

Paul - Past, Present and Future

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[0 : 0 0] we turn back then to Romans 7 that we've just read together and reread verses 22 and 23. Romans 7 and verse 22. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. I would think it goes without saying that reading this chapter, the seventh of Romans, has very much in it that can lead us to a little bit of uncertainty about what exactly the apostle is referring to. Even these two verses we've reread. If you look at his use of the word law, if you take one meaning from the word law and apply that across the two verses, it will lead us to some confusion. I delight in the law of God, he says in my inner being. So this is a law that's outside of himself, that he takes great delight in inside of himself. But then he was on to say in verse 23, but

I see in my members inside of himself another law, waging war against the law of my mind, which is another law again. And he says that this law in his members making war against the law of his mind makes him captive to the law of sin that dwells in his members. So it isn't any wonder that Peter himself, the apostle Peter in his second letter and third chapter says that our beloved brother Paul writes things that are hard to understand. So if we don't quite follow what Paul is saying sometimes, well we're in very good company if someone like Peter felt the same way. But even though we don't understand at times what he's saying, it would be wrong of us and we'd no doubt lose out if we, for that very reason of not being able to understand, would neglect to put the effort in to try with God's help to understand because there are massive benefits, massive blessing, and you know this yourself already, that can be reaped from studying the writings of Paul. But in addition to that, this seventh of Romans as well is, I suppose, a chapter of considerable variety of interpretation and it's one of these chapters that, well, I discovered that you can come to someone else's congregation and approach the chapter from a certain perspective or from a certain angle and to find out at the end that the minister of the congregation would approach, particularly from verse 14 to the end, 13, 14 to the end of the chapter, would take it from a different perspective.

And what that means is, well, some people would suggest that what Paul is talking about in the whole of this section, beginning around verse 7 to the end of the chapter, he's speaking in terms of someone who isn't actually a Christian. And the person who isn't a Christian is struggling, Paul speaking about his own life, struggling before he became a Christian with how he could never come up to the standard, try as hard as he would, he could never quite satisfy himself in his obedience, and if that was the case, then he could never actually satisfy God either.

But I think there's something, a number of things, but something in particular that, though doesn't avoid all the difficulties of the chapter, would lead us to a different conclusion about who Paul is referring to. He's referring to himself. Well, that much is known.

But he refers to himself from three different perspectives. He refers to himself, well, in the simplest way in English, I suppose, would be in the past. He speaks about himself that I was this, or this happened to me. And in the second place, he speaks about himself in terms of the present.

[3 : 5 3] I am, and this is happening to me. But then as he launches out, in the end, we come to verse 24 and 25. He speaks in terms of the future, where he says, who will deliver me? He says, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So Paul is looking at himself, it seems, his life and his existence, in terms of the past and the present and the future. And I think the way he writes this to us from verse 7 to 13, he's speaking in terms of the past in relation to himself, before he was, or at least when he was going through the process of becoming a Christian. Now that can seem to be difficult when we think of his Damascus Road experience, how could something so suddenly taking hold of his heart and mind be compared with something here that was somewhat more progressive and thought-engaging and thought-provoking?

Well, we'll maybe get a chance to say one or two things as we go along about that. His past, he's speaking in terms of what happened to him when he became a Christian. His present, from verse 13 and following, he's speaking about his life, I think, as a Christian and the struggle he had with indwelling sin. He speaks about the sin that dwells. Verse 17, it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. He's shifting in that section into the present and then to the future. He's thinking of his ultimate deliverance from sin that is so bound up with his existence in the body. The body isn't the cause of sin. He isn't saying that, but his body is so much a part of the sin that he commits that he can't isolate or separate the body from he himself. I mean, it's a real essential part of our personality. We think in terms of our soul being saved so often, but God has the great destiny for our bodies as well. But our bodies are, with all the senses and all the avenues of perception and openness to sin that comes through the body, we can so often find, as he says to the Corinthians, that we need to beat our bodies into subjection. Not in some kind of, you know, inflicting torture on ourselves, but we need to keep control of ourselves, of our bodies, because they can be the vehicles and the means of so much sin. So let's try looking from these three angles, the past, present and future, looking at them in particular, firstly, as something that we could maybe argue Paul describes as being a revolutionary realization. He came to realize something, and in coming to realize something, it changed his life. And what he came to realize is that he was a sinner. The second thing is that he goes on after having become a Christian through, in that initial stage of it, realizing he was a sinner, and much, of course, else was involved in that. But as he brings it before us here, having come to see that he was a sinner, that he was a dead man, in comparison with how he used to think of himself as a living, self-righteous man, he then realized that as a Christian man, as a believing man, he had these struggles with sin, the covetousness that he highlights, and no doubt other things as well, they didn't go away. He had a fight on his hands that led him to having, well, that second place, some relative relapses. Relative in the sense that when you look at what he's saying, and we'll try doing this in going along, when you look at what he's saying in verse 13 down to 20, 24, you'd think, this sounds like a man who's in bondage. Doesn't sound like a Christian. Maybe that's how we think.

