



Sermon Notes | Indwelling Sin. Indwelling Spirit. — Part 2 | Romans 7:13-25

## **INTRODUCTION**

We return, and continue to look at 'The Struggle' facing the regenerated soul of man; the believer's ongoing 'struggle' that is outlined in the passage. Indwelling Flesh, Indwelling Spirit! The Christian's inner being is 'soul regenerated', yet still there is indwelling sin in the Christian's outer members, the 'clinging flesh' that remains. This is the reality of the believer here and now as they grow in Christ. This is the 'already' of their soul, redeemed, renewed, and 'desiring' God's Law, yet still bent on sin. For alongside the 'already' remains the 'not yet' of the flesh, which has not yet been redeemed. This is the reality of the saint as he walks each day, and so the believer 'struggles'.

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

So, where are we in this letter, and where are we in chapter 7? Last week we dealt with The Struggle's Context, The Struggle's Conditions, and The Struggle's Conscience.

## **I. THE STRUGGLE'S CONTEXT:**

The Struggle's Context allowed us to recall chapters 1-5 of Romans which dealt with 'salvation' and 'justification', from humanity's need in Adam to humanity's hope in Christ, which 'came to a head' in chapter 5. Then in chapter 6, Paul turned to matters flowing from and out of 'salvation', to 'sanctification', which is the doctrine of 'holiness', the process of our being 'set apart', the process of growing in Christ's likeness. In the wake of the theology of the 'great salvation' of chapters 1-5, Paul then turned and looked at how the implications of that 'great salvation' are worked out. We recalled the focus of chapter 6, the continuation of our 'sanctification', the daily presentation of ourselves, of our bodies, of our lives to God.

Romans 6:1

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"*

And so Paul encourages his brothers to indeed not sin, not to lose sight of the progress they've made, not to let sin reign in their bodies, not to present their 'fleshly members' as instruments to sin and be unrighteous.

Romans 6:12

*"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions."*

Though tempted to sin, they must present 'self' to God, and their members as instruments of righteousness, not sin. This is the daily ongoing work of 'sanctification'. What is your fruit now? It used to be 'death', but now you grow in 'sanctification'.

Romans 6:20

*"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."*

The theology of chapters 1-5, pointing to when they were 'slaves to sin', was the old way, but now in the new way, there are implications to be worked out, a new way. Do not present your members to do sin. No. Let not sin reign in your body! Instead, ensure daily 'presentation' of self and the body to God. Seek righteousness, not unrighteousness. Indeed, new implications now exist for being a 'slave for God'. Now you are 'set free' from death, and now you bear 'fruit' for God, and 'the fruit' of your labour leads to 'sanctification' and its ultimate end of 'eternal life'. A new 'relationship' now exists.

And so we come to chapter 7. The 'old administration' context, which was followed by the believers of the Old Testament as well as the first century believers, that is, the stamp of God up to that day, was the 'Mosaic Law', and this same context leads into chapter 7. But now, Paul points out, the 'faithful' are 'dead' to that now. They are in a new relationship, and are given to the 'doctrine of sanctification', to the process of becoming more like Christ. However, they are not dead to 'Law' and 'standard' entirely.

We refer back to earlier in the chapter.

Romans 7:4

*"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."*

Yes, the believer has 'died to the Law', but has done so through the Body of Christ, in order to belong to another, this being the 'slave transfer'. Thus, now belonging to Christ, who was 'purposefully' raised from the dead, in order that the believer might 'bear fruit' for God, and therefore, it is no longer a relationship to external code and custom, that is to the 'Law', but is now relationship to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7:6

*"But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."*

We are released from the lesser, to serve the greater, released from the old way so that we can serve by the new way, by the Spirit. Yet, although the follower of God no longer serves by code, the 'Law' was not discarded. The 'Law' continues to be recognized as holy, righteous and good, and our 'renewed soul' agrees that the 'Law' is good.

