

Thanks Be to God!

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[0 : 00] Our passage this morning comes from the book of Romans. If you have your Bible with you, feel free to open it up to Romans chapter 7. As we initially read it, it won't be on the screen, so you can use the Bibles in the seats in front of you, or you can use your own.

Romans was a letter written to the church at Rome by the Apostle Paul, and this letter was written about 20 to 30 years after Jesus died and rose and ascended into heaven.

And this letter is one of the heavier letters in the Bible. And what I mean by that is Paul writes this letter to teach the church about a number of different themes.

And kind of throughout the whole letter, he's developing several arguments, and each section builds on the one that came before. Almost every paragraph and sentence of Romans is packed full of truth about God and Jesus and sin and how we're saved and God's great plan and the truth about how we should live as followers of Jesus.

So we're just going to jump right into one passage here in Romans chapter 7 this morning. And we won't have the chance to talk about everything Paul says here in these two paragraphs, but what we will see, I hope and pray, will be a blessing to you this morning.

[1 : 22] So we pick it up in Romans chapter 7, verse 14. We know that the law is spiritual.

Paul is talking about the law of God, as in the law that God gave through Moses at Mount Sinai to the Israelites all those years ago. So probably a helpful thing to think of when you hear that is the Ten Commandments, something from the law that most of us are familiar with.

Paul says, We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

[2 : 31] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do.

This I keep on doing. 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. So I find this law at work.

Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? I really treasure these words.

In fact, for as long as I can remember, since I was a boy, these words have resonated deeply with me. There's something Paul describes here from his own experience that is true to each of our experiences.

[3 : 47] Paul describes the battle within, that inner conflict that we all feel and face. Paul begins this very emotional and passionate description by referring to the law.

He says that the law is spiritual, but then all of a sudden, he reflects on himself. The law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

What is Paul doing here? He is lamenting. He's thinking about the law of God and how good it is.

How good are those commands that God has given? They are the good and the beautiful and the right things. They are the way of love. But I, says Paul, I am not full of the spiritual stuff that I see in the law, in those commands.

I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. When we talk about sin, we usually think of it as the bad things that we do.

[5 : 06] And it is. But notice how Paul describes sin here. Not just the bad things he does, it's more. It's worse.

It's a thing that enslaves him. Sold as a slave to sin. It's like a slave master that owns him, that has him under its control so that he is not free.

And then Paul goes on to describe his own experience as a slave to sin. He says, I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do. It's almost like a tone of frustration here. Almost like Paul is perplexed. Like, what's going on with me? What's wrong with me? There are things that I recognize as good and beautiful and right. And there are things that I recognize as wrong and ugly and evil.

[6 : 12] And I hate those evil things. I don't like them one bit. But I keep finding myself not doing the good and the right and the beautiful and instead doing the ugly, the wrong, the things I hate.

I think every single one of us can relate to that because every single one of us has experienced that inward conflict, that inward battle.

Even our world acknowledges this battle. We've all seen at least one movie or TV show with the little angel on one shoulder and the little devil on the other shoulder. We all know that this battle is real.

We might experience it in some different kinds of ways. We might be tempted by different things or drawn to different things. But it's the same battle, the same conflict in all of us underneath it all.

For example, you know that it's wrong and ugly and evil to say that hurtful thing about this person standing in front of you just to make this friend over here laugh.

[7 : 24] but you say it anyway. And the laugh of your friend over here, it feels good, it feels worth it for the moment, but then you look back and you see the hurt on the face of the person in front of you that you just insulted.

And in your heart, you know that it was wrong and that you shouldn't have said it. What I want to do, I do not do.

But what I hate, I do. He goes on. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. At least this inward struggle or battle shows that I have a conscience. At least it shows that I have an inward sense of what is good and right and beautiful.

I know deep down in here what God's law says. I agree that it's good. I want to live like He says I should. But there's a problem with me.

[8 : 39] There's something else in me that wants the opposite. He says as it is. It is no longer I myself who do it but it is sin living in me.

