

REAL QUESTIONS, BIBLICAL ANSWERS: Why Do I Still Struggle With Sin? | Romans 7:14-25ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so very good to see each of you this morning. I want to be sure to say a special welcome to those of you that are guests with us today. My name is Chris Wigley and I serve as one of the pastors here at Trinity. On behalf of our church family we say welcome to you today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you and pray with you. There are a couple of ways that you can help us connect with you. You can text the keyword TBCMP, that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you text that keyword to that number, a link is sent back to you. You can click on that link that will take you to a short form you can fill out. When you submit that form, it sends me an email with your contact information. I look forward to connecting with you.

Or, you can stop by the fellowship area by the Hope is Here sign and visit with one of our Host Team members. We have a gift that we would like to give you just to say thank you for your visit here today. There is also additional information about our church that you can get there. Thanks again for worshiping with us this morning.

SERIES RECAP:

We are in the middle of a teaching series we are calling, “Real Questions, Biblical Answers.” We are answering questions that you submitted this summer. Today we are tackling the question, “Why do I still struggle with sin?” Perhaps you can identify with the fact that there are things that seem to trip us up. We read Scriptures that talk about the victorious Christian life. To which, if you are a Believer, we say yes and amen to. But the reality is that we all still struggle. No one is perfect. That is certainly the case for me. So, why do I struggle? Does the bible speak to this struggle?

The answer to that question is, yes it does. I want to invite you to grab your bibles this morning and turn with me to Romans chapter 7. We are going to be in verses 14 through 25 this morning.

Answering this question dovetails perfectly with what we talked about last week. We discovered that there is nothing that can change or cause us to lose

our salvation. And in our study of Romans 8, we talked about the difference in being saved and unsaved. The Believer in Jesus has set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Remember that? A non-believer has set their minds on the things of the flesh. One of the key ways to knowing that you are in Christ is assessing your mindset toward sin. Are you accepting of sin, or are you opposed to your sin. For the Believer, we are opposed to even the sin in our own lives.

This is where our question of study comes in. I can’t stand the sin that is in me. Why is it that I struggle with sin? I have given my life to Jesus, why is this such a struggle? Where is this victorious life that has been preached about.

ILLUSTRATION: Chamberlin Announces Britain is at War.ⁱⁱ

On Sunday, September 3, 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin took to the radio airways in Britain. In a 5-minute broadcast, he announced that Hitler had failed to respond to Britain’s demand to leave Poland. The result led Chamberlin to announce, quote, “This country is at war with Germany.” That announcement was the beginnings of World War 2. Within minutes of the announcement, air raid sirens began to sound all over London.

The answer to the question, “Why do I still struggle with sin,” comes with the announcement that you are at war. Once we have given our lives to Jesus as Lord, we are at war. We have three enemies: Satan, the world system, and our inner sinful self.ⁱⁱⁱ

Romans chapter 7 gives us insight into this struggle. And I want to examine this passage in three parts: The Condition, The Conflict, and The Conclusion. That will serve as our outline this morning. I want to read the passage in its entirety and then look at the three sections. You read along in your copy of God’s Word. Romans 7:14-25.

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but 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. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

MESSAGE:

The first thing that we need to examine is...

1) The Condition

What I mean by condition is the condition by which we find ourselves. Let's consider Paul's condition and compare that to our condition. In verse 14, Paul says, *¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, **but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.***

There is much debate as to what Paul means here. There are some that suggest that Paul is referring to his old self, his life before Jesus. Others believe that Paul is talking about his current life, life as a Christian. How can the greatest missionary the world has ever seen be of the flesh and sold under sin? Perhaps your translation says sold as a slave to sin.

And when you look at the structure of Romans it makes us wonder. Paul has talked about sin, that all have sinned, that's chapters 1 through 3. He then preached the gospel that we can be saved by trusting Jesus as Lord, that's chapters 3-5. He then turns the page at the end of chapter 5 and talks about grace and sanctification, the process of becoming more like Jesus. That's chapters 5 and 6. In other words, Paul has said, we are all sinners, but we can be made right with God by faith in Jesus. And when you do that, the old sinful self, dies, and we are given a new self. Romans 6:1 and 2, *¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! **How can we who died to sin still live in it?*** So, is the struggle mentioned in chapter 7 about life before Christ or after Christ?

This is an important question to answer. Because if Paul is talking about his life before becoming a Christian, then he didn't struggle with sin after trusting Jesus as Lord. But, if he is talking about his life as a Christian, then Paul did struggle with sin, even as a Believer.

Now, I believe, and the vast majority of the scholars I read this week believe, that verses 14-25 is an autobiographical illustration that Paul is using to describe the fact that while he is a Christian, he still struggles with his flesh, his sin nature. I believe Paul is being very transparent here, and for that I am grateful. I will share with you a couple reasons why I believe that to be the case in just a second. But, if the GOAT, The Greatest Christian of all time, struggles with sin, isn't it comforting to know that you and I do as well? We struggle with sin because our new life in Christ pulls us to become like Him, but our flesh pulls us in the other direction.

