

Message #25

Romans 7:13-18

Before I came to faith in Jesus Christ, I loved sin. I laughed at sinful things, I pursued sinful things. I promoted them on the radio. The Apostle Peter described it accurately, “having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries” (I Peter 4:3).

That all changed on June 10, 1976. At that point the counsel of I Peter 4:2 took effect: “live the rest of the time no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” I had not gone to any church in those early weeks, but something had changed in me and 30 days after inviting Jesus Christ into my life, the radio station called a meeting and said, “Something is different about you. What has happened?” What happened was the Spirit of God was beginning His work and the process of sanctification had begun.

From that point, my desire was to try to live life for the will of God. That truly was the desire of my heart. But I soon learned that is a major struggle. I quickly learned I still have a flesh that does not want to surrender. I read my Bible, I started to go to church, I prayed. I went to different church sponsored seminars and could not seem to get rid of my old flesh struggle.

But this text right here combined with the one we will examine next week changed me. This text put me on a path of victory. **I did not say it put me on a path of perfection, but victory.**

The lesson I learned here is the lesson Paul learned and taught:

THE LAW OF GOD IS NOT DESIGNED OR GIVEN TO MAKE ONE SPIRITUAL; IT IS DESIGNED AND GIVEN TO SHOW ONE IS SINFUL AND THEREFORE IF ONE TRIES TO BE SPIRITUAL OR VICTORIOUS BY KEEPING THE LAW, ONE WILL BE MISERABLE.

There is a major discussion here as to whether or not Paul was discussing himself as a believer or before he became a believer. He says, for example, he was “sold into bondage to sin” (v. 14); and “nothing good dwells in me” (v. 18). Some take the position that he is describing himself before he was a believer, but we do not take that position.

I am completely convinced he is writing about his struggle as a believer, not prior to being a believer. For one thing, no unbeliever has this kind of conviction about himself. Second, present tense verbs indicate this was a continual struggle, not some previous struggle of the past.

I agree with Augustine, Luther, Calvin and others who believe that **Paul is describing the flesh struggle of the Christian life and he will show where victory is found.**

What Paul is doing here is speaking as a mature, honest believer. No immature believer or one who is not a believer has a grasp of how the O.T. law works. These kinds of people think the ten commandments are their friends, when, in fact, they will condemn you.

Now **verse 13** is critical to the entire contextual point. It asks a question and the question is this: “Is God’s good law responsible for us being spiritually dead before God? Is it the law of God that is responsible for causing me to be spiritually dead, which therefore leads to eternal death?”

Paul uses an emphatic personal pronoun “me” (emoi) here so he is specifically applying this to himself.

In the middle of **verse 13**, Paul directly answers that question “May it never be.” Here again Paul uses that aorist middle, meaning may you never in and of yourself ever have a point of time when you think the Law of God and the word of God is the problem. Paul says the Law of God is not the problem, I am the problem.

The law, which is good, showed me I am not good. The law showed me I was exceedingly sinful. The more one looks honestly and accurately at the O.T. law and then looks at himself, the more one recognizes one is spiritually dead and totally sinful. **Therefore the more one focuses on the O.T. law, one cannot possibly have victory.**

Let’s take a breakdown of the O.T. law and see if this is true. In **Matthew 22:36-40**, a Pharisaical lawyer asked Jesus which is the great commandment of the law. Jesus said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

So now the O.T. law is broken down to two simple commandments.

- 1) Love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.
- 2) Love neighbor as yourself.

That seems simple enough. We only have to work with two commandments and analyze ourselves in view of those two commandments.

If you honestly look at those two commandments and if you are honest with yourself, you will end up depressed because you will realize I have never done that, ever.

I don’t love my neighbor as myself. There have been times I have been driving and I come upon someone just driving as slow as a turtle and no one can pass. Not only am I guilty of not loving them, but I have actually invented things about them and their relatives. One time the person was driving so goofy that I took down their license number and actually hoped their license would be taken away for the rest of their lives. Does that sound like loving a neighbor as self?

I’ll paraphrase John Calvin on this point, take an honest look into the mirror of the law and you will curse yourself.

Now you will notice that **verse 14, verse 15, and verse 18** all begin with a conjunction “for.” This is what we would call an explanatory “for” or in Greek an explanatory *gar*. There are five explanatory points that Paul makes here:

EXPLANATORY POINT #1 – The law is spiritual and it shows us that we have a flesh that is enslaved to sin. **7:14**

We have a fleshly nature that does not, will not and cannot obey the law because it is driven to sin.

William Newell said, “This is slave-market talk: and it describes all of us by nature. Instead of being spiritual and therefore able to harken to, delight in and obey God’s holy spiritual law, we are turned back, since Adam sinned, to a fleshly condition, our spirits by nature dead to God, and our soul-faculties under the domination of the still unredeemed body” (*Romans Verse By Verse*, p. 292).

Paul is talking about a mature Christian here and not one who is a new believer. A new believer is an immature believer and he knows his sins are forgiven and that he is justified and is on his way to heaven and he is happy about that. But what that new believer doesn’t know is there is a sinful nature that will soon raise its sinful head. It will eventually cause the believer to do just the opposite of what God’s word and will are.

The more spiritually minded we are, the more we will realize this. We will see more and more the goodness and holiness of God and the worthlessness of ourselves. We will more and more realize our need to depend on God’s grace and less and less depend on our works or attempts to keep the O.T. law.

EXPLANATORY POINT #2 – The flesh and sin enslavement causes me to do what I hate doing. **7:15**

Sooner or later the believer will discover the flesh is still with him and he will end up doing just the opposite of what he should have done according to the word of God.