Romans 7:12

*"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."*

In summary of the context then, it is not a matter of 'salvation', nor a matter of being 'dead to the Law' period. Rather, it is a matter of 'sanctification', of being alive to 'Law' in Christ. It is no longer a boast about 'Law' fulfillment, but now, in Christ, it is a matter of 'struggle' in 'Law living' in the flesh. However, there is still more alongside our soul's inner being.

## **II. THE STRUGGLE'S CONDITIONS: (v. 14)**

Romans 7:14

*"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin."*

Verse 14 spells out clearly that the 'Law' is 'spiritual' and good. But Paul, though inwardly redeemed, is human, of the flesh in body, and still walks in unredeemed humanness. (The material human body, the physical bones and such --- the physiological self, the emotional self, the mental self, this is all of our bodily composition and how we walk through life.) But like Paul, as a 'believer', we have also undergone a 'humanity transfer' from Adam to Christ, and are now members of the 'humanity of life'. But we must recall that you can take Paul out of Adam, but you cannot take Adam out of Paul. There remains a remnant of flesh that lingers on. Mankind is caught between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. He is 'renewed spiritually' inwardly and soulfully, but is still 'fleshy'. He remains 'spirit' and 'flesh'.

So, there is one final and important point. We have one new nature, not two, and one 'new nature' that remains 'accountable' to God. We are saved from 'eternal penalty' but not from present day to day consequences, and so, these are the 'struggle's conditions'.

### **III. THE STRUGGLE'S CONSCIENCE: (vv. 15-20)**

Romans 7:15-20

*"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good, So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells with me. 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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells with me."*

Paul states, "I do not understand my own actions," (7:15a). And this is the cry of every true believer who is contemplating his own sin. I do not understand my own actions! It is the cry of 'the spirit' in wake of the flesh, the cry of the conscience. Paul expresses it twice.

Romans 7:15, 19

*"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."*

He acknowledges that he is in agreement with the 'Law'. The 'Law' is good. The 'Law' is right.

Romans 7:16

*"Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good."*

He acknowledges that he has done wrong. This is his conscience at work, and he is in 'right relationship'. He does not blame others because he has done wrong. He does not blame circumstances, or look to the past.

Romans 7:18

*"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."*

Paul's desire is right. This is the 'redeemed believer' 'struggling' in the 'flesh', acknowledging that 'the problem' is me and my 'flesh'. Deep inside 'I want to do right' and 'I want to do good', but my outer self is 'at war' with my inner self. Sin impairs my inner being. Strong 'flesh' makes war within me.

Only a 'new man' seeks God's 'Law' correctly and rightly. Only the 'regenerated' self wants to do right. It is not a dutiful boast or brag that Paul is making. He is simply stating a fact. This is what I want to do, but it is not easy to accomplish. Only inner conversion recognizes that there is a struggle's conscience.

#### **IV. THE STRUGGLE'S CONFESSION: (vv. 21-23)**

Romans 7:21-23

*"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 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."*

Paul states, "I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand," (7:21).

Such is Paul's brilliant and skillful writing, using the motif and context of 'Law' to bring clarity to his explanation. Who better than Paul to recognize that 'Law' is front and centre in sin's unfolding, and so he expands further. 'I find it to be a principle, a 'law' that establishes my behaviour, so that when I want to do right, when my desire is to act right, evil is close at hand.' Evil, ever around me, takes note of my heart's desire, sits up straight, and causes me to act against my heart's desire. Such is the 'law' of the flesh. And the 'law' of the flesh exists alongside the 'Law' of the Spirit. When there is 'desire' for goodness and righteousness, evil arouses and activates the flesh. Sin sees the opportunity and pounces! Seek righteousness, and evil sits up straight. When the forbidden is defined, evil is close by to react. Paul recognizes that this is what happens, that it is a 'law', a principle, about evil's actions.

