

The Struggle is Real

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[0 : 00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles. We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you and strengthen your faith.

! Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message. Have you all ever heard the saying, the struggle is real? You know, I know the struggle is real. As a matter of fact, my pants have been getting a little tight the last few months.

And I'm trying to eat a little bit less, but my nemesis is snacks in the evening when we're sitting down. And so the struggle is real.

Where we are in the book of Romans, as we're going through the book of Romans verse by verse, week before last, the Apostle Paul talked about the law, talked about sin.

And the Apostle Paul made one thing extremely clear. And that is, the problem is not the law. As Paul normally does, he would expect questions that his readers might have.

[1 : 06] And he was talking about that the law could not produce righteousness. And that grace came in. God provides grace so that we can become, so our sins can be forgiven because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary.

And we could be at home with him one day. And so Paul says, he expects the question where his readers might ask, who are great Jews? So they said, is the law therefore wrong?

No, the law is not wrong. Paul said the problem is sin. The law just points out sin in our lives. Well, the law does. Just as when you are walking into a dark room and you have a flashlight with you or you put your finger on the light switch and you flip it on, what the law does is the law turns the light on into our lives.

And it shows us what's wrong. If you go into a room and you turn the light on and you see a mess that's there, the light does not clean up the mess.

Sorry to say. I wish it did. But the law doesn't clean up the mess. The law just simply turns the lights on. And when Paul saw the lights turned on in his life, what he saw left him cold.

[2 : 25] He realized that he was a sinner. He realized that the more he tried to do what's right, the more he did what he didn't want to do.

And if you've been a follower of Jesus for any length of time, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know what's right to do. The Holy Spirit is at work in you and you know you should be doing something and the flesh takes over and we get lazy and we don't do it or we know what we're not supposed to do and temptation takes over and we give into it and we go right on ahead and do what we know we shouldn't be doing.

And the question that so many followers of Jesus ask themselves because of this inner struggle that's going on, am I really a Christian? Is there something wrong with me because I know what I'm supposed to do but I just can't do it?

I know good words are supposed to come out of my mouth but yet when things get tough or when I get aggravated, you know, some pretty rotten stuff comes out of my mouth. I know what I'm not supposed to do but I do it anyway.

And so the question we ask often is, am I real, am I really a Christian? And the Christian life we find out is a war. There's a battle going on in our lives and if we feel the struggle in our life, if we're a follower of Jesus, we know that there's a battle that's raging within us and there's one thing that if we miss everything else today, there's one thing that I want us to catch and that's this.

[4 : 01] The Christian life is a war. It's a battlefield and the only way through it is by trusting the one who's already won the war and that's Jesus Christ.

And that's what the Apostle Paul is going to come to the end of chapter 7 and realize that the struggle is going on. It's a real struggle. The struggle's within us but the answer is not within himself. So what Paul is going to do over verses 14 through verse 25 is he's going to walk us through three realities and when we understand all three of these, we will stop being surprised by the struggle and we're going to begin looking in the right direction for the victory.

Let's take a look at our starting point this morning and we'll read verses 14 through verse 17 to begin with in Romans chapter 7. Verse 14 of Romans chapter 7 says, For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

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.

[5 : 19] If then I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

And the first thing that we see, the first reality that we see is that the struggle is real and the struggle is yours and mine. The struggle is with that sin nature in our lives.

He says, because Paul opens with a sharp contrast. He says the law is spiritual. The law comes from God. The law is good. But I'm flesh. I'm just a human being.

And within me resides that propensity, that nature to sin. Where Paul talks about the law, he says the law is spirit.

The law comes from God and it reflects the character of God himself. You see, when God gave his law to Moses and when God wrote the law all the way through the Old Testament, what the law does is the law reveals the nature of God.

[6 : 27] God is good. God is just. God's honest. God never lies. And God will never do anything that is against his nature. So the law, Paul says, is spiritual.

