

ROMANS 7:13-25 (Part 2)

Last week we studied verses 1-12. Paul discovered from the law, or the Old Testament rules that, instead of being right with God he was a sinful, covetous person. The law acted like a light of truth revealing to him that instead of being “**alive to God**” he was in fact, dead in his sin.

The law also intensified Paul’s sinful desires. Sin used the law to energize Paul’s sin. The law is to sin, what oxygen is to a fire. The law has this effect on all people who, on their own effort seek to please God through trying hard to follow the rules of the bible.

In verses 13-25 Paul answers a possible misunderstanding. He has shown that the law does not help a person fight against the sin. Paul’s purpose in 13-25 is to explain that the evil is the power of sin, not the rules of the bible. Here is the text we will cover this week.

TEXT

ROMANS 7:13-25

Speaking of the law, Paul writes, “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do,

it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Paul wants to clarify that the law is not sinful. The enemy here is not the rules of God written in Scripture, but the enemy is the power of sin itself. The law merely shines the light on sin and shows sin for what it is, a wicked, enslaving power.

No matter how hard he tries in his own strength to serve God, the power of sin overwhelms him and causes him to fail. This text is powerful because it speaks honestly of Paul's own struggle with sin. The text can be summed up this way: The power of sin is so strong, it is impossible for us to fulfill God's moral law in our own strength.

THE LAW IS GOOD

ILLUSTRATION – LAW IS LIKE A MEDICAL DIAGNOSTIC TEST

One reason the law is good is the same reason a doctor will give you a medical test. If you go to a doctor he might give you a test to discover what is wrong with you. There are all sorts of these ranging from blood tests to mammograms, cardiograms, MRI's and others. These tests are not pleasant. In fact many of us avoid medical testing until we have no choice. Many of us don't like to be poked and prodded and exposed.

In the same way, the law of God is uncomfortable and humbling as it brings people to an understanding their true spiritual condition. But the discomfort in that process is not evil even though it can be very painful and shocking to discover. The rules in the bible tell a person the true state of their soul. If you break the rules of God in the bible you are diagnosed as a sinner. The only cure is the forgiveness, which is found in Jesus Christ.

SECOND POINT: OUR BEST EFFORTS AGAINST SIN WILL FAIL

We know that the law is good. The moral rules of the bible come from God. But we all know that we have not followed them perfectly. Apart from God's power working in us, we do not have the power to resist sin.

Paul before he was born again was functioning in his own power because that is all he had. He didn't have the Holy Spirit, so there was no source of supernatural power in him. He tried to follow the rules of the bible but he came up short. Many Christians who are saved by God's power and grace often neglect to draw on God's power. They know the dos and don'ts of the bible but are not cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Obedience to God is more than a mental exercise. It is a miracle. It is beyond our human capacity. Therefore we must walk in God's power and guidance if we are going to please him. Temptation is too great to overcome ourselves.

Paul said; ***"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do [15]....For what I do is not the good I want to do; the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing [19]."***

These verses describe the battle between sin and our ability as humans to resist evil. When we battle with the power sin in only the strength of our flesh, we will go down in flames every time.

In chapter eight Paul teaches how the Christian can live above the power of sin. Paul already said in chapter six *verse 14*, ***“For sin shall NOT be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”***

Several verses are crucial in understanding Paul’s point. In **verse 14** Paul says, ***“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual (or fleshy) sold as a slave to sin.”*** To be “unspiritual or fleshy” means to be a slave to your master, sin. Just as a slave is required to do what his master desires, so too our body appetites and tainted thinking do whatever sin wants. Paul clarifies what it means to be fleshly in *verse 18*. ***“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my “sinful nature” [or, “flesh.”]***

For Paul, to be fleshly as a Christian is to have a part or component of his being in which nothing good dwells. And when this part of us, which will be with us until the day we die, is not over-ridden by the power of the Holy Spirit, it will allow sin to bring us down to defeat every time. Our goal then is to allow God to override the part of us that says yes to sin. To get the Spirit of God to drown out the voice of sin.

TURN UP THE VOLUME

Not too long ago I was driving the car and the kids were in the back seat. They had headphones on and were listening to their own music. I could just barely hear the music coming from their headphones. And to be honest it was getting a little annoying as one of them was playing the same song over and over again. So my answer was to turn on the car radio and keep turning it louder until I could no longer hear what was coming out of the back seat. I got to play music that was a blessing to my soul and I enjoyed the rest of our drive home.

So also, when it comes to fighting sin, the best thing a Christian can do is turn up the volume of the Holy Spirit so that the voice of God is louder

than the voice of sin. If you are falling into sin, the answer is to turn up the volume of God's power in your life.