Now we have to be careful here. I don't think Paul is saying well I'm not really guilty of my sins of doing those wrong things. It wasn't me that did it.

It was sin in me. No the thing that is responsible is still in Him. It's still in us. And he calls that thing sin living in us living in me.

Do you hear that? Paul talks about sin like it's alive. A thing that lives in us. and at this point we might like to just look at what Paul says here and say well this is good I'll put the blame on that thing in me and I'll kind of you know deflect the guilt away from my true self.

But unfortunately sin is not like some parasite inside of our bodies or another organism living in our bodies. It's worse than that. It lives in us because it is us.

[10 : 04] It's part of us. It's hijacked our very selves our very bodies and even worse our hearts and our minds have been infected and corrupted by it.

We wish that we could blame it on the sin living in us and kind of deflect the guilt away from ourselves but the Bible tells us that there's no separating of those.

We can't separate ourselves from the sin inside of us. We are its slave and it owns us and has control over us. It's not some other person inside of us or some other entity inside of us it's us.

We welcomed this corruption this thing called sin into ourselves long ago when we rebelled against God at the beginning.

Paul talks about that in chapter 5. We won't go there this morning. Let's keep on here in chapter 7 verse 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me that is in my sinful nature.

[11:19] Sinful nature is how the translation on the screen renders it the New International Version literally it's flesh I know that good itself does not dwell in me that is in my flesh and this term flesh Paul uses a lot in other places.

He uses it to mean more than just our physical flesh our body and so it somehow refers to that that place from where that bent towards evil comes from inside of us.

That's why the translation sinful nature but let's not miss the main point of what Paul is saying here. He's saying I know that good itself does not dwell in me.

There's a sense in which good is unnatural to us and it's not the way that God made us to be in the beginning but something happened.

We rebelled against God and we lost our goodness. We lost our innocence. We became so corrupt that selfishness is now what comes naturally instead of goodness.

[12:39] Goodness now is like almost like a thing that's not there anymore it's a thing outside of us and foreign to us like God is good. He really does care about other people.

about the things he has made but we are not like him anymore. I know that good itself does not dwell in me.

How does Paul know this? Well he points us back to the inward conflict. He says for I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out.

I recognize what's good. Deep down I know what's good. I even desire it but I feel powerless to do it. It's like there are two choices before me.

Vegetables and candy. I can't bring myself to eat those vegetables. I know that they're good. That's premium fuel for this body.

[13:43] I just every time I'm confronted with that choice. I love the candy. I want the candy. I know it's making me fat. I know it's rotting my teeth but I just feel powerless in that moment of decision to do the good and not the junk food.

It's a bad analogy because of course candy is something that even God has given us as a good gift to enjoy in moderation. Maybe a better analogy is roast beef dinner and a bowl of raw sewage.

Maybe that's more like the choice before us. And this is why Paul is frustrated because he sees in himself this sick and twisted bent, this preference for the raw sewage over the roast beef dinner.

I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. It's like it's wired deeply into my very soul. I can't help myself.

I just keep going back for more of it. And this is what sin is. It's evil. It's wrong. It's at its worst.

[14:58] It's disgusting. At its best, it's just bland and dim and empty. We all know it.

we tend to minimize it though. We tend to minimize the sin that we have in our own lives. But it's there. And it stinks.

It's easy to look over at somebody else who's maybe arrogant and obnoxious and just loves themselves and can only talk about themselves and we think, whew, I'm so glad I'm not like that.

God. But have we ever stopped to think that perhaps we are just as blind to our own sin as he is to his? Sin is ugly.

God and his commands and laws are beautiful and good. Let's think for a moment on what God has commanded. Let's think of some of those things.

[16:02] we'll just look at three of the Ten Commandments. You shall not steal. It's good. It's beautiful when you can go to work and earn and purchase and own something and have that thing belong to you so that you can use it when you need it and enjoy it because you like it.

And it's wrong. It's ugly when someone simply comes along and takes that thing from you. They did nothing for it.