The law carries with it the very nature of God. But Paul says, I'm flesh. I'm made of flesh. I am earthly.

The word Paul used was an adjective that referred to the fleshly body that he lives in, that where sin resides. And he says that he's made up of human flesh.

And in what we see in chapter 7 and verses 15 and following, he says, verse 17, But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

And Paul's not making a cop out here. He's not being like that old comedian, Flip Wilson, who used to say, the devil made me do it. That's not what Paul's doing here.

[7 : 33] Paul's not saying, well, you know what? I'm just a fleshly human being and I just can't help it. And my flesh made me do it. It's not exactly what Paul's saying.

What Paul's doing is he's just identifying the battlefield. He says, I'm a fleshly human being and this sin nature very often rears its ugly head and it's sin.

It's that principle of sin that's at work in my body. But the law of God's good. The law is not bad. So this is what he's talking about. When he says here that he is sold under sin, this echoes the slave market.

And what we know the Bible teaches us is that we once were sold under sin, meaning that we didn't belong to God at that point because we were doing sin's bidding.

And there was no way that we could be right with God because we were unregenerate. We were not redeemed. We were living in sin.

[8 : 44] We were sinners. And that's the problem that the Bible tells us. For the wages of sin is death. We know that. But we also know that the Bible tells us that all have sinned and all of us have come short of the glory of God.

So he says we're sold under sin. Before Christ, we were fully under sin. But now as believers, what happens is our sin nature still wants to take control.

Our sin nature still wants to be in control of our lives. And so what Paul is saying here in these verses, verse 15, is he's saying the law is what it is.

I am what I am. The law is good. The law is spiritual. I'm a sinner. And I was sold under sin. And the problem is the gap that exists between those two realities.

And Paul realizes that by experience because he's living it out every single day. And we look at verses 15 and 16. Verse 15 says, For I know what I'm doing.

[9 : 54] I don't understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice. But what I hate, that I do. If then I do what I will not to do, I agree that the law is good.

So Paul makes an honest confession. He says, I don't understand why I'm doing what I'm doing. He's not saying that he doesn't understand theologically because Paul does.

What Paul is saying is, it's almost like Paul is upset with himself because it's the struggle that is going on within him.

And when he sins, he knows that he did what's wrong. So Paul understands by experience this struggle in his own life. And the pattern is, I know what to do, but I don't do it.

I know what not to do, but then I go ahead and do it anyway. That's the language of someone who cares deeply about God. That's the language of someone who is not happy with himself when he disobeys God.

[11:03] There's a real struggle going on. It's not, well, I'll do whatever I want to do, and he's not torn up about it. He is. He is struggling with that.

And so Paul's conclusion, by the time he gets to verse number 16, we see in verse 16, he says, if then I do what I will not to do, he says, I agree with the law that it is good.

In fact, what he's really saying is, because I know that what I'm doing is wrong, I agree that the law is not wrong.

The law is not bad. The law didn't make me sin. It's my sin nature that led me to this. By hating what he does, he agrees with the law that it's good.

But we also see another thing, and I think this is important for us to understand. If we, as a follower of Jesus, know when we sin, we are grieved by our disobedience, that's telling us something.

[12:12] That's telling us that we have been regenerated, that we have God's Holy Spirit residing within us, because it's God's Holy Spirit that is letting us know that what we're doing is grieving His Holy Spirit.

So when we struggle, we understand that God's Holy Spirit's living within us. Because for someone who's not a part of God's family, and they sin, they lie, they do whatever, you think about, remember, if you came to Christ as an adult, and you think back, there was a time in your life that you were probably not convicted by maybe your language.

You probably weren't convicted by some of the things that you did. And I've heard people say, after they've trusted Christ as their Savior, that they said, you know, life's more difficult now, after I trusted Jesus, than before.

I said, well, that makes sense. I said, because before, you didn't really mind what you were doing. But now that the Holy Spirit lives within you, and now that your conscience has been redeemed, you understand the struggle.

