

A Double Life?

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[0 : 00] This morning we're continuing our series in Romans, even though Matthew is not here, and we're continuing in Romans chapter 7.! So if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn with me to Romans chapter 7.

And as you do so, the words will also be on the screen. They're also in your bulletin. Romans chapter 7. This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray.

Lord, we're thankful for your word. We pray that you might use it to diagnose our spiritual condition. Father, to give us words as we struggle through sin.

To show us sin. But more than that, to show us the glory of Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. I want to take you back.

[1 : 31] Now kids, join us on this journey. You might know more about this than your parents. Because you've heard this story more recently.

Now not many of us have thought about this story over the recent years. But it's one that we're all familiar with. It's a story from Hans Christian Andersen about an emperor and his clothes.

Or lack of clothes. You see this ruler lived pretty lavishly. He lived a big lifestyle. And then two men came along realizing this and thought they could make a quick buck.

And they did. They convinced this emperor that they were making clothes. And they said they'll be the most magnificent clothes that you've ever seen. But he never saw them.

Even though all the court officials and all the high people in the land. And the emperor himself went to go check to see how the progress was coming. After they promised him these new clothes.

[2 : 29] And they went and they saw nothing. And they said nothing. And then when these two tricksters came and put these new clothes on the emperor. No one said anything.

The emperor said nothing. They said they're invisible. Aren't they great? And he went out and paraded before the people with no clothes on. No high official.

No member of court. No man. No woman. But only a child had the bravery to say there's the emperor with no clothes.

We all know that story. And heard it applied in many different areas of life. You see the emperor got a dose of reality. We may even use that word or that phrase today.

A dose of reality. We're going to give somebody a wake up call. That I'm fixing to give them the hard truth. Whether it's exposing something that someone can't see in their own lives.

[3 : 28] Or pointing to the fact that they have no clothes on at all. Correcting a colleague at work. Or confronting a wayward child. Or helping a friend in the midst of trial.

We say to them. And we think to ourselves. That we're dispelling all their illusions and fantasies. But it's always someone else that we're doing that to.

It's never to ourselves. In this text this morning. Paul is on the receiving end of this wake up call. On the receiving end of this hard truth. Or dose of reality.

And we are along for a ride. A ride with Paul. As he speaks about himself. To you. Shine Mountain Presbyterian Church.

To you the Roman Church. To himself. To you the Christian. He's saying I don't see myself as I should. I need a dose of reality.

[4 : 28] And in doing so. He's not talking about a failure to pack your lunch the night before. He's not talking about a dose of reality. When it comes to financial planning.

Or public policy. Or anything that's important. Like that. He's not even talking about the overspending of an emperor. He's talking about a reality.

That affects each and every one of our own hearts. About our own disobedience. Every person. Parading around with no clothes on.

Convincing ourselves. That we're clothed. And yet. When we fail to see ourselves. With the goggles of spirituality.

We deceive ourselves. When really we are naked. We need that dose of reality. That Paul gives us this morning. That dose of reality. That sin exists.

[5 : 24] And specifically. That there's a struggle against it. Even if you trust in Christ. But there's also deliverance from it. The reality of sin.

It's something that we don't like to talk about in the modern day. Because we like to parade around. Tricking ourselves that it doesn't exist. And that continues when we put our faith in Christ. We don't think it will be a struggle at all.

And then when it happens. It's really, really hard. But here. We're reminded by the ancient words of Paul. He's calling us back to this reality.

That there's a struggle against sin. And there will be a deliverance from it. And those are the two organizing topics we have this morning. A struggle against sin. And then our deliverance from it.

First. Let's turn our attention to the struggle against sin. And this text. As we've talked about in weeks past. Matthew mentioned this last week.

[6 : 20] This is a really difficult section of Romans. And this is a really difficult section of the Bible. And people walk away with very different readings.

And it's because there's this interplay between Paul's own thoughts. His use of the term I. And the use of the law. What does he mean by the law?

Law. That's a problem that we've had. Not a problem. But confusion that we've even had in our own hearts. As we've walked through Romans. If you remember at the beginning of Romans.

He uses the term law to mean something in one way. And then he'll contrast it with the law of God. Look with me at verse 21. So I find it to be a law.

