

The Christian's war with sin

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone. And Beth Jenkins, it is so lovely to have you back.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's Word? Let's pray. Lord, thank you for restoring Beth's health to bring her back into fellowship with us.

And Lord, I pray that you would comfort us all today. Increase our awareness of how safe we are in Jesus. So that we can be strengthened to make war in our sin.

And cause us to lose confidence in our own flesh. And fill us with confidence in what you have done. What you are doing.

And what you will do in Jesus. Amen. Well, you know you shouldn't do it. You know it always ends in misery and shame.

[1 : 13] But you click on that website. You watch that movie. You drink that sixth, seventh, however many drink.

You put money on that betting app. And afterwards you hate yourself. Has anything really changed as a Christian?

Are you determined to be more patient? To speak only kind words? You resist anger as long as you can.

But then you lose control again. You're yelling at the kids again. You're bringing up past failures against your spouse again. You're criticising other believers as if they're the enemy again.

You're complaining and self-pitying as if God has short-changed you. And all these words just... Has anything really changed as a Christian? You set goals for yourself.

[2 : 12] I'm going to read the Bible. Devotion. I'm going to pray for X number of minutes. I'm going to read the children's Bible with my kids more often. I'm going to get back involved in small group. But then life gets busy.

You're just battling to get the kids to sleep, let alone adding in extra things. You'd rather play online games because you just escape for a bit rather than the effort of reading God's word.

And months go by, those goals unreached, and you're just like... Has anything changed as a Christian? You set out to help in church.

And one day something convicts you. Have I been doing this all this time to make myself look good? To be needed, to be noticed, to belong. Has it been for the love of Jesus and the love of people?

Or just myself? Has anything changed as a Christian? I think some fall into a deeper fear.

[3 : 16] Am I a real Christian? Wouldn't I find it more easy to pray if I was a real Christian? Shouldn't I be getting victory over sinful habits if I was a real Christian?

Wouldn't my motives be pure? So some fall in deep darkness because of this. I think many, many just begin to silently doubt all this talk about changing to become more like Jesus.

I think we can just silently doubt that actually happens. Now at this point, I could imagine a, inverted commas, mature Christian who seems to have life more together saying, well, no wonder people are struggling with their sin.

Because all they ever talk about and sing about is grace. All this talk about not being under God's law, dead to the law, released from the law. Of course that leads to more sin and not victory.

More struggle. What people need is to take all of God's words more seriously. Not just the bits about grace, but the bits about law. Get serious about God's law.

[4 : 39] Discipline themselves in trying to do what God commands us to do. Then you'll start to see progress. Grace and law. Get serious about the law and you'll see progress. I don't know about you, but do you sense, do you sense how right that sounds?

Maybe I'm alone in that. It sounds so right. But this, I believe, is the objection Paul is addressing in chapters 6 and 7 of Romans, what we've been going through.

And we come to the climax of today. If all you do is tell people that God only gives you grace, it's going to lead to religious and moral compromise.

Even worse, you're downplaying God's law. You're making it out to be the problem. Paul has to answer this. For his gospel of grace has huge holes in it.

Huge. And if we don't understand Paul, we will have huge holes in our confidence that we really are saved by grace alone.

[5 : 49] Through faith alone. It's so important this is answered. Surely more law leads to more righteousness.

We heard last week Paul saying, don't misunderstand my total superbounding grace gospel. God's holy, righteous, good law is not the problem.

Sin is the problem. It is a powerful enemy. It is the culprit. It's not the law. But also, the law isn't the solution. God never intended it to be.

He intended it to show us how deep our sin really is. So that we would cast ourselves on him. If you think law keeping can break the power of sin, you underestimate.

You underestimate the power of sin. So Paul finishes with this deeply personal picture of a divided, distressed man.

[7 : 01] And we're going to enter the debate. Who is it? Who is this divided, distressed man? Now, is it Paul as a Jew?

So he's looking back as a Christian at his time before he came to Christ. He's looking at his past through Christian eyes. Or is it Paul as a Christian? And there's actually a third option.

I'm not going to go into it. I can't do justice to the debate right now. And I don't want to set up a straw man argument because I just don't have time to go through it.