You did the work for it. You bought it. It belongs to you and they just take it for themselves. Or we could look at the command to honor your father and mother. It's good.

It's beautiful when after years of caring for every little need of your children who start life completely helpless, it's good and beautiful when your children honor you and treat you with respect and kindness and recognize all the love, every sacrifice that you made for them.

And it's wrong and it's ugly when they curse you and say, you, dad, I don't have to listen to you. I'm not going to do what you want me to do.

[17:28] I'm going to do whatever I want to do. Or we could look at the seventh commandment. You shall not commit adultery. God has commanded this.

It's good and beautiful when wedding vows are made and kept. It's good and beautiful when husbands and wives are loyal to each other and love each other and cherish each other and protect and honor and are faithful to each other helping each other through life, both the good times and the hard times.

And it's wrong and it's ugly when wedding vows and promises are broken, when husbands betray their wives and give themselves to other women just to satisfy their lust or craving.

It's wrong and it's ugly when women leave their husbands and give themselves to another man because, well, things aren't going as well as they did before. And this man over here, he treats me better.

Oftentimes in these cases, we see some of the damage that comes from that. Families are torn apart. Children are forced to grow up, going back and forth between two homes or without a dad or a mom.

[18 : 55] this is oftentimes what happens when someone commits adultery. Broken vows lead to broken hearts, lead to broken homes.

These are just a few examples of the goodness of God's law and the ugliness of sin. I got thinking about this. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if everyone in the world just lived the way God told us to?

I mean, think about that. If everyone in the world just treated each other with kindness, honor, respect, spoke the truth, kept our word, our promises, never stole, never killed, and the list goes on. It'd be a wonderful place to live. life. But the problem is we can't live like that because as Paul says, we are no longer free like we were made to be in the beginning.

We are slaves to this thing living in us, sin. Paul goes on, he says, for I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do.

[20 : 21] This I keep on doing. So I find this law at work. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Here it is. This is the problem with the whole world right here. We often read the news and we hear about all the messed up and twisted and evil stuff going on. Some of you got texts on your phone this morning saying that somebody has been going around stabbing people.

people. And then we hear people in the world proposing solutions to this problem.

We need changes in government. We need better policies and laws. We need a better justice system. We need to fix systemic problems. We need to do better at promoting peace and stopping war.

[21 : 35] And if you over here and you over here and you over there would just stop behaving the way that you are and start behaving the way that you should, this world would be a better place. But all of this is not the reason.

It's not the root issue of the problem. It's not the root issue of the evil we see in the world today.

There is a systemic problem. But it's much, much deeper than matters of race, privilege, legislation.

The systemic problem is something we all have. And it's this. There is another law at work within me, within all of us, waging war inside of me and making me a prisoner and a slave of sin.

It is that principle, that power of sin within us. That's the systemic problem with the world. God. And that's what Paul's lamenting here.

Even the good Jew that he has been growing up all these years taught from the time he was a little boy to obey the commands of God and what the good commands of God are. And yet, what does he say?

[22 : 52] He says, all this time I've been seeing another law at work inside of me. There's been this battle, this war that's raging inside of me.

Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. And all I feel is pull. And oftentimes, says Paul, I do the thing I don't want to do.

I do the thing I hate. So much so that it's as though Paul just weeps about it. He says, what a wretched man I am.

Who will rescue me from this body of death? There's things I've done. There's things that we've all done and things that we know we've done and we know we're not proud of them.

I hate the me that chose to do those things. What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?

[24 : 05] Do you hear the frustration and the angst in Paul's tone here? The inner regret and turmoil? And it almost seems like a question that expects the answer to be no one.

Like, nobody can. Who can fix this brokenness inside of me? I've tried and I've tried and I've tried but I can't do it. But then Paul tells us the good news that we've all been hoping for.

He says, thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord. God. There is someone who can fix the brokenness inside of me. There is someone who can make right all the wrongs that I've done.

There is someone who can give me victory in that inward battle. There is someone who someday will put an end to that war going on inside of me for good.

