

Romans 7:15-25a

**Theme:** The Struggle and Relief

We say, “The heart wants what the heart wants,” to justify being drawn to things, to people, to relationships, which are just toxic. “We’re not compatible, no good for each other. But hey, the heart wants what the heart wants!” Sometimes, the heart totally gives in, loses itself to another person, to a bad situation only to come out baffled and ashamed leaving us to wonder who that person was who behaved that way, did those things.

I want to forget some things I’ve done, but when my memory’s jogged, I say of myself, “Who was that guy? I can’t believe I did that.” Ever look in the mirror and say the same? Paul sure did. Such an honest look isn’t easy because we come to the same conclusions as Paul who couldn’t recognize himself sometimes either, **Romans 7:15**, “*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*” And this coming from the guy who for the previous two chapters explained the surpassing nature of grace, that where sin increased, grace increased even more! From Paul who said that new and holy life is ours because we, in baptism, died with Christ were buried with him, but are raised and that’s who we truly are. We are God’s saved people made for doing his will. Paul knew that, obviously, so how can he say here that he doesn’t recognize himself? Because the heart wants what the heart wants and sometimes his heart wants and does what he hates!

The heart is drawn to bad, destructive things like a moth to the flame. And there isn’t doubt about what the bad is, God’s Law lets us know, which Paul says is good because the law removes any doubt about it: he, Paul, is a sinner. I, Joe, am a sinner and the law proves it. The law reveals how we all are. But then, listen to this, **Romans 7:17**, “*As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*” This isn’t a lowball excuse like, “The devil made me do it,” or, “Of course I sinned, I’m a sinner.” Paul is God’s righteous person, so the reason he keeps on doing the things he hates must, be the influence of this powerful invasive force which has gripped him and fights to control him: sin living in him.

Sin lives in us and does the very same thing to us! Sin isn't attacking just from the outside, but within. So entirely, nasty, evil, and horrid is sin living in us that we don't view it quite seriously enough if we don't describe it in the simple but matter of fact terms of Paul: I know that nothing good lives in me, in my sinful nature. Nothing good comes from the sinful nature. Nothing! It isn't helpful, doesn't want what's good for you, yet is determined to get what it wants, so it promises benefit and satisfaction. When it says this to you, when you say this to you, you lie to yourself and give in to what the heart wants only to come out of that moment shaking your head and muttering in shame to yourself once more just like Paul in **Romans 7:19**, "*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.*" What do you think it was for Paul, that reprehensible thing he did again? Something that sure plagued his heart. Better to ask a better question though, "What thing did I do again that I hate?" Be honest, you can answer that one really fast. I can too.

In this struggle, sin bludgeons and batters us, lands haymaker after haymaker, and all the while, to keep us coming back, it's sweet talking us and telling us how much it loves us. It's trying to take us mentally hostage. We sometimes shout back how much we hate it as the Holy Spirit picks us up off the ground juicing us up again with forgiveness and Jesus' love so we can sock it right back. We can lend some heavy hits ourselves by just not sinning, that, and by actually doing God's will! We can! We do! But this still remains true for us, the struggle is beyond real and it's all going on right in here! **Romans 7:21**, "*So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*" Right when we're about to congratulate ourselves for the good we do, it's tarnished by sin because we're sinners. That's the way it is. We aren't helping ourselves if we chose to forget this spiritual reality. We don't struggle against evil occasionally but constantly from within

I mean, how relatable this, **Romans 7:22**, "*For in my inner being I delight in God's law.*" Right? Listen to a devotion podcast, sit in church, and hear God's will, laws, instructions, and nod up and down in agreement the whole time and mean it because you, who you truly are, the new self, knows it's nothing

but good and blessed for self, neighbor, and heavenly kingdom to do what God says only to turn around and – WHAM!! – smacked in the face by sin, knocked to the ground, tied up, bag thrown over our heads, and we’re dragged off, captive to sin AGAIN!

We see this struggle in ourselves. It’s exhausting. It hurts. It leaves us feeling ashamed and defeated. It makes us say of ourselves, *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death.”* (**Romans 7:24**) Doesn’t feel good to say that, feels like despair, sounds like despair. It is. It’s despairing of oneself, it’s an admission that righteousness has to be found in someone else, that someone else has to set us free from the war we’ll never be able to win. This is a confession that we must be rescued from ourselves. All of what Paul’s said here applies to us. All the good intentions all resolutions, all the, “Imma do it right next time God,” all the repentance only to fail adds up and weighs us down so that from the depth of our souls we cry, literally, out, “Who’s gonna save me?” “My Son will,” is God’s answer. Every time.

*“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (**Romans 7:25a**) Thanks, constant thanks. In the middle of pouring out his heart about his struggles with sin, Paul gives thanks to God because, in Jesus, the victory has already been gained, because redemption is certain. You can do the same, it’s God’s will for you! Think of these reasons to give thanks. **II Corinthians 5:21**, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Christ died and rose for us to have new life. **II Corinthians 5:15**, *“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”* There is no condemnation for you because you are in Christ. By his death on the cross, he has set you free from sin and death to life.

Christ succeeds where we fail. He is a perfect person who does perfect things. He is our relief, our rescue, our deliverance. Christ forgives. You are forgiven. You have been given grace and stand in it now by faith in Christ who gave himself for you to save you from yourself, free you from your struggle against sin, and give you eternal life. Amen.