

Romans 7:13-25

“What’s My Problem?”

We come to a portion of scripture today that even if as a believer you’ve never personally *read* it, you’re all too familiar *with* it. That age old frustration to be found in seeking to do in the efforts of my flesh what only can be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. You *try* to do what’s right, you really *want* to do what’s right, but you find yourself failing miserably over and over and over again. It’s just a frustrating, and radically aggravating place to be, you find yourself at this, “What’s my problem?” kind of quandary. and In this section of scripture Paul considers this very predicament and sights both the *source* of the problem and the *solution* to the problem. Primarily we see the source today, but before the ch is over he’ll sight the solution.

Thus far in ch 7 we’ve been discussing the wrong way to serve God, ch 6 dealing with how to *stop* doing bad things, ch 7 dealing with how *not* do to good things, (the fact that there’s a right way and a wrong way to serve the Lord,) and ch 7 deals with the wrong way. Tells us that when it comes to serving the Lord we’re to leave law out of it, it’s not a binding contract of legalism that we’ve entered into with God through Christ, but rather a covenant of love. and The things that we do as *unto* the Lord, are to be spilling out of the overflow of our love *for* the Lord. We *should serve* that much is for sure (vs 6) we’re to bear fruit to God (vs 4), but our service is to be in the newness of the Spirit, not the oldness of the letter.

Because in Christ not only have we died to sin, but we’ve also died to the law, we don’t serve God legally, but lovingly from the heart. If you have a job you might do good things for the company, but odds are it’s not out of the overflow of your love for the company, it’s because you were hired to do a job, there’s a legal contract there. But when you bless your family, or do good things for your family, or perhaps your closest friend, there’s an altogether different motive involved. That’s the difference, one is out of legal obligation, the other is out of love and opportunity.

Besides we learned last week that the law provokes us to sin. The law says, “Please don’t feed the animals,” so you want to throw them some popcorn or something. You want to do the opposite of what the sign says to do, *just* because the sign tells you to do it. The sign says, “Speed limit 55,” “Well I’m going to do 59,” as a matter of fact there’s a song that was written years ago called, “Signs.” and The whole point of the song was to say, “I don’t want to be bound by law so whatever the sign says I’m doing just the opposite,” you see the law provokes an edge of rebellion in me, but God doesn’t want to *provoke* you to *sin*, but rather to *produce* in you *holiness/sanctification*.

So then is the law sin? No way, it’s by the law that I know sin, and that’s where we left off in our last gathering, speaking on the atrocious nature of sin vs holy nature of God’s law. and Sin is so sinful that it can actually take something as holy and just and good as God’s law and use it as a means to deceive you and by it, kill you, (look at vs 11, read).

We're to understand the deceptive nature of sin, it takes something good like God's law, and twists it in such a way as to provoke rebellion in you, and sin has an agenda and it's to kill you. The wages of sin is death; I don't think anything portrays the graphic intent of sin more vividly than the cross of Jesus Christ Sin is not your friend, so often people think that God is just a giant "Kill Joy" in the sky who wants to punish us for having fun. Wrong, God is trying to save your life; sin is wanting to destroy your life, both now and eternally. and It's so wicked that it'll use the holy, just and good law of God to deceive you, then destroy you. Does that mean the law is death to you?

Vs13

That's a mouth full isn't it? But the point here is that it isn't the law that's death to me, it's sin, but it'll take the law of God which is good and says, "You shall have no other gods before Me," and through that provoke an attitude in me that says, "Well, that's kinda ego centric isn't it?" Because that would be the case if I were God, but that's the deceptive nature of sin, God isn't ego centric, He doesn't need me to reaffirm Him, the fact that He's to be my priority isn't for His sake, it's for *my* sake. Remember He's seeking to *save* me, sin is seeking to *slay* me. So it uses the law to provoke me to sin, be it in attitude or action, but there is something healthy for us that comes from all of this and that is an exposure to us of exactly how sinful we are. Because sin takes the occasion on virtually every point of the law challenges me to sin against it, if not outwardly, than inwardly. Doesn't matter to sin how you break the law, because to break the law inwardly in my heart brings on the same ultimate penalty as breaking it outwardly in my flesh. Now if I break it outwardly there may different societal ramifications, but sin isn't overly concerned with that, that's just a bonus, sure it wants to destroy your life here and now, but its ultimate aim is seeking eternal ramifications, separation from God.

