

Conquering the Spiritual Tug of War

There is an internal war within but there is victory ahead

Romans 7:14-24

⁷ What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 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. 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. ²⁰ 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.

²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ 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. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 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.

Transition

- Christians live in the tension between decisive freedom from sin's dominion and the ongoing battle with sin's presence, but through Christ and the power of the Spirit we become what we already are in Him.

Question – who is Paul talking about?

1. Paul – Before Christ
2. Paul – After Christ

3. I have argued and preached from the perspective that Paul is not talking about himself before he got saved. Paul is talking about himself after he got saved.

We have a lot to understand about ourselves as Christians.

- New Birth
- Born Again
- New in Christ

Here is where I want to land today.

- To encourage believers who are discouraged by ongoing struggles, while calling them to active Spirit-empowered warfare based on their new identity in Christ.

After four sermons in Romans 7

- Paul leaves us with neither despair nor triumphalism.
- He leaves us with reality.

Many believers live in one of two errors:

1. "If I'm struggling, I must not be saved."
2. "Since I'm saved, I shouldn't struggle."

Romans 7 destroys both errors.

- The Christian life is not the absence of warfare.
- The Christian life is warfare with a guaranteed outcome.

Three realities every believe should understand.

I. The Christian life is a real battle

Romans 7:25b

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.

A. Paul describes conflict – NOT DEFEAT.

1. The renewed mind serves God
2. Loves God's law
3. Desires holiness
4. Agrees with God's commands

B. The flesh opposes God's purposes

1. Indwelling sin remains
 2. The old nature resists
 3. Temptation persists
- C. The presence of conflict is evidence of life.
1. Dead men and dead women don't fight sin.
 2. Only living men and living women fight sin.

Straw Man

False View:

- "Real Christians never struggle with sin."
- Build It Up Fairly:
 - Some point to Romans 6
 - Some point to victory passages
 - Some believe Spirit-filled believers should live above conflict

Tear It Down Biblically:

Romans 7:15-25

repeatedly describes struggle.

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.

James 3:2

We all stumble in many ways

Galatians 2

Even Peter and Barnabas failed

Application

- The absence of struggle is not maturity.
- The absence of struggle is spiritual danger.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall

Illustration

- Jacob wrestling with God all night (Genesis 32).

- Jacob limped after the encounter.
- He won and limped simultaneously.
- Many believers are walking with a limp because they have been wrestling with God and their flesh.

Application

- Where is the battle strongest right now?
- Anger?
- Lust?
- Pride?
- Fear?
- Bitterness?

Do not interpret the battle as proof God has left you.

Interpret the battle as a call to fight.

Transition:

The battle is real—but the battle does not define who you are.

The Christian life is a real battle.

II. As a Christian my true identity is in Christ.

A. Sin is present but no longer reigning

Romans 6

- The old man was crucified
- Sin remains
- Sin does not rule

B. We are freed from sin's dominion

1. Not sinless
2. Not powerless

C. We belong to Christ

1. Our deepest identity is no longer our failure.
2. It is our union with Christ.

Straw Man

False View:

"My struggle is my identity."

Modern culture teaches:

- "I am what I desire."
- "I am what I feel."
- "I am what I struggle with."

People define themselves by:

- Addiction
- Sexual temptation
- Anger
- Trauma
- Failure

D. Response.

1. Romans never says "I am sin."
2. Romans says "Sin dwells in me"
3. There is a difference.

Romans 6 says

- You are in Christ.
- You are a new creation.
- You are alive unto God.

Sin is an intruder.

Christ is your identity.

Illustration

- Gideon hiding in the winepress.
- God calls him: "Mighty man of valor."
- God addressed him according to what grace had made him
- Not where fear had left him.
- Same Way – God addresses believers according to Christ's work.

Application

- Stop introducing yourself by your failures.
- Instead confess:
 - I am redeemed.
 - I am justified.
 - I am adopted.
 - I belong to Jesus.

- E. The Holy Spirit does not merely comfort us.
 - 1. He witnesses to our identity as children of God.

Knowing who you are is essential—but Christian identity must lead to action.

The Christian life is a real battle.

As a Christian my true identity is in Christ.

III. Become what you are.

- A. Act your age
 - 1. Act like you belong here.
 - 2. Act like you are a champion.
 - 3. Act like you are a soldier.
 - 4. Act like you are free
- B. Here is the pattern through the New Testament
 - 1. Statement of fact.
 - 2. Command of responsibility

Illustration

- You are new!
- Now live new!

Examples

- You are dead to sin → Consider yourself dead.
- You are free → Do not let sin reign.
- You have put on Christ → Put on Christ.

C. Grace empowers effort

- 1. It is not “Just let go and let God.”
- 2. It is not “Try Harder”
- 3. It is the Holy Spirit empowers active obedience.

Straw Man

"If God has changed me, I don't have to fight."

- God gives grace.
- Christ won the victory.
- The Spirit lives within us.
- All true.

Response - Because Christ won:

- We resist.
- We pray.
- We repent.
- We discipline ourselves.
- We walk in the Spirit.

Grace is not opposed to effort.

Grace is opposed to earning.

Illustration

- David facing Goliath.
- God promised victory.
- David still had to pick up stones.
- Faith never eliminates action.
- Faith fuels action.

Application

- Identify one area where God is calling you to active warfare.
- Practical examples:
 - Establish prayer discipline.
 - Remove sources of temptation.
 - Reconcile broken relationships.
 - Renew your mind with Scripture.
 - Pursue accountability.

The Spirit supplies power.

- You must still walk.

The battle continues, but the ending is already settled.

The Christian life is a real battle.

As a Christian my true identity is in Christ.

Become what you are.

IV. Our final deliverance is certain.

Romans 7:24-25

²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 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.

A. What a wretched man I am... Who will rescue me...

1. The cry is future-oriented.
2. Notice:
3. Not merely - "Who has delivered me?"
4. But – Who will deliver me?
There is still a coming freedom.

B. Romans 7 ends with HOPE

1. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Already

- Justified
- Redeemed
- Adopted
- Spirit-filled

Not Yet

- Glorified
- Perfected
- Completely free from indwelling sin

Illustration

- Israel leaving Egypt.
- Egypt was behind them.
- Canaan was ahead.
- The wilderness was between.
- The Christian life often feels like the wilderness.
- But the Promised Land is certain.

Application

If you are weary

- Keep fighting.

If you are discouraged

- Keep trusting

If you are in the middle of failure.

- Keep repenting.

If you feel like you are living in victory.

- Keep depending on Christ.

Proverbs 27:16

for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again,