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**The Struggle Within**

**Romans 7.13-20**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. When we first moved to Morgantown, WV, we decided to build a house
  - 1. We found some property about 15 miles outside of Morgantown
    - a. Up on a ridge, about 1,000 feet in elevation higher than the city which was in the Monongahela River valley
  - 2. And we found a builder who was willing to build a rather unusual home with some passive solar elements
  - 3. We had a design that we liked
  - 4. And we told the builder we wanted to build a \$100,000 house for \$80,000
    - a. (Remember – this was 1980!)
  - 5. He assured us that he could do that – as long as I was willing to labor with him to cut costs
    - a. Now you need to remember, this would be unskilled labor
    - b. Because I really knew nothing about building houses
    - c. So laboring meant hauling supplies, carrying cinder block, whatever
  - 6. So we established an arrangement where he would build the house “cost-plus”
    - a. That I would act as general contractor
    - b. Buy the material, pay the bills
    - c. And he and his crew would build the house, charge me for the labor, and add some percentage for his profit
- B. Well, long story short – nothing ever seemed to work out the way we intended it
  - 1. Right from the beginning, things started to go wrong
  - 2. A couple of examples
    - a. The excavator digging the basement encountered a solid rock shelf
    - b. So it took him longer to dig to the appropriate depth for the basement
    - c. And of course, longer means money
  - 3. And then, once the hole was dug for the foundation, it was time for the delivery of the cinder block
    - a. Normally, the truck that would deliver the block would drive right up to the house location
    - b. And using the truck’s lift, he would drop all the block right in the middle of the foundation

- c. Ready for the mason to get started
- 4. Well, it had been a rainy fall when we started the project
  - a. The block truck arrived, and immediately got stuck at the beginning of our gravel driveway
  - b. And he couldn't get anywhere near the house location
  - c. And he couldn't get unstuck
  - d. Unless, of course, he would dump the block right where the truck was – out near the road
  - e. And that's what he did
  - f. So we had these huge pallets of block dropped about 150 feet away from the house location
  - g. So three days of my labor at the beginning of the project was hauling more than 100 block, about 5 blocks at a time, with a wheelbarrow, the 150 feet to the hole in the ground before the mason could even get started
- 5. In the final analysis, we ended up building a \$100,000 house for \$100,000
  - a. Or – and this was the way I rationalized it – we built a \$100,000 house for \$80,000
  - b. And I paid another \$20,000 for the education that came with it
- C. So struggles and frustration accompanied the project from the very beginning
  - 1. But one of the other frustrating things – which was included in the price of the education, no extra charge – was learning how to grow a lawn
  - 2. The first thing I had to do was clear the yard of rocks
    - a. And as I implied a while ago – the soil on this ridge was rocky, to say the least
    - b. And so I got my trusty wheelbarrow and started hauling rocks, dumping them behind the house where I would make other use of them later
  - 3. Now the rocks at the beginning we large – anywhere from softball size to the size of a desktop computer!
    - a. (Of course, at the time I there weren't any desktop computers – but you get the idea)
    - b. Some of the rocks were heavier than a cinder block
    - c. I had learned very well how heavy cinder blocks were by that time!
    - d. But at least they were easy to find
  - 4. After I had cleared the rocks, we hauled in a couple of loads of top soil
    - a. And I seeded the lawn with fescue
    - b. Watered it, and watched it grow
  - 5. And it did grow
    - a. We actually had grass!
    - b. Very encouraging!
  - 6. But as it grew, more rocks started to appear
    - a. "Where did they come from?" I wondered
    - b. But there they were

