

Romans 7

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, March 18, 2018

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans. And as you're doing that this morning, we're in a series called "The Book of Romans in Three Months", where we're looking at the Book of Romans over a three month, or 12-week period of time. We're surveying the book and flying over it so you can get the big picture. And the big picture of Romans is this, Jesus saves sinners.

The big idea of the book is found in chapter 1, verse 18, if you want to look there with me. Paul writes and he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Romans is about the power of God for salvation. It's about the gospel, or the good news, and its ability to change lives.

In the 1800s, a painting was found in an art gallery in Chicago called "The Rock of Ages," which showed a person clinging to a cross that was firmly embedded in a rock. And as the wind and the waves beat against him, and the ocean crashed at his feet, the man was saved. That's what the book of Romans is about. It's about clinging to the Rock of ages and being delivered. It's about being saved from the storm.

I don't have to ask you whether you're in a storm this morning. I'm guessing that you are. For most of you, your life is stormy. Maybe marriage is stormy. Maybe the workplace is stormy. There's storms everywhere. Paul says you can survive that if you cling to the cross. He says you can be rescued and delivered, if you hold on to Jesus.

Several years after that first painting appeared in Chicago, another one showed up in an art gallery that had the same person clinging to the rock. Except this time, he had one hand on the cross and another one reaching down to help someone else who was in the water. That's what the book of Romans is about as well. It's about helping those who are drowning. It's about reaching down and saving others from the storm. Jesus saved us for that purpose. So we could, in turn, rescue others.

And just to tell you a little bit about a man who got this, just to tell about this book, if you look in Romans 1, verse 1, it tells us that the book of Romans was written by "Paul, a bond servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God". It doesn't tell you a whole lot about Paul, but it does give you a little bit of information.

Look at some of this. It says Paul was a bond servant of Christ. That word is *doulos* in Greek, which is actually the word "slave". Paul was a slave of Christ. He belonged to Him. Jesus was his master. Matter of fact, this meant so much to Paul that that was the first thing he said about himself. He doesn't go into any other title, any other name until he mentions that one. He was Jesus' slave.

He also says he was an apostle, which comes from the Greek word for "sent ones". Paul was sent out by Jesus. He was commissioned to save people from the storm. That was his job.

And finally, it says he was "set apart for the gospel of God". There you see the word "gospel" again. Paul was separated for the good news.

A little background about Paul. We haven't said much about him in this series, but Paul wasn't raised as a Christian. Nobody was back then. Christianity was a brand new thing. He wasn't raised in a Christian home. God set him apart for that. He did something special to save him.

The New Testament says Paul was a Pharisee. He was a member of one of the leading religious parties in Israel. It's interesting, this was the one Jesus fought with the most. If you remember, this is the one Jesus called "You brood of vipers" and "You whitewash tombs" and "You snakes". That was Paul's group. That was the party that he came from. Acts 23, verse 6, says his father was actually a Pharisee. So not only was Paul a Pharisee, but his family was a family of Pharisees. It was in his blood, it was in his birth.

And just a little background about those guys, history doesn't tell us when the Pharisees began, but in the second century BC, Israel came under the rule (about 200 years before this book was written), Israel came under the rule of several Gentile kings. One of them was a guy named Antiochus Epiphanes, who persecuted the Jews horribly.

He burned all the copies of the Torah, he outlawed the Sabbath, he forced Jewish priests to eat pig, and as a result, the Jews revolted. They rose up and kicked the Romans out of Israel. And one of the groups that came out of the revolution was the Pharisees. Their name means "separate ones" in Hebrew, because they separated themselves from everything unclean. They separated themselves from Antiochus Epiphanes. They separated themselves from the Gentiles. And they even separated themselves from other Jews.

So for instance, when a Pharisee left the marketplace, a Jewish marketplace, a marketplace in Israel, he would go home and bathe himself, just in case he touched anything unclean. Now you parents in here have a hard time getting the kids getting in and out of the grocery store. Can you imagine if you were a Pharisee? You'd have to come home and bathe everybody.

