

Good morning! Please pray with me.

The title of my message this morning is *Encouragement on the Difficult Way*. The verses I will be preaching from are Romans 7:14-25.

I want to introduce my message this morning by sharing a portion of my testimony. The reason why will become apparent in a moment.

Through a series of events that could only be orchestrated by God, I found myself seated in the back row of a church at the age of twenty three, about to hear my very first sermon. Sitting next to me was my high school sweetheart, whom I lived with, unmarried.

I'm not exaggerating:

- I had never heard the gospel.
- I didn't know who Christ was.
- I'd never stepped foot inside of a church except for weddings or funerals.

I had no understanding of Christianity, and I had no idea what was about to happen to me.

Through the providence of God, the message preached that morning brought the law powerfully to bear on my life. It was a message devoted to God's hatred and wrath for sexual sin. Now I'm not entirely sure what I expected to hear that morning, but I certainly wasn't prepared to hear about God's wrath toward me.

Like most, I believed I was a good person. I thought that God would be pleased with me that I had taken the time to be there that day. But as I sat, hearing the word of God preached, I became aware of just how displeased God was with me.

The preacher said the wages for my sin was death. That was stunning to me. I wanted to melt into my seat, or find an excuse to leave.

You have to understand, every word this man spoke rang true in my ears. It was as if the Lord Himself was speaking to me. At one point, I remember looking up at the people sitting around me, and they were smiling. I thought to myself, *how can they smile?* Am I the only one this message has condemned? Irrationally, I believed that was true. I was the only one there who had violated God's law and deserved death.

From my perspective, as soon as I attempted to begin a relationship with God, He ended it. I understood I was condemned. I understood God was angry with me. I understood that I had a death sentence hanging over me. I resolved that I was just going to have to make the best out of this life because that was all I had.

But then, thank God, before I could find a way to get out of there, the gospel was preached. Hope was offered. God sent His Son to die in my place - to take the death sentence for me. Reconciliation was available to the God I had so offended.

Friends, I grabbed a hold of Christ that morning with the desperation of a drowning man.

I left that church a different person than when I entered. I couldn't have put words to it. I didn't know anything about anything, except for this: Jesus was my Savior, and I couldn't live like I was living anymore.

Rather than feeling peace at being saved, my mind was a mess. Obedience to God either meant ending this relationship I was in, or pursuing it in the only way that would honor God - through marriage. I wrestled with this for a day before proposing to the wonderful woman who is now my wife. I think Kelli was more surprised than even I was at my proposal.

Those were exciting days. I remember clearly God just removing the desire for various sins that had previously characterized my life. Things that I used to love, I now despised. Things I previously despised, I now loved. I found that I had a new desire to live the way God wanted me to live.

Looking back, I remember naively thinking, *If I can just get victory over a few more areas of my life, then I'll be free of sin for good.*

Obviously, I lacked knowledge to have such a thought, but isn't that the desire of every believer here? To be free of sin for good? To walk in a manner that is only always pleasing to our Lord?

It didn't take very long for it to become obvious that sin was much more of a problem in my life than I previously thought possible. Time and time again, I'd be confronted by the sin I would see in scripture or hear preached about. It never ended. Just as I would deal with one, another was brought to my attention to repent of, pray about, and struggle with.

And to make matters worse, sins that I had previously seemed to gain victory over would periodically rear up again with renewed life, catching me unaware all over again.

The worst of all though, were the habitual sins of my former life that seemed to cling to me no matter what I did.

One in particular was so deceitful, and apparently so treasured by my flesh, that I searched out a number of teachers that were willing to tell me that I had the liberty in Christ to continue doing it. That sin was drinking alcohol.

But I didn't have liberty, because every time I would engage in it I came under heavy conviction. Crushing conviction. There are a number of verses in the bible that appear to permit consuming alcohol, but I discovered another verse that was clearly over and above these others.

Romans 14:23 says, “**...for whatever is not from faith is sin.**”

I couldn't do it in faith - I was crushed by guilt every time. So, I would repent and resolve to never do it again, but unlike so many of the sins that I struggled with and eventually gained victory over, this one just wouldn't go.

So I would repent, and I would walk for a time, but inevitably, I would stumble.

I can't tell you how miserable I was during that time. I hated what I was doing. I hated myself for doing it. I didn't understand why I couldn't gain lasting victory. I wondered at times if it were possible I wasn't saved at all. It felt as though the heavy hand of God was bearing down on me. I couldn't go left, I couldn't go right, this sin was ever before me.