- c. Not as large as the first rocks I hauled away, but still needed to get rid of them if I wanted a real lawn
    - d. So there I was again, picking up rocks, throwing them in the wheelbarrow, hauling them away
  - 7. Then days turned into weeks
    - a. And more rocks appeared!
    - b. “Where did they come from?”
    - c. Worked there way up from under the top soil, I supposed
    - d. So I picked up more rocks
  - 8. And weeks turned into months
    - a. More rocks
    - b. More picking up rocks and hauling them away
- D. We lived in that house for about six years
  - 1. And I was picking rocks up from the yard until we moved away!
  - 2. Removing rocks from the lawn was a constant struggle!
- E. If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, and if you’ve been one for any length of time
  - 1. You’re experienced in removing rocks
  - 2. And if you’re honest – you’re still finding rocks to pick up
- F. This morning’s message, and the next one in our Romans series, is about the struggle to pick the rocks out of the lawn of your soul

## II. The Gospel

- A. Before we examine our text this morning, let’s remember where we are in our study of Romans
  - 1. In our series The Pure Gospel
- B. The book of Romans is about the Gospel
  - 1. About the good news that God is, in His Son Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to Himself
    - a. Not counting one’s sins against them (2 Corinthians 5.19)
- C. We’ve learned that God was doing this through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – the incarnate Son of God
  - 1. “... whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood...” (Romans 3.25)
  - 2. And of course you all know what propitiation means!
    - a. Propitiation – wrath-removing sacrifice
    - b. Hilasterion (Gk) – mercy seat
    - c. Used in the Greek translation of the OT for the mercy seat where the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice of atonement
    - d. To pay for the sins of the people
- D. And we learned that all this is by grace
  - 1. That in Christ God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4.5, 5.6)
  - 2. And that He does so by faith alone
    - a. That the one who casts oneself on the mercy of Jesus Christ, and believes in Him, trust in Him alone for salvation
    - b. That God counts us righteous and declares us not guilty

- c. Not because of our righteousness – for we have none
  - d. But because of Christ's righteousness
- E. **Romans 3:21–25** (ESV) —
  - 1. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
  - 2. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.
  - 3. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
  - 4. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
  - 5. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith....
- F. That's the gospel
  - 1. That by faith in the righteous One
    - a. Our sins have been transferred to Christ who took the just penalty for our sin on Himself on the cross
    - b. And His righteousness has been imputed, or accounted to us
  - 2. That a glorious truth!
    - a. And one that we as the people of God treasure
    - b. And for which we thank God – every day if we think for even a micro-second!

### III. **Gospel Objections**

- A. Now of course, this wonderful gospel has raised objections
  - 1. And Paul anticipates them
    - a. And he deals with them in Chapters 6 and 7
    - b. We've seen that Chapters 6 and 7 is a parenthesis set within this astonishing gospel which unfolds from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 and then picks up again in Chapter 8
- B. There are two objections Paul deals with
  - 1. **Antinomianism** – that if salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, doesn't that mean that we can do anything we want?
    - a. That we can sin with impunity?
    - b. **Nomos (Gk) = Law**
    - c. **Antinomianism = Anti-law-ism**
  - 2. And the other is it's opposite – **Legalism**
    - a. Surely there must be more to it than salvation by grace through faith!
    - b. Otherwise, what's the Law of God for?
- C. Those objections are raised by Paul in typical Pauline fashion
  - 1. He becomes his own devil's advocate
  - 2. **Romans 6:1** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

3. **Romans 6:15** (ESV) —
  - a. 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?
4. And he deals with the issue of the purpose of the Law in Chapter 7 in a similar way
5. **Romans 7:7** (ESV) —
  - a. 7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin?
  - b. (In other words, if we're freed from the Law by the Gospel, what's the point of the Law?)

#### IV. **Gospel Answers**

- A. Of course, Paul answers these objections throughly in these chapters
- B. **His answer to Antinomianism is in Chapter 6**
  1. He says that when we come to Christ in faith something has changed in us
    - a. We've died to sin
    - b. We've been united to Christ in His death
    - c. So that we would be united with Him in His resurrection
    - d. And live in newness of life
- C. **Romans 6:1–4** (ESV) —
  1. 1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
  2. 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?
  3. 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
  4. 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
- D. **Romans 6:5–8** (ESV) —
  1. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
  2. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.
  3. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.
  4. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
- E. And then **Paul's answer to** the question of **the purpose of the Law is in Chapter 7**
- F. **Romans 7:4** (ESV) —
  1. 4 Likewise, 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.
- G. **Romans 7:6** (ESV) —
  1. 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.

