

From punishing master to perfect mentor

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to Romans chapter 7, and we're looking really at verses 7 to the end. Roll up your sleeves, shake out the cobwebs, and let's be hard at work.

In this section, Paul teaches us how the law of God becomes, for us, no longer a punishing master, but a perfect mentor for our lives.

Salvation in Jesus Christ, as we've seen, is far, far more than just rescue from the past, from the guilt and the shame of sin, and our rebellion against God. It's a salvation for a glorious future, and that future has begun already.

Chapter 5, verse 1 of Romans, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace. We stand in that grace now. But above all, says Paul there, we hope, we hope for the glory of God, for the full salvation, which is chapter 6, verse 5 tells us, we will certainly inherit when we are united with Christ in a resurrection, a bodily resurrection like his.

Nevertheless, Paul is clear. Nevertheless, Paul is clear. That eternal life has already broken into our present experience to liberate us from the power of sin, from the mastery of sin over our lives.

[1 : 32] We died to sin, he says. That is, our old self, what we once were in Adam, under the dominion and the rule of sin, is dead. It's gone. And a holy new person, a new me, has been reborn spiritually in Christ.

And the true me, and you, if you're a believer, no longer belongs to that tyrant husband's sin, as we saw last time. No, chapter 7, verse 4, we belong, says Paul, to him who is raised from the dead, the risen Lord Jesus, and so that no longer do our lives bear fruit constantly for sin and death, but rather, we bear fruit for what we were created for, verse 4.

We bear fruit, says Paul, for God. We've at last begun to live as true human beings, under God's loving lordship, not any longer under sin's destroying dominion.

We've died, he says, in verse 6, to that which held us captive. And now, literally, we serve, he says, in the newness of the Spirit. That is, the Spirit who lives in our hearts and unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you look down to chapter 8, verse 2, you'll see that Paul picks up that theme. And that the whole of chapter 8 goes on to expound it in great detail, more what this life, this newness of life in the Spirit really is.

[3 : 01] In fact, if you look, you'll see that it would make great sense to go directly from chapter 7, verse 6, right down to chapter 8, verse 2, and carry on. So, why then do we have chapter 7 in between?

Well, the answer is that Paul must stop here at last and deal with a question that's been bubbling under the surface all the way through these early chapters of Romans. And the question is this, what about the law of God?

What about the whole revelation of God given in the Old Testament scriptures to the people of Israel, revealed through his prophets all the way down the ages? Don't we need that anymore, Paul?

Is the law of God now utterly irrelevant and redundant for Christian believers, whether they're Jews or Gentiles? In fact, is it worse than that?

Are you actually saying, Paul, in verse 7 here, that the law is sin? And that question arises from verses 5 and 6, if you look at them.

[4 : 10] We were once, he says in verse 5, living in the flesh, that is, in Adam, under sin. And you say, Paul, that the law, God's law, even aroused sin and made it worse.

And that we needed to be released from this law, which was holding us captive if we're to find this new life. So is your gospel, Paul, opposed to the law of God?

To the very revelation of God himself all through the scriptures? That's a shocking thing, a shocking thought to Jewish ears. Although not a few Christians seem to actually think that that is true.

And Paul has been accused of that several times through this letter, but always he has utterly refuted it. Remember chapter 3, verse 31. Do we overthrow the law by this faith?

Paul's asked. By no means, says Paul. On the contrary, we, the gospel preachers, the apostles, we establish God's law. And the whole of chapter 4, remember, expounded that God's law, the Old Testament, right from the very beginning, the story of Abraham, was always about faith.

[5 : 19] It always pointed to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to come. In chapter 15, verse 4, Paul says, Everything that was written in these former days is written for our instruction.

Of course, it's not redundant. And yet, Paul has said many apparently very negative things about the law of God.

It can't justify people by itself. All it can do is condemn you under sin. Chapter 3, verse 20. It adds to the sin of those who know God's law by making them clearly transgressors and therefore magnifying the sin, making them more guilty.