So though sin uses the law to provoke us to sin, the law then uses that whole happening to show us the sinfulness *of* sin. In other words when the sign says, "Keep off the grass," so I go over and place my foot on that grass, that sign bears witness of how sinful the sin in me, is. and I need to know that, you need to know that, we need sin to *appear* as sin, because the nature of sin is deceptive, but we need the lid to be blown off of sin so that we can see how exceedingly sinful it is, the law does that. Because if we don't see sin for the reality of what it is, we'll never oppose it, or really desire victory *over* it. But rather it's probable that we'd wallow around in it, and enjoy it all the while. Like the frog thrown in a pot of cold water, then the fire is turned on and as the water slowly heats up, he'll never seek to escape, he senses no danger and he'll sit there and be boiled to death thinking everything is "A" ok. That's what sin does to us.

Spurgeon talked about sin undermining a man's constitution, yet leading him to boast in unfailling health, how it "beggars" him and tells him he's rich, strips him, and makes him glory in his imaginary robes. It simply takes from you your ability to discern, that's why leprosy in the bible is such a powerful illustration of sin. Because leprosy numbs you so that you don't realize when you're injured, or have an infection, and it just eats at you until it kills you and you never feel a thing. But when we see sin for what it really is (when the curtain is pulled back and it's exposed) and we're able to see its destructive nature, be it physically, circumstantially, and/or most important, spiritually, that's when we long for deliverance. and The law is what pulls back the curtain and exposes the true identity and agenda of sin. So the law is nothing but good to you and me, the problem isn't in the law, it's in sin, but unfortunately sin happens to dwell in me. But our problem in relation to the law is that though law can *inform* us as to the standard that we fall short of, it has no ability to *enable* us to meet the standard.

Vs14

Now we dipped into this principle just slightly last week there in vs 7 when Paul was speaking about the command, "You shall not covet" and how that covetousness is something that happens *in* me. Now all of the commands were pointed to the inner man, but that one in particular is the most obvious, because to covet is to have that strong *inward* longing for something that belongs to another, be it property, persons, position, or whatever. It would seem from the surface that, "You shall not commit adultery" dealt with outward actions.

To an extent it certainly does, but you're not going to commit a crime outwardly of which you haven't already crossed the line inwardly, so that by the time adultery spills over into an outward action, you've rehearsed it in your heart and in your mind over and over again. My point being that if your heart stays clean, if your inner man is staying pure, than your outward actions will stay in check. and That was the point of the law, the law dealt with the inner man, it's spiritual, the bible tells us that God is *Spirit*, Jesus said that Words that he spoke were *spirit*, and he dealt with that and brought proper perspective to that in the sermon on the Mt. and He pointed out how that the law wasn't fulfilled in the outward actions alone, but that it was concerned with the inward attitude of the heart. and How that to lust on a person is to commit adultery in your heart, to be angry with a person in a manner that didn't accord with godliness is to murder them in your heart. and When you begin to look at the law from that perspective, you find yourself in real trouble, because I've prioritized things over God in my life, I've been jealous over other people's possessions, I've been angry with out a cause, I've been guilty of lust in my heart, I've dishonored my parents, I've not always told the truth in every situation. and That's why Jesus called the Pharisees white washed tombs, because outwardly they seemed to have it all together, but inwardly they were a real mess, legalistic hypocrites with a dire inward problem.

Because the law is *spiritual*, aimed at the *inner* man, the problem is that I'm carnal, or fleshly, sold under sin. It's my nature to gravitate towards sin, that's why when you find someone who hasn't been in fellowship for an extended period of time, or they're not spending time in God's Word, or in fellowship with the Lord through prayer that they're generally in a backslidden mess. Because we're carnal, we gravitate towards the flesh; it's natural for us to be mindful of the things of men, not the things of God. But the law is spiritual, deals with the inner man, so it can point out how messed up I am, and then do nothing to cure me. Remember it's like an ultra sound, or an X-Ray machine, it can diagnose what's wrong internally, bring that to light very specifically, but do nothing to offer a remedy. So there rages in me this desire of sin to rule over me. Remember when Cain was jealous over Able because he offered a better sacrifice? Remember what God said to him? "...*sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.*" Gen 4:7 Sin wants to rule *you* but you should rule *it*, and so the battle rages on, notice.

Vs15-19

Time for a little reality check, who here can heartily identify with Paul's plight? We all can, you show me a believer who can't identify with this and I'll show you someone who's not a believer at all. Because you can't wrestle with the reality of sin and not know what this is like, John said, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" 1 John 1:8 and This is one of the things that bears witness of the reality that you've been born again of the Spirit. Remember Jesus said that that which was born of the flesh was flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. But often times people really struggle with the fact of whether or not they're really Christians on the basis that they struggle doing the right thing. Listen, if you weren't a Christian there would be no struggle, you just be doing whatever the flesh wanted, whenever the flesh wanted to do it and you wouldn't have that deep sense of conviction over sin in your life. But because you wrestle with the reality of sin in your life, that's just testimony to the reality of the Spirit at work in you, and the fact that He's doing a work through you.