He would also avoid certain foods or certain parts of Israel. So there were whole sections of the country that a Pharisee would not go in. Like the land of Samaria. Samaria was located right in the middle of Israel, between Galilee in the North and Judea in the South. And to travel from the South to the North, going straight through Samaria took about two and a half days. It was about a 70 mile journey. But the Pharisees, out of disdain for the Samaritans, would actually travel around the province and make it a four day journey, just to avoid that unclean place.

They were extremists with a capital "E". They were legalists to the hilt. They had a year long probation period in which the applicant had to prove himself worthy by doing things like counting how many steps he took on the Sabbath. Because this many steps was a sin, and that many steps was not. So he had to go through the Sabbath day and "one, two, three, four, five, six, five thousand" (how ever many steps it was) and count his steps.

There are actually Orthodox Jewish communities now that do that. If you drive in certain parts of New York and Los Angeles, you can see Orthodox Jews on Saturday walking back and forth to the Synagogue, and they built their house so they can count their steps back and forth.

Pharisees had to tithe their mint and cumin. Jesus talks about this in Matthew 23. He says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and neglect the weightier matters of the law." Mint and cumin were herbs you would put on your food for flavor. They were tiny spices you would sprinkle on it for taste. The Pharisees tithed those. They went through their pantry, pulled out their spices, and gave a percentage of that to the temple.

They memorized the Old Testament, or huge parts of it, before they could join. They had to learn the laws of the Rabbi, which was several thousand pages long.

And Paul says, "I did all of that." I went through the initiation, I met the requirements, I was a perfect Pharisee. In Philippians 3, he says "If anyone has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I have far more. I was circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ... as to the righteousness which is in the Law, I was found blameless."

But he says, in the book of Romans as I'll show you in a moment, "it didn't save me. All that law keeping, all that work, counting my steps on the Sabbath. Avoiding Samaria. Taking a bath after going to the grocery store. It did no good...for my soul."

In the fourth century A.D., a heretical preacher named Jovinian taught that baptism could save you. And his opponent Jerome said that's silly, because baptism can't drown the devil. That's what Paul learned as a Pharisee. Baptism can't drown the devil. Works can't save you. And when Paul believed that, it changed him instantly. And he wrote a letter like this.

You can imagine Paul as a Pharisee, going to a city like Rome (I told you how dirty Rome would have been, how unclean it was) and witnessing to the people. But that's what he does. That's what he talks about in the book of Romans.

And just to review what he does, if you look in chapters one through three (just fly through this with you very quickly), he says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but are justified freely by His grace. That's chapters one through three. In other words, the Rock is available for all. Salvation is available for all who will believe. Paul says you don't have to be a Pharisee, you don't have to be a Jew. You can be a Roman and be saved. Because it's a free gift.

In chapter four through five, he talks about how this related to some Old Testament saints like Abraham and Adam. Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness. He was saved by looking forward to the Messiah. Adam didn't believe. Adam rejected God in the garden. And he plunged the whole human race into sin.

But Jesus delivered us from that, which why chapter six, verse one says, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be." And then in chapter six, verse 15, he says, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? May that never be!" And then that brings us to chapter 7.

In Romans 7, Paul actually shifts gears for a minute, and he gives his personal testimony. I just had a few words about that testimony. But in chapter 7, he backs up for a moment, and he talks about how all this doctrine in chapters one through six affects his life. As a matter of fact, the word "I" or "me" appears 40 times in Romans 7. Because Paul says this is what this has to do with me. This is how it impacted my life.

If you look at verses one through three (I'm just going to fly through the first part of this), Paul writes in verse one of chapter 7,

1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

In other words, the point of this is, you shouldn't live in sin, because you have a new husband now. That's a carryover from chapter six. In chapter six, Paul says you shouldn't sin because you have a new master. Now he says you shouldn't sin because you have a new husband.

Verse four says "Therefore my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you may be joined to another..." And then skipping down a little bit in verse seven, Paul starts using the word "I". And from verse seven, all the way down to the end of the chapter, he's going to use this word "I" or "me". He's going to refer to himself more than forty times, to say, "This is my testimony. This is what all this relates to me."

And if you look in verse 7, he says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind."