V. **Gospel Law**

- A. That's the chapter we're in now – Chapter 7
  - 1. And that's when Paul raises another question
  - 2. If we're released from the Law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, then what function must the Law have
    - a. In fact, is the Law evil?
    - b. Is the Law sinful?
- B. **Romans 7:7** (ESV) —
  - 1. 7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin?
- C. Of course, he declares – as he did in response to the other rhetorical questions – “By no means!”
- D. And last week we examined his argument
  - 1. And we discovered that the Law has three important roles to play in the gospel
- E. **The Revelation of Sin**
  - 1. Without the Law we would not have known what sin was
    - a. Oh, we knew we weren't perfect!
    - b. But to know that our attitudes and actions were a direct rebellion against God Himself – the Altogether Righteous One – was only revealed to us by the Law
  - 2. Paul used himself as an example
  - 3. **Romans 7:7** (ESV) — 7 ... Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”
  - 4. So the Law is critical to the gospel
    - a. Because without the Law we would never understand that we have need of the gospel, and need of a Savior
- F. **The Provocation of Sin**
  - 1. That the Law does more than just reveal sin – it provokes sin in us
  - 2. Now the sin is already in us – the Law doesn't create sin in us
  - 3. But it inflames our sinful inclinations and desires
  - 4. **Romans 7:8–9** (ESV) —
    - a. 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.
    - b. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.
    - c. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
  - 5. We learned last week that it's a good thing that the Law provokes sin
    - a. Because not only does it reveal sin – it shines a light on it, puts it under a magnifying glass
    - b. So that we see ourselves for who we really are apart from the grace of God
- G. **The Slaying of Sin**
  - 1. The Law of God kills us

- a. In other words, the Law of God brings us to the end of ourselves
  - b. It strips away any last vestige of self-righteousness
  - c. And brings us to the place where we have no other option than to cast ourselves on the mercy of Christ if we are to be saved
- 2. **Romans 7:9–11** (ESV) —
  - a. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
  - b. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.
  - c. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.
- H. That's Gospel Law
  - 1. The proper use of the Law of God
    - a. To reveal sin in us
    - b. To provoke sin us to we can accurately diagnose our “sinfection”
    - c. And to bring us to the end of ourselves
  - 2. And that's why every proper preaching of the gospel involves, one way or another, the preaching of the Law
    - a. Because apart from the Law, the gospel makes no sense!

## VI. **Gospel Struggles**

- A. That brings us to the present text
  - 1. One that will bring us to the end of Chapter 7 in this message and the next in the series
    - a. And will bring us to the reality of our life in Jesus
    - b. The reality of the struggles that we still discover as we navigate our way through to the safe harbor that awaits us
    - c. The reality of the process by which the rocky soil of our lives continues to be culled and sifted
    - d. As we are continually being remade into the image of the Savior
    - e. Which is the goal of our life in Jesus
- B. **Romans 7:13–20** (ESV) —
  - 1. 13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?
  - 2. By no means!
  - 3. 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.
  - 4. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.
  - 5. 15 For I do not understand my own actions.
  - 6. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
  - 7. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
  - 8. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
  - 9. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.
  - 10. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

11. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.
12. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