Chapter 4, verse 15. Indeed, the law came in, says chapter 5, verse 20, to magnify the trespass.

And here, as we've seen in verse 5 of chapter 7, it seems that the law itself is what arouses sin.

And we need to be released from this law. So what on earth are you saying, Paul, about God's law? We've died to sin, you say. And so we must have absolutely nothing to do with sin anymore.

[6 : 30] Now you're saying we've died to the law. Does that mean it's just the same? That we're to abandon the scriptures? All God's commands have nothing to do with it anymore.

Is the whole law sin? That we're to despise it? No, no, no, no, no, says Paul. He says it immediately in verse 7.

Right at the beginning of this section. And again, look at verse 12, the end. Unequivocal. God's law is not sinful. God's law is holy.

And the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Unequivocal. Let me explain, Paul says here. It's just as I've been saying in chapter 6.

To be released from sin slavery isn't a release into a vacuum. It's liberation into a new slavery, he said. Remember? A slavery of righteousness. To be slaves to God.

[7 : 29] In whose service is actually perfect freedom. And so, as far as God's law is concerned, it's also a liberation from and for.

You're released, says Paul, from the condemnation of the law and for the consummation of the law, the fulfillment of the law.

The law condemns our sin. And so sin's power holds us captive by the law. And that's how God's holy law becomes to us the law of sin and death, as it's called in chapter 8, verse 2.

But Christ cleanses our sin. And now the Spirit's power commands our hearts in God's holy law.

And therefore it becomes for us instead, as the second half of verse 2 of chapter 8 says, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Quite, quite different. And the chief purpose of all of this is in chapter 8, verse 4. The purpose of the law is at last realized and consummated.

[8 : 42] The righteous requirement of the law, says Paul, is fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, and Adam under sin, in the old way, but according to the Spirit, in Christ, and by grace.

Totally, totally different. Maybe an illustration will help here. I had a very bad start to my secondary school education.

My first week at school, I got into a fight with a boy in the next door class. He'd been baiting me, and pulling my tie, and eventually I whacked him one and gave him a black eye. And it was doubly bad because it was the day of our class photographs, so his was particularly ruined.

Well, as you can imagine, I got in terrible trouble. I was sent to the yearmaster and faced his wrath. And I was clearly marked out by him as a troublemaker.

And he became something of a terror to me. I hated him. Every time I saw him in the corridor, he made me feel bad. Made me feel miserable.

[9 : 49] And really, I could not stand the man. But then something happened. One day, he picked me for his rugby team. And all of a sudden, everything seemed to really change.

And that master that I'd hated, I really began to respect. I really wanted to please him, not just on the rugby pitch, but actually, in the whole of my school life.

I didn't suddenly become a perfect pupil. I know you think I probably was. But I wanted to do well for this master who picked me. Who made me the puncher into one of his boys and his team. And that's the way it is with the transformation that comes about through the redemption in Christ Jesus. God's holy and righteous and good commands were once to us a punishing master. But they become, instead, our perfect mentor. To delight our hearts, to lead us in the way everlasting. Now, through all the struggles that remain in this fallen world, but ultimately, in the full glory of the resurrection life to come.

[11:03] That's what Paul's speaking about here in Romans chapter 7. So, with that overview in mind, let's look at the detail of the text where we're really asking three questions that Paul answers.

Why do we need liberated from the law and in what sense? Verses 7 to 12. And then, how are we liberated? Verse 13. And then, what does that liberation look like in our lives now?

Verses 14 to the end. Why do we need, then, liberating from God's law? Well, the answer, verses 7 to 12, give us this.

Because the good, life-giving law of God is exploited by sin in our innermost being. And this leads us into condemnation under God because of our sin.

Sin seizes us and we rebel. And that rebellion leads to utter ruin. Look at verse 5 again. It summarizes all that's expanded in these verses.