And it's not just those seasons of struggle with one specific serious sin that is so troubling. Those times are terrible, but it's also just the totality of all the "little" momentary sins that continue to afflict me.

- It's the anger that sometimes comes out at my children or my wife.
- It's the tendency toward laziness and selfishness.
- The list goes on and on.

Though I hate these things, I find myself still doing them.

It is not enjoyable to stand before you and recount my failures, but I'm doing so because I know you face the same problems, if you are in Christ. Let's not pretend that the Christian walk is easy. Let's not put a mask of righteousness on, and project to each other that sin is not an issue in our lives.

During that previous troubling time and whenever I am left perplexed over the continuing sin in my life, there is one passage that I am compelled to return to. When I read these verses, it is as if I am reading about my own life. They describe my experience perfectly, and they have a sustaining, comforting effect on my faith. Those verses are Romans 7:14-25.

There is perhaps no other section of scripture that better illustrates the difficulty associated with fighting against sin in the Christian life.

Please look with me at the entire text, so we can gain a level of familiarity with it right from the start.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 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. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 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.

To begin, I need to inform you that these verses are highly contested. I didn't know that early in my Christian walk, and honestly, I thank God that I didn't. I might have been robbed of what was sustaining me if that were the case.

Here is the gist of why these verses are contested: Some theologians, including godly, wise, knowledgeable men, look at these verses and they see:

- A man who is carnal - still bound up in sin.
- A man who is unable to do what is good.
- A man who is unable to stop doing what is evil.
- A man in whom “nothing good dwells”.

They conclude that this is an unregenerate man. That Paul must be speaking of himself as he was before he came to Christ.

Others see this:

- A man who hates his sin.
- A man who is deeply confused by his sin.
- A man who is struggling against his sin.
- A man who agrees with and delights in the law of God.
- A man who is so humbled and dismayed by his inability that he declares himself a wretch.
- A man who has placed all of his hope in Christ alone.

I will be dealing with these issues as I preach today. My intent is not to convince you of my opinion... Who cares about my opinion? I don't even care about my opinion! My goal is to expose God's intent for these verses. May the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth.

One of the strongest arguments for the position that these verses are dealing with an unregenerate person is found right away in verse 14 where Paul says, **“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.”**

The phrase **“sold under sin”** brings to mind the slave market, and it's quickly pointed out that Paul has just stated in the previous chapter in Romans 6:6&7, **“...our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.”**

So the question is, if this is dealing with a regenerate person, how can they still be described as “**sold under sin**”?

If that is confusing to you, you’re in good company. Look at verse 15. Paul says, “**For what I am doing, I do not understand.**” Clearly Paul was confused as well.

That leads me to the first lesson.

There is encouragement in:

Lesson 1: having the same confusion as Paul.

As we begin to look at the source of the confusion, I want you to notice something very important when it comes to how we interpret this text. If you scan through the verses that come before our text, particularly 7-13, you will see that the verbs Paul uses are in the past tense.

For instance:

- Verse 9 - **I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.**
- Verse 10 - **the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.**
- Verse 13 - **Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.**

Do you see how those verbs are in the past tense? For that reason, and since they refer to sin killing him through the law, it is easy to see how they speak of his pre-conversion life. Then when we get to verse 14, Paul makes an abrupt switch to present tense verbs, and continues this until the end of the chapter. He begins to say “**I am**”, “**I do not**”, “**I will**”, “**I hate**”, “**I find**”, “**I delight**”....

The most natural way to read these verses, is to understand them as Paul speaking of himself as he was when he dictated this letter.

For that reason, it's troubling to see Paul say, "**For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.**" I'll speak further about the tension between this verse, and the truth that we have been freed from sin in the next lessons. For now, I just want to focus on how this verse applies to Paul's confusion. In verse 14, Paul is making a comparison between himself and the law.

The law, he says, is spiritual. It is perfect - untouched by the fallen nature of man. It comes from God and reflects His holy nature. In verse 12, he says it is, "**holy and just and good.**"

But, Paul, on the other hand, is NOT perfect. He IS touched by the fallen nature of man. He DOESN'T reflect God's holy nature. In other words, he is making it clear that the problem is not with the law, the problem is with him. He greatly desires to walk according to the law. He wants to stop doing the things the law forbids. He hates them. He wants to do the good things the law commands.