C. Observations about the text

1. Nothing is said in this text, and through to the end of the Chapter, that Paul hasn't already stated or implied in the previous sections
  - a. Paul alluded to the continued presence of sin in the lives of those who are redeemed by Christ, those who are born again by the Spirit of God
  - b. That even though we are new in Christ, united to Christ, have died to sin in Christ
  - c. And even though we are new creatures in Christ, alive to God in Christ
  - d. Sin still maintains a residual presence, the locus of which is our bodies
  - e. That's why he admonishes us to "not let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions." (Romans 6.12)
  - f. And why he urges us: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6.11)
  - g. And "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification." (Romans 6.19)
  - h. This portion of Chapter 7 builds on these great truths
2. Paul uses the term "flesh" in this section in a moral sense
  - a. We observed in previous messages that the term "flesh" or *sarx* (Gk) is used in different ways depending on context
  - b. That it can simply mean our bodily existence, or can represent humanity itself
  - c. But in Chapters 7 and 8 he uses it in its moral connotation
  - d. It represents our sinful nature – the vestiges of sinful inclinations and desires that continue in us redeemed people until we are glorified in the immediate presence of Jesus
  - e. So he says in v. 18 "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh."
3. Paul unfolds the reality of the struggle that we find in ourselves through a series of contrasts and comparisons
  - a. Contrasts and comparisons that will give us a full-orbed, comprehensive view of our struggles from a variety of perspectives
  - b. We will unpack this passage using those pairs in a moment
4. This passage has been one of the more controversial passages in Romans as the commentators have struggled over the centuries, debating what kind of person Paul was talking about
  - a. For he uses himself as the illustration of his argument



- b. Was Paul talking about his pre-Christian, pre-conversion life as a religious unbeliever?
- c. Or was Paul talking about his Christian experience?
- d. Or was Paul talking about some other transitional experience, some kind of in-between state, after he had been convicted of his sin, but before he was truly converted

D. **The Past and the Present**

1. Quite honestly, I don't think that issue is that difficult to figure out
  - a. You just actually have to read the text as it is written – using the normal grammatical conventions
2. Here's how it works
3. **Romans 7:13** (ESV) —
  - a. 13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?
  - b. By no means!
  - c. 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.
4. “It was sin” – past tense
  - a. Paul is talking about his pre-Christian experience in that verse
5. That verse is simply the summary of what we saw in the last section – vv 7-12
6. **Romans 7:8** (ESV) —
  - a. 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness....
  - b. “Produced in me” – past tense
7. **Romans 7:9** (ESV) —
  - a. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
  - b. “I died.” – past tense
8. **Romans 7:11** (ESV) —
  - a. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.
  - b. “Deceived me” and “killed me.” – past tense
9. Romans 7.7-13 – past tense
  - a. Paul refers to his pre-Christian experience
  - b. And that's what we observed last week
10. **Romans 7:14** (ESV) —
  - a. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.
  - b. “I am” – present tense
11. **Romans 7:15** (ESV) —
  - a. 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.
  - b. “I do...” – present tense
12. **Romans 7:16–20** (ESV) —

- a. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
- b. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
- c. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.
- d. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.
- e. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.
- f. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
- g. All present tense verbs – all the way through to the end
- 13. So Paul – who never wrote anything without intention – changes the description of his experience in v. 14
  - a. Before – in 7-13 – he’s talking about his experience before his conversion
  - b. From v 14 on he’s talking about his present experience as a believer in Jesus
- 14. And he discovers – and if you’re a believer in Jesus and you’re honest with yourself – you’ll resonate with this
  - a. He discovers that life is complicated
- 15. Now life may have been complicated in his pre-Christian days
  - a. But life is even more complicated now
  - b. Because now there is an internal struggle going on
  - c. A battle for control of our persons
- 16. Remember the story of Isaac and Rebekah – as Rebekah was pregnant with her twins, Jacob and Esau?
- 17. **Genesis 25:22–23** (ESV) —
  - a. 22 The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?”
  - b. So she went to inquire of the LORD.
  - c. 23 And the LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
  - d. the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”
- 18. In a similar way, you and I now have, in our Christian experience, two struggling nations, vying for supremacy
- 19. Paul’s description of his own experience is Paul at his transparent and candid best
  - a. And I take great comfort that, as I find myself struggling within, that Paul can testify in the same way
- 20. So the first comparison is between the past and the present
  - a. Paul in this passage is describing his life as a believer
  - b. And he does not reside on easy street!
- 21. So let’s see how he describes his life
- E. **The Law and the Flesh**

