

**Not Ashamed
(Week 18)
Romans 7:14-25
“The Struggle is Real”**

Introduction

As we have stated earlier, legalism, the belief that by working through our own strength we can please God, is a destroyer of churches. So many Christians mistakenly believe that after they have been saved by grace, it is then left up to them to live according to God's commands. This, in turn, produces a strict rules-oriented type of person, with an overinflated self image, who tends to undervalue those around them. On the outside, the legalist appears to have it all together, but on the inside, if they were completely honest about it, they are miserable.

I once went to church with a lady, who was the textbook definition of a “legalist”. She put on this big show of being so spiritual, while making everyone around her totally miserable. It didn't matter what any of the rest of us tried to do to serve Christ, by her standards, none of us ever measured up. She critiqued every *Bible* teacher. She complained about the choir. She believed that no one in the entire congregation truly understood what it meant to be a child of God. I'll be honest with you. Being around that woman for any length of time was about as joyful as having a root canal without anesthetic. It was, to say the least, painful. And, as far as I know, she is still alive and well, judging everyone around her and making them feel unworthy. Truth be told, she was just as miserable on the inside as she was making everyone else, but she had no intention of changing. Sound hopeless? Well, that is the kind of misery that Paul is describing for us in Romans 7:14-25. Trying to please God, in your own strength will only bring you misery. And not only to yourself, but to everyone around you. Legalism kills churches!

It is a sad misconception to believe that it is God's grace that saves us, but then, somehow it takes our own willpower to enable us to live the “Christian life”. I love how Paul describes the struggle between the old nature and the new one here in Romans 7. You see, our new nature, that we received in Christ, is in no way compatible with the old nature, that we had in the flesh. They cannot work together. It is impossible to please God in our flesh, but sadly, it doesn't stop many Christians from trying to do just that.

J. Vernon McGee is probably my favorite all time *Bible* teacher. In my mind, he is the father of expository preaching, which is simply teaching through a passage in the *Bible* and wringing out every bit of truth in it, verse by verse, in a way that everyone can understand. Dr. McGee has gone on to be with The LORD now, but if you've never had the opportunity to hear one of his sermons, or read one of his Bible commentaries, the I highly recommend that you take the time to do so. You will not be disappointed! I would like to share with you an excerpt from his commentary on Romans 7.

“I remember when I started out, oh, I was going to live for God! That's when I fell on my face, and I have never fallen harder than I did then. I thought I could do it myself. But I found there was no power in the new nature. And that is the reason the evangelist can always get a response in a meeting. I'm afraid that ninety percent of the decisions that are made in churches today have been made by Christians who have been living in defeat in their Christian lives. What they are really saying is, 'I want to live for God. I want to do better.' Often, an evangelist in a meeting says, 'All of you who want to live for God, put up your hand. All of you today that want to come closer to God, put up your hand. Those of you who want to commit your life to God, come forward.' The minute the evangelist says that, he's got me. That is what I want to do. That new nature of mine says, 'I sure would like to live for God.' But there's no power in it. This is what multitudes of believers fail to recognize. There have been folk who have been coming forward for years, and that's all they have been doing — just coming forward! They never make any progress. Oh how they need to understand the truth!”

The “truth” that McGee is speaking of in this quote is the message of Romans 7-8. If you try to please God in your own strength, you will fail miserably. If you are in Christ, you do in fact have a new nature, but you cannot harness that nature by human effort. You need to be attached to the proper power source, in order to engage that new nature. In short, the message of Romans 7-8 is simple. Self-Reliance Overwhelms, but... Spirit-Reliance Overcomes. Please allow me to explain.

Self-Reliance Overwhelms (vs. 14-23)

“For we know that The Law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave to sin. For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with The Law that it is good. So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present within me. For in my inner self I delight in God’s law, but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.”
Romans 7:14-23

As are many of Paul’s teachings, this particular passage has become the subject of much controversy. Many Bible teachers claim that here Paul is speaking of himself, before he was saved by grace. But a closer examination of the language will reveal to us that he is not speaking of a lost person here, but rather, a saved person who is still struggling with the flesh.