So, if that is what he wants to do, why is he unable to do it? This is not a man wavering between two opinions. The confusion he is experiencing is not because he sometimes desires to walk before God in righteousness, and other times desires to walk according to the flesh. His confusion stems from his 100% commitment to righteousness, but his inability to live up to it.

Friends, isn't this true of ourselves, if you are in Christ? Aren't we as confused as Paul? When you sin as a Christian, does it not cause you to feel dreadful? Don't you hate it as Paul hated it? Isn't it true that you long to do what is right in God's sight? We know that Paul wrote these verses, but can't you see yourself writing the same things about your own experience?

It should also be mentioned that some have made the mistake of concluding that these verses must be speaking of a new convert since he is still entangled with this degree of sin in his life. They say perhaps Paul was speaking of his life directly after coming to Christ, or perhaps he was just using “I” as a type of literary device to better connect with new believers.

However, if the main objection raised against interpreting these verses as referring to Paul the Apostle is that he seems to be just too sinful, too unable, too wretched, you’re going to have trouble with a lot of what Paul says about himself.

- In 1 Cor 15:9 he said, “**For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle...**”
- In Eph 3:8 he said, “[I] **am less than the least of all the saints...**”
- And worst yet, in 1 Timothy 1:15 he said, “**...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.**”

Those verses were given in order according to the age Paul was when he wrote them. Isn’t it your experience that we become more sensitive to sin - not less - the longer we walk with the Lord? Doesn’t scripture paint the man who is open, broken, contrite, and sorrowful over his sin in the best possible light?

Paul’s recognition of his sinfulness is no basis for doubting that these verses speak of his experience as a Christian, it actually reinforces it.

I can find no convincing reason to see these verses as anything other than Paul the Apostle as he was presently. This is the Apostle who said, **Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.** (1 Cor 11:1) We should understand these laments not as coming from an unbeliever, or a new believer, but from the perspective of a mature believer. As we proceed through these verses, that will become more clear.

Here is the point I want to make in this first lesson: If the Apostle Paul was confused about his remaining carnality, we should find great encouragement when we are deeply grieved at the sin we continue to see in our lives. I want to make sure I am not misunderstood.... There is no encouragement to continue sinning in these verses, but encouragement in the sense that even mature, wise, godly men suffer confusion when confronted by their continued sinfulness.

If this is your experience, you are in good company. You are not suffering in a manner that is unknown to scripture, other believers, or even Apostles.

Now, while it is comforting to know we are not suffering uniquely, we still have not dealt with why we suffer this way.

That brings me to the next lesson:

There is encouragement in:

Lesson 2: understanding your new I.

Look with me at verse 17 for Paul's explanation of his remaining carnality.

17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

What?! If you're anything like me, that verse is almost terrifying, because it sounds like Paul is saying he is not responsible for his sin. He just finished saying:

- I am carnal
- What I am doing, I do not understand
- What I will to do, that I do not practice
- What I hate, that I do

He says, "I...I...I...I..." then we get to verse 17 and he says, "**But now, it is no longer I...**"

Would we accept that statement from one of our children? Imagine your child arguing with a friend over a toy they wanted. You can hear their voices getting louder and louder, so you get up from your chair to intervene, but before you can get there a commotion begins. By the time you enter the room they are rolling around on the ground punching, kicking, and biting like animals. You finally pull your child away and demand, "What is wrong with you?"

Would you accept it if they said, "Whatever, dad, you can't blame me, I didn't do it, it was the sin in me that did it"?

Nobody would accept that response from their child! But, is that what we are seeing in these verses?

No! This is what we see: You run into the room and pull your child away and demand, "What is wrong with you?"

They take one look at you and burst into tears. Through sobs, they cry out, "I don't know, daddy! I don't understand myself. I hate it when I act like this. I want to treat my friends well, but I do these terrible things instead. It's not the real me that does these things, it is the sin that lives in me!"

Would you accept that from your child? I would. I would scoop that child up and hold them tight and say, "Oh child, I feel it too." Why? Because just like that child broke the law of his father and hated it, so too do I break the law of my Father and hate it.

When Paul says, "**But now, it is no longer I...**" He is indicating that a change has occurred previously. He's saying that his confusion, his will to do what is right, his hatred for sin, his agreement with the law, all point to the fact that he is no longer what he used to be.

Let me stop there and ask:

- Do unbelievers humbly confess their carnality like Paul does in verse 14?
- Do unbelievers hate how they routinely break God's law like Paul does in verse 15?
- Do unbelievers agree with the law like Paul does in verse 16?

