

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
MAN’S RUIN & CHRIST’S REDEMPTION – Chapters 4-7

LESSON 22 – THE HOLY WAR – Romans 7:14-25

As we’ve seen so far in Romans 7, there are two types of people and their relationship to The Law...the spiritual person who is delivered from The Law and the natural person who is condemned by The Law. Now, as Paul begins this last section of chapter 7, he moves into writing in the first person and the present tense.

Paul’s use of himself as an example gives a sense of intimacy to this passage of Scripture. The way he interjects himself into this section cannot be missed. But to what time in his life is he referring? Some have taught that Paul is describing what his life was like before he was saved. This view however, is not the view normally held by most Bible scholars. It is also inconsistent with the descriptions of Paul’s life before his salvation. Never do we read of a struggle like this prior to Paul’s conversion.

What Paul is describing here in these verses of Romans 7 is something that every believer has experienced at one time or another. Paul writes in the first person forty-six times in chapter 7; but while he is referring to himself, he also typifies every single believer and their frustration.

When Paul says that he is carnal, he is not speaking of the legalistic, immature Christian that we often associate with the term. Instead, he is describing the most spiritual and mature Christians who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God’s standards of righteousness, the more they realize how much they fall short.

The Designation of the Holy War

Romans 7:14, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

This verse is Paul’s summary statement for this section. The Law is spiritual. It is spiritual because it originates from God and shows us His holy character.

Paul then tells us that he is not spiritual but carnal. Now carnal is not a word that describes someone who is unsaved, but rather a word used in the New Testament to describe someone who is saved but still controlled by the flesh.

In other words, when we face up to what we should do and be in this world, we completely fail! The harder we try, the more we realize our failure.

Paul says that he is possessed by the power of sin as if he were a slave in bondage. Whoever submits to the love of God in Christ, and really begins to fight against sin, discovers firsthand the strength of its hold on them.

The Description of the Holy War

The War Between Conflicting Powers

Romans 7:15-17, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”

Every Christian has two natures. The old sinful nature inherited from Adam that can do nothing right...and the new nature of God that can do nothing wrong. These two natures are in constant conflict for the simple reason they are incompatible.

Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want."

Paul is quick to point out that the cause of the conflict is not the fault of The Law. He is agreeing with The Law in every detail. As a redeemed man, he is confessing that The Law is good and the problem for the conflict is found somewhere else.

After a person is saved, sin is no longer master in their life but it somehow still manages to survive. It finds its dwelling place in the flesh and will be there in some form or another until we are perfected. The only way to have victory is to follow the instructions of Paul found in Galatians.

Galatians 5:16, "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

The conflict comes from us knowing the good but not being able to do the good. John Calvin said that Christians are, "pulled in two ways, for they fight against their own nature, and nature fights against them."

When Paul talks about "sin living in me," he is speaking of the conflict of evil in himself. He is not speaking of the great social ills and sins of the day, but to the powerful presence of sin within himself. Our problem is not "out there," our problem is "in here."

The War Between Conflicting Practices

Romans 7:18-20, "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. 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. 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."

When Paul refers to "me" in verse 18, he is talking about the flesh. The only place where sin can be found in a believer's life is right there in the "me" or the flesh. The flesh is subject to sin and provides the avenue for sin to operate in the life of a Christian.

Paul really wanted to do only what was good. And while he did some good, he could not do only good. He could not completely fulfill the requirements of God's holy law but he never gave up the quest.

Philippians 3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

The conflict is not one-sided. Paul not only failed to do the things he wanted to do, he did the things he did not want to do.

The War Between Conflicting Principles

Romans 7:21-24, "So I find this law at work: Although 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 me, waging war against the law

of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

2 Spiritual Principles – Paul sees two spiritual laws or authorities at work here. The first is The Law of God. The Law of God is holy, just and good...it points people toward heaven. It demands absolute perfection as a standard of behavior. The second is The Law of Sin. When Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, he placed the entire human race under this law. This law is in constant war against The Law of God...the two are in conflict. The Law of God pulls people toward heaven... The Law of Sin pulls people toward hell.

2 Personal Principles – Romans 7:25, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

The first personal principle involved here is The Law of My Mind. This law seems to be almost identical with The Law of God in verse 22. Paul's inner man delights in God's law and every Christian understands what Paul is talking about here. Every believer gives intellectual agreement to the laws of God. We believe in them...we memorize them...but then we break them. The second personal principle involved here is The Law of My Members. This law is nearly identical to The Law of Sin. This is sin asserting itself in the members of the Christian's body so that often, without warning, our eyes will look with lust...our tongues will speak slander...our ears will listen to gossip. Paul longed for the day when he would be rescued from his old, sinful, unredeemed flesh.

The Destruction of the Holy War

Just as eternal life is "through Jesus Christ our Lord," escape from the flesh is also through Him. On the cross Jesus dealt with the problem of sin, the problem of Satan and the problem of self. In Romans 8 we will see that Paul shows how victory can be experienced in our lives.

Outcomes of the Holy War

Only Through Realism Can We Respond

"Realism has to do with our willingness or lack of willingness to face unpalatable truths about ourselves and to start making necessary changes. We are assiduous blamers of others for whatever goes wrong in our marriages, families, churches, careers and so on. The most Spirit-quenching traits imaginable become excuses for doing nothing in situations where realism requires that we do something."

J. I. Packer

Only Through Struggle Will We Be Stretched

It is only through struggle we are stretched...not by formulas, books, recordings, seminars or any of those things. It is not by ignoring the problem, but by facing it.

Only Through the Spirit Will We Become Spiritual

The Holy Spirit is only mentioned once in chapter 7... verse 6. Since that verse describes the Christian era as the age of the Spirit, you would think this chapter would be full of the Spirit. Instead, Romans 7 is full of the law. It is Romans 8 that is full of the Spirit and it is in chapter 8 we find victory because we find the Holy Spirit.