

THE INNER BATTLE
ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH
Romans 7:7-25

BIG IDEA: PEOPLE TRYING TO KEEP GOD'S LAW WITHOUT GOD'S ENABLING ARE DOOMED TO FRUSTRATION AND JUDGMENT.

THE BIG QUESTION: WHOSE VOICE IS THIS?

- **FIRST SECTION: FIRST PERSON/PAST TENSE (7:7-12)**
- **SECOND SECTION: FIRST PERSON/PRESENT TENSE (7:13-25)**

FIRST SECTION OPTIONS: (7:7-12)

- A. **A youth coming to the age of spiritual accountability.** Verses 7-9 refer to Paul in his *personal experience as a child and perhaps even a youth prior to his awareness and understanding of the full impact of god's commandments.* [Witmer]
- B. **The dawn of conscience** (7:7-13) [Bruce]
- *The occasion might be his "bar mitzwah" ceremony, or the period immediately preceding or following it.* [Bruce]
 - *It should be pointed out that this autobiographical interpretation of verses 7-13 (and of the following verses too) does not command the general acceptance today that it formerly did; one recent writer speaks of it as "now regulated to the museum of exegetical absurdities". But it is the most natural way to understand this section, and the arguments against it are not conclusive.* [Bruce]
- C. **A sinner under the drawing conviction of the Holy Spirit:** *In verses 7-13 the apostle has delineated for us some phase of his experience.... as representative of what must occur in the experience of others.... BUT ...it is not his experience as an unregenerate man in a state of self-complacency and spiritual torpor. He is convicted of sin (vs. 7).... We must conclude, therefore, that this passage is an account of pre-regenerate experience. It is not, however, the period of pre-regenerate self-complacency but his experience after he had been a roused from his spiritual torpor and awakened to a sense of his sin. It is the preparatory and transitional phase of his spiritual pilgrimage...* [Murray]
- D. **Simply an unregenerate person:** *Throughout verses 7-11 the tense is past; Paul is referring to his **preconversion** experience.* [Fee]
- **Verse 9, Sin came to life and I died**—[Fee]—*When the commandment "came" it killed forever the proud Pharisee thanking God that he was not as other men and sure of his merits before God. It killed off the happy sinner...*

SECOND SECTION OPTIONS: (7:13-25)

NOTE: This debate is a very contentious, even emotional, issue. Alexander Whyte: *As often as my attentive bookseller sends me on approval another new commentary on Romans, I immediately turn to the seventh chapter. And if the commentator sets up a man of straw in the seventh chapter, I immediately shut the book. I at once send the book back and say "No, thank you. That is not the man for my hard-earned money" [in Bruce, 151]*

- A. **THE "REGENERATE MAN" VIEW:** [The "misery loves company" view]
1. **Pro Arguments**
- 1) **The present tense** is used in this section, which contrasts with the past tenses throughout the preceding section.... Paul uses **the emphatic "ego"** six times in this passage, which more naturally refers to Paul as he is than to Paul as he was.
- **F. F. Bruce note:** *"In relating his personal experience in 7:14-25 Paul consistently used the present tense whereas he has used the imperfect and aorist tenses. Obviously he was describing his present conflict as a*

Christian with indwelling sin and its continuing efforts to control his daily life.

Here then is the self-portrait of a man who is conscious of the presence and power of indwelling sin in his life.... for all his desire to obey God's law, he is compelled by the malignant power within to disobey it... True, but victory did come to him.... The inability persists only so long as 'I myself'—that is, I in my own strength—fight the battle.

2) **Paul's view of the unbeliever is given in 1:18-3:20.** It is very different from this.

3) **The Christian life** is the theme of chapters 5-8, not that of the unbeliever.

4) **The will is directed toward the good** throughout this passage. That **cannot be said of the unregenerate.**

SUMMARY: ...I do not see how it can be denied that what Paul says refers to the regenerate. This is not the whole story: Romans 7 leads right on into Romans 8. But it is part of the story and an important part. Paul is not talking here about the whole of his experience but what happens when the believer sins.