So, why do I believe Paul is describing his life as a Christ Follower? Two main reasons.

A) Paul changes tenses in his writing.^{iv}

Look with me at verses 7-13. These are the verses leading right up to our verses of study. Notice the verb tense he uses. *⁷What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I **would not have known sin.** For I **would not have known** what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, **produced** in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹I **was once** alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰The very commandment that promised life **proved** to be death to me. ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, **deceived** me and through it killed me. ¹²So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ¹³Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It **was** sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

Do you see the past tense Paul is utilizing? Now verse 14 again. *¹⁴For we know that the law **is** spiritual, but **I am** of the flesh, sold under sin.* Present tense. And as you will see in a moment, he continues that tense through the remainder of the chapter.

If Paul was talking about life prior to Jesus, then why would he have intentionally changed verb tense? One scholar I read said, "While Paul speaks of his experience as a non-Christian in verses 7-13, he is now speaking of his experience as a Christian in verses 14-25."^v

The second reason I believe Paul is describing life as a Christ Follower is because...

B) Paul uses a specific example.

In verses 7-13, Paul mentions a specific sin, the breaking of the 10th Commandment. The 10th Commandment is to not covet. I believe Paul struggled with coveting.^{vi} I'll share with you why I believe that in just a moment. But why would Paul use such a specific example? I believe it is because he is being transparent and discussing his struggle.

So, we've talked about the condition. Now, let's talk about...

2) The Conflict

Look with me at verses 15-23 of Romans 7. *¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For **I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.**¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For **I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.** ¹⁹For **I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.** ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that **when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.** ²²For **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,** ²³but 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.*

Do you see the conflict inside Paul? I do what I don't want to do, and I don't do what I want to do. I have the desire, but not the ability. When I want to do right, evil is right there. This is the war within.

Paul is describing the conflict that is present because it is the residual of an old life. I mentioned just a moment ago that I believe Paul is talking about a specific struggle. Why do I believe that he struggled with covetousness?

Well, I think Paul prided himself in the fact that he was the most religious person ever. Philippians 3:4-6. *⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe*

of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

But when Paul gave his life to Jesus, I think the residual of his old life waged war with his new life in Christ. What does his boasting have to do with coveting? Well, if anyone was more religious, Paul was jealous. He wanted to prove the fact that he was better. He desired distinction, respect, and status.^{vii} He was coveting other's religiosity. Paul was playing the comparison game. Ever do that? I know I'm not perfect, but I'm sure better than so and so. That was Paul. That wanting what someone else has.

But what plagued Paul before he met Christ, I believe he struggled with once he gave his life to Christ. What makes me think that? Well, look at what he learned in Philippians 4:11-13. *¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for **I have learned** in whatever situation I am **to be content.** ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, **I have learned** the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* Paul had to learn contentment. He had to learn how to not covet. And how did he learn that? Through Christ who gave him strength.

My point is that it is clear to me that Paul, in Romans 7, is being very real about the struggle he had with sin. He had to fight it. He was in conflict. He was at war within himself. He had to depend on Christ's strength and not his own. He fought the good fight. He kept the faith. He disciplined himself. All that to say, Paul struggled, he wrestled with sin in his life.

So, we see the condition and the conflict. Now, let's look at...

3) The Conclusion

Paul came to two conclusions. The first conclusion is in verse 24 of Romans 7. *²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

Conclusion number 1 is that Paul is a wretched man, a sinful man. The word translated as "wretched," means miserable.^{viii} Paul is miserable. He so desperately wants to be delivered from struggling with his sin. No wonder Paul said in Philippians 1:23, *"My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."* The first conclusion Paul comes to is that he is a wretched man.

The second conclusion he came to was that there is hope. Look at verse 25. Who will deliver me from this body of death? *²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.* Who will deliver me? God has delivered us through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen?!

Now, I want to mention a couple of application points here. We have acknowledged that we still struggle with sin in our lives because we are engaged in a war between our flesh and the Spirit of God in us. But I want to give us practical ways to struggle well. Just 2 points of application. Number 1,

1) Never Give Up The Fight

I think there are far too many Christians who have given up the fight. They've settled for a life of sin. Make no mistake, while Paul struggled with sin, he fought it. It was Paul's goal to kill sin in him. The struggle is real, but beloved, don't give up the fight.

Consider the language Paul used in his battle against sin. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. *²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control [the original language is "I pummel my body], lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

We are in a battle. Yes, it gets hard. Yes, there are times we want to give up. But stay in the fight. Never give up the fight.

Second application point...

