

In my Sinful Nature...

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Romans 7:15-25

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15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. 21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

With our sinful nature, this struggle is very real for us. It is hard to do what is right. It is hard to continue to have faith when you

are in the valley. It is difficult to continue to do the right thing when it doesn't bring pleasure like doing the wrong thing might do. There are people in this world living life simply by what makes them feel good instead of what is doing good for other people. There are people who simply think that if they do what is good for them and their pleasure, then they aren't really harming anyone else. Imagine for a moment what this kind of life would look like. How many of us like sweet treats? If I only ate cookies (especially fresh from the oven) what would happen to my health? I am doing what gives pleasure, but we know that I would gain a lot of weight. I would rot out my teeth. I would have a very smelly breath. I would not give my body nutrients that are necessary for long-term energy. My heart and lungs would start to give out. Eventually, this lifestyle would just kill me. I would even act surprised when it was actively killing me and most likely live in denial. Our bodies were not designed to simply enjoy sweets. We need protein to help our muscles. We need calcium to help our bones. We need exercise to help out blood flow. We have to make the choice to do something that doesn't necessarily feel good at the time to have good results later on. We can't just live life by what feels good because eventually it would be detrimental to us.

Paul begins to dissect this for us. He is explaining the difficulty in wanting to live a life of pleasure compared to a life of holiness. Let's turn to the first set of verses of today's text.

Verses 14-18. ***15 I do not understand what I do. For what I***

want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Paul mentions how the law is good. What is actually good about the law? Why was the law established to begin with? When it first came about, most of us know the story about Moses going up the mountain to speak with the Lord and receive the Ten Commandments. When Moses returns from the mountain, the golden calf has been made because the people were upset about how long Moses was gone for. They figured that Moses had completely abandoned them after being the only spokesperson for God to them. Without Moses, they knew nothing about God. It didn't matter that God had just rescued them from slavery, their mouthpiece was completely gone. They wanted a "god" they could trust in, so they melted the gold and made the calf. Moses brought swift punishment upon them by melting it down into powder and making them drink it. Moses receives the Ten Commandments a second time because he broke the first set of tablets in his anger. Here we have the Israelites who were freed from the only thing they had ever known: slavery. They didn't know anything about this God who was leading them. They didn't know how to serve Him. God gives them the law to teach them how they can live a holy life. This holy life was necessary because it was a reflection of the God who had rescued them. They could choose to follow this

law or reject it. Following led to holiness; rejection led to selfishness and punishment. After the Ten Commandments, which were given in Exodus, the law expands to discuss things like land, atonement, righteousness, offerings, and so much more. It eventually began to feel like a weight that could never be lifted because it was being followed imperfectly by imperfect people. It was followed by unholy people who could never be fully holy. “The spiritual man is delivered from the Law. The natural man is doomed by the Law. The carnal man is defeated by the Law.”¹

Let’s break that down just a bit. The spiritual man is one who could fully follow God. The law will not be able to hold them down because they are following God with no struggle. This is not possible for us to do because we are humans who were born into a life of sin that has been passed down through the ages from Adam. The natural man is one who understands that God exists, but don’t know enough about God to know that they need to follow Him. The carnal man is one who knows what it takes to be holy and chooses that they don’t want that life because it doesn’t satisfy them. Holiness will forever be out of reach of that person.

The purpose of the law was not only to teach how to be holy, but to point to the only one who could fulfill it on behalf of us.

“The Law was spiritual, a written expression of the character of God and could only be kept by one who was perfect

¹ The Complete Biblical Library

spiritually.”² We know that that man was Jesus because He was the only one without sin. He was God incarnate. He was God in human flesh. He came here and was tempted by sin but never acted in sin. He came to be the model for us to know what holiness looks like in the flesh. We can never attain it here, but we do need to strive for it. Making an honest attempt is worth more than being perfect.

Let’s move on to the next verses. ***19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*** Paul had two struggles he was tackling here. One was the idea that he was taught that in order to follow the law, it was based upon deeds rather than faith. In other words, he was taught that he needed to “earn his way into heaven.” Those of us gathered here can understand that it is more important to have faith than it is to rely on works. Our works don’t get us to heaven; faith alone does that. However, we have works in response to our faith. Following God grants us a desire to want to do good. We don’t do good to prove our faith. Once this is taught to the point that it is how you base your whole relationship with God, it can be hard to break that cycle. You get stuck on how much is enough and eventually you realize that that will only set you up for disappointment because it will never feel like you have done

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enough. This is because it is impossible. You can't outdo the works of God.

