

Romans 7:14-25

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[0 : 00] So if you remember last week I cut the talk in half. And so if you were here last week you'll see we dealt with past experience in verses 7-13 and in our journey in Romans we come to chapter 7 in verses 14-25.

So if you remember how we started last week we talked about it didn't we? Desiring to read and pray. To open the word when you're sitting at home and to pray. You have that desire and then there's suddenly this wave of great fatigue that comes over you and you find yourself instead watching the one show or something like that.

Or it's a monthly prayer gathering. Actually you thought through the day I'd really love to go but you have your dinner and you just feel slovenly. You feel like you can't move. There's this irresistible wave that comes over you of tiredness.

And we often find that don't we? That when we desire good well we struggle and we battle. And that's where we come to this morning this lunchtime in the apostles present experience.

I want you to notice in the way that he talks from verses 7-13 he uses the past tense. But in verses 14-25 Paul now shifts the tense from the past to the present.

[1 : 20] And Paul now shares his experience of the sin and of law as a Christian. I wonder whether it struck you. I wonder whether it struck you anything as surprising in the passage that I read.

Wasn't it striking that Paul is very conscious of the gap between his good desires and his bad performance? His good desires and his bad performance. Look with me at verse 15.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do. But what I hate I do. Look at verse 18. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me. That is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out.

Or verse 19. For I do not do the good I want to do but the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing. Is that really Paul the apostle speaking as a believer? As a Christian?

Now you may know, you probably are aware that this passage is often quite controversial. There are some people that find these descriptions so shocking that Paul must have been talking about his experience before he became a Christian in these verses.

[2 : 42] Surely they say, Paul's life before conversion. This must be him speaking as an upright Jew. Struggling to obey the law but failing.

And to that I would want to say, but why would Paul use the present tense? Why would Paul use the present tense if he is describing his experience at the time? It just doesn't make sense.

Because when we get to verse 22, Paul says, for I delight in the law. In my inner being I delight in God's law.

That's not the true of the unbeliever. That's only true of the Christian. That's chapter 8 and verse 7 of Romans makes clear. Now I take it that the end of Romans 7 really is a description of the experience as a Christian and as a believer.

And that is a great encouragement to you and I this lunchtime. Because if we are honest, don't we recognise the same pattern in our own experience? We do desire to do what is right.

[3 : 51] We desire to please God. And this emphasis on desire is very, very strong in Romans. Look with me at verse 15. I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do, I do not do. Look at verse 16. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

Verse 18. For I have, in the middle of the verse, the desire to do that which is good. Verse 19. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do.

And then verse 20. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is I, it is no longer I who do it. But it is sin living in me that does it. Do you see the emphasis there is on desire in Romans 7?

We can relate to that. But time and again, I don't know about you, but we find that our obedience falls short. Now Paul isn't saying here, and we must be careful.

[4 : 55] Paul is not saying that the life of a Christian is 100% failure. In living as God wants. He is not saying that. Elsewhere, he holds up his life as an example for other believers to follow.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 10. And he says, you know all about my way of life. My love, my patience, my endurance. But what he is saying is that all the time there is this gap between the good he wants to do, and what he actually ends up doing time and again.

And which of us can't relate to that tendency? The desire to pray for 5 or 10 minutes, and then that overwhelming wave of tiredness comes over you. So instead you settle down to watch another episode of Paule Off, or whatever it is.

I met with a new Christian the other day. It was delightful, but he was so disheartened. And he was so disheartened as a new Christian, because he desired to live for the Lord Jesus.

In every area of his life, and yet he was failing to live in that way. And perhaps you've got to the end of the day recently, and you've looked back, and in despair, you've thought, I do not understand why I did the things I did.

[6 : 10] Why was I so unkind to that person? Why did I do that? That isn't how I want to live. That wasn't me.

I don't know why I did that. And perhaps your sense of failure has left you wondering, am I really a Christian? Well, take heart from this passage. The Apostle Paul could relate to what you're going through.

The great theologian J.I. Packer, Jim Packer, wrote this. He said, For my part, I know that I have never framed a prayer, preached a sermon, written a book, shown love to my wife, cared for my children, supported my friends, in short, done anything at all, which I do not, in retrospect, realise could and should have been done better.

Or I have ever lived a day without leaving undone some things which I ought to have done. But it does leave a question, doesn't it? The question for you and I is, why? Why as Christians do we experience this performance gap?

Didn't we learn in chapter 6 and verse 22, we learned, now I have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of God.

[7 : 25] Now that we do belong to God, if we are Christians, why is life such a struggle with sin? Well, we turn from the reality we experience to the reasons for it.

And there are three reasons for it. And the first reason that we feel this tension in us, is because there are two residents. When we get to chapter 8 and verse 9, we're going to read that the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you.

It's an amazing thing. If you are a Christian this lunchtime, the Spirit of God dwells in you. But the Spirit of God is not the only resident.