It's a pretty simple argument here. Paul says, "No one knew the law better than I did. No one kept it more than me. I was blameless." But let me tell you, the law can't save you. "For", he says, "I would not have known about coveting if the Law hadn't said 'You shall not covet.' Paul says, "I was going along fine as a Pharisee, minding my own business. And then I read 'Thou shall not covet', and what did I do? I coveted." Right? "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced coveting of every kind."

It is said if you put someone in a room and say, "Don't push that button", they're gonna do what? Push that button. Right? You drive down the highway, and you see a sign that says 50 mph, you say, "Yeah, right". Paul says, "I did that."

And then he explains in verse eight, he says, "For apart from the Law" (or apart from the right understanding of the Law) "sin is dead." And,

I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause a death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by affecting my death through that which is good...

Now that's a little hard to read, I understand that. But Paul's point is just this. It's not the Law's fault that I sinned, it's my fault. It's not the button's fault that I pushed it, it's my fault. I pushed it. I did what was wrong. The Law is holy and righteous and good. The law is supposed to result in life for me, but I can't keep it. Therefore it's my fault.

Do you remember reading Psalm 51 last week? What did David say? He said, "I did it. I did it. I did it! It was me, Lord." That's what Paul says here. Paul says this the whole chapter. The reason this is such an impactful thing in the book of Romans, is because you're reading the story of a converted Pharisee saying "I am the least of sinners."

That was revolutionary in the first century. To the Pharisee, there were two types of people. There were the righteous and there were sinners. There were the Pharisees, the separate ones, the holy ones, then there was everyone else down there at their feet. Paul says the Law shattered that idea for me.

You guys remember when I stood up here and ripped the commandments. It just shatters the whole idea of self-righteousness. It broke it into a million pieces. Because now Paul says, "I understand there's only one type of person. Now I understand there's only one category of people. The sinner. And that's it." And he says, "And that's me. I'm a sinner. I broke the Law. I'm just as bad as everyone else." And to be saved, Paul says, "I'm gonna have to fight my flesh and kill my sin."

Warren Wiersbe said that a Christian life is not a playground, it's a battleground. That's what Romans 7 is about. There's nothing playful about being a Christian. There's nothing easy about it. It's battle, it's war. John Piper said you have to make war, if you want to be a Christian. You can't just murmur. You can't sit back and hope it'll all work out in the end. That's what Paul is saying here.

And to kind of dive into our passage here, let me give you our outline. If you're taking notes this morning, in Romans 7, starting in verse 14, Paul gives us four tips for the battle with sin. He gives us four tips for the battle with sin, from his own personal experience, from his life as a converted Pharisee. He reflects back on the change that was wrought on him and what it means now, and he gives us some tips for the battle.

By the way, we could balance all this with the flow of the book of Romans. I mean you're gonna see next week in chapter 8 that God does everything to save us. He foreknows us and predestines us. He calls us and justifies us and glorifies us. We'll get into all that in chapter 8 and chapter 9.

But here in chapter 7, Paul says, "If all that's true in your life, you will fight sin. You will make war on your flesh."

Here's some tips he gives from his own personal life for this war. By the way, I'm sure some of us are in a battle this morning. If you're not fighting sin, let me just say you're not alive. You don't have red blood in you. (We'll get into that in a minute). This is a fight for all of us.

And here's some tips. The first one is this: You need to understand where the battle begins. You need to understand where the battle begins. It begins inside of you. It begins in your heart. Paul says it doesn't start out there in the world, it starts right here in my soul. It doesn't start with what's going on, it starts with what's going on in here. And if you read in verse 14, he just gets right to the point with this. And he says, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I'm doing the very thing that I hate."

That phrase, "I am sold into bondage to sin," doesn't mean "all of me," because he talked about in Romans 6, that we're sold into slavery into Christ and freed from sin. But this phrase in verse 14 refers to "my flesh". "My flesh is sold into bondage to sin." Paul says "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh. So the law is holy, righteous and good, but I am not. And my flesh is sold into bondage to sin." Paul says, "My soul is saved, my body is not. My soul is free in Christ, my flesh is enslaved to sin."