The other struggle that Paul was dealing with is that his free will was making it difficult to choose to follow God. It was always a battle to do what is right because doing what is wrong can feel so good. God gave us free will because He always wants us to choose Him freely. If we couldn't choose, then it would not be genuine. We would only do it because we don't know anything else. It would not be done out of obedience. "The human will, apart from the strength of the Holy Spirit, is destined to fail under pressure. In human nature there is a weakness in the will. And yet the will is an obstacle of God's own creation. He never violates that will; He never crosses the threshold of the door to man's will unless invited to do so."³ God is not going to do anything that will help us unless we invite Him to. If we rely on our own strength and our own will to do good and live a life of holiness, then we are destined to do nothing but fail. However, when we ask God to work it out for us, then we can have the strength that is necessary to do just this.

Let's move on to verse 21. ***21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*** Paul was not saying that the law made him do evil. Some have decided that it is evil to live by the law because "you don't live by the whole law." "You pick and choose certain parts to follow." The reality is that we are inspired by the Holy Spirit to

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live holy, but that doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit can't reveal evil within us because it exists within all of us. If we deny that we have evil in us, then we deny the very reason that we needed Jesus to be sacrificed in the first place. "Paul by inspiration of the Spirit was describing the misery of one who has not yet yielded to the deliverance provided and described in verses following (7:25; 8:1-4). He was not delineating what should be the normal experience of the believer."⁴ If we can not give ourselves over the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then in our sinful nature, we will seek whatever is the opposite of holiness. We can have no chance in literal hell of being righteous if we ignore the need for the Holy Spirit to work in us.

Verses 22-23. ***22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.*** Some think that by following the ways of God, then they will be stuck in serious mode for so long that they can never have any humor or fun in their life. We have expectations of what we consider to be "appropriate for prayer." We have expectations of how children can must sit nonstop in church. We have hierarchy in the church and people think that that is a bad thing. There are some things in church that are necessary, but there are some things that we go so extreme on that it is rather off-putting to any visitor that we may have. Some people feel restricted on how they can worship in service. Can they use

⁴ The Complete Biblical Library

sign language? Can they raise their hands? Can they pray during songs? Can they cry out loud? People come in completely unsure of the expectations and think that we don't know how to care for guests. They believe that in order to come to church, they have to give up a life of fun. Let me tell you, at one church, we got together and played board games, and that did so much for me to have fun in church and feel closer with the congregation. In May, I took my family to the parade in Athens and felt more welcomed by members of the church than I have ever felt anywhere else before. We know how to have fun, but we don't define fun by the world's standards. The world's standards could lead to drinking. It could lead to orgies. It could lead to drugs. It could lead to challenges that simply put our life at risk simply because we don't understand the value of our life.

I take delight in the ways of God because they help me feel joy in a way that the world could never offer. Are there expectations and protocols when it comes to church, sure, but they are beneficial for helping me feel the presence of God instead of the pride of myself. Battling in the mind trying to decide which is the best way to go can be very difficult. We have to allow God to conquer our sinful nature so that we can attain salvation. "Unless its power is revoked by the "law of the Spirit" (8:2), it can only bring one down on a relentless march to hell."⁵

⁵ The Complete Biblical Library

We're bringing this home. Let's look at the last two verses really quickly beginning with 24. ***24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*** Our sinful nature desires to bring us nothing but death and destruction. Our sinful nature can make it seem like it wants to bring good to us because whatever is causing our distractions can feel good for a short time, but eventually, those good feelings lead to nothing but shame and guilt. Could you imagine if we constantly had to carry around a symbol that represented whatever our sin was? How much more would we be crying out to be rescued? "The words 'the body of this death' seems to be an allusion to an ancient custom from days of horrible tyranny. At times a convicted criminal was bound face-to-face, hand to hand, to the corpse of his victim and forced to carry it, until he died of a contagion from the putrid, decaying body."⁶ Could you imagine how horrible that would be to constantly live with whatever crime you committed? Perhaps if we did that, we would stick closer to God. However, God sees that simply as enslaving us to our sin, which having sent Jesus to die for us and our sins, would really be counterintuitive. God wants us to be free from our sins and their power because He is greater than the power sin could ever hold over us.

Now we can turn to our final verse. ***25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a***

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slave to the law of sin. Jesus came here to be born of the virgin. He performed miracles. He was sent here to die for us because of the love that He had for us. We were unworthy to receive a Savior, but we were loved enough that we got one anyway who prayed for our forgiveness. We were forgiven and saved because of the sacrifice of this man who would rise again from the dead and send us the Holy Spirit. We can be thankful that we don't have to live in enslavement to our sin anymore. Our sinful nature doesn't deserve our loyalty. "Deliverance must come through Christ and, in turn, through yielding to the Holy Spirit, whose work is to produce the Christ life in those who receive Him."⁷ We have the ability to receive the Holy Spirit and be delivered. Have you made the decision to do so? Are you delivered from the power of sin, or are you going to stay stuck in your sinful nature?

⁷ The Complete Biblical Library