Can you look at chapter 7 and verse 17? That passage for today, Paul says about the wrong that he does. Look at verse 17. As it is, I know longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

And that phrase is repeated in verse 20. Can you see that at the end of the verse? It is sin living in me. Sin that dwells in me. To remember the picture, we've seen it a couple of times in Romans already.

[8 : 33] Sin is a powerful master. And in these chapters of Romans, as a Christian, we have been freed from sin. Sin is no longer your master. Sin can no longer condemn you to death.

Sin still dwells within him. Sin still dwells within him. If you like, sin is no longer running the company anymore.

Sin is no longer running the company. But he's certainly not left with a link. If you like, there's a new CEO who's been installed on the top floor of Percival House.

But sin has barricaded himself into an office on the third floor. And he's doing his best. Doing his best to disrupt all the business operations. It's that sort of idea.

I love G.K. Chesterton's comment when he says that if a rhinoceros were to enter this restaurant now, there is no denying that that rhinoceros would have great power.

[9 : 36] But I should be the first to rise and assure him that he had no authority whatsoever. That's a brilliant quote, isn't it? That's so helpful. It's a very important distinction.

Sin has great, great power but no authority in the life of a Christian. Sin may have been dethroned in our lives.

But it is not destroyed. It does not have an authority but it still has power. And that is a sobering truth that you and I need to face up to as Christians.

I don't know if you've seen the film Resident Evil. I've not seen it. I've got no desire to see it but the title is a good one for sin, isn't it? Resident Evil. That is to say sin dwells within us.

And as Christians he will dwell within us as long as we are in this world. Sin never leaves home. Never sleeps. Sin never takes a day off. Sin is always there and always active.

[10:36] And it's because of this unwelcome resident in our lives that we find ourselves like Paul doing things that we don't want to do. And we conclude with Paul it is no longer I who do it but it is sin that dwells in me.

Now let me just put a little caveat in there. This is not denying personal responsibility. Perhaps it seems to be the perfect excuse to say well it wasn't me it was sin dwelling within me.

That would not cut much ice would it in the court of law. Well I didn't steal that car my lord. It wasn't me it was sin living in me.

I don't think the judge would accept that would he? But I think what Romans 7 does so helpfully here is it recognises the complexity of our make up as Christians.

Though we will find ourselves exasperated and echoing verse 15 I don't understand my own actions. I don't know why I did that. And we will find ourselves crying out with the apostle Paul in verse 24 wretched man that I am wretched woman that I am.

[11:50] Isn't verse 21 so true to experience? So I find this law at work in me. This principle at work in me.

Although I want to do good evil is right there with me. So whenever you want to do something good say you settle down you think I'm actually going to do some Bible study and pray tonight and out of nowhere your mind is suddenly flooded with lustful thoughts.

And you think where on earth did that come from? Or you try to concentrate listening to a sermon and suddenly you feel very sleepy. Very sleepy.

You do a good act of service and suddenly you find yourself puffed up with pride and you're resentful and you're resentful at other people not pulling their weight around that.

Do you find that? Why is it always me that has to do it? In his very, very helpful book called The Enemy Within Chris Lungard who's basically rewritten John Owen into English he says there is no spiritual duty nothing godly that you can set yourself to in which you won't feel the wind of sin's resistance in your face.

[13:08] The most striking and controversial phrase is verse 14 in the passage. In verse 14 where Paul writes we know that the law is spiritual but I am unspiritual sold as a slave to sin.

It says at the end of the verse sold as a slave to sin. How can that be true of a Christian? How can that be true of a Christian? You remember chapter 6 of Romans we've learned that we've been set free from sin as our master.

Well this brings us to the two natures. The two natures. In this passage within Paul the Christian there are two natures, two spheres of operation if you like.

Let's look at verse 22. For in my inner being I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in me waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

So you have the old nature referred to as my members. Verse 14 it's called the flesh. Verse 24 it's called the body of death.

[14:31] So you've got this old nature but you've also got this new nature which is referred to in verse 23 as my inner being my mind. And so the Christian is a complex person.

What is made of these two natures? So I'm in Christ I'm a new creation I'm a new person. I'm someone in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells.

But when God moved in sin did not move out. Sin is no longer in the center control center of my being but it is retreated to the flesh.

Look at verse 18. So I know the good itself does not dwell in me. That is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out.

Again he has to clarify he says that is in my flesh. He's aware of these true natures. So he's saying it is in my old nature that sin still is at work. And it is in my old nature that I am still sold under sin.

[15:40] And it wages war on the new nature. And so what we find here is that in the Christian there is civil war. There is ongoing conflict.

There is a daily struggle a tug of war. There is a lack of integration that we would experience as people which is unavoidable. You know why do I have these two natures now?

Well that brings us to the third point which is we live in the two ages. With the death and resurrection of Jesus a new age has come.

the new age of the eternal kingdom. That has now begun and if you are a Christian this morning if you are in Christ you belong to the new age.

But for the time being you also still live in the old order. In the old age. The old order of this world. We still live in these bodies don't we?