So second page of the bulletin, there's three articles, Gospel Coalition. Go read. I think they summarise the three main positions. Go wrestle with this.

Can I encourage you? Don't just say, oh, they're all right. That's not possible. Come to a personal conviction on it. It's an important question.

[8 : 01] There are implications. But we need to understand godly, trustworthy scholars and Christians are on all sides of this debate.

I don't think any of us can go, it's settled. Like, there's no debate. You can't do that. But in the end, there's major agreement.

All positions say the Christian is not under law as a covenant. We are not under law. We're under grace. All the positions say law keeping cannot break the power of sin.

It can't. All the positions say God's law is not the problem. Sin is. So there's huge agreement. Huge agreement. To demonstrate, like, it's going to become clear that I'm thinking this is Paul as a believer.

So there you go. My cards are out. But just to demonstrate how strong the argument is for Paul as a Jew. If you remember back to verses 5 and 6, chapter 7, it seems like chapter 7 is explaining verse 5.

[9 : 22] Where it's talking about flesh, law, bearing fruit for sin. Sounds like the rest of chapter 7 in verse 5. And then talking about the Spirit in verse 6 is chapter 8.

That seems really logical. Another big reason why people think it's not Christian is how can a Christian say in verse 14 that I am of the flesh sold under sin?

Doesn't that contradict chapter 6 that we are dead to sin? Now, there are two very big reasons. So go away and have a think about it.

Now, I'm going to give a very brief answer as to why I don't think those two things settle the matter. I think what we find here in chapter 7, this picture, is what Paul states in Galatians 5, 17 and 18.

He states it in Galatians as logic. And here we get a picture laid out. So Galatians is clearly talking to Christians. And it says, the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.

[10 : 38] And the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other.

To keep you from doing the things you want to do. But, if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

So for me, I find that verse helps me understand this passage as a Christian. But if we step back, I want to step back from the question for a moment and ask, why might Paul be saying almost polar

opposite things?

Like he's saying, I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I'm sold under sin. Why? Which is it, Paul? Why might he be torn in two different directions?

They sound completely opposite. I think there's a good reason if this is Paul is the believer. On the one hand, he's at pains to say, yes, we are not under law.

That does not mean a Christian has a low view of the Mosaic law. Christians love the law. I think he's saying that on the one hand.

[11:52] We love the law. But on the other hand, I think he wants to demonstrate that setting your mind on obeying the law, as law code, rules to follow, you will lose the battle.

Because sinful flesh is powerfully present. I think he's trying to do both things. Christians love the law. But you set your mind on obeying the law, not the answer.

So I think, anyway, I find that helpful, that you may not. I think that explains these radical statements. So I don't think it's going to be most helpful for us this morning to step through this first five verse.

I want to just sketch both sides of this divided personality. As we do, remember the objection. Paul's saying you're under grace, not law.

Aren't you accusing the law as the problem? Doesn't removing the law produce more sin? Well, no, here's a Christian's battle within them. Here's their attitude to the law.

[13:07] Here's their attitude to their sin. It is a war zone. It's a war going on inside. So verse 14 states the two sides of this war going on.

Verse 14, have a look with me. For we know that the law is spiritual. It is divine. I have the highest reverence for God's law.

It is divine. It is spiritual. It's one side. But I'm of flesh. Physical. My body is inherited from Adam. I'm sold under sin. Sin is personified here as a force, as a power. It captures me. It makes me a prisoner of war. So let's trace these two sides.

First, the law is spiritual. Why don't I do the good of the law if, verse 15, I want to do it? I want to do it.

[14:15] Verse 16, because I want to do it, I show that I agree with the law. I agree with the spiritual law. I want to do it. I agree with it.

Verse 18, I desire, I strongly desire to do it. So why don't I do it? What's going on? Answer, there must be something else at play.

There must be something else going on. Enter the flesh. Verse 15, I do the very thing I hate.

That word hate, I detest it. Verse 18, nothing good is in me. Now, I don't think he can mean totally because he goes on to say, well, he's saying, I genuinely love the law.

So he can't be saying I'm totally nothing good because he's saying I love the good. I think he clarifies here, that is in my flesh. Nothing good in my body.