But his sense of sin and his consciousness of sin, I think, is relative to how he used to be. Relative in the sense that comparing how he is here with how he used to be, there's a massive difference. There's a massive difference. We'll try to see that as we go along. And the last thing, when he's facing himself with his sin, and he's having a struggle with succumbing to things time and again, he says there, verse 24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? The version you have might say the body of this death, but he says, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is his reassuring reality. He knows that he's going to be delivered.

[8 : 28] He knows he is going to be ultimately and gloriously saved from his sin in the end. Well, the first thing we try noticing is this, what he calls, or we could call in terms of his past life, revolutionary realization. He's talking about the law, using that word in many different senses, but in this primary sense, he says in verse 7, the law is sin. What should we say? That the law is sin.

By the law, he's meaning, well, the Ten Commandments, because he highlights one of them. By no means, the law is not sin. He says, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. He's looking back into the past in his life. For I would not have known what it is to covet. If the law had not said, you shall not covet. Now, that sounds very obvious. Remembering who Paul was, and his background, his upbringing, his education, his theological training, he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. He's someone who knew the law inside out.

So when he sees, and hear him saying, that I would not have known what it is to covet, if the law had said, you shall not covet. Well, that's obvious. But the problem Paul seems to have had is that, while he knew the law said, you shall not covet, as well as everything else the law said, he didn't realize that it was speaking to him.

He felt it was speaking to someone else. Well, if he isn't a covetous man, if he isn't a sinner, if he's righteous, if he's obedient and keeping God's commandments as God expects him to, then saying here, you shall not covet, he'd say, well, nothing to do with me.

[10 : 06] But something happens, and he says in verse 8, but sin, he says, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

What I think he's saying is this, there was a time in my life where the law that I used to understand, including the commandment, you shall not covet, there was a time when that law came into my

thoughts and into my feelings in a way it hadn't done before. It was like looking into a mirror and seeing a reflection in that mirror I didn't ever see in my whole life.

He's saying, apart from the law, sin lies dead. Yes, sin is shown and highlighted by the law. But see what he's saying in verse 8.

That sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. He said, if you have children, maybe some of you had children a long time ago, maybe you have grandchildren now, maybe others have young children still, you tell them not to do something, they're going to do the very thing you tell them not to do.

It's in us. And when God says, thou shalt not, there's that within us that says, yes, I will. If God says no, the law says no, we say yes, we will.

[11 : 23] It's that twisted, corrupt, fallenness. That within us that is rebellious and defying God. But Paul, I think, is saying he came to experience.

He started finding that, being fixed with this wrong commandment particularly that I've struggled with. Thou shalt not covet, you shall not covet. He said, when I saw that, saw the way I never used to, I found myself fighting with it.

And what I found myself being was a covetous man. He says, sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, what's in me, rebelled against what I saw in the commandment.

And this rebellion involved a production of all kinds of covetousness. So this must have been a shock to him. How much of a shock? Well, see what he says in verse 9.

He says, I was once alive apart from the law. He says, the end of verse 8, apart from the law, sin lies dead. So here's Paul, and here's the law.

[12 : 23] It has nothing to do with his heart. We can remember that in our own lives, maybe. We can be in church, and go in one ear and out the other, and we maybe think we know it, or we understand it, or we know enough of it to know whether we should accept it or not.