[12:08] Notice the past tense. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

That's what these verses, 7 to 12, are explaining. Notice first that Paul makes his main point absolutely clear. As soon as he asks the question, he gives the answer, no, the law is not sin. And again, verse 12, it's holy, it's righteous, it's good. That is absolutely unequivocal. Yet, he says, yet there is a connection between the law and sin.

We know that any good law in the wrong hands can become an instrument of evil. That's characteristic, isn't it, of totalitarian regimes.

That's why civil liberties people are constantly warning that laws have to be framed very, very carefully because laws with very good intentions can so easily become used for ill.

[13:17] That's why there was so much concern over the anti-terror legislation. But we know that even good laws can be used for very, very wicked purposes. Think of how Hitler and Saddam and other tyrants have used the law for their own evil ends.

And that is exactly what these verses describe. Sin exploits God's good law. Because, you see, sin has no power of its own to do anything ultimately to man.

That power is God's alone. The devil is not God's equal. He's not even God's enemy. He's a creature of God. He may be our enemy, but he is not God's enemy.

So sin as a power has no power to condemn us. But God's law has become sin's chief weapon against us in order to wield the power of death over us.

Paul says that explicitly in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 56. The sting of death is sin, he says, but the power of sin is the law, the law of God.

[14:29] Notice, by the way, all through this passage that sin is always in the singular, never the plural. Sin is personified. We should have a capital S at the beginning of every word sin.

And, of course, behind that there's a very strong allusion to the author of sin himself, the devil. In fact, as Dick Lucas has put it, wherever you see the word sin, read serpent. And you'll very clearly get the picture.

William Stowe used to say exactly the same thing. Verse 21, where it says, evil is right there with me. Put a big capital D in front of that and you'll understand it much better. You see, sin and the devil cannot condemn you or me because he is not our judge.

God is our judge. People often don't grasp that. They think somehow that God and the devil are equal, battling it out, slugging it out on equal terms. Remember that stupid song by the singer Christa Berg about God and the devil playing poker for people's souls.

It's just nonsense. Sin and the devil do not have that power. But, it can accuse us before God of crimes that we have committed against God.

[15:44] In fact, that's his name in the Bible, isn't it? In Revelation chapter 12, the accuser. It's the vivid picture that we see in the prophet Zechariah chapter 3.

Do you remember Joshua, the high priest representing God's people, standing before God in filthy rags and the devil right beside him to accuse him. God, you must condemn him.

Your own law says you must condemn him. He traps and he accuses. In a sense, it's rather like a police sting operation.

Where undercover officers induce criminals with irresistible bait. And then, bang, they're arrested, they're accused, they're brought before the judge and they're condemned.

But the police need a law for them to be accused and condemned. And that is exactly what Paul describes in these verses. And he does so in very personal terms.

[16:44] Notice, he uses the first person pronoun, I, all the way through. Well, if you read the books, you'll know that there's endless argument as to who this I is that Paul's referring.

We just don't have any time to waste on that. It seems very clear to me that Paul is using the preacher's I. I'll often use the first person to make a point when I'm preaching, especially if I'm talking about an issue of sin.

But it's not that I'm simply saying, well, here's an example from my life, it might be helpful to you. That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying when I speak like that is, he is how it is for all of us.

And I myself, personally, know that only too well. I'm not up here speaking to you sinners down there. I'm right down there with you. I'm in it just the same as you.

That's exactly Paul's way of talking here. What I'm describing, Paul says, is a portrait of how sin seizes us, all of us, and makes us rebels in a rebellion against God that leads to utter ruin.

[17:51] This is man's story he's telling us. It's your story. It's my story. You can't miss, can you, the echoes of Genesis chapter 3 in these verses. Surely, we shouldn't be surprised because the shadow of Adam has stalked these early chapters of Romans so greatly, hasn't he?

He's been everywhere. And here in verse 11 of chapter 7, the explicit language of Genesis 3, 13 from the Greek Old Testament is used.

