

6. This passage speaks to some people who need salvation. It also speaks to some who are in the process of sanctification. Briefly summarize the message to each group of people. Finally, share the point of the message that hugely impacts you.

Notes for Lesson 7

Question 2 (“The Christian's Struggle with Sin” Romans 7:14-25)

Reading Romans 7:14-25 makes one wonder, “Why does God allow the flesh to remain in the believer?” It almost sounds like Paul was raising the flag of defeat in this section. But Paul was not writing these words to excuse defeat to sin. He was laying the foundation of this struggle in order to explain the victory that can be ours through the Holy Spirit. God allows these struggles in order to humble us and to make us dependent upon Him.

The point Paul was driving home is that the victory we want over sin comes only through struggle and not by some secret formula for success or by some easy way of avoidance. I think that it is at the point of struggle that the American church particularly needs to hear what Paul was saying because we hate conflict and are usually trying to avoid it by any means possible.

For example, we try to come up with easy formulas that will bring us release from the struggle against sin. We look for that one book that will fix all of our problems. We look for that three-step or four-step process that will remove the difficulties. We come up with trite sayings like, “Let go and let God.”

So when we find the Christian life hard, we assume that we are missing the right formula. Someone should be able to tell us what it is. If we do not find it, we tend to get angry with our instructors or even with God.

The bottom line is that we see the sanctification process of trials, tribulations, and the war against the flesh as an intrusion. It is easy to become quitters. We try to dull the pain by a variety of means. We cannot imagine that these difficulties could possibly be from God.

Question 3 (“The Christian's Struggle with Sin” Romans 7:14-25)

Think for a moment about what God said to Satan concerning Job in Job 1:6-8. *Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 8The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."*

Consider that God is bringing to Satan's attention the person of Job. Satan is the accuser of God's people, the enemy of God's children. God Himself seems to bait Satan to turn his attention toward Job. We find in the book of Job that God is sovereign even over the actions of Satan and uses his attempts to bring downfall to the people of God as an avenue of sanctification.

That is the message of Job. God caused the extreme hardship of Job in order to accomplish for Job a closer relationship with Him. In like manner, our hardships, trials, and struggles against sin are all from God, designed to grow us in sanctification. That is what we will continue to learn in Romans 7 and 8.

Question 4 ("Romans 8 Introduction" Romans 8:1-4)

Paul articulated the problem of his struggle with sin in verse 14, *"We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."*

James Boice wrote this, "What is sanctification? Is it an awareness of how good we are becoming? Or is it a growing sense of how sinful the old nature really is, so we will constantly turn to and depend upon Jesus Christ? If we are mature in Christ, we know it is the latter." Paul lamented in 7:24, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"*

There is a rather gruesome passage in the epic poem entitled *The Aeneid*, written by Virgil during the time of ancient Rome. The passage is as follows:

The living and the dead at his command
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand,
Till, choked with stench, in loathed embraces tied,
The lingering wretches pined away and died.

It is a description of a form of torture in which the tormenters fastened a dead body to a condemned criminal, tying them shoulder to shoulder, face to face, thigh to thigh, and arm to arm. There is another source that verifies this also was the practice of Etruscan pirates. It describes how a living man or woman was tied to a rotting corpse, face to face, mouth to mouth, and limb to limb so that each part of the living body corresponded with the matching putrefying counterpart. Virgil ends this grotesque passage with, "Shackled to their rotting double, the man or woman was left to decay."

No doubt, Paul knew of this method of putting criminals to death. The words of Paul in Romans 7 bring to mind this grim practice of carrying around a "dead body," much like a man condemned to death. It's as if Paul felt that something dead was strapped to him and accompanied him wherever he went.

Paul was expressing the experience of every believer. Even though we long for purity and holiness, yet at times we feel bound to the "dead body" of our old sinful nature. Even though we know that we are "new creatures" in Christ and that our physical bodies are not in themselves evil, the tendency to sin is always carried around with us. We often feel like Paul, that we do what we do not want to do, and we do not do the things that we want to do. How often do we cry out like Paul, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"*

Question 5 ("Romans 8 Introduction" Romans 8:1-4)

We need to keep in mind that at times Paul referred to himself, on one hand, as he fundamentally was as the new man in Christ who only desired to be pleasing to God. On the other hand, Paul at times referred to his actions in the flesh, as he struggled with the flesh. In fact, he described these two realms of operating in Romans 7:25. *"So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God [that is the new self], but on the other hand, with my flesh [I serve] the law of sin [that is Paul as he operates in the flesh]."*

John Stott said this about this struggle, "This, then, is what I know about myself . . . that the flesh still dwells in me, that no good dwells in the flesh, and that even as a Christian, if I am left to myself, the flesh brings me into captivity."

So Paul concluded that within the new self who wants to do good, there is the principle of evil always present, always tempting, always drawing away from godliness. This principle of evil is called the "flesh," the "body of sin," and "this body of death." But Paul does not stop there. Even though he laments this ongoing struggle, he ultimately ends with a shout of victory in Romans 7:24-25a *"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

Question 6 ("Romans 8 Introduction" Romans 8)

This passage speaks to some of you of salvation. Maybe you think that you are too evil to come to the Lord. That is an excuse. God has known of your evil from the very beginning. Nothing surprises Him. He calls you to repent and trust in what Christ has done for you. Do not let your pride prevent the salvation of your soul and cost you a never-ending judgement. Do not let your pride keep you from engaging what this life is all about. It is all about the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage speaks to some of you in terms of sanctification. You have struggled with awful sin in your life. You feel overwhelmed. Paul said, "I sin when I do not want to sin, and I ignore righteousness when that is the very thing I want to do. Wretched man that I am." I too feel overwhelmed at times.

The message to you is four-fold.

First, there is no condemnation. The law of sin in your flesh would tell you that you are condemned. Do not believe that lie.

Second, how does not being condemned impact you? The Holy Spirit has set you free from the domination of the flesh. The flesh would say, "No, you are still under my control." The Holy Spirit of Christ says, "No, I have set you free."

Third, how is it that you are not condemned? God Himself became a man and died in your place. That is who Jesus Christ is: the God/Man. The eternal, all-powerful God accomplished our freedom on the Cross. My friend, there is no reason to question the power of the Cross and the resurrection of God.

Fourth, for what purpose are you not condemned? Why did God choose to save and sanctify you? You are being sanctified so that you would be perfect before God and be saved from eternal destruction and gain the pleasures of heaven in the triune God's presence forever. Not only that but also you are not condemned so that you would begin to live a transformed life here and now, and all this puts Christ on display.

We are to the praise of the glory of His grace.