You understand that I shouldn't be doing this, and I ought not be doing this. And we grieve, and we are repentant because of what's going on in our life. That's where the Apostle Paul was. And so, by verse 16, he is seeing the struggle, and we realize that a person who delights in God's law is going to understand the struggle.

[13:56] But verse 17 says, but now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Sin is that internal force that's working at work within us.

There's an old story of a Cherokee elder who was talking to his grandson. And as he was talking to his grandson, he relayed to his grandson about two wolves that were fighting.

And as he's talking about this, he says, one of these wolves represents good, and one of these wolves represents evil. And the grandson said, grandfather, well, which one will win?

And in the wisdom of the elder Cherokee, he said, the one you feed. And that's so true about our sin nature. That struggle that's going on within us with our regenerate nature, those who have trusted Christ, the Bible says, we are a new creation.

Behold, all things are become new when we trust Christ as our Savior, but yet we still have that sin nature within us. And which one are we feeding? You know what?

[15:11] When we read God's Word, when we spend time with Him, when we are here in worship together, when we worship God, when we pray and talk to Him, we're feeding our spirit, and we're feeding that new nature within us.

But when we allow things into our lives by what we read, by what we watch, by what we listen to, we might be feeding that old nature. So it depends on who you're feeding or what you're feeding. That determines what will win. So if we're in the struggle, you're in the war. If you're a follower of Jesus and you realize the struggle going on, then that should tell you that the Holy Spirit is within you.

And we need to understand that we can stop the struggle by turning over, by submitting to our Lord Jesus Christ. And then number two, be honest with you.

Don't fight it alone.

[16:15] That's one of the reasons why the church exists. So because we're there for one another. I would encourage you to find someone that you respect, someone that maybe has been a follower of Jesus longer than you have, someone that you know has your best interest at heart, and be accountable to them.

Just let them know, I'm struggling with this, and I would like for you to pray with me, even to the point of giving them permission every week, whether it's a text or whether it's a call or whether you meet in person, to give them permission to ask you, how was it this week?

Did you give in to sin this week? And then be honest. Be honest with them. Which nature have you been feeding more this past week? So don't fight it alone.

Then verses 18 through 23. 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.

For the good that I will to do, I do not, but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice. And there's a lot of people who read chapter 7, verses 14 and following, and they say, you know, this is kind of hard to understand, because Paul keeps going back and forth, back and forth.

[17:35] But what he's doing is, he's just giving us an insight into what's going on in the inner struggle that Paul's having. As a matter of fact, there's been a great debate among theologians about who Paul is talking about in verses 15 through verse 25.

And what we see in chapter 7, verse 14, shows us a very definite transition, because before, verses 1 through verse 13, Paul uses the past tense.

He's talking about what his experience was before he came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior. But verse 14 and following, he starts using the present tense. And there are some who say, well, who is Paul referring to?

There are some theologians that says, well, Paul is referring to a person who hasn't trusted Christ yet. They're talking about someone who isn't a Christian. There are others who say that he's talking about the pre-Pentecost believers, those who came to know Jesus Christ, but before the Holy Spirit indwelt them.

But I think the most accurate thing to understand here, the most accurate reading is simply reading it as it says.

[19:02] Paul is using the first person. Paul is talking about a present day experience. And I believe the best way to understand it is a very practical reading where Paul says, I know what to do, but I don't do it.

I know what not to do, but yet I'm doing it. Verse 21, he says, I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, 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.

The third reality Paul brings out is the law can't win the war for you. You know, there are a lot of people that are trying to keep the law of God to be right with God. I've asked people, how do you know that you're right with God?

How do you know that one day God will accept you into heaven? They say, well, I'm trying to keep the Ten Commandments. I try to do good. I try to keep the law. What Paul understood, and he's telling us right here, the law can't win the war for you.