The great deception that leads to the curse of death. As does verse 10. Look at it. The command that promised life.

That was the command God gave man and woman in the garden. Even the one prohibition he gave them was to protect them and preserve them. Love me with all your heart and soul alone, he said to them, wholeheartedly.

Enjoy life from me the way I give it to you, my way. Don't seek to go your own way. That's what he said to Adam and Eve. Don't serve yourself.

[18:57] Don't go the way of autonomy, following your own self-desire, symbolized by the tree of good and evil. The way of knowledge without God.

The way of fulfillment against God's way. But what happened? Verse 8 here. Sin seized the opportunity that came in that very command of life to stir up all kinds of desires.

Not just covetousness in the narrow sense, but in the broader sense of all of our self-desires, which really means self-worship instead of the worship of God.

Paul in Colossians 3 specifically says these desires, these covetous desires within us are idolatry. C.K. Barrett puts it this way, it's the exaltation of our ego, which is the very essence of sin.

He says, the law is God's command. It puts man in his place as a creature. It's summed up in the command, you will not desire, you will obey.

[20:10] But instead, man does not obey, he desires. And sin exploits that willing self-desire and willing self-deception.

Man dethrones God and puts himself on the throne and is ruled now by his own desires. Self-desire becomes the driving force, the law of his innermost being, his heart and his mind.

That was Adam, wasn't it? And it was also Israel. God gave Israel above all peoples his holy law through Moses in such detail, in such fulsome wholeness.

And he said to them, choose life. Love me with all your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength. Have my commandment upon your hearts and you will live.

But rebellion was the absolute characteristic for the most part of Israel. Jeremiah 17 verse 1 puts it vividly, what was written on the people's hearts was not God's holy law but was sin, he said, engraved on tablets in their hearts.

[21:22] Stephen, Acts 7, you are uncircumcised in hearts and ears, he says, you always resist the Holy Spirit even as they proved exactly that by picking up the stones and killing him.

And that's my story too, says Paul. And it's your story and my story. All of us, as we were in Adam, without the regenerating life of Christ within us, rebels against God.

And therefore, verse 10, God's law becomes death to us. Sin deceives us, yes, for sure, but then its accusation is true and accurate.

And we are and we must be condemned before God for our sin. Sin, verse 11, has killed us. We're under the curse of death. To dust you shall return, said God.

And even in life we're separated from God. God gives us up. Remember those terrible words repeated in chapter 1? To the very self-desires that we've so cherished above God's commands.

[22 : 34] The ever-increasing idolatry of the self. And that's what so characterizes the world that we know so well, that we live in, isn't it? And Paul has said that's true for Jews and Gentiles both.

Remember chapter 1, his description of pagan idolatry? God gave them over to suppression of the truth, to idolatry, to destructive and unnatural behavior. But the religious self-deception of the Jews, of those who knew God's law, was if anything even worse.

That's what chapter 2 told us, do you remember? They had God's law, but their selfish hearts just put a veneer of religion over exactly the same heart rebellion against God's rule.

They boasted in the law, yet they broke the law, and indeed God's name was blasphemed among the nations because of them. And so you also will be condemned, said Paul.

And those who know the law more fully are the more guilty, he said. The law magnifies the trespass. Just like when a top barrister is before the courts for committing a crime.

[23 : 45] It's absolutely inexcusable. They know the law inside out, yet they broke it. And so even for Paul, as for the rest of us, the real truth is that when the truth of God's law comes home to our hearts, that's how one translation puts verse 9, the commandment came, we also discover that we too are children of Adam.

We're rebels. At heart, we want to be in charge of our lives. It's my body and I'll do what I want with it. And deep down, if you're not a Christian, it is because you think that your desires are really the things that will give you freedom and life and fulfillment, not God's commands.

And that's why you resist becoming a Christian. You say to yourself inside, well, it'll curb my social life. It'll curb my sex life. It'll curb all my ambitions and all sorts of other things.