No, they don't do those things. Unbelievers are enslaved to the dominating power of sin. They don't agree with the law, they rebel against it. Take a look at verse 5 to see what I mean.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

Now skip down to verse 8.

8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.

In the life of a person who is "in the flesh" - an unbeliever - sin is in control and exploits the law to arouse "**sinful passions**", and produce "**all manner of evil desire**." For the unbeliever, the law excites and magnifies sin, because that which is forbidden becomes all the more desired.

Man is unique in this way. Well, man and fallen angels are unique in this way. I want you to think for a moment about all of what God has created. Think of Genesis chapter 1. How did God create? He spoke forth a command, and creation left to obey.

Genesis 1:3 - **Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light."**

Genesis 1:9 - **Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so.**

Genesis 1:11 - **Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass...and it was so.**

Genesis 1:14 - **Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night...and it was so.**

Let there be...and it was so.

When Jesus and his disciples were crossing a lake, He fell asleep while a great windstorm developed and descended upon them, so they were in danger of sinking. Luke 8:24&25 says,

24 And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. 25 But He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

Creation obeys its Master without fail.

- He commanded water to become wine and it obeyed.
- He willed the sea to support Him as He walked on its waters and it obeyed.
- He ordered the sun to halt in the sky for Joshua, and commanded it to reverse its course for Hezekiah and it obeyed.

But to man He says:

- **"I am the Lord your God...You shall have no other gods before Me,"** and man says, "No, but I will have other gods."
- He commands, **"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,"** and man says, "No, but I will use your name as profanity."

- And on it goes with all of God's commands.

Natural man hates and rebels against God's law. That is the opposite of how Paul describes himself. What we see in these verses is a man who loves the law of God. He holds it in such high regard that he requires himself to live by it, and is crushed by his inability to do so. Now, this motivation is no common thing.

Jeremiah 31:33 describes where it comes from - it describes what God does to a man in the New Covenant. The Lord says, **"I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."** We see this very plainly in these verses. We see the law put in Paul's mind in verse 16 where he says, **"I agree with the law that it is good,"** and we see it written on his heart in verse 22 where he says, **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."**

When Paul says in verse 17, **"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me,"** he is not casting off the responsibility for his sin. Over and over again in verses 14, 15, and 16 he owns the responsibility, but that doesn't tell the whole story.

He is saying, there is a new "I". There is a new "inward man" that can be recognized because of his love for the law of God and hatred for sin that wasn't present before. Something has truly changed! Friends, this is a man who has been born from above. This is a regenerate man. This is you, if you are in Christ.

Now Paul is not refusing to take responsibility for his sin when he says, **"it is no longer I who do it,"** but let me tell you what he IS doing. He is getting more theologically precise. He is making a distinction - a separation - between this new inward man and the sin that remains in him. He describes sin as "dwelling" in him. Sin lives in his house, so to speak, but it's not a welcomed guest. It does not live with him legitimately, it is more like a squatter that can't be fully evicted.

Take a look at verse 18 to see where sin continues to operate in his life. **18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.** He can't simply say, "For I know that in me nothing good dwells." That would be a lie. His inward man - his spirit - has been completely redeemed. The Holy Spirit dwells within him. It is his unredeemed flesh where sin retains its power.

There is a sense in which the Christian is a walking paradox. There is within you a new man that is completely untouched, unstained, and set free from sin - but it's also true that you carry about in your flesh the sinful remnants of your old man.

You must understand what you are in Christ. If you don't, you will be prone to extreme highs when you believe you are walking well, and extreme lows when you find yourselves in a struggle to overcome sin. Understanding what God has changed about us, and what remains brings clarity in those times of distress.

The encouragement associated with this lesson is that sin does not originate in your deepest and truest self - your new "I" in Christ.

Despite all that I have said, some will hear that and believe I am giving license for Christians to continue living in sin. Don't think so little of regeneration! You cannot give someone a license to do that which they have been made to hate.

While I discussed this message with Pastor Scott, he made a great point that I would like to include here. These verses are not for the person who is making light of their sin. These verses are not for the person who is justifying their sin. These verses are for the person who is devastated by their sin. If you're going to counsel someone who is making light of their sin, take them to 1 John and hammer at them until something breaks. These verses are for the person who is already broken.

My hope is that these verses may become a safe haven and place of encouragement for you when you are in great turmoil because of sin.

Listening to everything I've said up till now, you could go away thinking that the life of a Christian is one of constant defeat. That couldn't be further from the truth. The new "I" doesn't take this sitting down!