2) Surrender to Jesus

Sounds funny to encourage us to fight and then in the very next point tell you to surrender. But notice who it is that you need to surrender to. Not to sin, but to Jesus. Paul answers his own question. Who will deliver me? Jesus.

Here's the thing. If we're honest, we hear messages like this and we recognize our need to change. And what we want is a list of things to do. Yes, I struggle with my sin to. What steps do I need to take? What should I do to have victory? What are the 3 keys to killing sin in me? Paul didn't answer the question as to

how to be delivered from sin with a list of things to do. **No, he said his victory lies in a person, not in a list!** Just thanks be to God.

Only surrender to Jesus will bring deliverance and victory in your life.^{ix} Zechariah 4:6 says, *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."* You need to fight sin, but do so by surrendering to The Holy Spirit. Fighting sin with will power alone will only bring frustration. Allow the Holy Spirit to pull you forward to victory. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in you.

CONCLUSION:

As we conclude this morning, I want us to notice something about Paul's fight with sin. He acknowledges that God's law is good. He has a desire to align his life to God's Word. He wants to do what is right. He is longing for victory. He is delighting in the Word of God. He wants deliverance.

This position is entirely different from someone who is not a believer. A non-believer is okay with their sin, perhaps doesn't even acknowledge sin in their life, or has even justified their lifestyle of sinfulness.

Paul doesn't cover up the fact that he is a sinner. He's not saying I'm perfect the way I am, you see. He is saying that there is something very wrong in me and I need Jesus to rescue me from it.

What about you? Have you given your life to Jesus? If not, or if you have questions about that, we are here for you. We would love nothing more, today, than to visit with you about what it means to make Jesus Lord of your life. In a moment, our elders will be here at the front. We would love nothing more than to visit with you about what it means to make Jesus Lord. You come this morning, take us by the hand, and simply say, I need Jesus.

Perhaps you just need prayer today. You come as well. We would love to pray with you and over you. There is freedom in this place.

I'm going to pray, but let's respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our hearts this morning. [PRAY].

ENDNOTES:

- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: John R. W. Stott, “*The Message of Romans*,” InterVarsity Press: 1994; John MacArthur, “*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Romans 1-8*,” Moody Press: Chicago, 1991; Douglas J Moo, “*The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*,” Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000; J.D. Greear, “*The Life-Long Struggle*,” sermon preached at Summit Church, May 5, 2019, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/the-life-long-struggle>; Bob Deffinbaugh, “*14: The War Within (Romans 7:14-25)*,” article published by Bible.org, August 18, 2004, accessed online: <https://bible.org/seriespage/14-war-within-romans-714-25>; John Piper, “*Clarifying Romans 7:14-25 As “Christian Experience*,”” article published Desiring God, October 7, 2014, accessed online: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/clarifying-romans-7-14-25-as-christian-experience>; Skip Heitzig, “*Expound: Romans 6-7*,” teaching March 3, 2021, Calvary Church, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/311/sermon/4548>; Nate Heitzig, “*Heart & Soul: The Struggle is Real*,” sermon preached at Calvary Church, September 22, 2019, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/24/sermon/175>; Jack Graham, “*Your Spiritual Revolution*,” preached July 4, 2021 at Prestonwood Baptist Church, accessed online: <https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/prestonwood/your-spiritual-revolution-yQxd7Bl6mSN/>; Erwin W. Lutzer, “*Living With Inner Conflict*,” sermon preached March 22, 1987, Moody Church, accessed online: <https://www.moodymedia.org/sermons/righteousness-god-volume-1/living-inner-conflict/>; Michael Youssef, “*From Valley To Victory, Part 9*,” Leading The Way, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/series/from-valley-to-victory/part-9>.
- ⁱⁱ BBC 100, “*Chamberlain announces Britain is at war with Germany*,” article published by BBC, accessed online: <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/september/war-announced/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The three enemies were mentioned by Jack Graham, “*Your Spiritual Revolution*,” preached July 4, 2021 at Prestonwood Baptist Church, accessed online: <https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/prestonwood/your-spiritual-revolution-yQxd7Bl6mSN/>.
- ^{iv} Pointed out by Bob Deffinbaugh, “*14: The War Within (Romans 7:14-25)*,” article published by Bible.org, August 18, 2004, accessed online: <https://bible.org/seriespage/14-war-within-romans-714-25>.
- ^v Ibid.
- ^{vi} Pointed out by Tim Keller, Sermon on Romans 7:1-25, part 1, Redeemer Presbyterian, NYC.
- ^{vii} J.D. Greear, “*The Life-Long Struggle*,” sermon preached at Summit Church, May 5, 2019, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/the-life-long-struggle>.
- ^{viii} Definition by Dr. Jack Graham.
- ^{ix} Point made by Dr. Michael Youssef, “*From Valley To Victory, Part 9*,” Leading The Way, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/series/from-valley-to-victory/part-9>.