

GRACE TO YOU

ROMANS 7:14-25

THE TOUGHEST TUG OF WAR



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

"Why do I do things I don't want to do? Why do I do the things I hate? Why don't I do things I really want to do? Why don't I do what I love?" Have you ever asked these questions?

I have. Sins I was sure would be defeated soon after my conversion 35 years ago, still raise their ugly heads and beat me up to this day. "Why do I do things I don't want to do?"

When Christ found me 35 years ago, I was sure that I'd have multiple juicy fruits of the Spirit in my life, but sometimes it seems my tree doesn't even have leaves. "Why don't I do what I want to do?"

We hear God's Word telling us not to gossip. We are convicted in our conscience and resolve that we will never gossip again. One hour later we are gossiping. We look back on our broken resolution with shame. "Why do I do things I don't want to do?"

We read God's Word about the sin of anger. We put our "Amen" to this and determine never to be angry again, but in a few days time we look back on a scene of defeat after defeat as we've repeatedly lost our tempers. "Why do I do the things I don't want to do?"

We hear a sermon telling us to pray more. We know our prayer life has been lacking and therefore get up early the next day to pray before work, but we can't concentrate on speaking to God for more than a minute without getting distracted or sleepy and we give up after a couple of days of trying. "Why don't I do the things I want to do?"

After years of looking at porn, you look again. You promise God you will pursue purity. But, within days, purity has lost and porn as won again. Why don't I do the things I want to do?"

If you ask these questions, as surely every Christian does, you may lose assurance of your faith. "How can I be a Christian when I'm still doing things I hate and still not doing what I say I love? **How can I be a Christian when sin is whipping holiness?**"

The Apostle Paul had the same questions (Romans 7:15-20) but also offers us some encouraging answers in Romans 7:14-25

BACKGROUND

The background and context to our passage is:

- Romans 5: Grace frees us from the law's **penalty** for sin.
- Romans 6: Grace frees us from the law's **powerlessness** over sin.
- Romans 7: Grace frees us from the law's **provocation** of sin.

In chapter 7, Paul has two main messages:

- Romans 7:1-13 The law cannot justify us
- Romans 7:13-25 The law cannot sanctify us.



1. THE LAW OF GOD IS IN MY MIND

For we know that the law is spiritual (14)...I agree with the law, that it is good (16)...I want to do right (21)...I delight in the law of God, in my inner being (22)...I myself serve the law of God with my mind (25).

The Christian thinks about and loves God's law

Verses 7-13 are in the past tense and describe Paul's past relationship to the law before he was a Christian. God's law convicted him and "killed" him.

Verses 14-25 are in the present tense and describe Paul's present relationship to the law as a Christian. God's law is his delight and yet he remains disappointed with his obedience to it.

Despite Paul's failures as a Christian to obey God's law, he doesn't blame the law, critique the law, ignore the law, reject the law, or abandon the law. He describes it as spiritual, good, delightful, and the best guide for serving God.

Paul often thinks about the spirituality of the law, the Holy Spirit as the source of the law, the beauty of the law, and the benefits of the law. He agrees with the law, desires to do the law, relishes the law, and serves the law with his mind. He looks at God's law as the perfect blueprint for how to live.

When Paul sees the law as a way of salvation, he opposes it with all his being. But when he sees it as the blueprint for sanctification, he adores it.

The non-Christian cannot think or feel about God's law in this way

No unbeliever can say the words Paul says about God's law. In the very next chapter, Paul asserts that "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" (Rom. 8:7). Unbelievers can agree with God's law to some extent. They can approve its morality, until it crosses their will, until it goes beyond the surface to their spirit, until it costs them. Then they start fighting it, ignoring it, changing it, modifying it, and disobeying it.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Be assured you are a Christian. Only a Christian can say these words about God's law. Despite repeated failures to comply, the Christian still think positively about the law and loves the law. We say, "I know that the law is spiritual. I agree with the law, that it is good. I want to do right. I delight in the law of God, in my inner being. I myself serve the law of God with my mind.

Praise God you are a Christian. If you can say these things and recognize these experiences, then you can rejoice that by God's grace you are a Christian. You've been sovereignly and savingly changed.

THE LAW OF GOD IS ENGRAVED
ON STONE AND MY BRAIN



I do view the law like this. I love it and think about how to obey it.
So what explains my many failures to follow through?



2. THE LAW OF SIN IS IN MY FLESH

Our flesh is strong

"I am of the flesh, sold under sin" (14)...It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me (17). For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (18)...Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me (20)

In the Bible, "flesh" can have three meanings. First, it can mean our physical body: our skin, bones, muscles, members, etc. Second, it can mean our frail and fading humanity, our physical weakness. Third, it can be the part of our humanity that opposes God and loves this sinful world (Gal. 5:19-21).

In the non-Christian, this flesh is fully in charge, it rules, and it dominates (Rom. 7:5; 8:5-8), because it has nothing to oppose it, except self-interest and common grace. In the Christian the "flesh-principle" it is still there to some extent but it has been weakened by regeneration and is continuing to be weakened by sanctification. The "flesh mind/principle" is now opposed by the "law-mind/principle."

