or wants to be offering inappropriate praise? Which of us, when really looking deep within ourselves as redeemed people, chooses to have the blessing of God withheld, joy removed, chastening in their place, growth hindered, service limited, fellowship polluted, and our life in danger? Which of us as believers would long to dishonor God?

Quite the contrary, as the Psalmist said in Psalm 42:1, "As the hart - " or the deer " - pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after Thee, O God."

I believe that when an individual comes to Jesus Christ, there is planted within that individual a new creation, a new nature, a new essence, a new self, a new man. And that the great heartbeat, and passion, and cry of that new creation is a longing for the things of God. And over against that, a resentment and a hatred of sin. And that indeed is the spirit of the Apostle Paul as he writes in our text, look at it, beginning at verse 14.

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am fleshy, sold under sin. For that which I do I understand not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

Now there’s a man in conflict in that text, a man in serious conflict. There’s a man in that text who loathes sin, who hates sin, who despises sin, and who loves righteousness, and who longs for the law of God. This cannot be an unredeemed man, for according to our Lord in John chapter 3, the unredeemed love darkness and hate righteousness. This is a man who loves righteousness and hates sin.

In Psalm 119 - and I’m going to be referring back to that Psalm so you might want to mark it somewhere in your Bible. We’re going to go back to it a few times. But in Psalm 119:104, we have a very similar statement in one simple verse. And here the Psalmist wonderfully reflecting on the Word of God says, “Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.”

There is the essence of the redeemed man who longs for the understanding of the Word of God, who longs for the fulfillment of the Word of God, and who hates every false way. Thomas Watson, the wonderful man of God of the Puritan era, in his very significant book called *The Body of Divinity*, said this. “A sign of sanctification is an antipathy against sin. A hypocrite may leave sin, yet love it as a serpent sheds its coat, but keeps its sting. But a sanctified person can say he not only leaves sin, he loathes it. God has changed thy nature and made thee as a king’s daughter, all glorious within. He has put on thee the breastplate of holiness, which though it may be shot at can never be shot through.”

So, there is a struggle. And I believe the struggle is presented to us here in Romans chapter 7, a classic passage describing the graphic poignant picture of the pain of indwelling sin in the life of a Christian.

Now you need to remember that in the 7th chapter of Romans, Paul is basically talking about the place of the law. And he is trying to demonstrate that because he preaches salvation by grace through faith does not mean that he sees no place for the law. That is not to say to Jews who esteem

the law that he does not esteem it, he is simply giving it its proper function, and its proper function is not to save people, or to sanctify people, but to convict them of sin and show them, as verse 13 indicates, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And he is pointing out that even as a believer, the law continues to have the function of demonstrating to the Christian the exceeding sinfulness of sin. When he sees the law of God, which his heart longs to fulfill, and in comparison sees the sin in his life, he loves the law and loathes the sin.

Now in the midst of this conflict we find the pouring out of the heart of the Apostle Paul in the first person, I, I, I, me, me, me. This is his testimony and ours, as well. And the testimony of his own struggle spiritually with indwelling sin is given in three laments. It's a very sad passage. It's a very remorseful passage. It's a very poignant passage, because it isn't often that we get this kind of deep insight into the apostle Paul's struggle. And it isn't often that he repeats it so many times. In fact, as I read that, you probably noted the repetition of the text. There are three laments, and they all three basically say the same thing. He laments his situation. He weeps over it. He sorrows over it. His heart is grieved over it. He's broken over it.

And each lament has three parts: The condition in which he's finding himself, the proof of that condition, and the source of that condition. Look at the first lament by way of review. We went into it last week. Verses 14-17. The condition is in verse 14. "We know the law is spiritual: but I am fleshy, sold under sin." The law is spiritual. That is, it proceeds from the Holy Spirit. It is energized by the mind, and the heart, and the will of God. It is holy, just and good, says verse 12. But I am, in contrast, unspiritual. The law is spiritual, and I'm unspiritual.