Thomas Robinson, a Biblical scholar from the University of Edinburgh said the law keeps us aiming at holiness, but shows us we cannot attain it.

Carefully observe the verb “I am doing.” This is a key verb of this section. It appears in four verses: **v. 15, 17, 19, 20**. **It is a Greek verb *katergazomai* which is a word that emphasizes to achieve by intense labor or works**. In this context it is referring to an intense works effort that attempts achievement by the O.T. law.

Paul is saying that he gave an intense effort by his own works to keep the law but could not figure out why he could not do it. He so desperately wanted to have victory over sin but he kept failing. In fact, he said there were times he did what he hated doing.

This is a major theological concession for Paul to make because at one time in his life, prior to his conversion, he actually thought he was blameless before God (Philippians 3:6, 9-13). But since he had become a believer, he saw it all differently.

This is a big difference between a spiritually minded believer and one who is not spiritually minded. **The difference between the spiritually minded believer and the carnal believer is that the carnal believer loves his sin and the spiritually minded believer hates his sin.**

This verse clearly refutes two faulty theological concepts:

- 1) The possibility of sinless perfectionism does not exist. As long as we have a flesh, we have sin.
- 2) The toleration and addiction to sinful things should never be loved, but hated.

EXPLANATORY POINT #3 – The law shows that it is good every time I end up not doing what I know I should have done. **7:16**

By virtue of the fact that we have a desire to keep God's law demonstrates we realize the law is good. The problem is not with the good standard, the problem is with us.

When we study for an exam, we admit there is a good grade to go after. We admit there are good grades and bad grades. The more we study the more we acknowledge there is an "A" grade. Our efforts prove this.

When we end up doing what we don't want to do, we admit the law is good because we wanted to do it and because we wanted to keep it. We also admit we did not measure up to the standard.

Let's illustrate the point with a couple of illustrations from the ten commandments:

Commandment #5 - "Honor your Father and Mother."

Now we would certainly admit this is a good commandment. But it is not one I always kept. There were times I was rude, disrespectful, disobedient and ungrateful to my own father and mother. In fact, when we had children there were times we told them what we wanted them to do and they did just the opposite. The problem is not with the law. That law is good. The problem is with us. We are not good.

Commandment #9 - "You shall not bear false witness."

Has there ever been a time when you have stretched the truth? Perhaps you discussed some unproved rumor or deliberately exaggerated or distorted reality. The problem is not the law, it is with us. The law is good, we aren't. That is what Paul learned.

EXPLANATORY POINT #4 – The law shows us that there is a sin force dwelling in us. **7:17**

That word “dwell” shows us in verse 17, 18 and 20. It is a word that means we have two natures continually living in us or indwelling us. **One nature moves toward godliness and the other toward godlessness.**

In **verse 17** Paul emphatically says that I am a new creation in Christ with a new nature, but I also have the old sin nature and that nature still lives in me and that is the reason for the struggle.

Every believer has a new nature in Christ and they still have their old flesh nature. The new nature desires to obey God and do the will of God, but the old sin nature wars against that.

When we fail as a believer, we hate it and hate ourselves and the good side of that is we show we do have a new nature that does want to do what is right.

Those without this nature don't care. We do see from this verse that God makes us new when we believe in Christ. We are no longer the same person, but we still do have the same old nature. If you are looking at the O.T. law for confidence and hope, you will never find it. What you will find is failure.

EXPLANATORY POINT #5 – The law shows us that there is a nothing good sin principle living in us that is against us doing good. **7:18**

In **verse 17** the more positive approach to our flesh is given in the sense that it does dwell in us, but in **verse 18** the more negative approach to our flesh is given in that no good dwells in the flesh.

Back in the 70's I used to play a song, sung by the great theologian Linda Ronstadt, called “You're no good, no good, no good, no good.” That song is theologically accurate pertaining to a part of every one of us. We have a flesh that is no good.

Pick a category—marriage, parenting, temptation, aging, retirement, relationships, work issue, finances—in your flesh nothing good exists in any of these areas.

William Newell said he knew of hundreds of people who were challenged to surrender to Christ by well-meaning ministers as if they had the power to do it. He said those ministers apparently did not understand the words of Paul. You have an old nature that does not want you to surrender to Christ and that flesh will fight you all the way to heaven.

What you will learn is that victory is not possible with you. It will come by crying out to God and asking for His grace and mercy.

J. Vernon McGee told this story from his own life:

“I remember when I started out, oh, I was going to live for God! That’s when I fell on my face, and I have never fallen harder than I did then. I thought I could do it myself. But I found there was no power in the new nature. And that is the reason that an evangelist can always get response in a meeting. I’m afraid ninety percent of the decisions that are made in our churches today have been made by Christians who have been living in defeat in their Christian lives. What they are really saying is, ‘I want to live for God. I want to do better.’ Often an evangelist, in a meeting says, ‘all of you that want to love for God put up your hand. All of you today that want to come closer to God, put up your hand. Those of you, who want to commit your life to God, come forward.’ The minute an evangelist says that, he’s got me. That is what I want to do. That new nature of mind says, ‘I sure would like to live for God.’ But there is no power in it. That is what multitudes of believers fail to recognize. There have been folk who have been coming forward for years, and that’s all they have been doing—just coming forward! They never make any progress. Oh, how they need to understand this truth.”

What is the answer? The answer is the grace of God found totally and only in Jesus Christ. Victory does not belong to us, it belongs to God.