But here's the deal, I know what I *need* to do, and even purpose that I'm *going* to do it, but then I blow it, and wind up doing the very thing I purposed *not* to do. I know that after a long day at work, I'm emotionally spent, I'm hungry therefore I'm grumpy, and so what do I do?

I think, "I'm not going to get upset at the wife or kids when I get home regardless of what's going on, but rather I'm going to stay cool, calm and collected and just express my appreciation for them." That's what I *need* to do, it's even what I *purpose* to do, but then I walk through the door right? Maybe there's been no real thought placed towards dinner or something, and all the sudden I'm ranting and raving until I realize that the very thing I "willed" to do I didn't do, but thing I hate (getting upset with my family) I've done. Can anyone relate to that type of thing?

Vs16

Remember when Jesus was speaking to a certain lawyer about the greatest command of the law? and He said that the greatest command was, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ‘This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it:’ You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” Matt 22:37-39 and Your neighbor is whomever you just happen to be with in the proximity of. In the illustration I just gave you it’d be my wife, now it was my will to come home and display love for her and my family, just like the law tells me to, no problem with the law but I didn’t do what I was wanting to, notice what Paul says.

Vs 17

Now this isn’t shirking of personal responsibility? It’s a confession of reality that we realize as believers. That being a new creation in Christ the desire to sin doesn’t come from the new nature God has given me, but from the impulse of the old man left in the flesh. It’s a conscious awareness of the difference between the inner man of the deep recess of my heart, who wants to please God, (which is who I am) vs weakness of my flesh that seems to subject itself residual impulse of sin in my members.

Vs18

If this vs isn’t underlined in your bible it should be, because herein lies a huge key in freedom from the condemnation that comes from the flesh (conviction is to be readily accepted, but condemnation is to be rejected, we’ll see that next time). But notice here that the problem isn’t *desire*, it’s *do ability*. The desire to do the right thing is all over me, the ability to do the right thing I find radically lacking, that’s what he’s saying here. “To will is present, but the power to perform what is good I do not find.”

But here’s what I want you to really zero in on in this vs, “I know that in me(that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;” because whenever I find myself, disappointed in myself it’s because I’m kicking against the reality of what this vs says right here. Think about it, why do we get down on ourselves when we blow life? It’s because we think we should’ve done better, but if I really believe what this is telling me, that in me (in my flesh) *nothing* good dwells, than what gives me the audacity to expect that I should prove anything otherwise? I think that we understand this vs theologically, many of us can quote it quite exactly, but we really struggle with its reality. I desperately want to think that somewhere in me is a little something good, “good ol’ boy” but that’s to deny the scripture. The bible says that there are none who are good, not even one, there’s only one good Jesus said, and that’s God. The rest of us fall short, it’s not saying you can’t do morally upstanding things, its saying that there is nothing we can do of eternal value whatsoever apart from Christ, what did Jesus say? “...without Me you can do *nothing*.” John 15:5

But I'm always finding myself shocked when I step out apart from the Lord's leading and I fail, as if I could do something good on my own. But when I let this reality sink in, far from depressing me, I find myself incredibly free, because I'm not placing myself in bondage to standards that I can't live up to. I just give Christ my life, and that's the key (I'm ahead of myself here but) it's not about me living *my* life for Christ, but rather it's about simply letting Christ live His own life, in me.

Vs19

To the Galatians Paul put it like this, "*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.*" Gal 5:17 I don't know that I'll ever forget when my son (Greg) was just 5-6 maybe 7yrs old and he'd done something to get himself in trouble (I know you're shocked), and I was tucking him in at night and talking to him about it and he says, "I want to do what's right but my body won't let me." and I thought, man he's in Romans 7 and he's never even read it, "...to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."

Vs19-21

Again we all know what this is like, every good work that you're purposed to pursue, even led of the Spirit, sin is lurking right there, always looking for the opportunity to somehow pollute it. It's a simple general truism (a law), or a principle at work.

Vs22

Again a testimony to the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in your life, apart from God's Spirit in your life, you have no draw or desire for His Word. But when His Spirit is alive in you, even though you struggle, down there in the pit of who you are you want to know His Word, to drink in His word, you delight in His Word. and Believe me there are tons of scriptures we could point out in regards to this I'll give you just a couple, "*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*" Ps 19:8-10 Job said, "*I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food.*" Job 23:12 That's what's in the heart of the redeemed, a longing *for*, and a delight *in* the Word of God.