And as a result, he says, there's a battle in me. There's a war. I'll talk about the flesh here in just a minute. But if you notice, Paul says, "for what I am doing" in verse 15, "For what I am doing, I do not understand." Some say that this is a reference to Paul's life as an unbeliever. If you've done some studying on this chapter, some say this is Paul reflecting back on what he used to be as a Pharisee. And I used to think that. I actually wrote a paper in seminary defending that position. And I got a C on it. Because if you notice, Paul doesn't say "I was of the flesh" he says "I am of the flesh." It's not past tense. This is a present tense thing. He doesn't say "For what I was doing I do not understand" he says "For what I am doing". That's Paul life right now. That is Paul describing his life as a Christian as he writes this letter.

He says in verse 16, he says, "But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Sounds a little bit like an identity crisis. Paul says, "I'm fighting myself," but that's what sin makes you do. It makes you fight yourself.

Paul's not saying I'm not responsible. He's already saying he is responsible. He's saying there's a war going on in my soul. I'm battling my sin. When Paul was saved, he got a new heart. He got a new master. But he says, "The old master is calling me back." When he became a Christian and left his life as a Pharisee, he got a new husband. But he says, "The old husband is calling me back. And I have to fight it." I have to make war with what I used to be.

In the ancient world, the Romans used to punish a murderer by chaining him or tying him to the person that he killed. It was a pretty brutal thing. They didn't do it very often. But for the rest of his life, this criminal had to drag around the old decaying corpse of the person he killed with

him. Paul says Christians do that with their sinful flesh. We drag it around. Our minds are redeemed, our hearts are made new, our soul is born again, but our flesh is still serving the same old master. And it's like a living man, dragging a dead one around. And it starts a war, because Paul says it makes me do what I don't want to do.

And it's interesting if you read Romans 7, you see that, no where he hints that this an exception. This is the standard for the Christian life. And he says "This is not for the worst of us. This is for the best of us." Paul was an apostle. You can't get any higher on the Christian food chain than an apostle. And Paul says if I experience this, you will too. He says, "If I fight the flesh like this, you will too, I promise you."

We could say it this way, the more you grow in Christ, the more you fight. The closer you get to the sun, the more you see the blemishes. And the closer you get to God, the more you see your sin. It didn't calm down for Paul, the closer he got. It won't calm down for you either. Which means, if you want to get victory over your sin, you're gonna have to see yourself as an enemy, not as a friend.

In fact, you're going to have to realize that you are your own worst enemy. Because you don't fight with others first, you fight with yourself first. You don't fight Satan and the demons first, you fight with yourself. To my knowledge, there are far more passages in Scripture about fighting sin and fighting flesh then fighting the demons, because this is where the battle starts. This is where it begins. Augustine said, "Fear no enemy but yourself. Conquer yourself and you have conquered the world."

And here's the thing, and this is Paul's point in the chapter, he says, "A legalist doesn't get that. A self-righteous man, like I used to be, doesn't understand that." As a Pharisee, Paul thought the battle was all outside of him. He thought the problem was all out there, "And if I just avoid all these bad people, and if I just count my steps and tithe my spices and avoid Samaria, I'll be saved." And now he says that's not true because the problem is so much deeper than that.

You know, in the Middle Ages, a monk named Benedict of Nursia struggled with his sin. And try as hard as he might, he couldn't get victory over it. So what he decided to do was throw himself into a thorn bush. He took a nosedive into some thistles. And when he got up, he found out that it didn't help, the temptations were still there. He just had a bloody nose. Paul says, "That's what I'm wrestling with here. I could just jump into a thorn bush and it didn't help," he said, "Because my flesh was still there."

I heard one of our men in our church say that he was witnessing to a relative the other day, and he told him "If you put all of your thoughts up on a screen from this past week, could you honestly say that you had never sinned?" And the relative grew quiet, he didn't know what to say. That's what the Law does for us, Paul says. It puts all of our thoughts up on a screen. It puts all of our actions out there. And it shows us that there is a war going on in our soul. And that leads to the next tip for our battle with sin that Paul gives us in this passage.

I just want to tell you, there is hope at the end of this. But I want to walk you through the chapter, because it looks really dark for a while. And then you'll see the light, and the rest of the

book of Romans is full of light. Matter of fact, the whole book is full of light except for this section here.