The Broader Principle:

Where righteousness is sought, evil is close at hand, and evil pops up. It is true in the 'believer's daily walk', but it is also true in the life of the local church, in the life of the 'company of believers'. When the church holds to righteousness and pursues good, evil pops up. Evil looms and lurks in the bushes, lying close, targeting the righteous with evil intent, waiting to pounce.

Bible readers, take note: Do not miss the word 'for'. The word 'for' is a 'connecting word. It connects that which was stated previously. Therefore Paul is connecting something back to verse 21. Paul has more to say about it. The 'law' principle from verse 21 is going to be expounded on further.

Romans 7:22

*"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being."*

Paul establishes a contrast between two kinds of law. In verse 22 he speaks of 'the Law of God' which has been defined as good and holy and righteous. And this is set against verse 23, 'the law of sin', and the presence of evil.

Romans 7:23

*"... 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."*

It is a dual confession, a positive and negative confession. 'I delight in God's 'Law' because I am in a new relationship through Jesus Christ. This is not my boast or duty, it is my 'delight'.' Gone is Paul's boast and sense of duty. He now is genuinely 'delighted' by God's 'Law'. This is the heart and mind confession of a true 'born again' believer in the Spirit.

I Corinthians 2:16

*"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."*

Thus, Paul genuinely delights in 'God's Law' yet he faces 'struggle'. In residency alongside the 'God Law' confession, Paul also admits, 'I am captive to 'sin's law'.'

#### 1. The Principle of Sin:

The 'law of sin' is different to sin itself.

Romans 7:23

*"... 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."*

In chapter 6 we are 'dead to sin' (6:11), set free from its penalty and power (6:7), but not from its presence. The 'law of sin' continues to "take us captive"; 'the law of evil close at hand, when we want to do right,' (7:21). The principle of sin lingers with us.

Romans 7:21

*"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."*

#### 2. The Principle of Struggle:

The 'believer' continually faces 'struggle' between his spirit and his flesh. Sin/evil no longer has ultimate power over us, but it still has a grasp. Paul confesses that 'it dwells in the outer members of my flesh', the dying part, not the inner part, not the regenerate part, not the purified soul part, but the 'old man' part (7:22-23). And therefore there is 'war' raging between the two natures, and the resulting 'struggle' is hard. Yet the believer is to fight the fight, ever seeking to fulfill righteous living choices. But this is not a futile fight. Elsewhere Paul describes this as 'training'. God has done the work, we now conform to it.

Titus 2:11-14

*"For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people of his own possession who are zealous for good works."*

Meanwhile Paul makes clear he is facing a war, "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind..." (7:23). The 'war' is hard and the 'struggle' is real. His inner being 'delights' in the 'Law' of God but the outer members want evil.

But there is no excuse for excusing sin. To do so could well be a sign. As with soldiers, one can not quit the war. To quit means he is not a soldier at all. And as for the said believer, to quit reveals the state of the soul. You see sin, you confess it, you own it, but the believer does not excuse sin. You do not deny sin. You do not sidestep sin. You do not make light of sin. You do not make sin respectable. No. Rather, because you 'delight' in 'God's Law', you repent, and confess the sin of your outer members, and then rejoice in the 'forgiveness' of your sin.

### **V. THE STRUGGLE'S CONSUMMATION: (vv. 24-25)**

Romans 7:24-25

*"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 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."*

Paul has two cries.

In the wake of sin, it is a logical cry. 'Wretched man that I am'. I am a miserable man, a distressed man, a helpless man. My inner and outer beings are at war. (Such is not true of the unbeliever/the unconverted. No. The unbeliever feels secure about law, and has a boast concerning it.) But Paul feels the 'struggle' keenly, feels the 'war' between the inner renewal and the outer decay, and thus, this is a 'spiritually sensitive cry'.

Romans 7:18

*"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."*

This is not the cry of an unbeliever. This is the cry of only one who is 'close to God', only one who 'delights' in the 'Law', but who still feels the influence of sin in their flesh, and feeling this, they therefore follow up with this cry.