Now you say, "Can a Christian say that?" Yes, in a perspective. That is one perception that we rightly should have of our own lives. We are not all that we should be, right? The law of God is spiritual but we are fleshly, we're unspiritual. We are carnal. And here he's looking at the battle. He's looking at his humanness. He's not talking about all that is renewed in him. He's talking about what is not renewed in him. His humanness is still there and it stares him right in the face. He finds himself sold under sin. He says in verse 23, he is "brought into captivity to the law of sin which is operating in his members." He finds himself still being victimized by sin, even though he's redeemed. This is his condition, condition of struggle.

In fact, in Philippians 3:12, Paul puts it this way, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: - " in other words, I haven't got it yet " - but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

What he's saying is, "I know I haven't gotten there yet." And that's all you have here in Romans 7 is a recognition of what he isn't. It's a perspective. It's not all that could be said about him, but it is

something that could be said about him. It isn't all that could be said about me to say I am unspiritual, but it is true about me to say I am unspiritual. I have not yet become fully what I will become, right? It is a non-technical view. It is a perspective. It is the same perspective that made Paul say "I am chief of sinners," 1 Timothy 1:15.

And what do you say gives that perspective? Well, listen very carefully. It is an understanding of the pure, holy, just, good law of God. And when you see yourself against that law, you are very much aware of how sinful you are. Now when you see a Christian, calls himself a Christian - or herself - and they appear to be very content with where they are spiritually, and they want to make sure you know how really holy they are, and how pious they are, that is not to indicate to you that indeed they are holy, but rather indeed they don't understand the Word of God. That is evidence not of their holiness, but an evidence of their ignorance of God's holy law. For the better we understand the infinite perfection of God's holy law, the better we will understand our own imperfection, true? And so I submit to you that what we have in Romans chapter 7 is not only the testimony of a Christian, but a very mature one, and a very insightful one, and a very spiritually-minded one.

After giving us the condition in verse 14, he gives us the proof in verse 15. Here's the proof that he's still not all that he should be, that he's unspiritual. "For that which I do, I understand not - " or I know not, or I don't love, or I don't choose to do " - for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do." Now that's the proof. The proof that I'm still fleshy is that I'm frustrated because I see the infinite glory of God's law, I see the magnificent holiness of His standard, and I can't live up to that standard. And I'm not satisfied with how far along I am, I'm only dissatisfied with how far along I'm not.

That is a very mature perspective. It's a very immature thing to think you've really arrived spiritually. The apostle Paul says, "I haven't obtained. I haven't apprehended that. But I - " what? " - press toward the mark. I see the goal and I'm moving. I'm not there."

That's the humility that comes from right spiritual perception. Instead of congratulating ourselves about how holy we are, if we really understand God's law, we're going to see ourselves as falling far short. And that's where he is. And that's why this, again, takes us back to the brokenness, and the humility, and the contrition that marks the true follower of the Savior.

Then he talks about the source. Because if you say, "Well, Paul, you're saved. You're redeemed. I mean, where is this coming from?" Verses 16 and 17 give us the answer. "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good." Nothing wrong with the law. Because I can't keep it doesn't mean it's wrong. What's your problem, Paul? "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

Now my condition is I'm in a struggle. The proof of it is that I can't always do what I want, and do sometimes what I really don't want in my deepest self. And the source of it all is sin that is in me. And

now the “I” and the “me” in verse 17 become technical. He says “I” in verse 14, very generally. “I’m unspiritual.” But now he makes sure we understand what he means in verse 17. “Now then it is no more I,” and the “no more,” you remember we talked about that, *de ouketi*, no more, no more since when? Since salvation. Since I’ve been saved, no longer is it I, the real me, the renewed me, the recreated me, that does it but it is - what? - it’s sin that dwells in me. And we went into that in some detail. The “I” then becomes a technical term.

Now what is the conflict, then? The conflict in the life of a believer is a conflict between a new creation which is holy, which is created for eternity, which is the eternal seed, which cannot sin, and that is in you, that is the real you, that is the basic you, the recreated you. The conflict is between that redeemed you and your unredeemed mortality, your unredeemed humanity, which is still present. And that’s where his struggle lies. And that’s his lament.

And I believe that every child of God who really is walking in obedience with the mind of the Savior laments the reality of his sin. I see the believer in 1 John 1:8-10, and he will not deny his sin, he will - what? - confess his sin. I hear him in Psalm 38:18 saying, “For I will declare my iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.” I hear him in Psalm 97:10. “Ye who love the Lord hate evil.” I think the truly regenerated person hates sin and faces the fact that even though he’s been recreated and there’s a new nature there, that new nature is still encased, as it were, in humanness, and therein lies the struggle.