That brings me to the next lesson:

There is encouragement in:

Lesson 3: the struggle.

In a moment, we are going to read verses 21-23, but before we do, I need to explain something about how Paul uses the word "law" in them. In the previous verses we covered, we see the word "law" used to refer to the moral commands of God. In these verses Paul begins to use the word "law" in the sense of a governing principle. Think about how we use the word when we say, "the law of gravity". So, "law" in the sense that it's a reliable and persistent truth.

Since Paul switches back-and-forth between these uses of the word, let's read through and I'll replace the word "law" with either "governing principle" or "moral commands", depending on which meaning is intended. Starting at verse 21...

21 I find then a [governing principle], that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the [moral commands] of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another [governing principle] in my members, warring against the [governing principle] of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the [governing principle] of sin which is in my members.

What I want you to notice in these verses is that there are contradictory governing principles that play out in Paul's life. There is the governing principle of his mind: his delight in, and desire to live according to God's moral commands, and there is the governing principle of sin in his members that leads him to violate those commands.

In verse 23, he says these opposing laws are warring against each other. This may seem very discouraging - I mean, he even says "**evil is present with me,**" and it's so continual and reliably true, that it can be described as a law. Worse still, it's not just that evil is present with him, but sometimes it overpowers him and carries him away into captivity to sin.

Looking back at verse 14, does it now make more sense why Paul said, "**For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.**"?

This war within is incredibly frustrating. It is vexing and confusing, but it should not be discouraging.

I want to explain why it should not be discouraging by discussing a phrase that I often hear believers use. I often hear them say, "I am a Christian, but I still struggle with sin."

I think we all know what is intended to be conveyed when we hear that. The person is saying:

- Sin was in my life before I became a Christian, and it's still part of my life now.
- I don't think I'm perfect.
- I don't want to be a hypocrite, preaching one thing and not recognizing when I, myself, fall short.

However, there is one aspect of that common admission that bothers me. If you say, "I am a Christian, but I still struggle with sin," you imply that the same struggle you currently have with sin was present when you weren't a Christian.

If that's true, what is the difference between a Christian and an unbeliever then? Is it simply that Christians are forgiven, and unbelievers are not?

I do think unbelievers can struggle against sin to some degree. Sin often has high costs that lead even unbelievers to war against it in a worldly-sorrow, godless, self-serving way. This is not the sort of struggle that brings encouragement.

The type of struggle that Paul is talking about - the type of struggle that IS encouraging - is the warfare between your regenerate spirit and your unregenerate flesh. It is not a self-serving, grudging, fight to avoid natural consequences to sin. It is a dead-to-self, Spirit-led, enthusiastic battle against sin.

Romans 8:13&14: ...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Galatians 5:16-17: 16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Romans 7:14-25 is focused on the remaining sinfulness of the Christian, and for that reason, it may appear that this is a defeated and sin-stricken man. There is a danger, I think, to reading these verses and becoming too comfortable with the idea of sin always being a part of our lives. Paul is not comfortable with sin. He is not defeated by sin. He is warring against his sin.

You need to understand that the Holy Spirit has created your new "I" as a fighter. Your inward man and your flesh are no longer walking in unity, they are trying to kill each other. They are fighting to the death.

Is there a war within you? Is there a battle that takes place when sin is before your eyes? When you stumble, does your inward man rise up and say, "NO MORE"?

Or, have you made peace with sin? Have you welcomed it into your home? Have you given it a guest bedroom to stay in?

Young people, listen! I know the temptations you face. You work so hard - you're so careful - to keep what you do on your cell phones secret from your parents, but God knows. Examine your hearts! Does that secret sin thrill you, or does it haunt you? If you can't find confession and repentance, you should be terrified about your spiritual condition. That goes for anyone who is harboring secret sin of any kind.

There IS a real difference between the believer and the unbeliever and it can be recognized by the way we respond to sin.

If you are in Christ, the frustration, the anger, the hatred you feel toward your sin, the intense desire to be rid of it, all of these are an encouraging sign of spiritual life.

It is that spiritual life within Paul which causes him to explode in a release of anguished emotion saying in verse 24, "**O wretched man that I am!**" When you read this you can't help but nearly shout it aloud as he would have done. You can feel his disgust with his condition. Why? Because all warfare has casualties. When the sin that operates in his flesh wins a victory, it carries him captive against his will, and it's his intense inward desire for holiness that suffers defeat.