With Paul, what's happening is the law that was over there while he was here, he could look at it, he could admire it, he could look at himself and admire himself, but this law and God's providence and God's grace started coming home to him.

It started becoming something real on the inside, something that never happened to him before. He said, I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, and that I think is a key set of words, when the commandment came, you know, we say something, it just came home to me.

It just dawned on me. This is, I think, God bringing this one commandment, particularly home to the heart of Paul, you shall not covet. And coming home to him, he says, whereas previously, I was once alive apart from the law, I was alive, I was well in my own estimation, I was right with God, sin wasn't a problem, no difficulties, God brought this commandment home to me.

Sin came alive, and the man I used to think I was so alive and right with God died on the spot. He came face to face with a sin, face to face with the fact that he wasn't right with God, that he wasn't a righteous, holy, sinless man.

[13 : 53] Though he was a Pharisee of the Pharisee, meticulous, and as he tells the Philippians in the third chapter of his letter to them, the catalogue of his past attainments, this experience seems to have brought him face to face with the very fact that he was a dead man, spiritually, before God.

The very commandment, he says in verse 10, that promised life, do this and live, I'm doing it, therefore I live, so I was alive once. That very commandment, that promised life, proved to be death to me.

I came face to face with the fact that I was a dead man, spiritually. We follow that. I think that's what Paul's talking about. He's going through this experience where he's coming under what we maybe call, or be used to calling, or maybe other people have said it to us before, an experience of conviction of sin.

Is it possible to be a Christian without this? Is it possible to become a Christian without this? And this could be a difficulty, and maybe, I don't know, it might be for some, it has been for others anyway, a struggle.

That coming into the Christian life for one person, or for most people even, maybe in the way they explain it, involves this somewhat traumatic, agonizing, period of conviction of sin.

[15 : 22] That realization that you're a sinner, you're lost, you need your sins, forgive it. Maybe you can't follow that. And maybe you look at what's happening here with, as Paul's describing it, and the sudden experience of the jailer at Philippi as well.

How he became so aware, so suddenly in the providence of God, all this need to be forgiven, his sins to be forgiven, that he had to be saved. And it can be a source of trouble that you can't identify with it.

Well, there'll be other Christians who would be able to maybe follow what you're going through. And wouldn't, like others, be able to say that they went through any traumatic period of conviction either. Maybe they would say they were a bit more like Lydia. And having this desire, and having this yearning and longing to know God, and many things like that, so subtle and gentle and somewhat below almost self-awareness, just as it were behind, the scenes of our own thoughts gradually coming to life, these desires and these longings for God.

But while in the initial stages like Paul had the sudden meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road, it would seem that what he's talking about here, and if not happening at the time or shortly, certainly, possibly, maybe, arguably, now, how arguably, that's the question, it may even have been something happening prior to his meeting with Jesus on that day.

[16:55] It may, I don't know how much we could say this, but it may even have possibly formed a part of what Jesus said to him. Why are you persecuting me?

He said, it's hard for you to kick against the gods. I mean, Paul was a born fighter. We know that. And he seems to have, in these verses 7 to 13, have been having a good fight with his sin, a good fight with the law, good fight with himself.

At any event, he's saying, this is the way I was. And it's in a context where he's talking about the law, the role of the law. Shall we sin, if we're forgiven and we're under grace, shall we carry on sinning?

He's saying no, back in chapter 6. He's working through all of this. He's giving some interpretation about the law in the section we're looking at from verse 7. He's saying, verse 7, what shall we say, that the law is sin?

No. Verse 12, in fact, he says the law is holy, the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Well, verse 13, did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means.

[18:02] It was sin producing death in me through what was good. The commandment was showing me the exceeding sinfulness of sin. I was broad face to face with myself.

Broad face to face with the fact that I needed someone to save me. And you know, that's all we maybe need to be able to say tonight. That while I can't maybe or you can't identify with what so many other people say, the very fact that we know we need to be saved from our sins.

However intense, however deep, however prolonged that knowledge is. And that knowledge being something that through God's grace brings us to Jesus. that's all we need.