I will not have that. I will do my life the way I want it. And any mention of God's commands that would say that is the wrong way arouses your ire and your hatred and your anger.

That's the world we live in, isn't it? Any mention of God's law and God's way immediately howls a protest in the press and in the media and everywhere else. And so God's life-giving law becomes an enemy that people hate.

[25 : 24] But also, and far more serious, it becomes a captor that we cannot escape because we're condemned rightly under God's just judgment and we're utterly helpless.

We cannot release ourselves. ourselves. How then does that rescue come? Well, verse 13 points us to the answer.

The good, life-giving law of God, says Paul, exposes sin in our innermost being. And that leads us to conviction under God for our sin. As God opens our eyes to our sin, he leads us to repentance and rebirth into a new life by the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

Did that which is good then become death to me, he says. Has God's law, God's word, failed? Has it failed in bringing death, not life? We'll find that question again, by the way, in chapter 9, verse 6. Sure looks that way. It looks as though sinners overcome God and used God's own power against himself. By no means, says Paul again.

[26 : 40] Sin and its author, the devil, will never, ever have the last word over God. Sin did its worst. Yes, it did. Using God's law to produce death.

But sin was not in ultimate control. It was all, look, in order that God might use, even sins worse, to magnify his grace all the more.

That sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment become sinful beyond measure. Shown up for what it truly is, heinous rebellion against our Lord and Master.

And to drive people to seek deliverance through God's grace alone, through his Savior alone. In this verse, you see, he's encapsulating everything that Paul's expended already in chapter 5.

Remember the great climax? The law came in to increase the trespass, says Paul, but where sin increased, not sin triumphed all the more, but where sin increased, God's grace abounded all the more to destroy the reign of death and bring life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[27 : 54] See, here is God's mysterious but marvelous sovereign power at work. He takes the tragedy of sin and evil and he turns it into the triumph of his salvation.

It's his characteristic. Remember in Genesis 50, what Joseph said to his brothers, you meant this for evil, but God meant it for good, for a great salvation.

That's the way he works. We'll see it again when we come to chapter 11. The extraordinary, staggering rejection by Israel of its own Messiah and salvation.

And that becomes, in God's hands, salvation for the Gentile world. It's what we saw, isn't it? At its very heart, at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, where the extraordinary rejection of Christ, the Savior of the world, by the world, becomes the way that he is the Savior for the world.

And so sin's worst can only expose itself to become the very road to repentance and rebirth. In the call of the gospel to obedience to God in Christ, people are exposed as the rebels they truly are and they're brought to their knees before God to find that superabundant grace that comes in the gospel.

[29 : 25] Some of you will know that during the war, in the build-up to the Normandy landings, there was an allied operation called Operation Fortitude.

It was counter-espionage, whereby countless spies who had been sent by Hitler and the Nazis into Britain to infiltrate all of its intelligence-gathering procedures, was actually turned around and used against Adolf Hitler, so that these very spies that the Nazi regime were paying to spy and to bring victory, in fact, fed back false information and scattered the German armies all up and down the coast, leaving Normandy empty and ready for the assault that brought at last the end to the war. That is the extraordinary turnaround that Paul is describing here. Sin's purpose was to exploit God's law so that we are condemned. But God's purpose was that sin, in doing that, would be exposed utterly so as to convict, so as to show how utterly sinful sin is and bring people to cry out for the grace of God.

And that's how it was from the very beginning. Read the Scriptures. It was as sin was magnified in murderous Cain and his dreadful offspring that led to what? Men calling out for the name of the Lord.

It was as Israel were constantly convicted by God's prophets and at last subject to the terrible punishment and the reality of the exile that they began from the depths to call out for the salvation of the Lord that Rupert was preaching about in Lamentations just not long ago.

[31 : 18] And so it is for anyone when God's law begins to come home to them and tell them the truth about who they really are. Sinful beyond measure. Condemned.

Helpless. God's law still leads people to Romans chapter 3 verse 20. To the knowledge of sin. That they are personally rejecting God.