[16:39] which have the sinful nature pre programmed on the machine. We still live in these bodies that suffer from decay and death and so we are caught in the overlap of the two ages.

They are not two ages that are separate. They overlap with one another. And we live in the tension of the now. God's kingdom has come now. But we also live in the tension of the not yet.

God's kingdom has not come fully. And that is why we have this experience. And so Paul cries out in verse 24. O wretched man I am who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death.

Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. Deliverance will come.

Deliverance will come but only when this creation and this body of ours are redeemed at the return of Christ.

And in the meantime, verse 24, we groan. We groan. In the meantime we live with this frustrating lack of integration as people.

[17:50] A lack of integration which is summed up in verse 25. So I then, myself, in my mind, am a slave to God's law but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Now let me finish with two implications. Firstly, I want you to be aware of teaching that denies this inner conflict. Beware of teaching that denies this inner conflict is normal Christian experience.

There is lots of it that denies that. Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, I keep going if you switch on the God channel at pretty much any time of the day and you'll find people that deny this inner conflict that it's normal Christian experience.

Beware of that people that deny it. This is normal Christian experience. Let me give you just two examples from churches. John Wesley who was a great Christian man.

He was a great Christian man but he looked at John, Romans 7 verses 14 to 25 and he said, this is describing life before conversion. But not only that, he taught that after you become a Christian there is a second work of grace that you should seek after as a Christian.

[19:09] And it's the second work of grace that you really need to seek. And God will root out of your heart all sinful motives and the result will be that you are left with a heart that is just filled with love, total love.

And that's what this second experience will give you, so he taught. Basically, John Wesley was claiming that you could attain in this life what I think the Bible only promises for the life to come. It's called Wesleyan perfectionism. And it had a profound influence on people. So some of you may have read Oswald Chambers, my utmost for his highest. It's a million selling book, but actually Oswald Chambers is profoundly influenced by that kind of teaching on perfectionism.

Now a modified teaching on this was the kind of higher life. You don't hear so much about that today. Keswick higher life teaching. It's why Keswick was formed, so that it could teach this higher life teaching. Thankfully, it's moved away from that.

But it adopted a framework of a kind of second blessing. That your sinful heart remains in you, but you can be enabled to live a life in which you do not commit sin anymore.

[20:19] And you're able to do that as you rely on Christ and live his life through you. And this Keswick teaching, chapter 14 to 25, is really a substandard Christian life.

That this kind of was the carnal Christian, the kind of bog standard Christian. And you need to move on to the higher life of chapter 8. That was the old Keswick teaching.

Now it seems to me as you read the book of Romans, that fails to do justice to the balance of the New Testament. That they create unrealistic expectations in people.

And they also lead to either self-deception or they lead to disillusionment. Ladies and other church, we'll edit this up the tape, okay.

But she used to say to me that she didn't really struggle with any sin anymore. She got to the stage of life where she really didn't struggle with sin. And could I point out any sin that she struggled with?

[21 : 27] And so I said to her once, I said, well I do think pride might be an issue. And she said to me, well I don't agree, I don't think that's right at all. And it is that, isn't it?

Self-deception or disillusionment. We love that lady, but it was quite obvious to spot something as it is in my life. Don't listen to people that tell you that you're not a Christian or you're a substandard Christian if you feel like Romans 7.

You are just as much a Christian as the Apostle Paul was. But secondly, and I think this is more a danger from the kind of background and the kind of church we are, beware of a teaching that only knows Romans 7.

If chapter 7 was a complete description of Christian experience, you'd have to conclude, either Paul is having a very bad head, he's got out of the bed the wrong way, or the Christian life is just drudgery.

A life of constant failure in which you never do the good you want to do. And you end up having really low experiences of holiness in the Christian life. But chapter 7 does not describe the whole of the Christian experience.

[22 : 39] Chapter 7 of Romans is a piece of the jigsaw, but it's not the whole truth. The first half of chapter 8 goes on to complete the picture. The first half of Romans chapter 8 goes on to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and how by the Spirit we are to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

And so in terms of how they go together, chapter 7 highlights the problems, the weaknesses in ourselves, as Christians in which we're all too well aware.

Chapter 7 does not tell you how to be holy. that's what chapter 8 goes on to unpack. And chapter 8 rejoices in the work of the Spirit in us. The two go together.

In our house, pretty much the same as every house in Ealing, at the back of the house it's warm and sunny, at the front of the house it's cold and dark.

And it's the same here, it's the same house, but one side of the house is warm and sunny gets all the sun, the other side of the house is dark and cold. It's the same here, Romans 7 and 8, they're in the same house, that's our experience.

[23 : 48] Romans 7 is pretty cold and dark. Romans chapter 8 is gloriously warm and sunny. And we should expect to find the same in our experience.

Every day in our life as Christians, it is not one or the other, it is both. And if at some point in our Christian lives we leave behind Romans chapter 7 and we go up onto the higher plane of chapter 8, well that's a disaster.

But neither should chapter 7 be a complete explanation of our Christian experience. More on that next week. Let's bow our heads in prayer.