So even though we’re redeemed, sin hangs on in our flesh, our mortality, our unredeemed humanity, and disallows us from seeing fulfillment of the deep heart longing that pants after the perfection of God’s law. And sometimes this doesn’t only show up before you sin, but it shows up afterward, and it shows up in your guilt, and your sense of sorrow, and your sense of contrition.

Let’s look at the second lament, and it’s just like the first. Verse 18. The pattern here is identical. Here comes the condition. “For I know that in me - ” now what me are you talking about? Just the general you, the whole you, the new you, the new creation? No, no. “In me.” That is which part of me? My what? “My flesh.” And he gets technical. He doesn’t want us to lose the distinction that he just made in verse 17 about that it’s not really him, it’s the sin that dwells in him.

And then in verse 18 he says, “The sin dwells in my flesh.” So it’s not really me, not the new me, not the recreated me, not the divine, incorruptible nature planted in me, not the eternal seed which cannot sin. It’s not that me, it’s, it’s my flesh. So “that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing.”

I don’t see any good thing in my unredeemed humanity. And so he says, “In me,” but the he particularizes which part, “that is in my flesh.” And therein, I believe, he locates in terms the seat of sin. Sin is seated in the flesh. And we have said before, and say again, that that flesh is our humanness. It isn’t necessarily in and of itself evil, but it’s where sin finds its base of operation.

I might just put it this way. Paul limits the area of corruption in the believer to the flesh, to the unredeemed mortality. That is why, beloved, when you die and leave this body, no change needs to be made for you to enter into eternal glory, because all you need to be fitted for that is not the addition of something but the subtraction. And so he limits the area of sin to the fallenness of his unredeemed mortality.

Now would you notice he says “that is, in my flesh.” He is no longer in the flesh, as we’ll find out in chapter 8:5-8, but the flesh is – what? - in him, still there. And, by the way, unsaved people are only flesh, flesh, flesh, flesh, flesh, flesh, and nothing else.

Now the proof of this condition is given in verse 18 again. And this is a sad song. And that’s why he laments it over and over again. Look at verse 18. Here’s the proof, middle of the verse, “For - ” in other words, here’s how I’m going to demonstrate it “ - to will is present with me.” In other words, there’s something in me that wants to do what’s right. “But how to fully perform that which is good I find not.”

Now please don’t misunderstand him here. He’s not saying, “I can’t figure out how to do anything right any time,” because that isn’t true. But what he’s saying is, “I can’t do it to the extent that my heart longs to do it.” You understand? “I can’t perform it in the way that I want to perform it.”

If you look at your own Christian life and you see the flow of growth, I think if you sit down and are honest about it, even though you can see growth in your Christian life, you’re going to have a greater hatred for your sin now than you did long ago when you were way down here on the growth line, and you really didn’t understand how serious sin was, and you hadn’t had such a vast comprehension of the majesty and the holiness of God, and the infinite purity of His holy Word. You see, as that escalates, so does your sensitivity to sin. And though while we’ve taught and we affirm again that spiritual growth involves the decreasing frequency of sin, along with the decreasing frequency of sin is a heightened sensitivity to it. And that is Paul’s experience. The will is present with me, the real me down inside wants to do what God wants, but I can’t perform the thing the way I want to.

And then verse 19, he says similarly as he said in verse 16, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” I want it. I just can’t do it.

You know, if you look back, for example, in the Old Testament and you see David, and you’ll find David as a friend of God, right? Sweet singer of the Psalms of Israel, wonderful man of God, exalted. Jesus Christ is glorified in being called “the Son of David,” isn’t He? Wonderful, wonderful. And yet if you read the Old Testament, you will not find any writer in the Old Testament who is more overawed, who is more contrite, who is more sensitive to his sin than David.

It is David who cries out to God through the Psalms, particularly Psalm 32 and 51, but not only those Psalms. Who cries out to God for mercy, who cries out to God for loving kindness, who cries out to God for compassion in the midst of his sinfulness. And it was David who was so near to the heart of God that any sin in his life became cause for him to have a broken heart. So, the struggle here to me is clearly the struggle of the regenerate man. Unsaved people don't even understand this kind of attitude.