Romans 7:24a

*"Wretched man that I am!"*

And this is the SOS. This is his second cry.

Romans 7:24b

*"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*

Day to day Paul groans for deliverance, that 'cry of the spirit' that sets the table not only for future deliverance, theologically, but for the argument contextually, and the point Paul is building to at the end of Chapter 8.

Romans 8:22-23

*"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

Paul also speaks with similar language elsewhere.

II Corinthians 5:1-5

*"For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened --- not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."*

Paul speaks of the time of waiting for the 'redemption' of our bodies, and the 'adoption' as sons. Of this, the Spirit is our guarantee. It is not just a hope. We know that it will be a positive terminus, and we, as believers, are longing for Heaven. We are burdened. We cry. We are at war. But we take care, for we know the terminus. Who will deliver us from this 'decaying' body of death? We know there is deliverance. It is not just hope. Chapter 7 of Romans does not end at verse 24. No. There is more. There is an answer to that cry. Thanks to God, there is deliverance through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will deliver us from the flesh, as He already delivered our souls.

Romans 7:25

*"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."*

Christ came the first time. He came, and lived, and died, and rose again, and through His sacrifice He freed us from the penalty of hell, and freed us from the penalty of sin. How did He do that? He imputed righteousness to our account and gave a new heart, a 'new law' inscribed heart, enabling us not to sin. The 'inner work' is done, the penalty of our sin is done, but He is not finished yet. The day is yet to come when He will give us the ability to not sin. One day we will be 'unable to sin', the terminus of our 'sanctification' complete. This will be 'salvation's consummation'. This will be 'struggle's consummation'. This will be 'glory'.

Philippians 1:6

*"And I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*



God's completion of the work of Jesus Christ! He came already to accomplish and inaugurate 'salvation'. The work of Jesus Christ on the Cross has been completed, the penalty of sin is done, but Christ is not done. He is coming again to complete and 'consummate' the transaction. Bodies will be made whole. The 'struggle' will be alleviated, over finally. This is our hope in Him.

Meanwhile, as Paul concludes, we go on, day by day, serving the 'Law' of God with our minds, with the help of the indwelling Spirit. Our mind is our 'desire', gifted by God, in 'struggle' for the time being with body and sin which serve a different law, the Law of Sin. Sin has no power for the believer, but it still is present. This is the reality of our days. But as you live, the end is near. The 'struggle' is real, but it will end, and is drawing to a close. Christ is soon to return. Wait, wrestle and walk!

How then, do we apply this text? What are the implications? Theologian William Barclay is helpful in this particular matter, suggesting that 'struggle' reveals our inadequacies.

**1.** Human knowledge is inadequate. We see that it is not enough to know right and wrong. Doing it is not so easy. Knowing is different than executing. While knowing 'the map' is crucial, it is only a partial part of the process. Yes, we must study the map, but the following through and 'doing' is what is important.

**2.** Human resolve is inadequate. It is not enough to have deep down resolve. Personal resolve is not enough before a Holy God. It does not help us to be resolved in order to avoid sin. The disciples were resolved. Peter was sure he would never deny Christ, yet did. The others said they would not either. But then they ran away rather than standing with Jesus.

Matthew 26:35, 56b, 75

*"Peter said to him, 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!' And all the disciples said the same. ... Then all the disciples left him and fled. ... And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."*

We need more than resolve.

**3.** Human diagnosis is inadequate. Even knowing the problem does not solve everything. It helps. It amplifies, but it does not cure the problem. No. It only amplifies.

The diagnosis is true: we have a body of decaying flesh and face death. The question is then, who will free us? Where is there deliverance? The answer is Jesus Christ. Christ has already delivered our soul, and He will soon deliver our flesh also. The 'struggle' is ending. Be encouraged therefore, because, in Jesus there is no inadequacy. In Jesus is perfection. In Jesus there is completion. In Jesus there is cure and hope. Make Him your preeminent thought in word and deed, and cling to Him, for Jesus is our Deliverer!