[15:21] I love the good. Flesh, nothing good in it. I don't have the ability to carry it out. I want to do it. I can't carry it out. Verse 19, the evil is what I repeatedly keep doing.

Spiritual law, I want to do. I desire to do it. Flesh defeats me. And he comes to the same conclusion in verse 17 and 20, exact same wording to emphasize the point.

So now, that's a logical now, not a time now. So it's not before and after. Here's the conclusion. The sin I commit, this is radical, is no longer I who do it.

Oh, dear. What are you saying, Paul? Are you like, are you not taking responsibility for your actions? Come on. You're the one who just lost with your anger.

You're the one out of fear of people didn't do the right you knew you should do. He's not absolving himself because this division is within one person.

[16:41] He did the evil. Somehow he's saying, there's spiritual newness in me, so new.

I didn't want to do it. The real me, the fundamental me, would choose the good every time except for this other power that's in play here.

Incredible words that he can say. No longer I who do it. Wow. Second conclusion, sin that dwells within my body, in my flesh.

Sin is indwelling. It's living there. It's residing in my body. It's in the likeness of Adam. So there's that division.

There's the conclusion. No longer I who do it, but sin, it's present. It's real. It's powerful in my flesh. And he finishes off driving in the point, driving the point home.

[17:55] And he's... Remember, the objection is to do with the law. And so I think he plays with the word law to really drive the point home. And he uses the word law in three different ways.

So it can get a bit confusing, but hopefully we can step through it. He wants to show that he has great love for God's law. But that sin is a great power.

So verse 21 is a unique use of the word law. So I find it to be a law. Not this rule, but a principle. When this situation occurs, this principle is in play. Here's the principle. When I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

The authority, law of sin, the power, the authority of sin is present.

[19:00] Exactly when I want to do God's law. That's the principle. When I want to do right, evil fights. Flesh fights.

A fierce war breaks out. The moment you set out to pray, don't expect peace.

War breaks out, doesn't it? Fear that God could accept you, knowing how sinful you are. Fear that my words are half-hearted at best.

Does God really accept these? Fear that I'm not eloquent enough to pray with my brothers and sisters. The thoughts of what I've got to do today are just rushing. The temptation to get this over with.

The doubt. Is this really achieving anything? The pride seeps in. Aren't I praying so well today?

Like, wow, this is eloquent. Suddenly I'm focused on myself. Oh, wow, my tears.

[20:03] I must be so godly if I'm praying and tears come. Suddenly it moves. Focus on yourself. Expect war when we... I don't know. Maybe that's my experience and not yours.

The flesh just fights. The moment we want to set out to pray, for instance. Before that moment, sin is happy. You're self-occupied, gratifying yourself.

You set out to do good. Expect war. War. If you think that merely determining to keep God's law breaks the power of sin, you don't understand this principle.

At play. That's when the war starts. Not when you're determined to do good, but that's when the war begins. So keep fresh in your mind the objections Paul is answering.

Paul, your total grace gospel accuses God's law as a problem. The cause of death. No. No. Sin is the culprit. I don't accuse God's law.

[21:08] I delight in the law of God. This is echoing Psalm 1. He's claiming to be a Psalm 1 man. In my inner being. That's a phrase he uses in 2 Corinthians 4 and Ephesians 3, which is another reason I think it's Christian here.

Because I think there is spiritual renewal. I've been made new. In my inner being. This new man in me. I love, I delight in the law of God.

I think this is a spirit writing the law on our hearts. I'm not accusing God's law. I delight in the law of God. My true person. I delight.

So I serve the law of God in my mind. The other accusation. Paul, you need to stop telling people that they've been released from the law. They need to take the law more seriously.

Get themselves under the law. No. No. Can't you see this other law at work? This power.

[22:15] It's not a set of rules law. This authority law. This power law. Sin waging war. The power of sin lives in my body, in my flesh.

And this power keeps making me a prisoner of war. And I think the reason Paul locates our love of God's law in our mind is to keep us from thinking the flesh has total control.

I think he's getting us ready for chapter 8. Where we need to set our mind on the spirit. So being sold under slavery to sin, it's not total here.