And leads them to cry out for Romans 3 verse 21. The liberation from sin that comes only from Jesus Christ. But does abound through the grace that is ours in him.

Release from sin's condemnation. From God's law in the hands of sin and death. From its strange work if you like in God's saving providence.

And freedom for the law's proper work. In the hands of the Spirit of God at work in the hearts of those he has redeemed. As the consummation of God's saving plan.

[32 : 18] That he would have a people for himself at last. Through the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. From a punishing master to a perfect mentor leading us in the way everlasting.

So what then does this liberation look like in the lives of those who are released in Christ. who have died to that which was holding them captive. Well that's what the rest of these verses unpack for us. As we've said they're in the present tense. Paul's talking about what is no longer. He says that twice in verses 17 and 20. What is true then now for those of us who are in the newness of the Spirit? What's true is that the good and life-giving law of God is embedded by the Spirit in our innermost being and that is the very thing that leads us into conflict under God against sin.

This is the renewed life of spiritual resurrection that leads us ultimately to bodily resurrection. Now it's sometimes said that verses 14 to 25 contain no mention of the Holy Spirit and therefore the struggles that it speaks about must be either the struggles of somebody who's not yet a Christian or the struggles of the so-called defeated Christian trying to live life in his own strength whatever that may mean.

[34 : 00] Some of you will have heard that teaching. Some of you might believe that that's the truth. But I find it utterly astonishing given that virtually the first line of verse 14 mentions the Holy Spirit.

We know, says Paul, that the law is literally of the Spirit. And who can possibly recognize such a thing apart from a Christian who's filled with the Spirit?

Look down to chapter 8 verse 2. Almost a very similar expression is used as we've seen. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is what he calls the law there. Just echoes chapter 7 verse 6.

The newness of the Spirit over against the oldness of the letter. He used that same language back in chapter 2, remember. When he contrasts those who have the law merely as the outward letter and those for whom it's not merely the outward letter but it's the inward heart circumcision by the Spirit.

Well, do you remember that last week we saw in chapter 6 verse 17 that the reborn person, the Christian believer born of the Spirit is marked by what?

[35 : 09] Look at verse 17 of chapter 6. The spiritually reborn person is marked by obedience from the heart to God's holy commands, the teaching, the obedience of faith through Jesus Christ.

And that is exactly how Paul speaks of himself and every true Christian here. He is no longer, he says, in heart and mind in rebellion against God's commands but rather he's rejoicing in it.

Look, verse 15. He now hates the sinful things he does. He's not proud of them. Verse 16. He agrees that God's law is good to be welcomed, not to be resisted.

Verse 18. He desires to do the right. Heart obedience to God with his whole life, with the whole direction of his life. Verse 22. He delights in the law of God, in his innermost being, in his inner man, the heart of his true personality.

And similarly in verse 25. I serve the law of God with my mind. Again, the heart and mind and soul of everything that he is. You see, the will of God has once again become enthroned at the very heart of his life through his rebirth by the Spirit.

[36 : 27] He's become truly human again in Christ. Now that was precisely the promise of the new covenant all the way through the Old Testament.

Moses himself. He said, you shall serve and love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

But he knew that their hearts were hardened and they were disobedient. They were disloyal. But God promised even through Moses, a day will come, he says, when God himself will circumcise your hearts so that you will love the Lord with all your heart and soul and live and so that you will obey his voice and keep his commands.

The prophets spoke exactly the same way. The mark of the new covenant will be that God puts his law in his people's hearts. Jeremiah 31 verse 33 says that.

Ezekiel 36 is especially clear about the work of God's Spirit in all of this. I'll sprinkle you with clean water and you'll be clean, he says. I'll give you a new heart.

[37 : 33] I'll put my Spirit in you and cause you to walk in my statutes and obey my rules. They're talking about hearts liberated from the idolatry of sin and united wholly to God by his Spirit as slaves to righteousness.

