

July 27, 2014  
Pentecost 7

*"Our Struggle with Sin"*

---

## ROMANS 7:18-25A

---

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. {<sup>18</sup> Or my flesh} For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

I don't understand it. I just don't understand it. What is going on in my life? There is a part of me that wants to do what God wants. I know what is right. There is another part of me that wants to do what God does not want. I know what is wrong. I wish I could say that I always hate doing what is wrong, but there are moments I actually love doing what is wrong more than I love God. I just don't understand it.

The Apostle Paul also admits to having a hard time understanding himself when he says, "I do not understand what I do." He shares his deepest feelings and emotions as he struggles with this problem of sin in his life. He uses the words "I" and "me" and "myself" and "mine" over thirty times.

Please, please, please do not think he is being overly emotional and dramatic with these well known words. This intense struggle he experienced in his life is exactly what you and I experience hour by hour and minute in our lives. Let's listen more closely to what Paul tells us about our struggle with sin.

### **What a struggle**

It is so hard to understand why I do what I don't want to do and why I don't do what I want to do. As Paul confesses, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Why do I do things I hate that I know are wrong? Why do I fail to do the things I love that I know are right? I know why I put food into my mouth. I am hungry. I know why I drink a glass of water. I am thirsty. I know why I tell my wife that I love her because I truly love her. But why, why, why do I do things I hate and fail to do the things I love? That was the daily dilemma Paul experienced in his life and that is the dilemma you and I face each day of our lives here on this earth.

It is so hard to understand why I open my life to sin because this is totally out of character with who I am as a child of God. I am born again by water and the Holy Spirit to a saving faith in my Lord Jesus Christ. Through Jesus all my sin is washed away. I know what he has done to rescue and save me. Minute by minute the Holy Spirit testifies to me that I am child of my heavenly Father. And yes, I love my Lord and God with all my heart and soul and mind, and so do you. One of my favorite hymns begins with the words, "Lord, You I love with all my heart." You and I share this intense personal desire to live for Christ. Yet we open our lives up to sin. This is so out of character with who we are as dear children of our heavenly Father.

Paul knows that this sin does not originate from his desire to live as a child of his heavenly Father. "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but is sin living in me." When I see sin popping up in my life I need to be shocked because I know in my heart of hearts that this is not the real me. This is not who I am as a child of God. Where does it come from then? Paul says, "It is sin living in me." He confesses "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature." He sees the root of his sin in his sinful nature or sinful flesh.

We see evidence of this sinful flesh in Adam and Eve after the fell into sin. When the Lord asks Adam "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" he responds with the words, "The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." I was watching a little girl, about one year's old, interacting with her older brother while I was waiting in the airport. He was teasing her and she could take it no more. She not only pinched his bare arm, but gave it a twist to make it hurt. Her parents did not have to send her to special classes on how to pinch or hit or bite or scream. Every child is hardwired by their sinful flesh to hit and scratch and bite and even say, "I hate you." How do you explain Cain killing his brother Abel? How do you explain terrorist making bombs that include nails and other sharp objects to that increase the level of destruction and suffering? How do you explain someone aiming a missile into the sky to take out an airplane filled with passengers en route to family vacations? The prophet Jeremiah had this to say about the people of his time who made their mark in history by worshiping Baal and other false gods that included sacrificing their children. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

Every single Christian who has ever lived on this earth has lived with the constant ongoing struggle with the sinful flesh that still is present in their lives. Our sins are washed away through Jesus. We wear his beautiful robe of righteousness. We are saints of God through Jesus. Yet we still struggle with sinful thoughts that lead to sinful actions.

Listen more to what Paul says about his struggle which is our struggle. "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 what 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." I totally agree with what Paul says here. When I see sin pop up in my life, I can say with full confidence, "That is not the real me. That is not who I really am." I am not someone who wants to turn my back on the Lord and open my life to sin. The real me is someone who wants to say with Paul "For me to live is Christ." That's the real me. Yet sin lives in me. It is there. We never know when it will rear its ugly head and lead us down a path that we have said, "I will never do that again in my life."

The life of a Christian is indeed a struggle. Here is how Paul further describes this struggle. "So I find this law a 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 in my members." Paul, I totally agree with what you are saying. I too delight in God's law. I love to see fruit being produced in my life because I am a branch attached to Christ the vine. Galatians 5 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." How I long for these fruits in my life done not rescue myself from the problem of sin, but done out of love for Christ who has redeemed and washed me clean by his blood.

Dear Christian, the closer we walk with the Lord and the more we want to serve him in thanksgiving for being saved and spared from the wrath to come, the more devastated we will be when sin pops up in our lives. Then we will find ourselves crying out in pain and suffering with Paul, "O wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death?" Then we will feel like we are waging war. Sin will make us feel imprisoned in a very dark place. So we pound on our chest as the man did when he went up to the temple to pray, not boasting of our the good lives we have lived, but humbling beating the chest and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

A man once told a pastor that he didn't like going to church because every church he ever visited had something wrong with it whether it was the music or the pastor or the people. To this the pastor replied, "Well, if you ever find the perfect church, please don't join it." The man looked perplexed and the pastor continued. "No, if you find the perfect church, don't join it, because you will ruin it."

Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church is made of people who are saints washed in Jesus' blood. You have been baptized into Christ. You have put on Christ. You are perfect and holy in God's eyes through Jesus. You are justified which means, "Declared not guilty." Yet, you are at the same time sinners. When Paul describes his spiritual condition here in Romans 7 you are the first to jump up and say, "That's me. That's me. That describes my struggles with sin to the 't."

### **What a victory**

The more we see our wretched condition, the more we appreciate the victory we have in Christ Jesus our Savior. Paul calls himself a wretched man. He cries out for rescue. Then he bursts forth in joyful proclamation: "Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thanks be to God. Jesus has come to rescue us and set us from. The next verses in Romans 8 begin with the powerful proclamation: "Therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The sinful flesh leads me down to the path of sin. I cry out in pain, "What a wretched person I am!" Then the Holy Spirit takes me down the path of hope and points me to Jesus. The Holy Spirits leads me to hear his cry from the cross, "It is finished." I stand in the tomb of Jesus and it is empty. If every sin had not been forgiven, then the heavenly Father would not have raised his Son to life again because he would still be guilty of our sin, yes of my sin.

In our gospel for today our Lord Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give your rest." Weary and burden, beaten down by sin. That's the story of my life and your life. Jesus says, "Come to me. I have rest. I have peace that this world cannot give."

When our heavenly Father rested on the seventh day, he did so not because he was tired after six days of creation. He rested because his work was done. It was finished. There was nothing left to do. The book of Hebrews encourages us to find our rest or our completed payment for sin in Jesus. "There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work just as God did for his." During our trip to Colorado we see some of the beauty of God's creation. As beautiful as this work of God is, the work that Jesus did to make full satisfaction for all the sin of your past life is even greater. We find our rest in Christ and his Word for us. Jesus is a the right hand of God interceding for you. He pleads for your forgiveness and mine. He is there actively standing by your side to strengthen you to say no to sin when it pops up in you. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God. Jesus has and Jesus will. He carries us close to his heart. Amen.