Vs23

Notice the 2 laws in this vs, the law of my members (which is a reference to sin at work in my body) and the law of my mind (which is a reference to the inner man, my walk in the Spirit which we'll touch on more next time). We're speaking here of the battle between the flesh and the Spirit, and he confesses here quiet frankly that at times the law of sin which is at work in his members wins the battle. That there's no power in and of himself that can keep him from sinning, now if you disagree with that than just stop sinning, but the bible is clear that we all stumble in many things.

As we quoted earlier the one who says that he has no sin deceives himself and the truth isn't in him. The fact is, every now and then we all fall prey to the devices of sin in our lives, but I would say that though we're not sinless, as we grow in Christ we are to be sinning less and less, but we'll be plagued with our human frailty till the day we see Jesus face to face. and As Paul has been rifling back and forth in this problem of wanting to do right, failing to meet the standard, trying harder to do right, not having the power to perform, he crescendos in vs 24.

Vs24

As we began this study we spoke of both the source of the problem and its solution, Paul is on the brink of the solution, but perhaps the source has become loud and clear to you over the study of the last 12 vs or so. Where's Paul's focus been overwhelmingly throughout the portion we've studied today? On himself, when you get a chance you might draw a circle or something around every reference that he makes to himself between vs 13-24, you'll find around 40. What's my problem? *I am*, the bible is clear that it's not about me *trying*, it's about me *dying*. Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* Matt 16:24-25 The harder I try, the more emphatic will be my cry, "O wretched man that I am."

That word, "Wretched" speaks of being strung out from sheer exhaustion, just drained, coming to that place of realizing that the harder I try, the worse it gets and you're brought to this place where you're ready to give up. Now that's both a broken, and a beautiful place to be, because it's a bummer emotionally to find yourself at the end of you, but it's beautiful to finally get to that place whereby I realize I can't do it in and of myself. That if it's about me, I'm destined to fail miserably, therefore there must be an answer that lies outside myself. and That my friends is where the Lord desires to bring *us all*, the source of my problem is me, therefore the solution *can't* be in me. Back in vs 18 Paul asked, "How." Here in vs 24 Paul asks, "Who" and therein lies the key, it's not about *how* it's about *who*. This phrase, "...body of death" is sort of interesting. In Paul's day one of the ways they'd execute murderers would be to take the corpse of the victim and chain it limb to limb, back to back to the man who was the murderer. Then the murderer was free to roam where he may, but no one was able to free him from his chains. and Of course it wouldn't take long before the decay, the smell, and the infections would kill the man to whom the corpse was chained. Paul says, that's what it's like to the believer, you have life in Christ, but you feel like you're dragging around your old self everywhere you go, and he's just putrefying, seeking to infect you, and you just long to be set free. So the cry goes out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" and As I said when you're ready to look outside yourself, you're on the edge of a breakthrough, God's just been waiting for you to come to this point. The solution?

Vs25

As soon as Paul turns to Jesus he has something to thank God for, God will deliver you, and He'll do it through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is the go between, the bridge builder between you and a right relationship with God. Is there going to be a struggle, sure there is, the war between the flesh and the spirit will be with you throughout the remainder of your life, but the key to victory isn't found in *how*, it's found in *Him*. So many people get caught up in methods, self-help programs, and all of that, but listen, the flesh profits nothing. It's not in, "How's this going to happen *theologically*" it's in "Who's going to deliver me *personally*" and the key is found in Jesus Christ *exclusively*. Stop trying to do what only Christ can do in you, don't focus on what you *need* to do, focus on what He's *done* for you, and rejoice in the freedom with which Christ has made you free.

Prayer Points:

God I pray for anyone here today who's in that place of desperation for deliverance, they've been wondering *how* it's going to happen, God open our eyes to the reality that it's not in *how*, it's in *who*, it's in *Him*, You're only begotten Son. Teach us what it means personally, and practically to simply abide in Christ. and Help us Jesus to rest in Your righteousness, rather than trying to somehow create our own, may the truth sink in; "In me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells" God forgive us when we insult You (though unintentional it may be) when we try to please You on our own rather than simply rejoicing in the satisfaction You've found in the work of Your own Son, may we rest in that, thanks for Your mercy.

If you've never come to Christ, perhaps you've wanted to get a few things right before you come to God, or give your life to God, I pray that somehow today your eyes were opened to the fact that it's not in what you do, it's in what He's done *for* you. and You simply believing Him for it, by faith resting *in* it. One day some people asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*" John 6:28-29 It's just that simple, God couldn't have made it any easier for you to receive everlasting life, if you're willing to respond to His invitation today, than simply open your heart, place your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, and God will wash you white like snow, forgive your sin, and give you eternal life.