Just as Paul is speaking about here. Fruitful for holiness and eternal life. Well that's me, says Paul now. And that's you if you're in Jesus Christ.

But you've noticed, haven't you, it's not the whole story about these verses. The description Paul gives us here isn't of heaven, is it? It's not the serenity of absolute peace.

It's absolutely down to earth. It's the struggle of absolute war. Look at verses 22 and 23. I delight in the law of God in my inner being.

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. It's a war zone he's describing, isn't it?

[38 : 42] But that is the new life of the Holy Spirit according to the consistent teaching of the New Testament apostles. It's a fight of faith, Paul writes to Timothy. It's a war against the passion of the flesh, Peter says in 1 Peter 2.

Your passions are at war within you, says James in chapter 4 of his letter. Plenty more of the same. Why such a battle? Oh, you know the answer.

Paul keeps telling us over and over again. Because, verse 24, we are not yet delivered from these bodies of death. We shall be, but not until we also are raised with a resurrection body.

That will happen. Look down to chapter 8, verse 11. He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

But that is not yet. And so until then, although we are resurrected spiritually in a rebirth, alive with Christ by the Spirit, we are a new creation in Christ.

[39 : 53] But until then, friends, we are a new creation wearing the same old clothes of this flesh. And we live in these old clothes all the way through this present age until the day of our resurrection.

in these bodily clothes that are tainted by sin. And so there will always be tension, always be inner conflict, as we live out the salvation that has begun in us but isn't yet complete.

And that conflict is the mark of the truly Spirit-filled life. In fact, that conflict was the hallmark of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ himself when he lived out his earthly life in this realm of the flesh.

As Paul puts it in chapter 1, verse 4, before he entered the realm of the Spirit, the resurrected body. We get a graphic illustration of that in Matthew chapter 4.

Do you remember, after Jesus' baptism, when he is filled with the Holy Spirit in absolute fullness, what happens? Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness into conflict with the devil.

[41 : 08] He was tempted in all points exactly as we are. Yes, he was without sin but he was not without conflict and suffering. Far, far greater than any of ours.

And so it is for us in the genuine life of faith in Christ, in the newness of spirit. It will always be marked by the two things that are mentioned here in verse 25, the second half.

Joyous slavery to God in our minds, in our hearts, in our innermost being, what we really are in Christ, and yet still encumbered by the flesh. The remnants of corruption that we simply cannot fully escape from until we leave behind the world of this curse and the bodies of curse under the sin.

And that's why this chapter is one of conflict, of battle. It's the fight that's true of all true and genuine Christian faith. It's the same battle that was there in chapter 6, do you remember?

Our members must be given as weapons for righteousness, not as unrighteousness. It's the same battle we're going to find in chapter 8, which some people think is the great victory chapter, where you overcome sin forever.

[42 : 23] It isn't. Chapter 8, verses 12 and 13, we're told to go in ongoing murder day by day, putting to death the deeds of the sinful body.

That's conflict. And it's the same conflict that's being laid out here. And these verses, Paul simply says the same two things that he summarizes in verse 25, the second half of it.

He says it over and over again. So, verses 15 to 17, he says he struggles constantly not to do the things that he knows to be wrong.

He doesn't want to do them. Neither do we. To be jealous and angry and lustful and boastful and gossipy and unkind and envious and getting drunk and watching porn and all these other things.

Are there any Christians here who don't struggle not to do these things and hate yourself when you do them? Don't think so. And in verses 18 to 20, he says he struggles constantly to do all the things that he knows are right and he wants to do, but so often he finds himself not doing.

[43 : 31] Being loving and joyful and patient and kind and peacemaking and faithful and gentle and full of self-control and so on. I want to be that.

I do the opposite so often. But that's not the real me. He says that twice. Verse 17 and 20. It's not the real me. It's sin still living in me in these members in this earthly body that I can't escape.

