

Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church

March 12, 2023

S.C. Brown, Pastor

Series: Romans

Sermon title: Waging War with the Flesh

Scripture reading: Romans 7:13-25

Of all the passages in the New Testament, the passage that we come to today in **Romans 7** is one of the most debated. You could read many commentaries on the passage and you'll find that scholars just don't agree. So, **let's pray**.

It's going to be important for us to read this text again.

Romans 7:13-25

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.

The big debate is this:

1. Is Paul writing as a believer and so the passage describes the normal Christian life- describes all of us?
2. Is Paul writing and describing a non-believer?

Well, when we come to a tough passage like this, it is so important to look at the context.

I had dinner on Friday night with my 2 prayer partners after our kid's play at school and it was a helpful conversation.

They helped me see the passage from some different angles.

I've done a lot of reading on this text.

I have generally thought that this passage was a mature believer who understands his indwelling sin so well that he feels deeply.

Romans 7:15

He says, "I don't understand my own actions." "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

Maybe I have felt like was a mature believer because I have felt this way so often and considered myself mature.

Convenient interpretation.

And this is a true description of how a Christian feels when struggling with sin or should feel.

"I don't want to do it, but I do."

So, probably the most popular interpretation is that Paul is writing as a mature believer and he knows himself so well and is so in tune with his sinfulness that he describes himself this way.

Some believe that Paul is writing about his life before Christ, for how could a believer say:

Verse 14- " I am in the flesh, sold under sin"

Verse 21- mentions the 'evil' in him.

Verse 23- "captive to the law of sin".

Verse 25- "I serve the law of sin."

One of the main reasons why scholars take the position that he's writing representing himself as a non-believer is that the word 'Spirit' isn't mentioned but once in all of chapter 7.

In **Chapter 8**, the word "Spirit" is mentioned 21x.

But, I do not believe he is representing an unbeliever.

Unbelievers aren't aware of their own struggle with sin like Paul.

In **verse 18** he says he has the 'desire to do what is right'.

In **verse 22** he says he 'delights in the law of God in [his] inner being'.

This is a believer.

Ah, but is this the normal Christian life or is this kind of experience to be avoided.....doing the evil that you don't want and not doing the good that you want to do?

As I said, the context is crucial.

This text is about the LAW!

In Romans 7 the word LAW is mentioned 31X.

Paul has mentioned already in Romans 7:1-12 that the Law is not the cause of sin and now.....

He will show us that the Law cannot defeat the flesh.

We need something stronger because of sin.

So, where I have landed on the interpretation of this passage is this: this passage is descriptive of a Christian who is trying to wage war with the flesh BY the flesh.

This is a New Covenant believer living in an Old Covenant way.

This is an immature believer who doesn't know how to wage war in the Spirit.

This was me for so many years. Living defeated. Trying to be better in my own strength. Defeated Christians love to talk about Romans 7. I didn't say sinless Christians but Christians who are stuck in besetting sins and can't stop and the reason they can't stop is because they are fighting with the wrong weapons.

There is a war going on. The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. In this case, the Spirit is quenched and the flesh is strong.

A key verse is **Verse 18**...“I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

Desire? Yes

Ability? No

Why not? Because they're waging war with the flesh with fleshly weapons.

It doesn't work. You can't be holy and sanctified by keeping the Law. You need the Spirit of God.

As **John Stott** says, “Although they were Christian enough to delight in God's law, they were not Christian enough to obey it. They were making the mistake of looking to the law, instead of the Spirit, for their sanctification.”

Look at some of the passages surrounding this text.

Romans 7:4-6

my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. **5** For while we were living in

the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. **6** But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Romans 8:12-13

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

These passages surround and engulf **chapter 7:13-25** to make sure we know that the way to holiness is not through the Law but by the Spirit.

You see, when we are waging war against the flesh by the flesh, we end up having a kind of spiritual schizophrenia.

In this passage Paul says he has: (as Stott points out) **2 egos-** I want to do this but the other I wants to do this.

2 laws- He delights in God's law (**verse 22**), the law of his mind, but (**verse 23**) the law of sin is there too.

2 cries- What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

2 slaveries- serving the law of God with his mind
Serving the law of sin with the flesh (**verse 25**)

Application

So, here is the question you need to ask yourself today.
Is this me?

It's all of us in some way.

We all still have indwelling sin.

We are not perfect yet.

But **Romans 6:14** has already told us that "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Am I trying to live like an Old Testament believer?

Am I trying to live in the New Covenant in an Old Covenant way?

Am I trying to wage war with the flesh....meaning fight the desires of the flesh....with effort or with the empowerment of the Spirit?

So, here's how you know.

Does **Romans 7:13-25** sound like you often?

"I don't understand my own actions".

"I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate"

"I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."

This is how we ALL sound when we are stuck in unrepentant sin.

Do you feel like you are always trying to get up but getting knocked down as soon as you stand?

Are you attacking those besetting sins with the sword of the Spirit?

Are you reading and meditating and memorizing God's word, specifically passages that will help you in the battle?

Or, are you just trying to do better?

If you are just trying to do better, then you are waging war with the flesh.

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