The other day I felt a little disconnect from God. I was a little anxious and I was working through a personal fear that I have. My answer was not to avoid it. Rather that answer was that for about 20 minutes without stopping I asked God to fill me with His Holy Spirit. And I saturated my soul with music and prayers that helped me overcome my fears rather than just avoiding them with my own human mental gymnastics. In Christ we can be overcomes rather than avoiders.

ILLUSTRATION – CONCRETE SWIM FINS

Hitting this from a slightly different angle another illustration of our struggle against sin would be swimming. When we swim our goal is to float or glide across the top of the water. Unless you have scuba gear you are going to die if you stay under water for very long. Let's say you are about to dive off of a dock into the water. Suddenly a couple guys snatch you and strap 40-pound concrete swim fins to each of your feet and ankles. Then they throw you into the water. You start swimming like a mad freak and once or twice you are able to get your nose just above the water but the gravity of those concrete swim fins is too great for you and you begin to sink. Then you hear a boat coming. Perhaps it is someone who will rescue you. You hear a splash above head and as you squint in the dark water you see a line coming closer toward you. When you grab that line you are able to pull yourself up because the rescue boat can hold the weight. The people in the boat pull on the line when you have it, and they finally pull your head above the surface of the water. If you let go of the line you would eventually begin to sink. It is only the capacity of the boat and those who saved you that are keeping you above the dark waters.

So it is with sin. There is something within us that causes us to sink into sin. We can fight against the gravity of sin, but we do not have the capacity to stay above the dark waters of sin. The only way we are able to stay above sin is with the assistance of the one who can lift us out of the sin. He has more power to pull us up than sin has to draw us down.

DISGUSTED WITH OUR SIN

I am sure all of us have been disgusted with ourselves when we give in to sin. Paul echoes that frustration in *verse 24*, ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me free from this body of death?”*** Do you hear the anguish in that? Have we felt that? If you have not felt anguish and despair over your inability to resist sin you are either ignorant of the life God calls us to live or you have no real desire to do what God wants.

THIRD POINT. *Verse 25 says, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature [or, flesh] a slave to the law of sin.”*

To some people what they hear in this verse is this; *“yes there is a battle raging between the desires of God and the desires of my flesh. But God won’t be upset with me if I have a mediocre spiritual life because Jesus forgave my sins.”*

But we cannot afford to miss a very important word in verse 25 and that word is, “Lord.” Yes, God has provided Jesus Christ, but not only as the Forgiver of sin. He is both Lord and Christ. When you move to chapter eight, Paul tells us how we can, by the Spirit ***“fulfill the law,”*** submitting to the lordship of Christ. The point is this: Only Jesus Christ can free us from sin’s power so that we can serve Him as the Lord of our lives. That is Paul’s point, which he expands upon in chapter eight. How does this apply practically to our lives?

APPLICATIONS

First, we must daily admit that we are no match for sin's power apart from the strength of Christ. We should never be shocked or surprised when we, in our own strength fail God. Why should we be surprised?

LOGGING WITH A BUTTER KNIFE

Recently we decided to have someone come out and take out the poplar trees on our land. When the trees get too big their either get punky and mushy inside or they break off. So the loggers came out and brought in a machine that is amazing. That machine can drive in and pick up a 60-foot tree and shake it around like a Popsicle stick. It is amazing.

But what would happen if those loggers came in and tried to clear out the poplar trees with a butter knife? They would be there all their lives and probably never fall a single tree.

Trying to resist sin apart from the power of the Holy Spirit is like trying to log off a forest with a butter knife. We can't cut sin down to size.

ENABLING GRACE

A second point of application is this: When we do fall into sin, we must place our focus on Christ and His forgiving and enabling grace, NOT our failure. When Paul fails he doesn't spend valuable time beating himself up. He doesn't spend weeks and weeks lamenting what a filthy, rotten sinner he is. He does hide from other Christians in shame.

No, if he sins, he confesses his sin to Christ and to other and then he takes the forgiveness of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to move on and live in victory.

Some Christians have a bad and harmful habit of beating themselves up. There is just no place for piling on. When we sin, we must confess that we have depended on our pitiful flesh instead of Christ. And then we must

confess the particular sin, repent and then walk in God's strength. Some people get a good feeling from spending time denigrating themselves, but that feeling does not come from God because God would never bless us in any self-centered activity. And when we are beating ourselves up, we have our eyes squarely focused on ourselves. Paul shows us we are to look to Christ.

Finally, we must **thank God we don't have to live like this because of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ.** Romans 6:14 is true— “*...sin shall not be your master.*”_ We don't have to be held in bondage to the power of sin. As we saw in chapter six, we “*died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*” There is no promise of perfection in this life, but Jesus Christ died in part so that we could gain more and more victory over sin's power as we learn to trust in Him and not in our own flesh.