[25 : 17] And that someone is God. God. And he has done all this and he will do all that remains of this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Think back over the story of Jesus. Jesus atoned for our sins, making right what has been made wrong. He suffered the punishment that we deserve for all of those things that we've done when he died on the cross.

and he was able to do it because he had no sins of his own. Perfect son of God that he was. Not only that, but Jesus teaches us how to fight that inward battle.

We see Jesus go head to head with the devil himself in the wilderness. He was tempted and he won. God and we hear him urge his disciples and us pray so that you will not fall into temptation. We hear him urge us if you love me you will keep my commands. And then we see how his disciples they sometimes failed and gave in anyway.

[26 : 34] They did the wrong thing. And then again we see the depth of his love for them still. Forgiving them. Wiping the slate clean. Giving them another chance.

Next Sunday we're going to see how it's the spirit of Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God who Jesus gives to every believer. And that spirit enables and gives us power to overcome and win this inward battle like we never could do it before.

And then finally there's the promise of Jesus. that when he returns he's going to raise all who believe in him to new life. Eternal life. And Paul tells us in another letter that we're going to receive a new body and it will be incorruptible.

From that day forward we will be free of the corruption and taint of sin forever. That will be the day that the inward battle ends for good.

All of this, all of these good things come from God as a gift of love and mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Which brings us this morning to the table.

[27 : 52] Let me read you Paul's own way of telling us how this works just in the next few verses. We'll just go through this quickly. Paul says, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Why? Because, he says, through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

How does it work? He goes on. for what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

And so, God condemned sin, that's our sins, in the flesh, that's Jesus' flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us.

That's the good news according to Paul. And he'll go on and he'll talk about how the Spirit is then given and we have new power to fight the battle within but the decisive turning point in this battle is one here at the cross.

[29 : 19] That's what Paul's talking about. God condemned sin. That's our sins. In the flesh, that's Jesus' body, so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, so that there is now no condemnation from God for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.

Our forgiveness, our life, our victory over this power of sin and death, it came through the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf, on the cross.

It was there that God condemned, he punished Jesus for our sins. This was the plan and gift of God to save us.

And this was the loving decision of Jesus made to rescue us. And so once a month we mark this love, this sacrifice with bread and cup, just like Jesus taught us to on the night of his betrayal.

The bread that's broken and shared out represents the body of Jesus, which was broken, died for us. And the cup represents the blood of Jesus, also another symbol of his death, which atones for us.

[30 : 56] And we eat and drink this bread and cup to signify that yes, we have come to share in all that Jesus' sacrifice secures for us.

And so this morning if you believe in Jesus, if you've made that decision, if you've made that declaration, yes, Jesus is the Lord.

He is my Lord. Then I invite you to partake with us this morning of the bread and of the cup as we pass them around. It's a solemn thing that we do, but it's a deeply sweet thing that we do, because it's all about the love of Christ, which saved us and which set us free from sin and condemnation. So I want to invite you to pray now quietly in your hearts in these next minutes. I want to invite you to examine yourselves. confess your sins to God and to give thanks to him for the body and the blood of Jesus, which was broken and shed for you.

After a few minutes of this, I'll invite Charles to come up and pass out the elements. If you do not wish to participate, just raise your hand quietly and signal that.

[32 : 25] Otherwise, we'll wait until everybody who wishes to partake has been served. And then we'll eat and we'll drink together in unison. Amen. morning.

How many do you know Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. I wrestled for a moment whether to put that image up on the screen, but it brings home to our hearts the reality of the love that Jesus had for us, that he did that for us.

[36 : 19] So let's eat and drink in celebration of that love. Amen. Father in heaven, we thank you for sending Jesus.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for being willing to do this for us. Thank you that we can have complete forgiveness, complete peace between us and you, life forever, and that one day this war which rages inside of us will be gone, never to be remembered.

We give you praise and we give you thanks for your great sacrifice and the love that you have for us. To your name be the glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.