Now don't you worry about someone else's experience or not having the kind of experience someone else had because if sin isn't so much of a maybe difficulty to you as it was to others, it might become a great difficulty and then I think we all come to know what Paul's meaning.

In the second section, we're looking in the second place at his relative relapses. He's saying, this was me in the past. But now when he comes to speak in terms of the present, and this is a difficult one, verse 14, he says, we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh sold under sin.

[19:24] As soon as we come across that, we think, well this doesn't sound like the language that describes a Christian at all. He goes on in chapter 8 to draw the contrast between those who are in the spirit, walking according to the spirit and those who are in the flesh walking according to the flesh.

Verse 5, chapter 8, for those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Verse 6, to set their mind on the flesh is death. So if Paul is saying in chapter 7, verse 14, that I am of the flesh sold under sin, is he therefore by what he says in chapter 8, saying that he's actually dead and in effect saying I'm not a Christian?

Well if that is the case, what he goes on to say in this section is describing someone who isn't a Christian. But I don't think that's what he's talking about. For this reason, and there will be many other reasons and you maybe have other reasons yourselves and maybe to think about, is that when he's speaking to the church at Corinth, one of the great difficulties he had with the church at Corinth was that they were divided over their favorite preacher and they were associating themselves with one over the other.

Apollos was, he was a hit with them. He had the gifts of eloquence, he could preach, he could communicate in a way that Paul couldn't. And it was causing difficulties. I'm of Cephas, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Paul, I'm of Jesus, you know the way it was.

But what Paul says to them in bringing them face to face with us, I think it's in chapter 3, he speaks to them as those who are, well, in the flesh.

[21 : 03] They're behaving in a fleshly manner. He isn't saying that they aren't Christians, but he's saying their behavior is the kind of behavior that non-Christians show on the things that they naturally do.

And that's in a context where he's saying he couldn't teach them because they were, because of their own choosing and their own sins and errors, immature and way back of where they should have been. So, if he can say to the church at Corinth that they're behaving in a fleshly way, he isn't saying there's such a thing as carnal Christians.

So much as he's saying that there is that aspect of the flesh that can surface and rise at times in a Christian's life, that sin within us, it was happening in Corinth to Christians.

I think that's what he's saying, what he says in verse 14, but I am of the flesh sold under sin. It's not an absolute thing. It's not meaning I am under the dominion of sin. Chapter 6, and please if you get a chance if you're not too sure of it, and even if we are, we can never read it enough.

Chapter 6, he's explaining how that dominion of sin has been broken through our union with Christ and all that he has done. So it's not an absolute sense that I am in the flesh of the flesh sold under sin, but there's aspects of his experience as a Christian who are struggling with sin.

[22 : 25] He feels as much as that. He feels a bondage. What does that mean? What does that bondage look like? He says in verse 15, I think this is how he goes on to explain what his being of the flesh sold under sin means.

It is a difficult phrase, and you can understand how people would think, well, Paul is talking about his unconverted life, but how he explains that in the following verses, we can follow it. And I think, well, you don't want to go too far down this road, but we'd have to ask.

We'd have to ask ourselves some serious questions if we couldn't identify with verse 15 down to the end of the chapter as Christians. We'd have to ask ourselves some serious questions.

What about Galatians 5, God willing, on Sunday? I don't know the practice in different congregations, but sometimes we read from that section Galatians 5, the works of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit, and the way Paul describes the desires of the flesh, the desires of the Spirit, it's different terminology, I think, for the exact same thing that's here in chapter 7 of Romans, and when we read it, and when we engage with it, and we can say, I follow that, I can sing Psalm 51, I can sing Psalm 25, I can rejoice in Psalm 103, because what he's saying here, I feel in here as well. I'm fighting with my sin. How does this fight take effect? How thankful we are for Paul's honesty, and how almost incidental so much of his greatest theological teaching is.

[24 : 06] It's just incidental, it's beside the point in some ways of the main thing that he's saying, but how profound it is that he admits, verse 15, I don't understand my own actions.