We can set our mind on the spirit. And this war in me, it makes me wretched.

That word is miserable. I'm distressed. And notice Paul's focus on the body.

[23:23] Who will deliver me from this body of death? This sinful body is too strong when I try and obey God's law. I don't just need forgiveness.

I need rescue. I need rescue from this powerful disease. This powerful enemy. I think a young Christian.

Young Christians in the room. This won't be true of all. But most of you are probably prime of health and fitness. You don't know the body kind of breaking down yet.

Enjoy that. Go nuts. But I think you can still look at your body, which is in the prime of health, and see this war going on.

That I want to please God. And I keep doing the evil I hate. And you can go, I want to be rid of this body. I think that's the force here. I want to have that new resurrection body where I can please God.

[24 : 32] If you've never tasted this anguish of the man described here, or maybe if you've forgotten this anguish, I think that can only be because you're focusing on your own flesh, either just gratifying you just do what you want.

There's no struggle if you just live doing what you want. Your life's pretty okay. Like obviously there's external hard things, but we're talking internal distress.

Either you're just gratifying your own desires or you've got a false confidence in your own flesh to do what God says. As if you can keep the law based on your own determination and discipline. It's a false confidence. I think we should be sharing this distress. Why do I keep doing the evil I hate?

Who can deliver me? And this question, who can deliver me? It's worded in a way that's expecting the answer of no one. No one.

[25 : 55] Not me. Because it is me. My body. It's not even God's law. And deliver me. Only grace. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We're going to come into chapter 8. Hope you're itching to get into chapter 8. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. By sending his own son.

Grace gets the victory. So has anything changed now that I'm a Christian? With my constant mixed motives in any good I do and how often I say and do the evil I hate, has anything changed?

The entire war has changed. Because in the death and new life of Christ you're released from the law and you're now united to your resurrected husband.

You are under grace, you are under grace, not law. And that changes everything. Let me quote Tim Keller from a couple of weeks ago again. When you become a Christian, you don't move from warfare with sin to peace.

[27 : 19] You move from a battle you could not win to a new battle which you cannot lose because you're under grace. It's a new battle.

Totally new battle. I want to spend the rest of our time looking at this new battle. Firstly, your fundamental inner being, the real you, that's united to Christ is alive to God now.

When you click on that website, you place that bet, criticism and complaining and anger come out of your mouth. Before you were united to Christ, the love of self was fundamentally you.

You might have hated those things but we probably hated them for self-centered reasons. But now you're in Christ, you hate it for God's sake. It's dishonouring him.

It's not loving him. It places distance between me and him. There's a new hatred. Because the you has been changed.

[28 : 26] I think this passage gives us an incredible perspective. When you're feeling the deepest shame, you can say in prayer to God, Wow, thank you, but that's no longer me.

It's no longer me. Not the me I know. Not the me that loves Jesus. I hate my sin for your sake now. I want to be finally free from my sin.

In that moment of deepest shame, you can say, Thank you that fundamentally you've changed me. I can't wait to be complete.

Thank you for your grace that I hate this now. So that's a huge change. I think the other change that grace brings is your confidence in your own flesh has completely changed.

Christian, if you know you're not under God's law, that God's purpose for the law wasn't to give you the tools to break the power of sin, but to reveal our sin so that we cast ourselves on him.

[29 : 44] To try and play into the law, to set your mind on obeying the law, is to try and not sin by your own determination, by your own discipline.

You're putting your confidence in your own flesh. That is playing right into the hands of sin in our flesh. So it is wonderful news.

You're not under law. Don't think that way. About what I must do in my own strength. With my own flesh.

The cross shows us what we do with flesh. It's got to die. It's been killed in Jesus. We've got to think of ourselves as having died with him on that cross.

It is dead. It will die. And this mortal body will be replaced with one like his. So we've got to know we're dead to the law.

[30 : 48] Because thinking obedience to the law plays into the flesh. I would much rather we be a church full of distressed Christians crying out for grace all day, every day, rather than a church full of self-confidence in the flesh.

Thinking we choose the right most of the time. Because it honours his grace then. We look to his help. We know we belong to a new husband.

