

The Struggle – Romans 7:13-25

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read Vs. 13-19

B. Controversy

1. There probably isn't a person here who can't say a mighty "Amen" to this.
2. We can *sympathize* with Paul's frustration in the struggle with sin because we *feel* it.
3. And yet—this passage has become *a point of contention* among Bible students.
4. The debate is over *when* Paul faced this struggle, before or after he was born again.
 - a. One side says this is Paul's moral struggle *before* he came to faith in Christ.
 - b. The other side says, "No – this is Paul *after* coming to faith."
5. Which is it? Well, let's dive into the text & see . . .

II. TEXT

A. V. 13

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.

1. This *recaps* what we've seen over several weeks & brings those visiting today up to speed.
2. The Law, given to Israel thru Moses, is a picture of the holiness of God.
3. But God did not give it as a way to *make* people holy.
 - a. It was meant to *reveal* our spiritual *inability*; to diagnose our *brokenness* –
 - b. And to move us to seek the mercy & grace God offers in Christ.
4. But the Jews *misunderstood* this purpose for the Law & *altered it* into a way to *be* righteous.
 - a. The problem is – it was a *counterfeit holiness* & only *external*.
 - b. It left the *root cause* of sin untouched – our rebellious hearts.
5. Though Paul had begun as a Pharisee, as one of those who looked real good as far as *outward holiness* was concerned, *inwardly* he came to see he was a wretch.
6. He realized the Law was *not a ladder* he could climb up to God by; it was a *fence* that kept him away.

B. Vs. 14-23

1. Now – we need to read the next section as one piece. Reading it out loud helps us catch Paul's theme & emphasis. As I read, see if you can pick it out . . .

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.

2. 33 times in 10 vs. Paul uses *I, me* or *my*.
3. And notice he changes from the *past* tense in v. 13 to the *present* in v. 14.
4. Here's light on the debate over *when* Paul's moral struggle took place → This was his *present* struggle.
5. What Paul writes here is *perfectly placed* in his presentation of the Gospel in Romans.
 - a. Let's recap what we've seen so far –
 - b. In chs. 1-3, Paul's made it clear apart from Christ, everyone's lost & dead in sins.
 - c. In Chs. 4-5, salvation is God's gracious gift to us, received by faith not works.
 - d. In Ch. 6, faith in Christ *identifies* us with Him so that when He died, *what we were died with Him*.
 - e. In Ch. 8, describes our new life thru the resurrection & walking in the Spirit.
 - f. Here in ch. 7, Paul's not quite *there yet*.
 - 1) He's describing life *between* dying & living with Christ.
 - 2) He's relating his experience of trying to live the Christian life thru the old ways or relating to God, by self-effort.
 - 3) Thus the emphasis on *"I-me-my"*
6. Look at v. 14 –

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am **carnal, sold under sin.**

- a. His use of the word 'carnal' here gives us a clue to the cause for his struggle.
- b. In 1 Cor., Paul describes 3 kinds of people; the *natural, spiritual & carnal*.
 - 1) The *natural man* is an unbeliever, the one described in Romans 1-3
 - 2) The *spiritual* man is born-again & walking in the Spirit, seen in Rom. 8
 - 3) The *carnal* person is born-again, but *not* living in the Spirit;
 - a) He/she is trying to attain holiness *through the power of the flesh*.
 - b) That's what Paul describes here in the last half of Romans 7.
7. The carnal person is the one who's been saved by grace, but is trying to *stay saved* by self-effort.
8. Here's someone who's tracked with him from ch. 1 to 6.
 - a. He/she has come to realize that *salvation is a gift* God bestows on those who trust in Jesus.

- b. But *once they receive* God's grace, they try *to hang on to it* by returning to their efforts to be good & do better.
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9. In vs. 15-20, Paul describes the intense struggle that takes place when we try to live the Christian life *through our own strength*.
- We all know that coming to Christ doesn't mean immediate perfection; we have a lot of growing to do.
 - What we must realize is that we're not only saved by grace, we *grow* in & by it.
 - We've spent years thinking being good was hard work & meant making resolutions & committing ourselves to the straight & narrow.
 - We thought holiness came by *toughing it out*.
10. What many discover is that the struggle with sin *gets worse* after they're saved, not easier.
- Before we're born-again, we suspected we weren't living as we ought, but it didn't bother us a whole lot.
 - After we came to Christ, sin became distressing, a big deal.
 - And the harder we tried to please God, the more we felt like a failure.
 - The struggle gets so fierce, it can drive you crazy!
 - We cry out – "What's *wrong* with me?!!?!!!"
11. Look at v. 24 –