If I look at myself seriously, I'm a something of an enigma to myself. For, he says, I do what I, I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

But what is the thing he wants? He says, I want to obey the law of God. I want to obey the law of God, not as an end in itself, but as Psalm 119 so very clearly explains, it's with the longing and the yearning heart, aspiring after pleasing God, having that sense of God's approval and favor, his fellowship, his blessing, wanting to run in the way of his commandments.

The place where God feeds us and teaches us and meets us and guides us and changes us. His law, his word, he says, as we re-read in verse 22, only a Christian can truly say this, I delight, he says, in the law of God in my inner being.

I delight in the law of God. The very core and center of who I am, I love God's word. I love it. Can we follow him there? But he's saying, I cannot do, I do not do the very thing that I want.

[25 : 32] Keeping God's law is something I can't do. I can't do it as I want, I can't do it as I should. Not only can I not keep it, but I actually do the opposite.

And this is how he doesn't seem to get himself. I don't understand my own actions. What actions? For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it's good.

The law says you shouldn't, I say I shouldn't. And when I do what the law forbids, I almost hate myself for it. I hate the sin that I'm doing. Now what a difficulty this can be.

How can we, how can we be in this conflict? How can we understand this conflict of loving God's law and not being able to keep God's law at the same time? Well, he explains I think in verse 17.

He says it in words like this repeatedly through the section. It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. It's not the old man, but it's the new man who's imperfect because of the sin that's dwelling within me.

[26 : 42] You go back to chapter 6 and he says, I think very clearly, that the old man is dead. The new man is alive. But within the new man there is that indwelling sin.

I see verse 23, he says, in my members another law, in my mind, in my inner being, I delight in the law of God. But within me and my members, bound up with my whole personality, including my body, he's saying I see another law waging war against the law of my mind, making me captive to the love of sin that's in my members.

It is, he says, the sin that dwells in my members. It's no longer I who do it, he says, but the sin, in the verse 20, the sin that dwells within me.

This is where we get indwelling sin as a turn of phrase from. Indwelling sin, sin that dwells within me. John Murray said something quite interesting, maybe helpful.

He said, the believer is a new man, a new creation. But he's a new man not yet made perfect. Sin dwells in him still and he still commits sin. He's necessarily the subject of a progressive renewal.

[27 : 55] He needs to be transfigured into the image of the Lord from glory to glory. He's the new man. He's the new creation and so are you, so am I, if we're Christians.

We don't sometimes feel it. We sometimes feel the fight and we can feel the fight so much that we think the old man, the things I used to think, the things I used to be tempted to do or maybe the things I used to do I may be tempted to do now.

Maybe things I never in my worst nightmare would have thought I think now. And we can sometimes feel it, the worst moments, struggling like this. Maybe I'm not even a Christian.

How can I not do what's right? How can I do what's wrong? Not only not do what's right, that's bad enough. Never coming up to the standard and never coming up to the match, that's bad enough.

But how is it that I can actually do and yield and consent whether it's thought process or words or actions to actually do the thing that I shouldn't do and don't want to do?

[28 : 57] How complex. Can I be a Christian and do that? And we maybe look at one another and think, just to be as well you don't know what goes on in here.

And you'll be saying, just as well you don't know what goes on and that's how we are though isn't it? We know ourselves. It's surely one of these great indications that we're Christians is that we learn the sheer depravity of our hearts.

We recognize, as someone has said, the residual hatred of God. That's a horrific thing to say or even think about. But what else is sin?

when God's law says you shall not. And even as Christians we say somehow, not maybe so openly, but by the way that we don't obey but actually disobey, we say I will.

God says you shall not. And we end up doing it. We end up saying it. The struggle here, maybe there's something else we can ask ourselves. The struggle here that Paul seems to have, he says, verse 17, it's no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me.

[30 : 05] You'd almost think he's splitting himself into two personalities but he isn't. There's two forces. There's himself, the man, the new man, indwelled by the spirit, empowered and energized by the spirit.

But there's this indwelling sin. It's a force, it's a power, he almost personifies, speaks as the word with a person. It can war, it can produce things, it's an active force.

The worrying thing is where we do something or think something or say something and we find ourselves struggling like this.