Then he comes to the source again in verse 20. The condition, the proof, and the source. "Now, if I do the things I don't want to do, it is no more I that do it but - " what? " - sin that dwells in me." Exactly what he said in verse 17. It's no more I. What do you mean "no more"? There's that "no more" again. No more since when? Since what? Salvation. Before salvation - you know, unsaved people can't be in this chapter because there's "no more" for them. There's no "no more." There never was a change. There's never been a time that things have been different. What would "no more" mean in an unbeliever? There isn't any "no more." It's always been the same.

But since he's redeemed, there is a "no more." And since that redemption, it is no more that recreated I, that real self that's doing these things, but it is sin that dwells there. And so we fight, says Paul, and we lose. And the losses seem so much more overwhelming because of the perfection of God's holy law.

So, if I can just reach back and add a little addition to your list that you may have been accumulating through Romans 5, 6, and 7, add this to your list of results of justification by faith. The first one we saw in chapter 5 was security. The second we saw in chapter 6 was holiness. And then in chapter 7 we saw freedom, fruitfulness, and service. And a fourth one in this chapter, sensitivity to sin. That is a result of justification. Paul's still talking about the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, and one of its results is a heightened sensitivity to sin.

Now at this point you might figure Paul's going to give up. And he made the point, right? He's sort of like me, he labors the point. But let's look at the third lament. And it's just like the rest. But this is one way to get the point across, isn't it, of how sorrowful he is so that he goes over it and over it and over it. And here come the same three things.

First the condition, verse 21. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Now here we come back to the same condition. He says "I find a law." And by that he means a principle. He's using the word "law." It's a literary device again, so he stays with that term. There's the law of God. And then I see another law, he says. Another principle, another standard that makes demands on me, another inflexible law that drives me to conformity.

“I see another law in me - ” another principle operating, another source of commands, another standard, “ - that when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Literally it says “evil lies close at hand.” It’s right there. It’s battling every good thought, every good intention, every good motive, every good word, every good deed, every good act. It isn’t way away. It isn’t far off. It has never been eradicated, as some theologians would tell us, that you get to the point where your sin nature is eradicated. And then they say from then on you don’t sin, you just make mistakes. Paul says, “It’s right there. It’s right at hand. It isn’t the real me but, boy, it isn’t far away.” And the condition is one of conflict again.

And then the proof, verse 22. How can you prove this again? Well, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” That’s one side of the conflict. In his inward man he delights in God’s law. And again I would draw you to Psalm 119, which I think is the best Old Testament parallel to Romans 7. I don’t know if anybody’s ever said that before, but I’d like to suggest that. Psalm 119:77. “Let Thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: - ” listen to this “ - for Thy law is *my* delight.” And it may well have been that Paul had in mind that very passage. And when he says “I delight in the law in the inward man,” he’s affirming the heart of the Psalmist.

In Psalm 119:111 and others - but just look at 111. “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they *are* the rejoicing of my heart.” Again, his delight. In verse 20 of that same Psalm, just one other, “My soul breaks for the longing *that it has* unto Thine ordinances at all times.” Oh, what a tremendous verse. My heart actually breaks at the longing that it has to Thine ordinances at all times.

And what is the mark of the truly spiritual man in Psalm 1:2? “His delight is in the - ” what? “ - Law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” The regenerate man is marked by a love of the Word of God, a love of the law of God, a delighting in that law after the inward man.

Now I want you to notice that phrase “after the inward man.” It really says, “from the bottom of my heart.” That’s the meaning. From the deepest part of me. And the deepest part of him, the bottom of his heart, the inward man, the inner man, the real inside guy hungers, and longs, and delights, and loves the law of God. The deepest joy, the truest expression of personhood is to delight in God’s law.

I believe the inner man or the inward man is that renewed, redeemed nature. And even though - Paul says to the Corinthians, “even though the outer man is perishing, the inward *man* is being - ” what? “ - renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4:16. And we are “strengthened by might by His Spirit,” Ephesians 3:16, and the Spirit does His work “in the inner man.” That’s the area of the new creation. That’s the real self, the center of redeemed personhood.

