

Thank God There is a Battle Waging Inside of You!

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 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. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

About ten minutes ago, I was able to do the impossible. I got to look inside your heart. I did. And you also saw deep inside my heart. That doesn't happen. Only God can look into hearts. But we did when I read to you the text from Romans 7. Paul told us what was going on in his heart and it wasn't pretty. When we think of the heroes from the Bible, we often think that they are head and shoulders above us when it comes to faith and godly life. Sure, they may have made a mistake or two, but normally we consider them superheroes and we feel so inferior to them.

That is wrong. They are no different from us. What we go through, they went through, and what bothers us bothered them. That is what I love about Romans and especially chapter seven. Paul pulls back the curtain and lets us see past his zeal for the gospel, past his ability to raise the dead, past his tireless energy and love for God and we see Paul struggling with sin just like us.

And it frustrated him. ***"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."*** Paul did a lot of good. He endured whippings and stonings for Christ. He sang hymns while in prison. He considered his unjust imprisonment as an opportunity to spread the gospel. He did so much good, but he tells us there was a lot of good he didn't do. In fact, he did evil.

And if that went on in his heart, I know it goes on in our hearts. Behind the outward appearance of decent Christians who do so many good things, we find so much sin. We are frustrated. "I don't understand," we say. We know the Ten Commandments and how to do good. We saw Jesus practice perfect love as he obeyed those commandments. We want to be just like him. But what do we find? The good we so eagerly want to do, we don't do. Instead, the evil we hate, we keep on doing. Take gossip for example. We know gossip is wrong. We hate it. But we do it anyway. We know we should defend the reputation of others, to speak well of them, and always take their words and actions in the best, kindest way. We have every intention of doing that, but instead we gossip and ruin them.

We don't understand. How can redeemed, children of God washed clean of sin act that way? It seems we are committing just as many sins as before. We are frustrated. What is going on in our lives?

I. We are people who struggle with a sinful nature.

Paul asked the same question. But he already knew the answer. ***"As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 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. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."***

There is a conflict going on inside of Paul. On the one side you have Paul, the born again Christian with a new man living inside of him. This new man didn't live there before, but took up residence when God showered Paul with his grace and brought him to faith in Christ Jesus. This new man is the restored image of God lost in the Fall. He is pure and wishes only holiness and righteousness. He delights in God's law. He wants to do only good, holy things just like Jesus.

On the other side is a monster. Paul calls it "sin" or the sinful nature. The Bible often refers to it as the Old Adam or the flesh. We are born with it. We inherited it from Adam and Eve. We see it even in babies. When a baby cries, he is actually being selfish. "Mom! Drop whatever you are doing and tend to my needs NOW! Wake up! I am hungry!" The sinful nature is the complete opposite of this new man we just talked about. He is evil, wants evil, wants to gossip and so on. He does not delight in God's law, but hates it.

"So I find this law at work," Paul says. Law here is not a law like love your neighbor, but like the law of gravity. We notice things always fall when we drop them, so we call this the law of gravity. It is a pattern. And what is that pattern we find in ourselves? ***"When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."*** The new man and the sinful nature are constantly fighting, arguing and resisting each other. It is an outright war 24/7. We, that is, our new, believing image, delights in God's law and wants to do good, but

the sinful nature fights back. How bad is it? We feel like prisoners. Maybe this helps us understand. We know of Parkinson's disease. It is terrible. It affects the nerves, the limbs, hands, and eventually the brain. If someone with Parkinson's went to the chalkboard to write something, the letters and sentences would be all shaky and scribbly. His mind knows what to write. He wants to write. But the disease turns his letters into a scribble that is hard to read.

That is the frustration we feel. The good we want to do, we don't do. The evil we hate we keep on doing. Even if we do good, it is all scribbly and tainted with sin. We are prisoners of our own bodies! It is maddening. It is frustrating. We cry out with Paul, "**What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**"

II. We are people who find relief and comfort in Christ Jesus.

Well, God does. "**Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" Notice the relief in Paul's voice. After an aggravating nine verses describing the prison of sin, he breathes a sigh of relief and thanks God. Why? Jesus Christ.

We go to Christ because he alone rescues us from this body of death. We don't need a little forgiveness, we need a ton of it, not just for the sins of yesterday, but today's sins and the sins we know we will commit tomorrow. We don't need a little righteousness. We need Jesus' righteousness. So we run to Jesus and the cross. Remember what he promised earlier: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**" Jesus invites us to find rest for our souls. It is like that standing invitation you have with your neighbor, "Whenever you need to borrow my mower, just go in the garage and take it." Jesus' invitation to come to him is a standing invitation. This is why we come to the cross and come to it often. We come to hear him say, "Your sins are mine and my righteousness is yours. You are forgiven."

What good will this do? How can this rest help? Tomorrow the struggle continues and the next day and the next. "**For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**" But this is how it helps. At the cross you will say: "**Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**" Imagine yourself aboard a cargo vessel during a storm. Waves are sweeping over the bow and the ship is pitching left and right, up and down. You are seasick. You are afraid you will sink. But a crewman says, "Don't worry. The captain will get us to port safely." The ship is still being tossed back and forth. You are still seasick. But you are less anxious because you know this will all end soon.

That is why we run to the cross every day. The war wages day in, day out, and it frustrates us. But one day the struggle will end. Christ will carry us home to heaven. So don't be frustrated. Rejoice that there is a war going on inside of you because it tells you that you are saved. If you didn't believe, if you didn't have the new man, if you didn't trust in Jesus for your salvation, you would not have that conflict going on inside of you. It is healthy that you hate the sin you do. It is good that it frustrates you. It means you are resisting. It means you are saved.

It even means that you try to overcome temptation. Someone asked me if it is possible that homosexuals are in heaven, and I said, "Yes. It is very possible because of Christ." They may have had to struggle all their lives against the urges of the sinful nature, but if it frustrated them too, like Paul, and if they turned to cross, they and adulterers and murderers and liars, like Paul, all of us who struggle with temptation are saved. So we fight back against this sinful nature. Ideally we fight harder each day and we win a little more each day, but don't be surprised if a day comes when you go backwards. Ask David and the months of anguish he endured because of one glance at another man's wife. But where did he find rest? In the words, "You are forgiven."

Christians are not people who have overcome sin. We are people who struggle with sin every day, but who also live under the shadow of the cross where we find forgiveness. Frustrated? Good. It shows you are saved. Thank God you struggle against sin, and to get you through today, take up Jesus' standing invitation: "**Come to me, who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest for your ... souls.**" Amen.