

# The Christian Struggle

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to our services today, and as we come together around the Word of God, let us seek his blessing upon the Word. Let us pray.
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- [ 4 : 28 ] and we pray, O Lord, that they may know that thou art the one who is able to bring true comfort to them.
- For we are unable to do that in and of ourselves because we are mortal creatures ourselves. But blessed be thy name that thou art able. And so we come before thee, O Lord, seeking that thou would bless thy word to us as we read it and as we meditate upon it, that we would wait upon thee.
- For we know that it is a blessed thing to wait upon the Lord. We ask that thou would continue with us now and forgive us for our many sins. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Now let us read the word of God as we find it in Paul's letter to the Romans and chapter 7. Now ye not, brethren, for I speak to them that know the law, how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth.
- For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth. But if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if while her husband liveth she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress.
- [ 5 : 53 ] But if her husband be dead, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.
- For when we were in the flesh the motions of sins, which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law that been dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the latter.
- What shall we say then? Is the law of sin God forbid? Nay, I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concussions, for without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

And the commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death. For sin taking occasion by the commandment deceived me and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good.

[ 7 : 17 ] Was then that which is good made death unto me, God forbid. But sin that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not, for what I would, that do I not. But what I hate, that do I.

If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.

For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me.

[ 8 : 23 ] For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warning against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God to Jesus Christ, O Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

May the Lord bless unto us the reading of that portion of his word. Seeking the Lord's self, let us now look at Romans 7 and verse 14.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. Over the past few weeks, we have tried to study Romans 7 with a brief digression to Romans chapter 3.

Now let me give a quick explanation of why I decided to do our study this way. You will recall that when we looked at the first 13 verses of Romans 7, we saw that all mankind is under the law of God without exception and therefore accountable to God.

[ 9 : 47 ] We saw what the law demanded. We saw that the law demands are quite clear that the man which doeth these things shall live by them. However, in practice, we are unable to obey the law of God, which means that we come under its condemnation or in the presence of God, we are all guilty.

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. How then can we be set free from its condemnation?

How can we be just before God? It is quite clear that the law can never be the way of salvation.

Not because there is anything wrong with the law, but because the law had to work through us, in us, and by means of us. Therefore, it was bound to fail.

The law could not produce the required righteousness because it depended on us. We saw that a person sins not only outwardly by actions of the body, but also inwardly by actions of the mind and the imagination.

[ 11 : 05 ] We sin not only in the body, but in the mind and imagination. That is what an unregenerate life is. It's a life of sin, which leads towards death.

We are spiritually dead in trespasses and sin. Physical death must also be included here, for if man had never sinned, man would never have died.

Of course, there is also eternal death, or the second death, which means the eternal separation from God. We also noted in our study the power and the deceitfulness of sin, so that if we are going to be saved and be set free from the condemnation of the law, then a change must come in our relationship to God.

And as we turned to chapter 3, we saw that Paul had looked at this sad story of sinful mankind and how sinful man is under the wrath and condemnation of God.

For he said, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth. There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way. They are together become unprofitable.

[ 12 : 22 ] There is none that goeth good, no, not one. Paul brings before us the hopelessness state of sinful man. Paul has established beyond any doubt that no man has ever been or be able to justify themselves before God.

No man has ever provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God's justice. No man has or ever will be able to provide a righteousness that will meet the demands of God's most holy law.

So we may ask, Is there any hope? The law leaves us guilty before God. The law leaves us in a hopeless condition.

It leaves us under the sentence of death. So that if we are going to be saved, then we must be delivered from being under the law. And this is where chapter 3 comes in.

Paul tells us there in chapter 3 that God has intervened. This is the good news that there is a righteousness that satisfies the law.

[ 13 : 41 ] But it is not a righteousness that is achieved by us, but a righteousness that is provided by God. For we read there in chapter 3, but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested.

Paul is speaking of something that God has done to provide for the salvation of sinful man. And if God had not done this, man's position would have remained hopeless.

And this provision that he has made, it is a righteousness that is provided by God, a righteousness that is prepared by God, a righteousness that is made available by God.

How? He has provided this righteousness through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

This is all God's action. It is God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. It is God who delivered him up and spared him not on the cross of Golgotha.

[ 14 : 59 ] Peter, in his first epistle, reminds us that the whole object of the work of Jesus Christ was to bring us to God. For we read, for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

So here, Paul reminds us that it is a God-provided righteousness that is now available for us.

And it is available for us all because we are equal in our sin. And so we have equal access also to God's righteousness through faith.

Faith brings the necessary change that must come into our experience if we are going to be saved. We are no longer under the law, but under grace.

And we came to consider the doctrine of justification. How can God justify the sinner? How can the sinner be declared righteous before God?