You see, Paul has already established the fact that a lost person is hostile to the things of God. Therefore, someone without Christ has no desire whatsoever to obey the commands of scripture. Only a person with a renewed mind has the inward desire to serve God. And not only that, Paul uses a word to describe himself here that is usually used to describe a Christian who is operating in the flesh. The word translated in the CSB “of the flesh” (**vs. 14**) is “sarkikos” (pronounced sar-kee-kos’), and it literally means to be “governed by mere human nature”, rather than, The Spirit of God. Make no mistake. Paul is speaking here of a Christian trying to please God in his own strength. And the result thereof is utter failure.

Let me see if I can explain this more clearly. When a person is born again, they are given a new mind, and along with that, comes the desire to serve Christ. I have often preached that one of the ways that you can tell if a person has been genuinely saved is the desire within them to serve the Savior. A person, who does not long to serve Christ, does not belong to Christ. Period.

What usually happens, when a person becomes a new believer, is the thrill of knowing that they have been forgiven. They call up everyone that they know and share the Good News of what Christ has done for them. They say things like, “This is wonderful!”, when they describe their newfound relationship to Christ. The next thing that happens is the earnest desire to know Christ and to study His Word. That’s when something scary often takes place. They go from saying “This is wonderful”, to “This is really hard!”. For, no matter how hard they try, they cannot live up to the perfection demanded in God’s commands.

Now listen again to what Paul says:

“For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with The Law that it is good.”
Romans 7:15-16

Do you see his struggle? This is exactly what a new believer goes through, when he tries to be obedient in his own human frailty. It cannot be done. The more we learn of God’s standards the less able we feel to live up to them! Now remember what J. Vernon McGee said about the evangelist. Some preacher gets in the pulpit and rails against a particular sin. The new believer becomes convicted and ashamed. He/she goes forward and promises God that they’ll never do that again. Only to get up from their knees and commit the same sin once more. They don’t want to, but they do, and then feel defeated and worthless. Just look at how Paul describes it for us. He emphasizes over and over that he wants to do good in his renewed mind, but he ends up submitting to the desires of his flesh time and again. And the guilt is unbearable! Can I get a witness?

We try everything we can think of to get better. We read self help books and promise ourselves that “this time it will be different”. We vow to “turn over a new leaf”. Some even join support programs

and surround themselves with other people, who struggle with the same types of sin. We long to break the seemingly endless cycle of sin; asking for forgiveness, only to sin yet again. But try as we may, we fall for the same old things over and over. Some even begin to doubt their salvation. While others (legalists) actually start to convince themselves that they are much better at living for Christ than everyone else around them, and therefore, they arbitrarily bestow upon themselves a “passing grade”, because they are grading themselves on the curve! But, deep down inside, even they realize that they don’t measure up. And this knowledge makes them miserable. And, just like those who are questioning their salvation, the legalist is just as conflicted internally, whether they will admit to it or not. You cannot please God in the flesh.

Why? Because you do not have what it takes to empower your new nature! The Law of God is not fleshy, it is SPIRITUAL (**vs. 14**). It cannot be lived by human strength or willpower. It can only be obeyed with spiritual assistance. And that, my friends, means that in order to “power up” that new nature you have been given, in order to overcome the desires of your flesh, you need to plug in to a different power source! If you do not wish to be overwhelmed by your flesh (and if you are truly a believer, then you do not), then you need to energize that new nature that has renewed your mind. And how, you might ask, do I do that? I’m glad you asked!

Spirit-Reliance Overcomes (vs. 24-25)

“What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our LORD! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.” Romans 7:24-25

It has been documented that in the small village of Tarsus where Paul lived, an ancient tribe that once lived there had actually punished murderers by lashing them to the body of the one they had killed. The killer and his victim would be bound hand to hand face to face, and then left out in the Mediterranean sun. As the dead body would start to decay, it would in turn slowly infect the one chained to it killing him as well. Now that, is a serious deterrent to murder I would imagine!