But then the struggle goes and we can start thinking and saying and doing the thing without us even being bothered. I think that's when it gets worrying. So in one sense you know when we lose the edge and we don't feel that agony, you know the occasions where remember David cut the corner of Saul's robe and where later on in his life he numbered the people and his heart smote him.

You know what a wonderful thing it is. Where God in his mercy may be without anyone else knowing or seeing or being aware just what's within our own hearts through his word through whatever it might be in his providence bringing us face to face with what we are, what we're thinking and to smite to just hit our hearts and we feel crushed, we feel broken and we can turn.

[31 : 38] The worst thing is we're sin isn't bothering us. when we compare ourselves in a situation where it's not bothering us with when it used to bother us.

By that I mean the same thing. You know we've got to beware the writer to the Hebrews tells us lest any of us is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. It's a warning isn't it?

So if we can follow what Paul is saying verse 18 I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh for I have the desire to do what's right but not the ability to carry it out.

Doesn't he say this in slightly different language to the church at Philippi where he speaks about working out your salvation with fear and trembling work out your salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who's working in you.

And this is the thing both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. God gives us not only the will. I delight in God's law. I want and aspire with all my heart to obey and keep.

[32 : 48] He also gives us the ability. God that works in you both to will and to do. Isn't that great? Because we can so often follow Paul and we can say I have the desire to do what's right but not the ability to carry it out.

You can imagine the Philippians saying but Paul have you got this struggle? God working in and we trying to work out. With God's in working energizing his grace his spirit moving giving us energy the desire but we just feel we can't do it and you're telling us that we can and we should well what about you?

And he'd say I've got the same struggles as you do. We'd put Paul up on this we'd put some Christians up on this high almost pedestal and we realise as James himself says about Elijah they were men he was a man with a nature just like ours but he prayed.

I mean it's nothing in the person we're all all the same in the grace of God but do we follow do we identify with this not doing what we want but doing the very thing this is important as well he says doing the very thing verse 15 that I hate it's very searching it's a love hate it's polar opposites I love God's law and I hate sin but I end up sinning how can I be a Christian and do this because you're an imperfect man or woman new creation new man but sin still dwells in you and when you do the wrong things and say and think the wrong things and so when I do it feels almost we could almost say it's like someone else doing it we so distance ourselves in our desires from sin that we can say I hate it well why are you doing it if you hate it because I have the desire to do what's right but I lack the power to carry it out that's why we're so dependent on God when you think why doesn't God and this is I mean this respectfully we may sometimes ask legitimately and not questioning why does God do this but why does God choose to do things the way he does why when he saves us does he justify us and why does he in giving us the new nature begin to and then progressively sanctify us couldn't God just do the whole thing all at once of course he could if he so chose to do it but he hasn't chosen to do this next chapter explains that you know those he had foreknown he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son and those he predestined he called and whom he called he justified whom he called he glorified that's God's chosen way and when we're going through all of this the great blessing is if we can say to one another tonight and coming to communion a time where we look at our hearts and we can say to one another this is me that's a good sign and when you come and when I come in God's will when we were able to come to communion sit at the

[36 : 00] Lord's table and we do say I'm not worthy of this and it makes us look to Jesus but briefly as we look in the third place it is reassuring reality he knows he knows that this situation he's got is going to come to an end one day I delight in the law of God in my inner being but I've got this in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind bringing me into captivity making me captive wretched man that I am he says so how can you tell the church at Philippi rejoice in the Lord how can you look at yourself as such a wretch and at the same time call upon and command others to rejoice rejoice well that's all part of that multi-dimensional element of our Christian lives because in this sense what on earth do you mean well take verse 24 and 25 how could someone in verse 24 say wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death you may have it in front of you the body of this death and that's an interesting shift of emphasis whether it's death or the body that's been emphasized and there's a resulting difference in meaning though it may be just slight how could you shift from that either way whether it's body or death that's this body or this death wretched man that I am who will deliver me how could you then go to thanks be to

God because your focus as he says himself is through Jesus Christ our Lord you know Psalm 2 speaks about that pulling together what's well two quite differing emotional states pulling them together in the same mind at the same time where he says rejoice with trembling we can follow that the effect of God's presence the pressure as it were that his spirit can bring his word to bear on us

with such a weight with such a glow with such an emphasis that we can have a sense of joy and exhilaration like we find nowhere else and will find nowhere else other than in our God and that very joy and exhilaration is accompanied with such a great sense of awe and fear and trembling and nothing else nowhere else will give you that combination and so here