[20:06] The law can't make you right before God. We've mentioned this before. The law simply diagnoses the problem. When, most of you know, Catherine broke her leg this week, and so we had to end up going to the emergency room in Abbeville, took an x-ray, and they said, yep, it's broken.

The x-ray didn't fix it. The law doesn't fix the problem. What's going to fix the problem, hopefully, will come on the 21st when the surgeon does the repair.

Well, for us, that's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit within us is the one who gives us the power to obey God and to live a life that honors and pleases Him.

And so Paul says, the law is just the light. The law shows us the problem, but the law can't win the war for us. So we have a really, we have an admission here in verse 18.

He says, I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells. Now, he defines this. He says, in me, my flesh, these bodies of ours can't produce anything that's of eternal spiritual value.

[21 : 22] Try as you might, you can get as educated as you want to be, you can get as disciplined as you want to be, but nothing that we do in our own strength can ever be of any eternal value.

You know, there are a lot of people who are trying to do good today, but unless the Holy Spirit is the one that's empowering that and that motive is to please God, the Bible says, it's of no value.

And you say, well, pastor, that's kind of harsh. Well, Paul is giving us a fine example of what the flesh can produce. The flesh produces not anything that's of eternal value.

He says, the old nature has no capacity for genuine goodness. And so the result, verse 19, the good that I will do, I do not do. For the evil that I would not to do, he says, that I practice.

And Paul uses a couple words here. One is for practice, that habitual doing, and the other word is the word poiemo, from which we get our English word poem, that which we produce.

[22 : 32] That which we do. I don't think they have much significance because Paul turns those two around. So he talks about the good that he would, the good that he would practice, or the good that he would do.

But Paul said, the struggle is, I know what's right, but I do wrong. I know what's wrong, but yet I can't do what's right all the time.

And so the war he's been describing is aligned with the law. We know the law is good, but he is sold under sin. See, the old nature can't be educated into holiness, and it can't be disciplined into righteousness.

We can't get good enough. That comes from the blood of Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for you and for me, and that's what makes us right before him.

In the verses 20 and 21, Paul finds a principle. He says, Now if I do what I will not will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Verse 21 says, I find then a law that evil's present with me, the one who wills to do good.

[23 : 47] So what does he discover? Verse 20 repeats a diagnosis of verse 17 that sin was dwelling in him, and that is what was producing the failure, and in verse 21, he names it as a principle.

When I want to do good, he says, Evil is present with me, and he uses the word law. This is not here the law of Moses. This is a general principle that he is bringing out here that's drawn from experience because in chapter 8, verse number 2, he's going to talk about the law of spirit of life.

He's going to talk about the law of sin and death. It's that principle that's at work within us, and every single one of us who has tried to do good in our own strength realizes that we often will fail.

So verse 22, For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. He says, But I see another law in my members. And he says, It's warring against the law of my mind, and it's bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Paul says, I know what to do, but I find myself not doing it. And what's happening is, he says, I have been taken captive by this law of sin and death.

[25 : 10] It's a military term that he uses here. A continuous, ongoing warfare. And the result, Paul says, he finds himself a prisoner of war in his own strength.

He cannot break free. We know what to do, but we can't do it. As a matter of fact, a physical therapist one time described rehabilitation this way.

They said, Knowing which muscle needs to work isn't the same as having the strength to work that muscle. A patient can understand perfectly what needs to happen in their body, but still be unable to make it happen.

He said, Information alone doesn't produce strength. Effort alone doesn't produce strength.

Strength comes from a long process of allowing something outside yourself, he says, in this case, the therapy itself, to work in you what you can't produce on your own.

So when you have a physical issue and you can't stand up well or you don't have the strength to walk, what rehabilitation does, what physical therapy does, is someone outside of you works into you what needs to happen.

[26 : 34] So that strength comes from the exercise. That strength comes from something outside of you. And that's that similar principle that's at work within us. We don't have the power within us to do right.