2. **Con Arguments**

1) **This voice doesn't sound like a believer:** Look at **7:18**, *I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

- How does that statement fit with **6:18**, *You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.* **AND 6:11**, *Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*
- How does that statement fit with **8:3-4**, *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. **AND 8:9**, *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.**

2) **This view doesn't fit the stated purpose of the passage:** Notice that is still trying to explain that the lethal effect of the Law is not the fault of Law but the fault of human weakness.¹

- **Romans 7:13** *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*
- **Romans 7:14** *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin...*

3) **This view mimics the inner struggle of the Christian but goes too far.**

Appropriate Christian "inner struggle" verses would include:

- **Philippians 3:12-14** *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, **I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.** But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

¹ Douglas Moo: [W]e must start our interpretation of this chapter on the right foot by insisting that anthropology—the identity and situation of the "I" of vv. 7-25—is a subordinate issue in Rom. 7.

The main topic is the Mosaic law. Paul makes two basic points. First...Paul argues that a person's bondage to the law must be severed in order that he or she may be put into a new relationship with Christ (7:1-6)... [Second], questions about the origin and nature of the law. These Paul answers in 7:7-25, where he shows that the law is from God, but that it has nevertheless become an unwitting tool of sin, being used to confirm and imprison in death.

- **1 Corinthians 9:26-27** *Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air.* ²⁷ No, **I beat my body and make it my slave** so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.
- **1 Corinthians 3:1-3** *Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-- mere infants in Christ.* ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ **You are still worldly.** For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?
- **Galatians 3:3** *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal **by human effort?***
- **Ephesians 4:22-24** *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self,** which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to **put on the new self,** created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

B. THE “UNREGENERATE MAN” VIEW

1. Pro Arguments

1) This voice doesn't sound like a Christian's experience

- *Sin is not defeated in this section, and it is asked, “Does Paul really hold that Christ cannot overcome sin in the believer?”.... The struggle of which Paul writes here, it is suggested, is the experience of the unregenerate, not necessarily as the unregenerate would describe it but as the believer would regard it as he looked back on it.*
- *The Christian life is one of peace, not inner conflict (cf. ch. 8).*
- *“I know that nothing good lives in me” (v. 18) is not the verdict of the believer.*
- *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (v. 24) is an impossible cry from the one who has been already rescued by Christ.*

2) The Chapter 8 Christian is irreconcilable with the Chapter 7 so-called Christian. Now in 8:1 marks a contrast with the preceding. Chapter 8 with its description of the victorious Christian life is thus set over against chapter 7. Therefore Paul is not here describing the believer.

How could the same person who wrote **chapters 6 and 8** insert the defeatist **chapter 7** between them? It is spiritually schizophrenic.

NOTE: Francke and Bengel: *one who is only “halfway” to true Christian experience—under conviction but not yet “reborn.”* [in Moo, 444]

2. Con Arguments

1) How can an unbeliever say that he ...

- **Verse 18**, *has the desire to do what is good.*
- **Verse 22**, *in my inner being I delight in God's law.*

2) This inner tension does fit Christian experience.

3) The most natural understanding of the text is that it is Paul the Christian talking.

C. THE “PIOUS JEW” VIEW²

² Douglas Moo: *Vv. 14-25 describe the situation of an unregenerate person. Specifically, I think that Paul is looking back, from his Christian understanding, to the situation of himself, and other Jews like him, living under the law of Moses..... Paul...uses “ego” to represent himself, but himself in solidarity with the Jewish people.*

Decisive for me are two sets of contrasts. The first is between the description of the “ego” as “sold under sin” (v. 14b) and Paul's assertion that the believer—every believer—has been “set free from

1. **Pro Arguments**
 - 1) **DITTO VIEW #2: This voice doesn't sound like a Christian's experience**
 - 2) **DITTO VIEW #2: The Chapter 8 Christian is irreconcilable with the Chapter 7 so-called Christian.**
 - 3) **This view best fits the stated purpose of the passage:** Notice that is still trying to explain that the lethal effect of the Law is not the fault of Law but the fault of human weakness.
 - **Romans 7:13** *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*
 - **Romans 7:14** *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin...*
 - 4) **A pious Jew would delight in God's Law, yet would not have the inner power to keep it.** Witness Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus.
2. **Con Arguments**
 - 1) **It still seems that the most natural understanding of the text is that it is Paul the Christian speaking.**
 - 2) **This inner tension does fit Christian experience.** There is no need to seek an alternative explanation.
 - 3) **The "Pious Jew" is primarily in mind, but this includes all who try to live for God in human strength.** Griffith Thomas: *"a Jew under the Mosaic law" is primarily in mind, but he holds also that "The one point of the passage is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin"; it thus refers to anyone, "regenerate or unregenerate."*

TRANSFERABLE INSIGHTS FOR "EVERYMAN" FROM ROMANS 7:

1. God's law is good and holy (v 7, 12-14)
2. Because God's law exists, I am accountable to it. (v. 7)
3. Because of my sin problem within, I break God's Law and am culpable (v. 7-8)
4. Sin dooms me to death (v. 9)
5. Sin involves deception (v. 11)
6. Law serves the purpose of convincing me that I am lost and need help (v. 12-13)
7. Without the power of Jesus within, the best spirituality a person can summon from within is doomed to frustration and wretchedness. (v. 15-24)

A BRIEF HOMILY ON LIVING UP TO WHAT I AM IN CHRIST:

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Have you ever had a habit you hated but couldn't break? You tried and tried and tried to defeat the habit, but it always ended up defeating you instead. I had a habit like that. I used to bite my nails unmercifully. It started sometime in grade school and persisted

sin" (6:18, 22). The second contrast is that between the state of the "ego," "imprisoned by the law [or power] of sin" (v. 23), and the believer, who has been "set free from the law of sin and death (8:2). This means that the situation depicted in vv. 14-25 cannot be that of the "normal" Christian, nor of an immature Christian.

I do not, then, deny that Christians struggle with sin—I deny only that this passage describes that struggle.

I must say again that the conflict Paul describes here [v. 15] is indicative of slavery to the power of sin as a way of life (v. 14b) that is not typical, nor even possible, for the Christian.

Paul, reflecting on his own experience, focuses in this passage on a "pious" Jew—one who took his religion seriously and sought to do what was required of him.

This is--Paul [in] his pre-Christian situation, as a Jew who reverences the Mosaic law but finds that the power of sin is too strong to enable him to comply with the demands of that law.

until sometime in my college years. I chewed my nails down to the quick and beyond. I chewed them till they bled. I chewed them till the flesh on the tips of my fingers cracked open. My mom bought some foul tasting polish made for nail biters. The idea was that when a person began to bite a nail, the awful taste would deter. I just licked it off and kept on biting. That's just one of a number of stories I could tell you about the weakness of my will.

- B. I wish that doing my best was as easy as making up my mind to do something. But I have made up my mind to do many things that never got done, or never got done thoroughly. That really bugs me! Anybody out there have the same kind of problem?
- C. Is there any hope for us weak-willed folks? And by the way, in view of the perfection of Christ, even the most disciplined among us are comparatively weak-willed.
- D. I'm happy and encouraged to say that the Bible does offer hope. To be filled with God's hope, we have to believe **three great truths** about God's laws.

THREE GREAT TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S LAWS/RULES

I. Rules Are Good

- 1. The Old Testament Law is a list of rules. It covered all kinds of things:
 - how to worship God,
 - how to treat other people,
 - how to handle sin,
 - how to do personal hygiene,
 - how to discipline your rebellious son,
 - how to handle debt,
 - how to farm your fields and harvest your crops.And the Apostle Paul says about this great body of rules, that...
 - it is holy, righteous and good (**Romans 7:12**)
 - it is spiritual (**Romans 7:14**)
- 2. Now, not all rules are created equal. There are some rules that are bad, for instance the rules of legalism. The Bible has nothing good to say about them, in fact, about those rules we read things like, "*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*" (**Colossians 2:23**)
- 3. I'm glad our society has rules. Sometimes when Christians push for new legislation they are met with the protest that "You can't legislate morality." What a ridiculous statement. Of course you can legislate morality. We live with it every day. We have laws prohibiting theft, rape, slander, abuse, child support and a thousand other things that are all issues of morality. And it's a good thing or we'd live in the midst of absolute chaos.
- 4. **Romans 7:12** again, "*So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*"

II. But Rules Provoke

- 1. **Galatians 5:17**, "*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*"
- 2. Some rules are easy, like *don't murder*. Some are harder, like the one that nailed Paul, *don't covet*.

If I said, "*For the next half hour I don't want anyone in this room to hit the person sitting in front of you,*" that would be easy to do, unless this was a fifth grade boys SS class. But if I said, "*I don't want anyone to think of anything except God for the next 30 minutes,*" that would be hard to do.

Like the early circuit riding preacher who met a boastful farmer. The preacher was commenting on how hard it was to pray without thinking of other things. The braggart protested, saying that he often spent hours at a time contemplating the glory of God and thinking of nothing else. The preacher said, "OK, if you can get down on your knees right now and pray thinking only of God and nothing else, you can have my horse."

The fellow immediately dropped to his knees, closed his eyes and started praying. After just a few minutes he looked up and asked, "Does that include the saddle?"