He is not crying out for his soul to be saved, he is crying out for his saved soul to be delivered from his carnal body. He says in verse 24: **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?**

We can talk at great length about the distinctions between the inward man and the outer man, but it can't be denied that a man is made up of both. Paul is crying out for the day when he will no longer be at war with himself.

That brings me to the last lesson:

There is encouragement in:

Lesson 4: [our future hope](#).

When we read our bibles we are constantly reminded of the glorious blessings we already possess in Christ, but we also see that these blessings will find their ultimate fulfillment in the future.

For instance, Ephesians 2:6 speaks of us already being raised with Christ. It says God **“raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”** but we see elsewhere that we are still waiting to be raised in the future. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says, **“For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible.”** So, there is a sense in which we've already been raised with Christ, but also not yet.

Or, consider our adoption. When do we become God's children? There is, of course, a glorious sense in which we already are. John 1:12 says, **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”** But it is also true that we are waiting for the final adoption. Romans 8:23 says, **“we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”** We are already adopted, but also not yet.

What about eternal life? In John 10:28, our Lord says, **“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish...”** So we already possess eternal life, but also not yet, because believers still experience what? Death.

Here is the point I want to make: this same principle applies to our sanctification as well. So, we see verses like Romans 6:6 that say, “... **our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin,**” but then we come to a section of scripture like Romans 7:14-25 where Paul says he is “**sold under sin**” and that sin is “**bringing [him] into captivity**”. So, he is already freed from sin, but also not yet.

How do we reconcile these things?

We exist in the tension between the “already”, and the “not yet”. What do I mean by that? We have been raised with Christ, we have been adopted, we possess eternal life, we have been set free from sin, how? We already have all of these blessings spiritually.

Spiritually speaking, we are fit to be ushered directly into the presence of the Lord. We know that because what does scripture say occurs directly after our spirit leaves our body? 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, “**We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**”

In a very real way our flesh is the obstacle between us and the greatest fulfillment of the promises we have in Christ. It is where sin continues to operate, and because of that it is the source of the Christian’s confusion and frustration. It is the enemy we must daily fight. Our flesh is the reason that we remain in the “not yet” of all of those promises.

Look with me again at verse 24 and this time including verse 25: **24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

The title of this message is *Encouragement on the Difficult Way*. The encouragement of this last lesson is that scripture promises the Difficult Way has an ending. It's just temporary. Yes, it's confusing. Yes, it's frustrating. Yes, it's very hard. But, all of the difficulties we face keep us looking unto Jesus and hoping with great perseverance for the day when God will finally deliver us from our bodies of death.

Pastor Scott has recently preached on our bodies breaking down and how that should cause us to long for our glorified bodies. Final deliverance from our old man - final deliverance from a lifetime of struggle with sin should do the same.

Philippians 3:20&21 - 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Our new body will be like His glorified body. It will no longer be carnal. It will no longer provoke confusion. It will no longer war against us. It will no longer carry us captive into sin. That is what we have to look forward to in hope. Paul was so sure about this promise that he was able to thank God for it before he received it in full.

Perhaps you've listened to this sermon and rather than finding encouragement, you've found anxiety because:

- You are not like Paul
- You don't hate your sin.
- You don't love God's commands
- You don't recognize a new inward man created by God
- You don't war against your flesh.

If those things are true, you are not on the Difficult Way. You might think to yourself: *Good. Who needs more difficulty in their lives? I'm glad I'm not at war with myself. I'm glad I've made peace with sin. I'm happy I'm nothing like Paul. He sounds miserable.*

Listen to the words of Jesus. Matthew 7:13&14 **13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

If you are on the broad path - the easy path - you have great cause for fear. Yes, there are many who travel that road with you. Yes, it is the road acceptable to the world. Yes, the gate is wide and accepts all who wish to go in by it, but it's end is destruction.

I would like to invite you to join Paul and every other Christian on the Difficult Way. “How do I get there?” you ask. You must enter by the narrow gate - through faith in Christ alone you may enter. The way is hard. There are enemies to face - chiefly yourself. There are battles to fight. The war will not be over this side of eternity. You will be hemmed in on one side and the other. You will be hard pressed, and continually corrected when you stumble off the path. It is a life of hardship, of self-confrontation, of painful pruning, but it is the path that leads to glory.

Romans 8:18 - **18 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.**

I will be up front after service and would be thrilled to pray with you or answer any questions that you may have.

Let's pray.