It's that part of himself, the flesh-mind/principle that Paul is referring to here. He is not "in the flesh" but the flesh is still in him. He complains that part of him is still sold as a slave to sin. It's not the major part of him though, which is why he says "It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." He can distinguish himself, his primary self, from this part of himself, a secondary part of himself. His flesh has "shrunk" in size and influence, but it's no less flesh, which is why he says, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (18). Now, when he does what he doesn't want to do, he doesn't completely write himself off as a Christian, but rather points to his remaining sinful flesh as the source. He says, "It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me." He owns his sin as his own, but his sin doesn't own him as its own.

Our fight is fierce

I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand (21)...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 (23)...with my flesh I serve the law of sin (25).

What would you expect if two completely opposing moral forces are found in the same person? You'd expect a collision wouldn't you? That's exactly what Paul experienced, an almighty battle between the law-principle/mind and the flesh principle/mind. Compared to what he was before he is spiritual and free. Compared to what he longs to be, he is still fleshly and enslaved to sin at times. Hell battles heaven in his life.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

An explanation. This helps us to understand ourselves when we are perplexed about sin's victories and virtue's defeat in our lives. It helps us to see we are no longer sinners but not yet saints. We are saint-sinners.

An exhortation. If the flesh-principle/mind wages war against us and within us, let's wage war against it. Paul did not intend this explanation to be an excuse for sin, and an encouragement to fight.

FIGHT YOUR FLESH
TO ASSURE OF FAITH



When will I win and this weary war end?



3. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS MY HOPE

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (24-25).

A wretched man

Which Christian hasn't felt like this from time to time? We fall into sin again, we fail to do good again. The flesh-mind/principle wins again. The law-mind/principle fails again. The true Christian doesn't shrug this off with a nonchalant wave of the hand, "Oh well, another flesh-win, no biggie." Rather, true Christians mourn and grieve that they have made so little progress in holiness and have suffered so many setbacks. We look at ourselves at times and say, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" When will we get free from this flesh, from this fierce-fight, this body that's like a war-zone of losses and defeats?

A wonderful man

But we don't stop there. We don't wallow in defeat, disappointment, despair, and death. No, we look away from the wretched man/woman that we are to the wonderful man, Jesus Christ. He was 100% law-mind and 0% flesh-mind and therefore he can increasingly deliver us from the flesh-mind in this life and totally deliver us from it in the life to come.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

We are wretched at times. Wretchedness does not define us, but it does drag us down. We are often disgusted with ourselves and tempted to give up when the flesh-mind seems so strong and triumphant. It's OK to berate ourselves and condemn ourselves for our sins. But we must never stop there.

Jesus is wonderful all the time. When we feel wretched we turn to him in grateful worship that he has already weakened our flesh-mind and strengthened our law-mind with regeneration. He is continuing to weaken our flesh-mind and strengthen our law-mind through justification and sanctification. He will one day, at our death or his second coming, completely deliver us from all flesh and all fighting through glorification so that we too will be 100% law-mind and 0% flesh-mind. Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ!

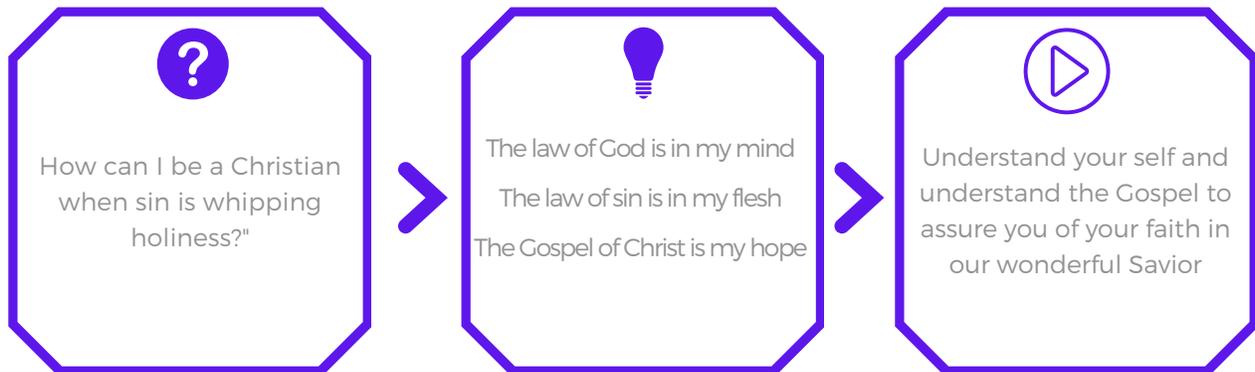
WHEN WE FEEL WRETCHED
REMEMBER WHO'S WONDERFUL



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Defeat is not death. We will lose spiritual battles. We will be wounded and even come close to our last breath. But defeat, even bad defeats, are still consistent with the Christian life.

Fight is life. The question is not "Will I lose?" the question is "What will you do when you lose?" Do you turn to the Deliverer to strengthen you for the next battle, do you train your faith in Jesus so that next time you will win? Do you fight with confidence of complete victory?

Prayer. Wonderful deliverer, continue to deliver me from my wretchedness by helping me to fight for faith to fight the flesh until your deliverance of me is victoriously complete.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you felt discouraged about how much flesh and so little fruit in your life?
2. How is the Christian view of God's law different to the non-Christian's?
3. How much of Paul's Christian biography can you identify with?
4. In what ways will this passage help you to fight against sin and for holiness?
5. When is it right for a Christian to feel wretched and what do you do when you do?
6. How would you rate your fighting spirit?

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