

**Title:** Our Spiritual Conflict

**Scripture:** Romans 7:14-25

**Series:** God's Saving Grace

## 1. Introduction:

a. This section of Romans 7 has been controversial for centuries. The controversy arises in identifying the subject (the person) of whom Paul is writing. In other words, who is the person struggling here? There are three schools of thought on the matter.

i. The first view states that this passage describes a non-Christian.

1. This view is clearly incorrect in that no unbeliever desires to please God as the person in our passage does. Our passage clearly describes someone who is broken by their sin. Someone who always wants to please God but finds it impossible within the human experience.

ii. The second view is that this passage describes a "carnal Christian," a supposed Christian who has no compulsion over sin and lives as if holiness did not matter.

1. However, the Scriptures teach that there is no such thing as a carnal Christian. This type of person is actually unregenerate (by their fruit, you shall know them). Therefore, we must reject this second view because the passage demonstrates a person who is actually mortified by their sin.

- iii. The third view is that this passage describes an average Christian. Historically, this has been the church's position.
1. In the passage, we must pay attention to the fact that Paul exclusively writes in the first-person singular (28 instances combined of the personal pronouns I, me, my). Paul also writes in the present tense (right now).
  2. Throughout history, the best Greek interpreters have worked on this passage and found no justification for seeing here anything other than the current struggle that the apostle was having concerning his own progress in sanctification.
  3. Therefore, the language makes it clear that Paul is speaking about himself. This might bother you, but the language is irrefutable. Paul was speaking about his own experiences. Paul talks of a painful, ongoing struggle in his life between walking according to the Spirit and surrendering to the remnant of the flesh.
  4. **The key to understanding this passage is this:** Paul describes the spiritual bankruptcy that is sure to follow when any Christian forgets to trust in Christ and reverts to progressing in sanctification by human will.
    - a. Historically, the church has understood that this passage of scripture was Paul's autobiography, but it is also the experience of every Christian. Anyone

who has seriously followed Christ has known something of this reality! We are quick to think that justification is based on effort alone; therefore, we are equally as quick to forget to depend on the One who is our forgiveness of sins.

i. **Romans 7:18A** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

b. Beloved, we must also understand that Chapters 7 and 8 should be seen as one continuous unit. In chapter 8, which focuses on spiritual victory, Paul's experience differs from that of his experience here in chapter 7, which focuses on the impossibility of sanctification based on human effort. So Paul teaches that he himself alternated between these experiences. Like you and I, Paul struggled with the remnant of the flesh, so he aimed to fight against unlawful desires by entrusting himself to the God of sanctification.

i. This is something for us to remember. Every day, we must wage a spiritual war against the remnant of the flesh. The only possible victory for the Christians in this war is to rely solely on Christ and not on human efforts or will.

2. Verses 14-15 - The Conflict Within: For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. (15) For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (16) Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

- a. How many thousands have said words like these to their pastors or counselors? It is the cry of the believer who is trying but is mistakenly relying on self. As Paul teaches us, those who trust in self are dominated by sin. Our own effort can never defeat sin.
  - i. Trying to achieve a higher level of sanctification by human effort only leads to confusion.
- b. **For I do not understand my own actions.** Paul expresses confusion. He is confused by his own behavior. **I don't understand myself. I just don't know why I do the things that I do.**
- c. He describes a conflict rooted in the will: **For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.** Paul is not engaging in a philosophical exercise of how the will functions; he is speaking in a real language we can all relate to.
  - i. We all aspire to live in perfect obedience to Christ, but we often struggle because our desire to obey clashes with the specific actions required of us.
  - ii. We also face the strong temptation to disobey, which stems from our remaining sinful nature. This is why we cry out, **“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**
  - iii. We are people of mixed desires, which is why life does not really become complicated until we are born again. Before we were born again, we only wanted to live according to the flesh. We walked willingly and happily, submitting to the temptations of Satan. Once the Holy Spirit has raised us from spiritual death, our lives become a

battleground between two opposing forces. Satan persists in his efforts, our sinful nature doesn't disappear immediately, and the conflict starts.

1. Life becomes complicated because we are involved in a war that penetrates the very deepest parts of our souls and lasts until our glorification in heaven.

- a. Until then, the battle rages on.

- iv. This is the universal experience among Christians and what the apostle Paul discusses.

- d. At this point, it would be easy to ask, “Why not just eat, drink, and be merry and not be so consumed by sanctification since we cannot reach the goal fully while on earth?”

- i. But beloved, just because we cannot reach the goal entirely does not mean that we cannot, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, make significant progress. We must remember that elsewhere, Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:13-14** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- ii. So, what are we to do? We are to go forward. We engage in the daily fight, and the Scriptures admonish us not to yield to the sin that besets us.