[ 16 : 09 ] Paul's answer is through or by means of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We are brought from our hopeless and helpless condition under the law to look for salvation to the cross of Golgotha and to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the place of God's intervention.

Both by his life and death, Jesus established the law. And this is this righteousness of Christ that can be imputed to us by faith, by which God declares us as righteous in his sight.

We become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, where he says, For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Having come from our helpless and hopeless condition under the law for salvation, we have come to faith in Jesus, to which we can be declared righteous in the presence of God by having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us or put to our account.

Now today we return to this last half of the book of Romans and chapter 7, beginning with verse 14.

[ 17 : 40 ] And this passage has probably provoked more debate and discussion among Christians than any other part of the letter. And it is all centred on who is the wretched man of verse 24 who gives such a graphic and explicit account of his inner turmoil.

Now perhaps I should say, for we know that the wretched man is Paul, for he is speaking of himself, but which stage in his life is he speaking about? Is he speaking about himself at the time of writing this letter?

Or is he speaking of himself in the past, before his conversion? Or is he speaking of himself somewhere in between? This question has divided theologians from the earliest days of the church and continues to be much debated even today.

There were those who are of the opinion that these verses speaks of the unregenerate person, a person who in his relationship with God stood in Adam in contrast to those who stood in Christ.

Augustine adopted that view, but he subsequently changed his mind. They insist that Paul of Romans 7, 14 to 25 is the same Paul as that of verses 7 to 13, that he is so different from the triumphant and jubilant Paul of Romans chapter 8.

[ 19 : 09 ] But others, like Luther, Calvin, Cranfield, and John Murray are of the opinion that Paul is speaking of the regenerate man. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, whose writings I value very much, reject both these views and suggests that Paul is describing those who in times of revival are brought under conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.

They feel themselves utterly condemned, they struggle to keep the law in their own strength, but that they are those who have not yet grasped the gospel. In other words, they experience conviction, but not conversion.

Lloyd-Jones refers to the teaching of many Puritans, and he cites John Bunyan's experience in *Grace Abounding* as an example of someone in intense agony over conviction, but not converted.

Now, as we turn to verse 14, we accept that there are difficulties in explaining the passage.

For there, we read, For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal sold under sin. Now, the first part of verse 14 says, For we know that the law is spiritual.

[ 20 : 28 ] Now, no unregenerate person can make such a statement. I think that is sufficient for us to refute the suggestion that Paul is here describing an unregenerate person.

In our previous studies of this chapter, we saw that no unregenerate person knows that the law is spiritual. This was Paul's problem before his conversion, that he did not understand the spiritual nature of the law.

Paul thought that he was alive and doing well, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. His understanding of the law was solely in terms of actions.

But another day came in his experience, and his whole view of the law was turned upside down. For he says, But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

Paul came to understand the spiritual nature and character of the law. For he says, I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

[ 21 : 38 ] Paul, before his conversion, thought of sin simply in outward or external actions. He had no knowledge that he could sin by having evil desires, or evil thoughts, or even by his imagination or coveting.

As long as it remained in his desires and thought and in his imagination, he concluded that it was not sin. Paul did not look at sin as extending to the thoughts of his heart.

But the law taught him that sin was not merely in outward actions but an inward reality. When Paul says here that we know that the law is spiritual, that can only be spoken by a person whose understanding has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

So Paul, under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, now says, we know that the law is spiritual. Only a regenerate person could say such words.

Also, as we come to verse 14, we notice the change in verb tenses from the first half of the chapter to the second half.

[ 22 : 57 ] In verses 1 to 13, Paul was discussing his pre-conversion state and all the verbs that Paul used were in the past tense.

But in verse 14 and onwards, there is a noticeable change in verb tenses as Paul begins using the present tense I am. Now, Paul's use of the present tense verbs would imply that Paul is describing the reality of his current experience as he is writing the book of Romans.

I think that Paul here is unfolding his own inward struggles because he knew that his British had the same struggles. undoubtedly, the second part of verse 14 is rather difficult.

But I am carnal, sold under sin. How can he say that he is carnal, sold under sin? Can these words be that of a regenerate person?

The word carnal means fleshly or pertaining to the flesh. We have already met with this word in verse 5 when Paul is describing himself before his conversion.

[ 24 : 16 ] For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the Lord did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. Again, we meet with it in chapter 8 verses 5 to 8.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit do things of the spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Paul is using the word carnal or flesh in those passages to mean the unregenerated people who are outside the realm of the Holy Spirit. It is a natural state of mankind who is in a state of sin.

For when a person is converted or born again or regenerated, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell in that person. That person is no longer in the realm of the flesh but in the realm of the spirit.

[ 25 : 23 ] However, we find that Paul uses the word carnal in another sense. For we read in 1 Corinthians at the beginning of chapter 3, And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for thitherto ye were not able to bear it. Neither yet now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal.