That has to come from God. So he says, So then with my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. And then thirdly, deliverance comes through Jesus alone.

Let's look at verse 24 and 25. Verse 24, O wretched man that I am. That's Paul's conclusion. O wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?

That's the cry of a desperate man. I know what to do, but I can't do it. I know what I shouldn't do, but I do it anyway. And so Paul reaches his breaking point. He says, O wretched, I'm a wretched person.

Wretched here is that Greek word for a soldier being exhausted after a battle. That soldier having been on a long campaign, had marching, and fighting, and marching, and is exhausted.

[27 : 41] And when the battle is over, he just falls down totally bereft of any energy left. So Paul says, I am wretched.

He says, I have no energy left. I've been fighting this battle, and I have nothing left in me to give. And then Paul talks about this body of death.

That's the body that he lives in. That's the body where sin, that principle of sin, still at work. And so then his question is, who will deliver me?

Not what, but who. We see in verse 25, I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So Paul is preparing for what he's going to be telling us in chapter number eight.

The struggle is real. is real. You see, if you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior, let me back up just a minute.

[28 : 44] The Bible says that we have a problem. The problem is sin. The Bible says all have sinned. That's every human being. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We all miss the mark. God is a perfect God. The Bible says God cannot allow sin in his presence. And so if we, as human beings, who are sinners, expect one day to be in God's presence in heaven, something has to take place.

We cannot be good enough to get there. We cannot work hard enough to get right with God. And so therefore, something has to take place. Well, that's bad news, but the bad news got worse.

The Bible says for the wages of sin is death. Eternal separation from God. So, that's pretty bad. But the Bible also has good news.

But God demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He died in our place.

[29 : 52] God in the flesh, eternal God, took our sin upon himself. Him who knew no sin, the Bible says, became sin for us. And Jesus Christ, while he hung on the cross of Calvary, eternal God, paid an eternal debt for your sin and for mine.

And the Bible says, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So if you're here this morning and you are not sure that your sins have been forgiven, you're not sure that you are right with God this morning, know this, the Bible says that salvation being right with God is not anything that we can work for or earn on our own.

It's a free gift of God. For by grace we're saved through faith, the Bible says, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

So what's the answer to our struggle? The answer is Jesus Christ. And the answer comes from outside of us. I would say this morning, if you haven't yet placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone, place your faith in Jesus Christ.

The moment you trust Christ as your Savior, the Bible says we are regenerated, we are made into a new creation. The Bible says that the moment we trust Christ as our Savior, we are seated in the heavenly places with Christ.

[31 : 25] The Bible says that we become a child of His, we are adopted. But what Paul brings out in Romans chapter 7 verses 15 to verse 25 is what theologians have called the already and not yet, or the now and the not yet.

Now, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you're regenerated, you're born again, you are a new creation, you are seated in the heavenly places with Him, but you're not yet glorified.

One day, that's going to happen. One day, we're going to be removed from this earthly body and we will have that glorified body and we will have a brand new existence.

But today, we are in what Martin Luther called the simul justice et peccator. at the same time, righteous and a sinner.

At the same time today, I know what's right, but yet, sometimes, I don't do what's right. So at the same time, we're righteous and a sinner.

[32 : 33] Just let go of the struggle and turn your eyes on Jesus and let Him take care of you. The struggle's real. the answer's not within us.

The answer's Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father, we come to you this morning. We thank you for your goodness. We thank you for your love and your mercy, your grace. Father, I pray this morning that if there's anyone here this morning that does not know Jesus as their Savior, I pray that they would come to know Him today, be able to receive full pardon from their sin and be made right with you. And Lord, we thank you for what you're going to do in each heart, each life here today. Father, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. As our worship team... Thanks for joining us today.

We hope this message encouraged you and gave you something to apply to your life this week. If you'd like to learn more about Faith Bible Church or connect with us, visit our website at meetfaith.org.

We'd love to hear from you. Have a great week and we'll see you next time.