But here's the next tip for our battle with sin. And that is this: You need to understand where the battle dwells. You need to understand where it begins, and you need to understand where it dwells, or where it abides and continues. Paul kind of raises the stakes here, as he goes through the chapter. And he says not only does the battle start in our hearts, but it lives there. It's like an unwelcome guest. Which means that not only do you fight sin, but you have to keep fighting and keep fighting and keep fighting it.

I think it was Spurgeon who said, "It's not the pace of the race that wears you out in the Christian life, it's the endurance." And Paul says this in verse 18, he gives us an example of that and he says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the will is present in me, but the doing of the good is not."

If you pick up on this, you see the word "dwells" there at the first part of the verse. "Nothing good dwells" or "abides in me, that is, in my flesh." That's a strong expression. Because Paul says, "Of all the things inside of me, my flesh is the worst, because there is nothing good in it." He says I can't find anything good in it.

The word "flesh" there is an interesting one. It means "my nature" or "my fallen nature". If you think about it, everyone has flesh on them. Everyone has skin. But Paul says that's not what he's referring to. Because Paul says, "this dwells in me, not outside of me." So it's a reference to his nature, to his fallen humanity. It's actually the Greek word *sark*, from which we get the word "sarcophagus". Paul says I'm a spiritual sarcophagus on the inside. My flesh is dead to God, and that's what I have to fight. That's what I have to kill.

He says, "Not all of me is dead. My soul is alive to God. For the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not."

Just a few uses of this word "flesh" to give you a perspective on this. Galatians 5, verse 19 says "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are" immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities and strife." I have to fight all that, Paul says. I have to put off the deeds of the flesh. Second Corinthians 7, verse 1 says "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of the flesh..." "I have to do that as well," Paul says. "I have to cleanse myself from the flesh's defilement." He says, "Before I thought I had to cleanse the outside of me, come home from the grocery store, take a bath." He says, "Now I realize I have to cleanse the inside of me."

And he goes on and says in verse 19, as he kind of unpackages this, he says "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want." "But if I'm doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." There you see the word "dwells" again. Sin abides in me. Lives in me.

If you notice the word "do" is mentioned six times in this passage because Paul says, "My doing is not right. My actions don't add up." And as a Pharisee it was all about actions, all about doing

things. Counting your steps. Paul says, "I want to do what is good, but I can't." It reminds me of what Jonathan Edwards said. Jonathan Edwards said, "When I look into my heart and see its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell."

Jonathan Edwards was an interesting man, a very Godly man. Some say he was the greatest theologian America ever produced. And he said when people would come into his office for counseling issues, Edwards said, "My first thought was, 'I struggle with that too.'" They'd come in and talk about their pride or their jealousy or whatever sin it was, and he thought "My heart struggles with that too."

That's what sin does to you. It makes your heart look like hell. It's what the flesh does. It makes it look like an abyss. And therefore, you have to fight it continually. Because it dwells there.

You know it's interesting, if you look at all the books on spiritual warfare, they talk about battling demons and battling the devil. And they talk about reclaiming spiritual territory and breaking generational curses and praying a hedge of protection around you. But they don't talk about sin that much. Maybe some, but not that much. They don't talk about fighting the flesh, because for a lot of those books the battle is outside of you. The battle is out here.

The assumption is that people are good, and the devil is bad. So just keep the devil away and people will do the right thing. "You know, people are good, and the demons are bad. So just keep the demons away and we'll all be fine." Paul says we won't be fine because there's still a problem here. Paul says it won't solve all the problems because nothing good dwells inside of us; not outside of us, but inside of us; not out there where the devil is, but right in here in my heart. Yes, we want to keep the devil away, but our biggest fight is with something else.

You know if you remember with me Luke 9, verse 23, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny" what? Demons? No. Satan? No. Evil? No. I mean it's all wrapped up in this, but he must deny himself. He must deny his own nature. His own flesh. That's where the battle rages the most.

James 1, verses 13-14 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." Again, what are we carried away and enticed by? Our own lust. Ourselves.

It doesn't mean the devil doesn't exist, because he does. And it doesn't mean the devil is not a threat, because he is a threat. He's a huge threat. It means the greatest battle is not with him, it's in our hearts.