For whereas there is among you envying and strife and division, are ye not carnal and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?

Now there, Paul describes the carnal person as one who is a babe in Christ. When Paul says, I am carnal, he cannot possibly be referring to the first sense in which we have looked at the word, that of an undue-generate person.

But can Paul use it of himself in the same sense that he used it in reference to the church at Corinth? Many, including Dr.

[ 26 : 36 ] Martin Lloyd-Jones, would say that it could not be used in that sense either of Paul, because he says, Paul, when he wrote this letter, could not possibly be in the same condition as the Corinthians, babes in Christ.

However, as Christians, we are always developing or growing up to the point of being as fully developed as we can in this life.

One commentator says about the Christian, their deliverance is never in this life so complete that Paul finds it unnecessary to warn them against the flesh.

For instance, in the book of Galatians and chapter 5, Paul wrote, for the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.

And these are contrary to one to the other so that he cannot do the things that he would. We have to realise and understand and every Christian experiences this, that there is tension in the Christian life.

[ 27 : 43 ] Osborne in his commentary says, the believer has been set free from the enslaving power of sin, but sin uses the flesh to make a counter-attack and gain a bridgehead once more in the life of the believer.

Or if we can use an illustration at this point, the children of Israel were set free from the enslaving power of Egypt, and yet much of Egypt remained with them and caused them to fall and fail the Lord on so many occasions.

A good example would be the golden calf. Well, the same is true of the Christian. Although the Christian is set free from the enslaving and the penalty of sin, yet he is fully aware that sin still dwells in his mortal body.

And as Osborne says, it tries to gain a bridgehead once more in the life of the believer. I think that what Paul is doing in this passage really is telling us about his present struggle with sin, which is the same struggle that every Christian faces on a daily basis.

Most Christians can easily identify and see themselves pictured with Paul in his struggle, in his sighing, and in his frustration. I think Paul is using this word carnal to bring before us the power of the struggle in his own life and that of every Christian person between the flesh and the spirit.

[ 29 : 22 ] He is still conscious of indwelling sin, or even perhaps of some prevailing sin of the flesh, trying to gain control. He is conscious of these immense forces that are at war within him, that he says, I am carnal.

It doesn't mean that he is unregenerate, but that as a Christian, the flesh is still powerful and battling within him. John Owen, in his writings on the nature, power, deceit, and prevalency of the remainders of indwelling sin in believers, says that in this chapter and in verse 21, that Paul calls indwelling sin a law, because it is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing into actions agreeable and suitable unto its own nature.

And he goes on to say, believers have experience of the power and efficacy of indwelling sin. They find it in themselves. They find it as a law.

It hath a self-evidencing efficacy to them that are alive to discern it. They find not its power under its dominion.

But the Christian is a person who is aware of this power of sin that still resides in his body. This struggle with sin does not mean that we are lost, but rather it is a confirmation that we are saved.

[ 31 : 03 ] Before his conversion in Paul's life there was no struggle with sin and that is true in the life of every unregenerated person. That is not to say that we are not aware of sin before our conversion or fear the consequences of our sin, but we still go down willingly the broad path of a lifestyle of sin.

But when one is converted and the spirit comes to indwell giving a new heart, a new nature, a new principle of holiness, a person immediately experiences this internal conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

This may cause some puzzlement at the beginning and one perhaps may be prone to use the words of Rebecca as the twins struggled with in her womb when she said, if it be so, why, am I thus?

If I be generated, if that be so, if I am born again, if I am converted, if that be so, why am I thus?

Why do I have this internal conflict? Well, Rebecca was told, two nations are in thy womb and within the Christian there are two principles, that of the flesh and that of the spirit.

[ 32 : 28 ] And they struggle. Then he says, I am carnal sold under sin. Sold under sin.

We have all to agree that this presents more difficulty for in the previous chapter he had said, but God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you, been then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

If Paul is saying in chapter 6 that as a Christian he has been made free from sin, and if he is still speaking as a Christian in chapter 7, can he say that Christians have been made free from sin in chapter 6, and then say that he himself is sold under sin in chapter 7, is he contradicting himself?

Well, this is especially the part where many say that Paul must be speaking about himself before his converse.

However, I tend to agree with those who say that Paul is using this phrase sold under sin because he feels that he is still subjected to the influence and power of sin in his life.

[ 33 : 49 ] He is continuing to speak about the Christian struggle. I think the for that we have in verse 15 explains why Paul can say I am sold under sin.

For that which I do I allow not. For what I would that do I not, but what I hate that do I. The New King James says for what I am doing I do not understand.

For what I will to do that I do not practice, but that what I hate that I do. Paul acknowledges that although he is not living in sin as though it is the only reality in his life, nevertheless he is still under the influence of sin.