That when I want to do right. Evil lies close at hand. What's presented here is the same issue that we ran into earlier in Romans. Is he talking about God's law?

[7 : 14] Because when we hear law. We think immediately of the Ten Commandments. Is that what he's talking about when he says law here? Now most of our English Bibles say not the law.

But a law. To draw a distinction in this way. If you notice here. That distinction. Is represented by not just a law.

But this contrast with God's law that we'll see in verse 22. A law. In that sense. It's not the law of God.

It's not the Ten Commandments. He's not saying that this is God's word. But it's a principle that's at work in life. He's not saying he created this law.

But he's acknowledging this principle is at work. This law that when he wants to do right. Evil is always close at hand. We even talk like this. Think about.

[8 : 10] You don't argue before the Supreme Court. On the basis of a law of gravity. And yet it's still a law. It's a general principle that affects all of life. That's what Paul is saying here.

The law or a law in his life. Is that when he wants to do right. Evil lies close at hand. Now. When we think about this.

When we think about this principle. We think there's an alternate reality. For the Christian. And that's true. That we are justified by Christ. And yet this is still a struggle.

When we want to do right. Evil lies close at hand. And that's why he can say 22. At the same time. Look with me. For I delight in the law of God.

A different law. Than the law before. In my inner being. Now. This verse is so helpful. As we try to navigate what's going on at Romans 7.

[9 : 07] Is it Paul talking about himself only? Is he talking about a Christian? Is he talking about an unbeliever? Well. Well. The answer is in verse 22. For I delight in the law of God.

No unbeliever can say that about himself. That he delights in the law of God. He's the furthest thing from delighting in the law of God. Because it actually condemns him.

Only a Christian can say this. That I delight in the law of God. It's the same sense that we see in Psalm 1.

It's the same sense that we read earlier in Psalm 119. The one who follows after God delights in knowing him. And all the means by which he's revealed himself.

Most clearly and most explicitly in his word. That's why we can say with the psalmist in Psalm 119. That we delight in God's law. The clarity from 22 kind of parts the waters in Romans 7.

[10:09] And we know that Paul is talking about himself. This battle that he wants to do right. While evil lies close at hand. Is of a Christian. The most obvious clue that Paul is talking about himself is what?

Not even what I said. But the fact that he uses the first person pronoun I. He's talking about himself. And we're along for the ride. Because in doing so. He's explaining our experience as Christians. That we still struggle with sin. That we want to do things. And yet we don't do them. Because evil lies close at hand. That we serve our flesh.

And that is a law of itself. You see when the Christian delights in God's law. Evil doesn't just go away. It's still there. An ever present reality lurking around the corner.

And Paul is giving words to that experience. It's not just lurking outside of him. But it's actually a conflict that's going on inside of him.

[11:14] Look at verse 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.

There's a conflict that's raging inside of him. Because he wants to do what's right. And yet he doesn't do it. He wants to honor God. But there's a tension.

Because he knows. He loves God's law. And he does what's wrong. And this time in verse 23. It's not God's word or general principle. But another law that's waging war against him. It's that law of sin. A set of characteristics.

Not the law of God itself. He clarifies that on that back half of that verse. When he says that law of sin dwells in his members.

[12:13] He means in his body. That's exactly the same language. If you remember from the earlier part of Romans 7. He says this. For while we were living in the flesh. Our sinful passions aroused by the law.

Were at work in our members. It's another way to say in my body. In his experience. This law of his mind. Is kind of curious though.

I see the law waging war against the law of my mind. It's the principle that he wants to do God's will. That's the law of his mind. And the battle between that.

Is he wants to do what's right. And yet he doesn't. And it functions as a law. He wants to do God's word. He wants to respond in obedience.

And yet in his members. In his flesh. There's a conflict. There's a war that's being waged. We must be extremely careful here.

[13:10] As we're trying to navigate all this. It's not just. It's not. That the law is evil. That's not what Paul is saying. If you remember with us. From the earlier parts of Romans.

God's word. His law is holy. It's not even the idea that we struggled with earlier in Romans 7. That there's more than one law.