But then the proof of the conflict takes us to verse 23. “But I see another law, another principle.” And where is this one? Where is it? In his what? “In - ” what? “ - in members.” And what did we say the “members” are? They are the human factors, the bodily factors, the flesh, humanness, unredeemed

mortality. And his use of terms is completely consistent.

So he sees in verse 23 another law, and this law isn't in his real self, his deeper self, his inner man. It's in his outer man, isn't it? It's in his members. It's in his humanness. And it is "warring against the law of my mind." And the law of his mind is the same as that which is the law of God, that which is the inner man. So the mind is equated with the inner man. And he sees the war. And sometimes he confesses the law in my members wins against the law of my mind, and thus "brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." He makes a very clear distinction.

Listen, beloved, if this were an unbeliever here, the law of his mind would be just as rotten as the law of his members. For the carnal mind is enmity against God. But his mind, which is his inner man, his truest self, his redeemed creation, longs for the law of God, and is warring against the law of his members which, of course, as we said, is his humanness. And notice again, verse 23, sometimes the battle goes in favor of the law of his members and - watch this - brings him into captivity.

Listen. That would have to be a redeemed person because unredeemed people can't be brought into captivity. Why? They're already there. But when sin wins the victory in the spiritual struggle, then the believer is brought into captivity to that sin and becomes captive to that sin.

And so, he demonstrates again the condition in verse 21, and then proves it. The conflict between the law of his mind, which is his inner man, longing for the things of God, and the law in his members. And keep in mind that consistently through chapter 6 verses 12, 13, 19, chapter 7 verse 5 and all through this part of it, in all of those places he always puts sin in the members. The bodily parts is what it refers to. That does not just mean the flesh. That means the mind, the thoughts, the emotions, all that goes with our humanness. And there is a war going on.

Now I want you to go back to Psalm 119. And I don't know if you ever noticed this about Psalm 119, but I see the Psalmist having the same war. And I want to show you that. Let's go back to where we left off, Psalm 119:20, and I want to pick up that great verse and then I want to take you right through the Psalm, maybe ten or twelve verses. And they're very brief, but follow closely.

"My soul breaketh - " that's a very, very intense language. "My soul breaketh for the longing *that it hath* unto Thine ordinances at all times." Oh, that's a, you say, "That's a spiritual person with that kind of heartbreaking longing for the things of God." Then look at verse 70. It talks about the proud. "Their heart is as fat as grease." Pretty vivid. "*But* I delight in Thy law."

Go to verse 81. "My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy word. Mine eyes fail for Thy word, saying, When wilt Thou comfort me? For I am become like a wineskin in the smoke; *yet* do I not forget Thy statutes." I'm drying out. I need Your law so desperately. I feel so cut off from it. And here is this heart panting after God's law.

Verse 92. “Unless Thy law *had been* my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.” Verse 97 sums it up. “O how I love Thy law! it is my meditation all the day.” Verse 113. “I hate *vain* thoughts: but Thy law do I love.” So vivid. Verse 131. “I open my mouth, and panted:” You say, “You been running a long ways?” No. “I longed for Thy commandments.” That is - do you experience that? That’s a profound hunger for the commandment. You have little question about the spirituality of this man.

Verse 143. “Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me: yet Thy commandments are my delight.” Verse 163. “I hate and abhor lying: *but* Thy law do I love.” Verse 165. “Great peace have they who love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” Verse 174. “I have longed for Thy salvation, O Lord; and Thy law *is* my delight.”

Now by the time you get to 174 you say to yourself, “This guy is so spiritual, it’s, you know, intimidating.” And then you’re literally knocked over by the last verse in the Psalm. What does it say? “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments.”

You say, “Wait a minute, this guy is really riding the crest. What are you doing ending a thing like that?” You know what he says? “I love Thy law.” And at the very end he says, “But I’ve gone astray.” See, he was right where Paul was, wasn’t he? Same conflict. It’s no different. Now let’s go back to Romans 7.

What’s the source? The proof is in the first part of verse 23, where he says “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” What is the source? Well, it’s right there in that same verse. “Bringing me into captivity to the law of - ” what? “ - sin which is in my members.”