Paul is comparing this practice to that of being chained to his old sin nature, while having a new nature of the mind. He longed to do what was right, but his sinful flesh was holding him down. He needed to be set free from this body of death, so that he could live according to the commands of Christ. So he cried out:

“Who will rescue me from this body of death.” Romans 7:24 (b)

And that is where the good news comes in! Christ can! You see, He is the only One, Who can empower that new nature of yours. Let me see if I can give you an illustration. I type my sermons on a computer. A few years ago, Sandi and I decided to invest in a really good one. This thing does most everything. The problem with me is that I’m not a “technological” kind of guy, and the vast majority of the stuff that my computer can do is way above my comprehension. So, I am constantly having to call Sandi and ask her to help me muddle through. I think, if she realized that she was going to end up being my IT person, as well as, my spouse, she would have thought twice about marrying me in the first place. But that’s another matter altogether. Needless to say, I have this great piece of equipment at my disposal and can just barely use it.

Do you know what the first question an IT person will ask you when you call for assistance with your computer, when you can’t get it to work? (I do. I’m kind of an expert in the field.) They will ask you if your computer is plugged in! You see, as incredible as these things are, without being hooked to a power source, they are just really expensive paperweights! The same is true with the new nature that you have been given in Christ Jesus. You can’t work it without power, and it has to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The night before Jesus went to the cross, He gave His disciples one last message. Now you would assume that since it was His last message before His death, it would be of great significance. And you would be correct in your assumption. Jesus told His disciples to **“Abide (stay connected) in Him and they would bear fruit.”**

"Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me." John 15: 4

So what is He saying? He is saying that unless we stay closely connected to Him, we can never live the way that He intends for us to live. We can't "produce the fruits of righteousness", when we aren't attached to The Vine. It is The Vine that empowers the branches to bear fruit! So Christian, how can you be set free from the "body of death" that keeps bringing you back to sin time and again? Concentrate on your close relationship with Christ and let Him do His work in you. I love this verse in *Hebrews*:

"Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrew 12:2

In *The Berean Study Bible*, it says "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...". I love that word fix. And I also love the original Greek word that is translated "source" (NIV) and "author" (Berean). The word actually means "*Pioneer*". It is a word used for someone who blazes the trail for others to follow. In other words, Jesus began the work in you, and He will guide you all the way to your destination, if you simply follow His lead. So, just stay close to Him, and everything else will be taken care of. If there were such a thing as a "Pastor Scott Translation" (and believe me there never will be), it would say this:

"Don't try and fix yourself. Fix your eyes on Jesus instead! He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. It starts and ends with Him. He leads the way, and He will take us all the way home! He died on the cross to save us. He sat down at the right hand of God because the work was finished, and now we can count on Him to finish what He started in us as well."

Hebrews 12:2 PSCT (Pastor Scott Childs Translation)

Sorry, couldn't resist. But that is exactly what that verse means. If you will simply concentrate on your relationship to the risen Christ, and follow His lead, and stop trying to serve Him in your own strength, you will overcome your own personal "body of death". Legalism kills churches. Let Jesus will work in you until you reach maturity.

"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds of things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, put to death what belongs to your early nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry." Colossians 3:1-5

So, how do you put to death the things of the flesh? By setting your mind on things above! Keep your focus on Christ and allow Him to get rid of all that is holding you back. If you will simply stay focused upon your relationship with Christ, through prayer, the study of His Word, and your abiding love for Him, then He will set you free from all that is dragging you down. He alone has the power to break the chains that have fastened you to your "body of death". Stop trying to fix yourself and simply fix your eyes upon Jesus. Turn on the power source that goes with your new nature and watch sin and legalism fall to the ground like broken chains. God has predestined you for so much more. Be all that you were meant to be in Christ! You will go from saying "This is wonderful" to "This is Hard", and finally, to "This is glorious!" You were never meant to do this alone, you need Christ, your Power Source in order to bear fruit for God.

And all of God's people said... **Truth!!!**