1. **1 Corinthians 9:26-27** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. (27) But I discipline my body and keep

it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

iii. To what point are we to resist?

1. **Hebrews 12:4** In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

a. We use the means of God's grace to progress in our sanctification.

b. The fact that no one has made it to the finish line in this lifetime already perfected does not mean we should stop running.

c. We are to be diligent in every way to feed the new man and kill the old man.

i. **Ephesians 4:22-24** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, (23) and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, (24) and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

2. We must devote ourselves to God and ask Him for His power to continue down the path of sanctification.

3. Verses 17-20: The Truth of our Conflict: So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. (18) For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability

to carry it out. (19) For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. (20) Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

- a. Paul says, "**it is no longer I who do it.**" He is not actually saying he does not commit the sin, but that it is not what his deep inner self, renewed in Christ, wants to do. The Apostle finds himself dominated by sin when he seeks sanctification based on human effort.
  - i. **For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.**
- b. Thomas a Kempis wrote of the same frustration:
  - i. I want to experience You deeply, but I struggle to do so. I long to focus on heavenly things, but worldly desires and uncontrolled passions weigh me down. I prioritize spiritual matters in my thoughts, but I find myself drawn to worldly concerns. I am in a constant battle with myself, causing me inner turmoil. Oh, the suffering I endure as I try to focus on heavenly things, only to be distracted by worldly matters when I pray.
  - ii. How many times have we exerted all our effort to follow Christ, only to be dragged down by our sinful nature and fall short?
    1. **For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.**
    2. Here is the secret. As faithful Christians, we all desire to live in obedience and holiness. However, none of us has the power to

accomplish this great and lofty goal. It is outside of us. We must look to Christ!

4. Verses 21-23: The Conflict Arises from Our Dual Nature:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. (22) For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, (23) but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

- a. The principle Paul recognizes is that he is a man with two natures. One delights in the Law of God. The other wages war against God's Law. The Christian is subject to two forces simultaneously and thus lives in a state of tension.
  - i. The seventh chapter of Romans is a passionate piece of writing. Paul wants us to feel the emotion he experiences in trying to live up to God's standards in his own strength.
  - ii. And here we find wisdom: A believer who tries to please God in their own strength will always come to disheartening, aching frustration-always!
- b. Dear friends, even "good Christians" and those considered super-Christians can experience this. Paul, one of the greatest Christians, faced this struggle. He had a deep understanding of theology and incredible passion, yet he sometimes tried to live up to God's standards on his own. It's easy to fall into this trap, to think too highly of ourselves.
  - i. It would be naive to say that after Paul understood how sin defeats us through the Law,



he never again sinned throughout the rest of his life.

1. Of course, he did.

c. We see a truth in Paul's life: Over time, he became less bound by sin and more like Christ. He never reached perfection—no one can—but he was noticeably more Christ-like at the end of his life than at the beginning.

5. Verses 24-25: The Believer's Power over this Conflict:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (25) Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

a. Take heart, brothers and sisters. Paul's teachings remind us that trying to attain holiness through our own efforts is futile. However, as we recognize our limitations, sanctification becomes more within reach.

b. **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** The adjective "**wretched**" means "a miserable distressed condition."

i. Paul has come to the end of himself, which is the ground where grace grows. Are you tired of trying to live up to the standard for holiness solely based on your own effort? Do you, like Paul, exclaim, **O, wretched man that I am!**

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

1. I pray that you do! I pray that you will be outside of yourselves. When in despair, we say, "I can't do this!" it is then that grace brings us to Christ.

- ii. How so? The cry of human inability brings us to the Sermon on the Mount:
  1. **Matthew 5:3-6** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4) “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (5) “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (6) “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- c. Actually, Paul is now in the right place because when the believer realizes his helplessness, he will trust in God and receive His gracious help. As long as we think we can do it ourselves, we are in Romans 7.
  - i. Now we must admit, this is true of more than just Paul. It is true of me, Dr. Ismael Miranda, and you!
    1. **John 15:5B** for apart from me you can do nothing.
- d. How does Paul handle the realization that he cannot keep falling into the temptation of seeking sanctification by human effort? Paul cries out for divine help. **Who will deliver me from this body of death?**
  - i. Notice that he does not say, "What must I do to be delivered from this body of death?" but "Who will rescue me?"
  - ii. There can only be one answer to this question. **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**
    1. Here, Paul anticipates something else he knew so very well.

- a. **Romans 8:1 NKJV** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
  - i. “Now that I have come to my end,” says Paul, “I know where to look to. I look to Christ and his indwelling Spirit.”
  - ii. Praise God!

6. Benediction:

- a. **Romans 8:1-2 NKJV** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

**Public Reading of Scripture**  
**Romans 8:1-8**