Why do you sin? Why do you sin? Because God didn’t do a good job when He saved you? Cause your new nature isn’t complete? Because you’re not prepared for heaven yet and you’ve still got to earn your way in? No. Why do you sin? Because what? Sin is still there in your humanness. And this has to be a believer because unbelievers aren’t brought into the captivity of sin. They’re already there. And your members, your humanness, includes your mind, and your emotion, your feeling, your body, and all those things.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not fleshly, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)” I love that. He says, “You know, though we have to walk around in this flesh, when you get to the real us, it’s really not flesh at all, is it? The weapons with which we fight are not fleshly. They’re spiritual.”

Three laments, and they emphasize the condition of the believer. It's a condition of conflict. They emphasize the proof of that, inability to do God's will to the extent we know we ought to. And they emphasize the source of that, indwelling sin. The true believer, the spiritual believer, the Godly believer cries out for deliverance from this. And if three laments aren't enough, he lets out a wail in verse 24, a wail that exceeds the other laments, a wail that goes beyond anything he said. He just cries out in the distress and the frustration and says, "O wretched man that I am."

And you say to yourself, "Can this be the apostle Paul? Can this be a Christian?" And the wonderful and God-blessed commentator of years and years ago, Haldane says, "Men perceive themselves to be sinners in direct proportion as they have previously discovered the holiness of God and His law." And he's right. This is a believer who says, "O wretched man that I am." He wants to be all that God wants him to be.

The Psalmist cries out in Psalm 6, "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I *am* weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is very vexed - " terrified, it means " - but Thou, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: save me for Thy mercies' sake. For in death *there is* no remembrance of thee: in Sheol who shall give Thee thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." And what the Psalmist is saying is, "I'm so sick and tired of not being everything I ought to be."

In Psalm 38, "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath: neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure," says David. "For Thine arrow stick fast in me, and Thy hand press me greatly. *There is* no soundness in my flesh because of Thine anger; neither *is there any* rest in my bones because of my sin." And David says, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: like an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are repulsive *and* corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. And my loins are filled with a loathsome *disease*: and *there is* no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and very broken: I have roared by reason of the disquieting of my heart. Lord, all my desire *is* before Thee."

You say, "If all your desire is before Him, how could you be in that mess?" That's the battle, isn't it? And David is saying little else than what Paul is saying. "O wretched man that I am. My heart panteth. My strength faileth me." He wanted to be more than he was, and he found himself debilitated by his humanness.

In Psalm 130, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But *there is* forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope." Here again, crying out of sin by one who is godly. This is the way of the redeemed. "O wretched man that I am."

And then he asks a question in verse 24. “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Would you keep in mind again, where is his problem? It is in his – what? - his body. And it is a body of - what? - death. The word “deliver” is the word “rescue.” It’s used to denote the act of a soldier who runs to his comrade in the midst of a battle, and he rescues him from the enemy. And the body of death is very interesting. It literally refers to “the body which is subject to sin and death.” It is the unredeemed mortality, again. And again, the terms are consistent. It’s the body, the members, the flesh.

It has been reported that near Tarsus where Saul was born there was a tribe of people who inflicted the terrible penalty upon a murderer. When a person murdered someone, it was their custom to fasten the dead corpse to the murderer face to face, nose to nose, chest to chest, thigh to thigh, foot to foot. That was the punishment until the decay of the dead body had killed the murderer. So tight were the bonds that he could not free himself. And a few days is all it took for the corruption of death to pass to the living and take his life. And Paul looks at himself and he sees that in his own case, and senses that he is face to face, chest to chest, thigh to thigh to something that is dead and corrupt and killing, and cries, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?”

Is there any hope? There’s hope. Verse 25. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That sounds like triumph to me, doesn’t it to you? That is assurance. What are you saying, Paul? Is this some mystical kind of thing? How do you get deliverance from the conflict? Through Jesus Christ our Lord. What would he have in mind? I believe what he has in mind is expressed in the 8th chapter of Romans.