C. V. 24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

- Christian, if this is where you are today, don't despair! Even the Apostle Paul had been where you are! He knew the struggle you're in.
- He refers in v. 24 to the practice of a tribe living near his hometown of Tarsus.
 - They had a unique way of punishing murderers.
 - They tied them *face to face* with their victim for a time.
 - It was an effective deterrent because—who wants to be shackled to a dead body?
- Paul feels himself face to face with his spiritual & moral failure.
 - Inwardly he *yearns* to do good –
 - But his flesh is weak & keeps failing.
- Here's the crux of the problem; Paul is doing *as a believer* what he'd done as a Pharisee.
 - He's depending on himself to do right *instead of depending on God*.
 - He's a Christian now, he's born-again, but he's still seeking *to forge his own righteousness* →
 - Instead of standing by grace thru faith in the righteousness of Christ.
- AND** because he's depending on himself, all he sees is failure & despair.
- So he cries **OUT** for help – & in that instant, **WHEN** he looks *outside* himself, he finds the help he needs –

D. V. 25

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.

1. Jesus was the answer to Paul’s dilemma, just as He’s the answer to ours.
2. Christian – don’t trust yourself to be good or do better.

Instead, *cast yourself completely* on Christ.

3. Don’t make resolutions & commitments.

Surrender it all to God & simply cleave to Him.

4. I had a friend years ago who spent several months in Blythe on business.
 - a. There’s not a lot to do in Blythe & he was bored out of his mind.
 - b. He met a guy who caught rattlesnakes for a living who invited my friend to go with him. Since there wasn’t anything else to do, he went.
 - c. He said it was amazing watching this guy. He was fearless & bagged several.
 - d. He made it look so easy, my friend decided to go out on his own one day & give it a try.
 - e. Out in the desert alone, facing a 4 ft. coiled rattler was a different story. He was so scared he gave up & went home.
5. As we make our way through the spiritual desert of this world, we’re going to face a lot of sin-rattlers.
 - a. If we try to bag them ourselves, we’re going to get bit.
 - b. At the Cross, Jesus *crushed* the serpent’s head. *He’s* our rattler-catching expert.
 - c. So → Stay with Jesus!
6. Christian – victory over sin isn’t had by trying harder to be good.
 - a. It’s found by running to Christ & casting ourselves completely on Him;
 - b. By trusting in & looking *to Him* to deal with sin.
7. Listen: Where God is, sin is NOT.
 - a. So if you want to overcome temptation – Run to Christ.
 - b. When you turn on a light, darkness flees.
 - c. If you want to dispel the darkness of evil, Come to the Light.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Life Is In Christ

1. Jesus died to remove the barrier between God & Man.
2. As Paul has made clear in Romans, we come to God *thru Christ* – not thru the law & self-effort.
3. God *does* want us to be a holy people who live free from sin.
4. But holiness, like everything else, is a gift He bestows, not a work we perform.
5. God asks one thing of us – To trust in His Son, not ourselves.
6. The life we’re called to live is **IN HIM**, which is what Paul is going to go on & develop in ch. 8

B. The End of the Struggle

1. If the struggle Paul relates in these verses describes you – **Surrender!**
2. Not to temptation – To Christ.
3. In every every choice & challenge you face, ask yourself this question:

What will keep me close to Jesus?

4. If you chose that, it will be the right decision, *every time*.

C. Some Things Gracious Souls Discover

1. I want to end with some words by William Newell in his commentary on Romans

Title: *Some Things Gracious Souls Discover*

- To “*hope to be better*” (by making resolutions) is to fail to see yourself in *Christ only*.
 - To be *disappointed* with yourself is to have *believed* in yourself.
 - To be *discouraged* is *unbelief* as to God’s purpose & plan of blessing for you.
 - To be *proud* is to be *blind!* For we have no standing before God in ourselves.
 - The *lack of divine blessing* comes from *unbelief*, not from a failure of our devotion.
 - Real devotion to God arises, not from our will to show it, but from the discovery that blessing has been received from God while we were yet unworthy & undevoted.
 - To preach devotion *first* & blessing *after* is to *reverse* God’s order & preach law, not grace.
 - The law made man’s blessing depend on devotion.
 - Grace gives undeserved, unconditional blessing.
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2. Take this to heart → God is not waiting for us to “get our act together.”
 - a. He’s waiting → *for us*.
 - b. We’ll *never* get our act together.
 - c. If we give ourselves without reservation to Him, *He’ll* put us back together.