1. The first contrast we see in this passage is between the Law of God and the flesh, the sinful nature
  2. **Romans 7:14** (ESV) —
    - a. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.
  3. Recall that Paul concludes the previous section by affirming the goodness of the Law
  4. **Romans 7:12** (ESV) —
    - a. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.
  5. The word “spiritual” in v. 14 is **pneumatikos (Gk)**
    - a. It refers to that which has its origin in the Holy Spirit
    - b. In other words – its origin is divine
  6. So, as a believer in Jesus, Paul feels the contrast between the holiness of the Law of God and his own morally corrupt flesh, his sinful nature
    - a. In fact, the weight of contrast is crushing
    - b. For he says, “I am of the flesh, sold under sin”
    - c. He feels like he is, in his flesh, is still under bondage
  7. Now eventually, we’ll see that that’s not the case
    - a. But that is how it feels to him
  8. And maybe that’s how it feels to you
    - a. As you struggle with what may be your besetting sin
    - b. “Sin which clings so closely” (**Hebrews 12.1**)
    - c. The sin with which you struggle the most
  9. You and I should all feel the stark contrast between the Law of God and the nature of our flesh
    - a. And it is natural and normal for the Christian to feel the weight of our flesh in light of the “holy, righteous and good” Law of God
- F. **The Battle of Desires**
1. The second area of contrast is the battle of desires
    - a. It’s expressed not only in terms of desires in this text but also in terms of “wants”
  2. **Romans 7:15** (ESV) —
    - a. 15 For I do not understand my own actions.
    - b. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
  3. This is another indication that Paul is talking about himself as a Christian
    - a. For the unbeliever doesn’t really want to do the things that please God
    - b. And the unbeliever certainly doesn’t hate that which is antagonistic to the things of God
    - c. So Paul is saying that he wants to do what is right, what is in accordance with the Law of God
    - d. But that his actions don’t live up to his desires for righteousness
    - e. Or, as J.I. Packer put it, “his reach exceeds his grasp”
  4. In fact, Paul expresses the opposite about himself

- a. He says that his actions correspond to that which he hates
- 5. **Romans 7:16** (ESV) —
  - a. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
  - b. Paul says that since his actions belie his desires for righteousness, he confirms the goodness of the Law
- 6. **Romans 7:18** (ESV) —
  - a. 18 ... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.
  - b. So there is a disconnect between the believer's desire for righteousness and one's ability to actually pull it off
- 7. Back in the day I was involved in track and field
  - a. I was a high jumper in high school, and actually did it for a couple of years in college as well
  - b. At the high school level I was pretty good; jumped my height, which in terms of elite high jumping is not very good
  - c. But it's not insignificant – I mean – it's over a bar at the height of my head without knocking it down
  - d. Boy, if I went out to a track and approached a bar at that height today, no matter how much I wanted to jump over it, there's absolutely no way
  - e. I could say I had the desire to do it, but not the ability
- 8. Well, with respect to real righteousness, it's even worse
  - a. In the flesh, no matter how much my redeemed self wants to achieve it, in the flesh I do not have the ability
  - b. There's a disconnect between my desires and my ability
- 9. **Romans 7:19** (ESV) —
  - a. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.
  - b. This is essentially a restatement of v. 15 – but with even more force
  - c. Not only does it say, as v 15 says, that I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate
  - d. It states it in morally descriptive terms: I do not do the *good* that I want, but the *evil* I do not want is what I keep on doing
- 10. So I want to do good – that which corresponds with the Law of God
  - a. But I end up actually doing evil!
  - b. In the flesh, the only thing I can do is evil – no matter how much I want to do good

G. **The Old Me and the New Me**

- 1. Finally, the other area of contrast is the old self and the new
  - a. Or the old me and the new me
- 2. Remember, Paul has been alluding to this transformation from the very beginning of Chapter 6
  - a. We are new creatures in Christ