Look at verse - let’s start at verse 18, and we’ll get into this later. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” And then he talks about the creation waiting for the full manifestation. Drop down to verse 23. “And not only *they* - ” that is, not only the creation groans and travails waiting for its glory “ - but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

In other words, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have the new creation. We have the eternal seed. We have the divine nature. And it’s there in us, but “we also groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, that is the redemption of our - ” what? “ - of our body.” You see, we’re waiting for the final phase of salvation, for we are saved in hope. We’re still hoping for that day when we fully are freed and redeemed in body as well as soul.

And I believe that’s what Paul’s looking forward to in verse 7:25. “I thank God - ” he says, that the end of the conflict is going to come “ - through the Lord Jesus Christ.” And it’s going to come when He appears and when we are glorified, or when we enter into His presence and are glorified. That’s when the end comes, the end of the battle.

You want to hear it in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15? Here it is. “When this corruptible shall have put on - ” what? “ - incorruption, and when this mortal shall have put on - ” what? “ - immortality.” That’s when, he says in verse 57, “thanks *be* to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Almost the same phrase he uses in Romans 7:25.

And here he says, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” And it’s the same day that he sees when this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption. So he’s looking ahead at the time of redemption and he says, “I see it and it’s coming, and I’m living in hope that indeed it will come.” It’s the same thing he had in mind in 2 Corinthians 5:4 when he says, “We that are in *this* tabernacle do groan - ” why? “ - because we’re burdened - ” with our humanness, and “ - we would like to be not unclothed, but clothed upon, when mortality is swallowed up by life.” Great truth.

We look for that day. It’s the same day he had in mind in writing to the Philippians, when we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like His glorious body. That’s a triumphant hope, isn’t it?

Meanwhile, verse 25, until then, “with my mind I serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” You know what he’s saying? Until that day, the battle - what? - goes on, and it goes on as long as we remain in the flesh. And we continue to cry with Tennyson, “O for a new man to arise within me and subdue the man that I am.”

So, the battle isn’t going to be over till Jesus gives us immortality and incorruption. Full deliverance awaits glorification. That’s the point. But, that is not to say that we can’t experience victory here and now, right? And that’s chapter 8, and that’s for two weeks from tonight. But between now and then the Holy Spirit will help you. Let’s bow in prayer.

I want you to just have a silent word of prayer with me for a moment. And I want you to do a couple of things. First, I want you to thank God for the new creation that you are. Would you do that? That you’ve been made new in Christ, fit for heaven. Would you thank Him for that?

And then would you confess to Him that though you love His law and you long to do it, there’s something in you that wars against that? And would you just confess that to Him with sorrow in your heart and ask that He would give you victory until Jesus comes to free you from this lowly body and give you a body fashioned like His own?

Dear Father, we thank You that You’ve let us into the heart of this beloved apostle and into the heart of the Psalmist, for both of them have articulated the cries of our own hearts. We want to be so right. We want to be all that other people need. We want to minister the way we should. We want to love

the way You love. We want to be always dedicated and committed. We want always to speak the truth, always to have integrity, character. We want to have the purity, and the gentleness, and the meekness. We want to have the strength of character. We want to always say the fitting word. We always want to bring strength to weakness.

But, Lord, so often we just don't. We're indifferent to people. We're selfish, self-indulgent, critical, unfaithful to promises made, and we just fall short. And as we lament that power of indwelling sin, help us to know, Father, that even in such admission we're saying more. We're saying that we know You're a holy God who has given us a just, and holy, and good law.

And so, even in our sensitivity to sin, and even in the sense of sorrow that we have, there is a hope for it speaks of one redeemed, it speaks of one moving along in spiritual growth, seeing sin for what it really is, and the law of God for what it is. And it's even comforting, Father, to know that we hunger for those things that are holy, just, and good, even though we don't always perform them.

Thank You for that reverse effect that in our sorrow we find a measure of joy. Help us to have our hearts filled with hope for the coming of Jesus Christ. And in the meantime, to be delivered from defeat by the power of the Spirit in us.

We thank You for our fellowship this day and we pray now for those who may be here who do not know Jesus Christ, in whom there is no conflict, who like the scoffer do not feel the weight of sin because they're dead, and a dead man feels nothing. May they awake as Paul did in Romans chapter 7 and see face to face the law of God, and see their sin, and come to the Savior. Our Father, You bring those that You would desire to come. Touch every heart. Bless the counselors as they share and give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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