He's saying this battle is not simply in his body. But in his sinful flesh. And his will. Or his desire to obey God's law. Is a real war.

And that fact is often lost on us. As Christians. We think it's kind of like make believe play war. Like we're fighting battleships in the bathtub. In fact.

Is an actual war. Now think about this. When Paul is using that language. Like hey. I am being taken captive to the law of sin. That dwells in my members. Or the law waging war against the law of my mind.

[14:10] He's not punting on something that's really painful. For all of his listeners. Instead he's pulling that out. And saying. That experience that you have. Of maybe being sold into slavery.

Being captive because of war. And sent to Rome. I'm using that language. I'm using all that pain. And describing a reality. That's even more painful.

Than what you've experienced in this life. It's even more real. Than the war you think you know. Paul is speaking to a people who knew war.

Whether brought to Rome as slaves. As I mentioned. From the outer regions of the empire. Or they saw it themselves. Or they were slaves themselves. They knew and were acquainted.

With war. And he doesn't dance around it. He goes right at it. And that sense. In which it feels like the air has come out of the room.

[15:09] That pain. He's saying. The more real. Sense in which that happens. Is sin. Now.

I'm not advocating this. But. Whenever there's a fist fight. If you're an observer. Maybe you've been in one.

There's a moment that happens. Okay. And this moment happens. Whether you're a kid. Or you're an adult. I'm not advocating for fist fights. But I've seen this over and over. From kids and adults. Okay. And maybe teachers will know what I'm talking about. There's a moment. When it's all. Ethereal. It's all make believe. And then.

The first moment. That it becomes real. You can see it on the face. Of the person that gets punched. It's like. Oh man. This is real. And normally what happens.

[16:02] Is a response of anger. Right. That's how we think about sin. We think it's not real. And then. Paul is telling us. In this section. Oh no.

It's real. It's written all over our face. In fact. We've gotten punched. And we can feel it. That's what Paul is saying to us. That moment.

When we realize it's real. And that sting on our face. That's how we should think about sin. That struggle against sin. Is not make believe. It is real.

And we're in for a fight. So why do we as Christians. Think there's no struggle. Think there's not going to be anything like that. Well. One is.

Bad theology. To be quite honest. I know that seems like a really nerdy. Presbyterian response. But it's true. We think. And we believe the lie. That everything is going to be.

[16:57] Great. And it is. Because we have fellowship with the Savior. If we put our trust in him. But the reality is. We still dwell in this body. Until we are called home to glory.

And there is a version out there. Of Christianity. That says. If you put faith in Christ. You're not going to struggle anymore. And then what happens. We get punched in the face.

Because we sin. And then our whole world comes undone. The reality is that Paul is saying. We are going to struggle against sin.

Do not be surprised. Even I. He says. Struggle against sin. That's the warning that comes with this. There's also the question of.

If this doesn't look like your Christian experience. If you put your faith in Jesus. There might be a problem. We might not be taking sin seriously.

[17:52] We're not concerned about rooting out. Sin in our lives. We're not fighting against it. We fought and given up. I'm not saying you're going to fight and win every time. In fact.

Paul seems to indicate that he's fighting and losing. But if we don't care about fighting at all. Are you really a Christian? That's what he's saying to us.

Or has our love grown cold? Do I know him? Do I love the same Jesus? Where I can see my sin as waging war in my own body?

That's what Paul is asking us. Have I ever really experienced fellowship with him? To know there is even a tension in my own heart.

In my own life. When sin arises. Now for those of you who have never struggled. I would really caution you to think really long and hard.

[18:53] About if you have sin at all. You do. Whether you acknowledge it or not. Paul told us that at the beginning of Romans. That we've all failed to uphold the righteous requirements of the law.

We've all failed in the holiness department. And if we're honest with ourselves. We know that from experience. And we need Jesus. For those of you who are not struggling now.

Maybe you won't for a time. But you will. And there will come a day when you experience that jarring reality again. Of getting punched in the face. Of this is a struggle.

And this is a fight. Not just for Paul. Not just for Bible people. Or pastors. Or missionaries. Or people in the Middle East. This is for every Christian.