I think although it's different I think it's related in the sense that we can have such a sense and awareness of our sin and our wretchedness but remind ourselves that that is proof that we're Christians and at the same time we can be reassured that that very fact is also proof it's almost predictive God's as it were the effect of God's down payment the deposit now this is a kind of knock on from that not a thing in and of itself but the very fact of having the presence of the spirit of God within us this war will be going on and that itself is a prediction in so far as God giving us that and us having that experience can look forward to the time where we will be delivered from it body and spirit thanks be to God he says through Jesus Christ our Lord the day is coming he's saying where he will in the whole person body and spirit body and soul be delivered from this wretchedness that is bound up with this indwelling sin what a hope this is what a hope it is because you know the grief where we we disappoint other people and fall short of our expectations of where we even fall short of our own expectations and where we well do we fall short of

God's expectations can it ever actually be said that we disappoint him if by disappoint we mean something being discovered down the road in a relationship that wasn't known at the beginning no isn't it despite our sin that God loves us that when we were enemies that when we were sinners Christ died for us God who is rich and merciful Ephesians to him for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins it isn't anything in us God sees that draws his love and draws his saving purpose there's nothing in us nothing and God knows you the Psalm 139 sense he knows me individually all of our failings all of our faults all of these things we've done all of these things we're prone to be doing and thinking and saying people may know people may not know we likely know ourselves these areas of struggle and difficulty God knows all of them and it's not that you're in a relationship with

God like it could be with someone else in this world and then you realize a personality defect and think I wish I knew this 10 years ago there's nothing you can do about it then really other than try and put up with it God knows all of this there's no secrets and that's why we can among other things be so honest with him and be thankful that he knows us Psalm 103 he knows our frame he knows our weaknesses he knows everything so with that in mind and other things let's come to him and not let the sense of our sin even if we're at the end of a situation where we know we've sinned and today might have been one it might even have been a prolonged thing let's take the time like David did in Psalm 51 even if it's someone pointing the thing out to us let's take ourselves to God and coming preparing for communion confess our sin and know that the thing though the devil and his angels will say to us and our own heart may even say to us no stay away come to him come to him in prayer come privately secretly confess turn from it through his grace and help and he will he promises forgive we finish just with this thought in light of that what

[42 : 38] John says in his first letter if we confess our sins it's not just that he will forgive us it's he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins there's there's something of divine necessity associated with God's forgiving our sin not that God is under compulsion by anything outside of himself that forces him to forgive not even we might argue the fact that he delights in mercy as the prophet tells us but the fact that he has satisfied his own justice the outstanding claim his justice and the resulting punishment had on our guilt and our sin him having taken that away in Jesus John says if any man sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous he's the propitiation for our sins that massive word massive concept the one who carries our sin carries our guilt away and in carrying our guilt away in bearing its it's its punishment turning the wrath of God away from us not turning his anger into love but carrying away that judicial punishment that our guilt deserves that God having done that he's faithful and just to forgive the sins we confess because he's already dealt with the guilt he's dealt with the problem he's satisfied himself he's satisfied himself that's amazing and would we dare to say it like this that because he is

God and because he has done what he's done for you as a Christian he has to forgive you he has bound himself to forgive you not that we can force him or any of that but he's faithful and just to do it because he has met all of his own demands to make forgiveness not possible but actual don't stay away from him that can be difficult for us let's confess and let's yes feeling ashamed but in one sense we can come with with that confidence to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace

to help in time of need because it's a throne of grace and written all over that throne as it were being grace we're looking at a place that's telling us and testifying you are not worthy to come here in yourself but because of me you can come let's try to do that let's let's pray together let's pray we give thanks

Lord that you have given us your word we pray the Holy Spirit who is its author would clarify and explain and apply the word to our hearts and that you will help us through your word as we engage it over these days and that you will bless the congregation of your people bless them Lord and have mercy upon us we ask in Jesus name Amen