So what's the sum of it? Verses 21 to 23. I'm in a constant war says Paul. Always as I seek to live out in my heart what is really true.

There are other powerful forces arrayed against me. How I long for the day when I'll be delivered from this conflict, this body of death, to receive the body of life free from this conflict with sin.

Isn't that your life? That's my life. Am I a total failure? Am I a defeated Christian? I feel like that quite often.

[44 : 43] But you go and ask the most godly, mature Christian that you know and I think they'll tell you it's their life too. I don't think they'll tell you yes, conflict's all in the past.

Serenity and peace. Martin Luther said it's the characteristic of a spiritual and wise man that he knows that he's carnal, that he's dissatisfied with himself, that he hates himself.

And he praises God's law because he knows it's spiritual. It's a characteristic converse of a foolish and a carnal man who thinks he's spiritual and is very satisfied with his Christian life and he loves his life in this world.

See, this is the spirit-filled life Paul's speaking about. And the answer is not that we need some new experience of the Holy Spirit to lead us into our Romans 8 kind of life of victory.

No, it's the spirit himself who leads us into this conflict. Conflict with the world and the flesh and the devil because he has embedded what the world hates right at the heart of our being.

[45 : 53] The lordship to one God alone through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the more that our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit, the more our lives will be marked by this conflict.

It's like a heart transplant. The more foreign and difficult and different the new heart is from the body, the greater will be the body's natural rejection of it.

And so it is with us. We will all the days of our lives be fighting the antibodies of the flesh. And the more godly you are, the more you will go to the grave crying, O wretched man that I am, God deliver me from this body of death.

But don't despair. The answer is immediate and it's sure says Paul. There is deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord. And don't give up either.

Don't expect too little in this life of conflict. Because this struggle, although it's real and it's painful, is not an equal struggle. There's a remarkable parallel between the words Paul uses here in verses 17 and 20 and something he says in Galatians 2 verse 20.

[47 : 14] Here he says, it's no longer I who do these things I don't want to do, it's sin living in me. But there he says, it's no longer I who live, but it's Christ who lives in me.

And greater is he who is in us than he that is in the world and in our flesh. Much more in every way to use Paul's language is what we have in Christ.

And therefore you can and you will and you must make progress. There will be many, many victories over the sin and the attitudes and the habits and the behavior that once crippled your life. when you come to Christ. There will be as you fight the battle of faith to believe the gospel that calls us to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

To offer these members as weapons of righteousness not for the mastery of sin. Walk in the spirit says Paul to the Galatians and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[48 : 20] That's a promise. promise. And it's a promise to be believed. And it's a command to be obeyed. Because we're called not to stand still but to go on.

To go further up and further in to the new Narnia as Bob would surely put it. In the newness of spirit. To bear fruit for God. But when all's said and done the message of these verses is a sobering one isn't it?

As long as we walk this earth we will never be able not to be sinners or rather not to be real saints who still sin and who know their sin and who hate their sin and who cry wretched man I am Lord deliver me from this body of death.

Conflict is certain in the real Christian life. Conflict will be continuing in the real Christian life.

But friends that conflict is the great comfort of the real Christian life. I love to say that the very first description in the Bible of a true believer comes in Genesis 3 verse 15 where God says I will put enmity struggle conflict in you between you and the serpent.

[49 : 54] It's the conflict embedded in our hearts by the Spirit of God who makes us His. Paul says in chapter 8 it's those who have the first fruits of the Holy Spirit who groan inwardly as we await and long for our adoption the resurrection of our bodies.

So be encouraged. That struggle that you feel at the very heart of your being is the earnest it's the first fruits it's the promise of the deliverance that is ours in Christ Jesus and will never let us go.

Let's pray together. Lord there are many things in your word that we struggle to understand and there are many many struggles that are ours in the Christian life but thanks be to God that through our Lord Jesus Christ we are on the road to victory.

Lead us we pray through these battles keep our footsteps in yours for we ask it for the glory of Christ and in his name.

Amen.