If you think about it for a minute, in the Garden of Eden, you guys remember that? Do you know what the serpent did? All he did was talk. That's it. He didn't do anything else. He didn't possess Adam and Eve. He didn't twist their arm. He just gave them options. And the problem is what they did with those options. Our problem is, as Paul says, "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."

You know most governments corrode from the inside first. Typically it's not the outside forces that destroy a nation, but the inside ones. People are the same way. We corrode from the inside first. And Paul says you have to understand that as well, if you want to win this battle. You have to understand that you can't just separate yourself from the world because the world is inside of you.

And that leads to another tip. Again, I do have good news for you, so please hang in there. I'll pick you up off the floor here in a minute. I know this is some tough stuff, but this is what the word of God is telling us this morning.

Here's a third tip for the battle with sin (and this one will be pretty brief): You need to know how bad the battle is. If you don't know that already, that's the next thing he gets at here. You need to know how bad the battle is. Paul has already said "I am sold into bondage to sin" which is bad enough. I mean, that's horrible. And he says "nothing good dwells in me. In my flesh." And that's taking it a step further. But now he says this in verse 21. He says

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

This is the first time Paul mentions the word "war" in this passage. And he starts off by saying, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me." Not just sin, but evil. Not just nothing good, but the opposite of that. Evil itself.

And he says, "It puts a different law on the members of my body." Paul says, "I'm trying to follow the law, I'm trying to please God, but my flesh is putting another law in there." Right before this in verse 22, he says "I joyfully concur with the law," or "I delight in it." As a Christian I love to obey the law. I love to read my Bible, and do what it says, but evil is present in me.

That sounds pretty strong, but you guys know what this is like. You read something good in the Bible, you learn something new from God's word, and you're blessed by it, you're encouraged by it, and you want to live it out. So you go to work, and what do you do? You sin. Oh come on guys, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You lose your temper, right? Or you let a bad word slip out of your mouth. Why? Because evil is present within you; because there's a different law in the members of my body.

Or here's one for the parents in here. You have a great quiet time in the morning, slip away for five minutes of prayer with the Lord (because if you're a parent, sometimes it seems like just five minutes), and you're blessed by that, you're encouraged, until the kids wake up and say "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy" right? And then you sin. Or you pretend like you don't hear it. Then they say "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy," and you lose your temper again. Why? Because evil is present within you.

I mean, you and I do evil without even thinking about it, right? I mean, we sin without even trying. No one comes into your room in the morning and says "You know, you've been too good today. You really need to try to soften up a little bit and do bad things." Nobody talks like that. Paul says, "It's like I'm a prisoner to it." This doesn't mean you don't do anything good. Because of course you do. And this doesn't mean that you're as evil as you could be. Because you're not. No one is as evil as they could be. It just means that this is a really, really desperate battle. The war is desperate. You're fighting evil itself. And you're fighting it in your very soul.

I mean Romans 1 through 6 talk about what all Christ has done, and in Romans 7, for just a moment, Paul actually gets at the depth of what He's done. I mean you think about how many sins that you've committed. If you trust in Christ, He died for them all. I mean, that evil that's present within you was punished on Him on the cross. And that's the hope in this chapter. (I'll get into the hope some more in just a minute). But the hope is, that as deep as this problem is, that's how deep the love of God goes. Amen?

I think it was Spurgeon again who said "You never know how great your Saviour is until you know how great your sin is." And Paul, after talking about how great the Saviour is in the first six chapters, steps back for a moment. He says, "Let me open up my heart to you. And you can see how great the Saviour is when you look at my sin." He says, "My sin is this bad."

You know, one author said it this way. He said,

This doctrine does not mean that all men are equally bad, nor that any man is as bad as he could be, nor that anyone is entirely destitute of virtue. And much less does it mean that the body is dead. What it means is that since the fall, man rests under the curse, and that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or do anything meriting salvation.

Paul says, all I did ... by the way, some scholars think the Paul was about the same age as Jesus, so at this point, he could have been in his 50s. When he was saved, Paul was probably somewhere in his 30s, potentially. Paul said, "All I did for the first 30 years of my life was try to merit salvation. That's all I did." And he said, "I couldn't do it. And here's why: My heart is this bad. Evil is present within me."