- b. We have died to sin; we've been buried with Christ through baptism
  - c. Our old self was crucified with Christ so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin
  - d. We are to consider ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus
  - e. We've been set free from sin
  - f. We have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which we were committed
  - g. We have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that we belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead
  - h. In other words, we are new men and women in union with Christ Jesus
- 3. But in this struggle, we find that our new man, our new creature in Christ, wrestles with the vestigial remains of our old man, our sinful nature, our flesh
  - a. And that's infused throughout this passage when he speaks of "I"
- 4. **Romans 7:15–16** (ESV) —
  - a. 15 For I do not understand my own actions.
  - b. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
  - c. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
  - d. I is the new me!
- 5. **Romans 7:17** (ESV) —
  - a. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it,
  - b. but sin that dwells within me.
  - c. There's the "I" and that "I" is distinguishable from the sin that dwells within me
  - d. There's the new me – and the old me, the sin that dwells within me
- 6. So when I sin, it's not the new me that's sinning
  - a. It's the flesh, the sinful nature, the sin that continues to dwell in me
  - b. That is in my body
- 7. **Romans 7:18** (ESV) —
  - a. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh....
  - b. So here he makes it clear
  - c. Nothing good dwells *in my flesh*
- 8. **Romans 7:20** (ESV) —
  - a. 20 Now if I do what I do not want,
  - b. it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
- 9. So there's a disconnect again – this time between the new me, the "I" that Paul refers to about himself – and the flesh, the sin that dwells within
- H. So that's the struggle within the soul of the believer
  - 1. Struggle between the Law and the flesh
  - 2. Struggle between the desires of the redeemed believer and ability in the flesh to perform those desires

3. And the struggle between the new, redeemed me (the “I” Paul refers to) and the old me, the old self, the old nature, the flesh, the sin that dwells within

## VII. The Maturing Believer

- A. Now this may seem to you to be discouraging
  1. How can we live a life like this with the nearly constant prospect of defeat?
- B. So we can approach the issue in a couple of different ways
  1. One way is that I can continue to preach for another 45 minutes, through the end of Chapter 7, where Paul says,
  2. **Romans 7:24–25** (ESV) —
    - a. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
    - b. 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...
  3. Paul says there is an answer – and I can take another 45 minutes to tell you about it
  4. Or I can preach for another two and half hours through Chapter 8 and show you how the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of the believer is the answer!
- C. Or the other way is for you to be patient
  1. With yourself
    - a. And with me, the preacher
    - b. Confident that we will eventually understand the victory that we have in Christ Jesus, through the Spirit of Christ who indwells us!
- D. One more thing
  1. If you resonate with this state of affairs, you might be discouraged
    - a. You very well might feel the depth of your sinful nature, your flesh, as you seek to live the Christian life
    - b. You might sense the vast moral distance between the Law of God on the one hand and the corrupt nature of your flesh on the other hand
    - c. And you might be discouraged
  2. But I want you to know, that these feelings that you have is not a sign of weakness in your walk with Christ
    - a. It is actually a sign of maturity
    - b. Because the more we grow in our relationship with Christ, the more sensitive we become of how far from the pure righteousness of Christ we really are
- E. One brother in the Lord sent me an email after last week’s message
  1. That was the message which ended with the story of Dr. Gerstner
    - a. Who was approached by a woman after a message and said, “Dr. Gerstner, you make me feel this big”

- b. Whereupon Dr. Gerstner replied, “No Madam, that’s too big. Much too big. Don’t you know that this much self righteousness will send you to hell.”
  - 2. My brother wrote this: “I find that sometimes I’m just a fake Christian. Oh, I can go to Bible study and talk about the Bible, but sometimes I fake it, too many times...”
  - 3. No, my friend, if you feel this way, you’re no fake Christian
    - a. You’re the real deal
    - b. Because that’s how real Christians feel when we genuinely encounter the struggle within
- F. Yes, it can be discouraging when we continue to find rocks in the lawns of our souls
  - 1. But Jesus Christ has already paid the price
    - a. And He, through the Holy Spirit, is not only our Savior, but also our Sanctifier