And so we lose confidence in our own ability, our own flesh. That's changed. We used to rely on our ability. Not anymore. We've got a new husband.

We have the most high God dwelling in us. Everything's changed. Who you are has fundamentally changed. Your confidence in your own flesh, in being able to keep God's law, that's changed.

And so how you fight sin has completely changed. Does the everyday common struggle with sinful flesh mean a Christian just, I don't know, just makes peace with their sin?

[32 : 13] Oh, well, that's my sinful flesh. I can't change it. Do we make peace? Does it mean the Christian life is characterised by defeat? Sin is too strong?

No. No. We make war. But I think that's the point of Romans 7. Paul is also trying to tell us, don't set your mind on the law.

When you get into that distress mode, push yourself into Romans 8. His flesh keeps sinning. Reliance on self ends in defeat.

I need to stop setting my mind on law and set my mind on the spirit. I think it can sound godly just to say, I'm just such a sinner.

And I do believe I'm a sinner, by the way. But I'm just a sinner. I'm just a sinner. But there's a problem with that. You could just go, oh, change isn't possible. That is not biblical thinking.

[33 : 17] It's not gospel thinking. We have the spirit now. Now, but how we fight has changed. Our weapons have changed.

We fight with hope. I think we fight with thanksgiving. And we fight knowing we're a loved child. You fight with grace.

You don't fight with law. You fight with grace. Now, again, I hope you're itching to get into Romans 8. This is just heavy stuff. It's important we lose confidence in the law so that we understand Romans 8.

So, we're going to spend five weeks in Romans 8. Martin Shatterick's going to kick us off. Can I encourage us? I'm not sure what you're reading or listening to at the moment.

Why not just jump into Romans 8? Find some good commentaries, good podcasts. It would be a wonderful thing if we just immerse ourselves in Romans 8 for five weeks. Anyway, you don't have to do that.

[34 : 21] It's not a law. Well, I think it would be a wonderful thing. But I want to pick one aspect of the hope that we have in Romans 8 that's really relevant to our passage today.

Romans 8, 23. We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly. We're groaning because we have the first fruits of the Spirit.

As we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. I think that's more than just the lack of health.

It's also the redemption from this sinful body. We're groaning and we're waiting eagerly. Come on. Give me that resurrected body.

Now, we are adopted. No, this is getting too far into Romans 8. We are adopted. We are secure.

But our full experience of that sonship, when our bodies will finally be free from sin, fully able to love God, carry out our desires to love Him.

[35 : 34] Oh, it's coming. It's coming. I'll be there one day. We'll be there one day. We shared in a body like Adam. 1 Corinthians 15 tells us, we will share in a body like Christ.

When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the noonday sun. Righteousness. That hope is coming. It's guaranteed. Christ has got it for us.

And because of that hope, we give thanks. Thanks be to God. That's how you fight. Oh, thank you. This war, yes, it's present still, but it is, it is, like, it is one.

Christ, Christ finished it. I don't have to finish off this war. You'll promise it. Thank you, God. The war cannot be lost.

Thank you. So we can move back to the struggle through hope and thankfulness. Because if we're united to our new husband, we're not under law, we're under grace.

[36 : 47] As a child. So has anything changed? Whole war has changed. And we're going to see more of that as we get into Romans 8.

I want to finish with a poem by William Cowper, which I think just captures this. Obviously, poetry can express it in a heartfelt way.

How long beneath the law I lay in bondage and distress. I toiled the precept to obey, but toiled without success.

Then to abstain from outward sin was more than I could do. Now, if I feel its power within, I feel I hate it too.

To see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty to choice.

[38 : 10] Why don't we pray? Let's pray. Lord, thank you for doing what we could not do, what we could never do in sending your own son.

Lord, I pray that you would not only help us understand in our minds this hope and the fullness of grace that we have now in Jesus.

I pray that you would be speaking to each one of us exactly where we're doubting that so that we might actually believe it in the depths of our being that we're under grace and not law.

Because we know, Lord, that will fill us with a life of thanksgiving and produce a life that's pleasing to you. Even our hatred of sin will be pleasing to you.

So, Lord, please bring these marvellous truths home to each of our heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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

[39 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.