Although sin is not reigning, it is still there. He is still in the body of sin. He wants to do good and he wants to do what is right, but he finds that he cannot achieve the total obedience that he is aiming at.

Because although sin has been dethroned in his heart, it still dwells in his imperfect and weak body. The Christian still has sin left in his mortal body.

[ 35 : 08 ] He has still to fight as Paul exhorts in chapter 6, therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that ye should obey in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as been alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

He warns them because he knows that the possibility is still there. Charles Cranfield writes that. These verses depict vividly the inner conflict characteristic of the true Christian, a conflict such as only possible in a man in whom the Holy Spirit is active and whose mind has been renewed under the discipline of the gospel.

You see, such words can never be said of the unregenerate person because that person does not know the sort of conflict that is described here by Paul. In the Old Testament it is said of Ahab in 1 Kings 21 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

And he answered, I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. And in verse 25 of the same chapter, Ahab but there was none like unto Ahab which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

Ahab abandoned himself to do evil. In 2 Kings chapter 17 it is said of Israel that they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

[ 36 : 52 ] Now that kind of language cannot belong to a regenerate person. John Burry says it is one thing to sell oneself to do iniquity it is another to be sold under the power of sin.

For he says in the former case the person is the active agent in the latter case he is subjected to a power that is alien to his own will.

What we find in Paul is a Christian who has progressed in his spiritual life and as he does so he has a heightened awareness of his sin and that is true of every Christian that as we grow in grace that we become increasingly sensitive to sin in our own lives.

This is a struggle that we must undertake every day of our life for we are still in battle with the sin within us. Is not that the teaching of scripture?

Is that not what Paul meant when he wrote to the church at Philippi where we read not as though I had already attained either were already perfect but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus brethren I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do for getting those things which reaching forth unto those things which are before I pressed out the mark for the price of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus the Christian life is a constant struggle against sin as we learn from the teaching in Romans and elsewhere in the Bible and as every Christian knows by experience not only do we have the example of Paul and others in the New Testament but we have also the examples brought before us in the Old Testament think for instance of

[ 38 : 56 ] Isaiah who was one of the greatest of the prophets yet when he had his great vision of God recorded in Isaiah chapter 6 he said woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King the book of Psalms the psalmist speaks often of his sins and you know this will be a struggle to the end and the reason for this is that we carry within us the very root of the problem and the very root of the problem is sin within our hearts now all this talk of the Christian struggle against sin may look to you as extremely negative and perhaps making the Christian life undesirable but you know it is because we have been saved from the penalty of sin by the grace of God through the life and death of his son



Jesus Christ and that he is saving us from the power of sin that the Christian struggles against sin and it is because he is saving us that we can be assured of final victory remember the words of Paul again as he wrote to the church at Philippi when he said work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure for our conversation is in heaven from whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our wild body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body according to the working whereby he say believe and subdue all things unto himself the outcome of the battle against sin is certain and although what we have studied today may sound discouraging it is not discouraging at all because the outcome of the struggle and battle against sin is certain and that is exactly the place to which we shall come as we continue our study of

Romans chapter 7 it is this assurance that we have through Jesus Christ that enables the Christian to fight on this assurance that we have through Jesus Christ enables us to fight on despite of how badly we may think we are doing and how often we may fall and fail but when we do so we can take the words of Micah chapter 7 upon our lips rejoice not against me O mine enemy when I fall I shall arise when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me oh however intense the fight may be even if we are brought to the brink of despair the knowledge of our final victory in Jesus Christ spurs us on you see Paul could say I thank God for Jesus Christ our

Lord so then with the mind I myself said the law of God but with the flesh the law of sin yes although we may think this all this talk about battles and fights with sin is discouraging you know it is not discouraging it is a mark that our lives have been changed that we have been born again that the spiritual struggle in our life is a true mark that our hearts have been changed may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord thou knowest the struggles that thy children have with the sin that is still within their hearts hypers have abuse in the midst of the heat of the battle and in the midst of the heat of the struggle against sin in our lives.

O grant to us, O Lord, that we may not be discouraged or despaired by the intensity of the struggle that we find in our experience, but that we shall look upon it as that token and mark that thy Spirit hath come into our lives and that there is that struggle against the flesh and the Spirit.

[ 45 : 23 ] O Lord, we give thanks that we will have victory through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Bless each one of us, we pray thee, and we pray, O Lord, that those who are still outside the realm of the Spirit, that thou would draw them to thyself, that this Christian struggle may come into their experience.

We ask, O Lord, that thou would be mindful of all our needs. Go before us, we pray thee, and forgive us for all the sins that we commit, our sins of omission and our sins of commission.

May thou the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and for evermore.

Amen.