In **Romans 7:7-8** Paul explains that at one point in his life, probably as a child, he didn't even think about coveting. But then he became aware of what coveting was and that the law said, "*Do not covet.*" And it was as if a dam broke in his heart and he was filled with coveting. He doesn't say what it was he coveted, but he coveted big-time. The Law didn't help him stop coveting, it just provoked coveting.

Every one of us has his own weaknesses. There are some temptations that may rake you over the coals and they don't even phase me. But there are sins that trouble me that you don't even think about. But every one of us has his weaknesses and we know how some rules just seem to beg to be broken.

3. **Like diet programs.** I was looking over a Jenny Craig ad the other day. It has a stunning picture of Kristine Loiacona who lost 34 lbs. in 12¼ months. There is a little footnote at the bottom of the page, though, that says, "Results not typical." The ad says that their new "ABC Program" is about beautiful changes and starting it is as easy as ABC. I'll bet the easy part ends after you write the check. You have to follow a careful regimen of what you eat, start exercising a minimum of 3 days a week and drink 64 ounces of water daily.
4. Just like the Law, diet programs are good, but they don't come hard-wired with discipline and sometimes they just make you want to break them.
5. You see, we're not just weak, we're sinful. **Alexander Solzhenitsyn** was right on when he said, "*The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart.* (in the Gulag Archipelago)
6. Sinners are rebels at heart and rebels hate rules. Eve could have had fruit salad with a hundred different ingredients, but she was drawn that fateful day to the one fruit God said was off-limits. Don't be too hard on Eve. We all do the same thing.
7. The effect of law upon us reveals what we are made of—"The law," says [Augustine], "*is not in fault, but our evil and wicked nature; even as a heap of lime is still and quiet, until water is poured thereon, but then it begins to smoke and burn, not from the fault of the water, but from the nature and kind of the lime, which will not endure water; whereas, if oil, instead, be poured upon it, then it lies still, and burns not; even so it is with the law and the gospel.* --Quoted in **Martin Luther's Table Talk, #243.**

III. And Rules Condemn

Romans 7:10: "*...the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.*"

Romans 7:24, "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from the body of this death?*"

1. The ancient philosophers knew something of what Paul is saying here:
 - a. **Philo** speaks of the body as "*that composition of clay, that moulded statue, that house so close to the soul, which it never lays aside but carries like a corpse from the cradle to the grave - what a grievous burden!*"
 - b. **Epictetus** speaks of himself as "*a poor soul shackled to a corpse.*"
2. Now we have to be careful here. The Bible doesn't actually teach that the body is something evil. The early cult of the Gnostics mistakenly taught that the body was evil, and it led them to two extremes. Some Gnostics felt they had to defeat the body so they became ascetics, depriving their bodies and living lives of harsh and rigid self-denial. Others felt that since the body was evil anyway, it didn't matter what the body did, so they lived lives of sensual pleasure and indulgence, glad that their separate, holy spirits were untouched by the nasty things their bodies did.
3. The body itself is just a tool, but it is a tool that sin loves to use. And it is a weak tool that gets tired and hungry and hurt. In your heart of hearts you want to get up at 5:30 a.m. to have a half hour with God in Bible reading and prayer. But that tired body gropes out from under the covers to hit the snooze button because you're so tired and the bed is so warm.
4. And it's not just the body's weakness we have to worry about. These spirits of ours have a perverse will of their own. Whenever there are rules, you are going to break one. Take

speed limit signs, for instance. I have a better record than most. I've been driving 40 years and have just one speeding ticket. There are 3 reasons for that:

- 1) The grace of God. There are times I should have had a ticket and I just didn't get caught. Maybe that's not the grace of God at all. Maybe it's just dumb luck.
- 2) The fear of God. Generally I do keep to the speed limit because I understand God's view of laws and I don't want to get in trouble with Him.
- 3) My skin-flint nature. Speeding tickets are such a waste of money.

But when I'm out on a clear stretch of lonely highway and that sign says 55 and I want to get somewhere, I just hate that sign and I really want to disobey it.

5. So, you see, because of our sinfulness, the law just gets us into trouble. It doesn't bring life. It actually brings death. It condemns us. **Romans 8:3** states it bluntly, "*the law was powerless*" to make us good.

6. That's why Paul interrupts his litany of defeatism in **Romans 7** with his cry of victory in **verse 25**, *Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!* And that's why **Romans 8** is such incredibly good news.

Romans 8:1-4 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

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