



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Struggle is Real

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Romans 7:13-25

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¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ 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. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

(Pastor prays)

No Christian lives in continual victory over sin. And here before us this morning is the inner conflict that is characteristic of the true Christian. This is a conflict that is possible only in the person in whom the Holy Spirit is active and whose mind is being renewed under the saturating power of the Gospel of Jesus. Because we are in Christ, we love God's law; but because we are of the flesh, we can't consistently obey it. And it can be terribly frustrating. You feel that in this passage. I think that's why I love it so much. This is Paul's autobiography and also the experience of every true Christian. I say that because even though he struggles, Paul shows the marks of true Christianity right here in this raw passage. In verse 15 he says he hates sin. In verses 19 and 21 he wishes to do what's good. In verse 22 he delights in God's law. In verse 18

he regrets his sin and in verse 25 Paul sees that deliverance is in Christ alone. And in verse 25b he understands that this is a life-long struggle. What was true of Paul is true of every one of us that are in Christ. There was a time when Paul was exclusively a sinner. There will be a time when he is exclusively a saint. But right now, in this passage, Paul has put into words the struggle that every true believer knows and feels and battles. We live between the times, in two worlds. The apostle Paul would be the very first to tell you that the Christian life is hard. He likens it to a "race to be run," a "battle to be fought." And following Christ is pressing on to the goal of God's upward call in Christ Jesus. And today I want to use this passage to encourage you in the fight and to let you know that you are not alone in this battle. God the father loves you, God the son has purchased you and, Chapter 8 tells us, God the spirit will sustain you. In the meantime what does this passage teach us?

In Christ We Need to Know What We Are Up Against

We need to know our sin

This is what Paul said earlier in Chapter 7. And we talked about it some last week. Here in verse 13, he takes the idea even further as he speaks of God's law being good. Notice what Paul says about sin in verse 13. There are 2 things. ¹³*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

Sin produces death, so it's a delicious poison. You drink it, it tastes great and then burns your esophagus and stomach; and like acid it burns you from the inside out. It's deadly. But then he goes further in verse 13 and, about middle way through the verse, he says, *in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

We are right to look at God's law for moral guidance. We are wrong to look at it for saving power. We are so numb to the sinful world we live in that we don't often enough see our own sin as utterly evil. Evil so bad and so offensive to God that only the blood of Jesus could stop the judgment of it. If Moses, the most humble and godly man to ever live, was punished because he struck a rock twice, how much more do I deserve? This is important because if you don't understand the depth of your sin, you can never love the ocean of God's grace. You won't wonder at God's love for you at the cross. You won't be secure in His affections. We need to

know our sin, not in some morbid, introspective way. We need to know it so that we might embrace the full measure of God's grace for us at the cross of Jesus. We need to know our sin.

We need to know ourselves

It's an unflattering thing to look into the mirror of scripture. I think that's what Paul is realizing here. Look how he describes himself in verse 14. We know the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh. Paul says, "Although I'm saved, I'm still carnal, of the flesh." It's important to see that Paul doesn't say, "I'm in the flesh" or "controlled by the flesh." The law is spiritual but the nature of man is unspiritual.

The three areas we are tempted in are: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. They all appeal to that side of us. Paul says the same sort of thing down in verse 18. ¹⁸*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.* That's not to say that we aren't altruistic or kind or love our parents or nice to children. He's talking about the righteousness that God demands; the holiness that is required of us and yet we can't live up to. Paul even kicks it up a notch down in verse 24 when he says, *wretched man that I am.*

Wretched. That's not really a term you hear much in polite circles. If you were single and registering on a dating app of some kind and you had to describe yourself, you would not say, "I'm wretched." It is a word used twice in the New Testament. The other time is when Jesus is talking to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3. That's the church that was lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and He spit it out of His mouth. Revelation 3:17 says, ¹⁷*For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* When we see our sin and our true selves as being of the flesh, sold into sin, having nothing good in us and wretched, then we can truly sing, *Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a Wretch like me.* We've seen our sin and we know ourselves.

We need to know our struggle

Do you struggle with sin? Do you fight it to the point of anguish and exhaustion? Do you wrestle sin by the power of God? Paul presents the Christian life as a constant struggle in this passage. I'm so glad this passage is in the Bible. It shows us self-frustration. Notice in verse 15 Paul says, *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* Anybody here identify with that? Paul writes the same sort of thing in verse 19. *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* This is the conflict of a

saved person who knows and loves and chases and longs for God's word. He even says so in verse 22, *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.* I love the Bible and studying the Bible. I have my devotion and love to worship, but I still want to cuss when somebody cuts me off in traffic.

Paul loves God's law and wants to obey God's law. And when he sins, when you sin, it's against what you believe and have believed. It's against your desire to please God and honor Christ. And Paul is saying here: the law can't help me, only the power of the indwelling spirit of God can change things. I think that verse 21 probably sums it up most clearly for me at least. ²¹ *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.* It's what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:17, *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

The Christian life is hard and will only get harder publicly and privately. Whether it's the LGBTQ agenda eroding the boundaries of God's good creation or politicians seeking to penalize the church for believing and preaching the Bible, we have an increasingly difficult struggle in the public square. But the Christian has private battles too, with the indwelling sin, real addictions, sexual damage, unrelenting shame, spiritual laziness, and stubborn bitterness. They are all there, even among the most well versed, well put together Believer. It's why we need the gospel preached to us daily; to see my sin and know it. I need to realize the danger it puts me in, to see myself as wretched and in need of God's grace given to me at the cross. And I need to realize my biggest struggle is not externally, my biggest struggle is with myself.

Paul knew that. Look again at the statement he makes and the question he asked in verse 24. *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* Look at the question - Paul has come to the end of himself. This is where we've got to get. Matthew 5: 3 says, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Blessed are the bankrupt, wretched, broken down, addicted, overwhelmed and anxious. Blessed are those who mourn; they will be comforted. Notice the question: *Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me?* Notice Paul doesn't say *what must I do.* But *who will deliver me?* We need to know our sin, ourselves and our struggle.

We need to know our Savior

So in verse 24 Paul asks, *who will deliver me from this body of death*. And in verse 25 he gives us the answer - Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul takes us to the goodness of God found in Christ. The grace of God in Jesus at the cross saves us, sanctifies us and secures us. This eases my worried mind, calms my tormented heart and makes me realize that, although I will fight sin my whole life, I can be secure in the grace of God found at the cross.

(Pastor prays)