And it leads to a final tip for the battle with sin. I've told you so far this has been discouraging, but that was the point of it. I mean, it's been kind of a hopeless chapter in some ways, but here's why. Because when you focus on "I," like Paul does, it's hopeless. I mean when you focus just on yourself (he mentions "I" or "me" 40 times), when you do that, it's discouraging. But he ends the chapter by looking elsewhere. And that leads to a final tip for the battle.

You need to know where the battle ends. You need to know where the battle begins. You need to know where it dwells and how bad it is. But finally, you need to know where the battle ends. And it ends at the cross. Same place we started. Same place Paul has been taking us throughout the entire book of Romans. It ends with the Rock of ages.

Romans 7 is really a parentheses in the book of Romans. If you've read through the book, this is why you get to chapter 7 and you kind of go "huh?" for a minute, because that was the intention of it. It's kind of a rabbit trail. I had a professor who said you could chase rabbits if there's meat on the bones. And there's some meat on these bones.

But the end of chapter 6, verse 23 says "For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life and Christ Jesus our Lord." And now at the end of chapter 7, in verse 24, after the rabbit trail, Paul says this. In chapter 7, verse 24, he says "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!" The thing begins and ends with Jesus. Our hope is found in Him. Salvation is found in Him. At the end of chapter 6, He gives us eternal life, and at the end of chapter 7 He frees us from the "body of this death".

As bad as the battle is, one day you will be free from it. As brutal as it is, and bloody as it is, and horrible as it is, one day you will be in heaven, where there will be sin no more. You'll get a glorified body there. Evil will not dwell in you there. Evil won't dwell in anybody.

Paul says next, he says "So then on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." Paul says one day Jesus will make you free. One day He will pull you entirely out of this storm.

Do you believe that this morning? Do you believe that Jesus can save you from the storm? After looking at how bad the storm is in chapter 7, I mean, it looks horrible, but do you believe that you have a Saviour that can rescue you from that? A Rock that is stronger than all of this?

Let me ask this another way to see how you're doing with this. Are you fighting sin? That's what Romans chapter 7 is about. Are you fighting sin? Are you wrestling with it? Are you putting it to death at the cross?

Let me dig into that a little more. When's the last time you repented? And I mean, truly repented. I mean something specific, not just something general. But when's the last time you can say that "On this day, I committed this sin, and it was evil in the sight of God, and I was wrong and I'm sorry, God forgive me." If you can remember, it's a good sign that you are saved.

I mean, the way you know that you are winning the race is that you're still running it. And the way you know you're winning the battle is if you're still fighting. So are you fighting? If you're not fighting this morning, I pray that you will start today. If you can't remember when the last time you repented was, we're about to approach the Lord's table this morning, and I can think of no better time to repent than right now. I pray you will begin to fight and fight for your life.

To illustrate this, let me read a quote from J.C. Ryle, and I'll close us with this. In his book on holiness, Ryle says,

There are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday, and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They're reckoned Christians while they live. They're married with a Christian service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any fight about their religion. Of spiritual strife and exertion and of conflict and of self-denial and of watching and warring they know literally nothing at all. Such Christianity may satisfy man, and those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable, but certainly it's not the Christianity of the Bible. It's not the religion that the Lord Jesus founded and His apostles preached. It's not the religion that produces real holiness. True Christianity is a fight.

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, I do pray this morning that there would be a fight about our religion. And it would not be a fight amongst ourselves, it would be a fight within ourselves. That we would fight sin as desperately as your apostle Paul did in Romans 7. You can just read this chapter, and the fight comes off the pages, and the wrestling and the warring in his soul. Lord, may we all fight our sin this way. May we all be as desperate to get it out of our lives as Paul was.

Father, we thank you for the depth of our Saviour. We thank you for how deep He went into each of our souls that are saved, and He pulled the sin out of there, and He put it on the cross. Father, as we approach Your table this morning, may You be honored in that.

Lord, I pray if there's any here that are not fighting sin this morning, either they're a believer who is backslidden, or if they're not saved, Lord, I pray that You would open their heart to their need of a Saviour. I pray You would open their heart to their need of a Rock to cling to in the storm. And may He be glorified as we take Your supper this morning, we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.