That if we are united to Christ. And we have fellowship with him. And we are not in glory. We will struggle against sin. And it is coming. But even for this.

[19:55] Christian. There is a danger. In thinking that we can fight. Or it doesn't matter if I fight at all. I am just going to give up. It doesn't matter. We have already dealt with that question in Romans 6.

That we are called to fight against sin. And it matters. You are not perfect. Because we still dwell in this sinful body. We still dwell in our flesh.

Which serves the law of sin. As Paul reminds us. There is another danger though. It is a Christian that sees all of this.

And is kind of undone. Which is good. Right? Because we know we need a savior. But it is the Christian that thinks he does battle alone. And doesn't remember the promise. He doesn't remember the temptation that we confessed earlier in the shorter catechism. It doesn't say that once you put your faith in Christ. Then you figure it all out. And you do the law. And that is how you become more holy.

[20 : 54] What does it say? It is a free grace from God. That same gospel that saves you. That justifies you. Is the engine that propels you down the track of becoming more and more holy.

The gospel saves you. And makes you more holy. It's not you just left to your own devices. Because the law can't do anything.

Because we don't have the spirit. Oh wait. You do. The spirit is the thing that enables us to give glory to God. It opens our eyes to see our sin and the law.

And to see what Christ has done on your behalf on the cross. And it also gives us. That same gospel gives us energy to propel us down the tracks towards godliness.

That's the struggle. It's a fight. We have to recognize that it's a fight. But good news. There's a deliverer. Before the deliverer comes we see the hopelessness that Paul says.

[21 : 58] This wrestling. What does he say in 24? Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus. He knows the pain.

He knows the frustration of trying to glorify God. And failing. That a law is waging war in his members that fights against his desire to honor God.

And he knows it can't come inside of him. It has to come from somewhere else. He knows that it's Christ Jesus that will deliver him from this body of death.

The one that will deliver him from this present reality of struggle. One writer has called this the miserable tension. How appropriate is that?

We know that we sin. And we want to root it out. But we feel like we're never there. It's because we're not this side of glory. He cannot achieve it himself under his own power.

[22 : 56] It's only Christ by the working of the spirit in our lives that makes us more holy. Jesus is not the beginning of faith.

And then it's all back on you. He's there with you. Delivering us now. Tomorrow. And one day. Finally and fully. From this body of death.

From this body of flesh. Where the law of sin. Wages war against the law of God in our minds.

It's easy to lose sight of this reality though. We turn inward and we think. And maybe we even kid ourselves that the struggle is not real or even there. Or that we've arrived in some sense of perfection.

And then when we do sin. Then our world becomes undone. Or we think in discouragement. We're left alone. That we don't have the spirit.

[23 : 53] That the gospel doesn't give us grace to walk more and more holy. There's a hymn writer, William Cooper. He's a friend of John Newton.

Right? Amazing grace. He also wrote glorious things of thee are spoken. There is a fountain filled with blood. His own personal experience in this. Is losing sight of the fact that the spirit is at work in his life.

And Christ is still working. He gets so weighed down in depression. Because he knows the reality of his own sin. And he's struggling against it.

And he's not winning. He knows the own darkness of his heart. But he forgets about Jesus meeting him in the midst of that. Christian. Christian.

We cannot forget that Christ walks with us. That same gospel that saves us. Also meets us in the midst of that struggle. That Jesus is the deliverance from them.

[24 : 51] From all of these things. Oh wretched man. That I am. That you are. Look to Christ. We must cling to him.

When the darkness of sin of this world weighs upon us. When it wages war in our own hearts and mind. When we feel the tension of wanting to do right.

But always failing and doing wrong. That's overwhelming. Cooper is undone by this. And in that dark hour. We must look to Christ our Savior.

And cling to him alone. It's Jesus. Only Jesus. Let's pray. Lord we're reminded from your word. To look to Christ.

May we look to him in faith. And Father as we do so. May you strengthen us. For the day. In which we will see him in glory.

[25 : 50] And there will no longer be a war. We won't wage war against our sinful flesh. Because. We are with you in glory.

Let us march on towards that day. And let us struggle. But not struggle as ones without hope. And struggle as ones under our own power. We ask.

In Christ's name. Amen.