

The Great War Within.  
Romans 7:7-25

John 15:11:27  
Colossians 3:1-17  
Responsive Psalm 84

This morning we are going to be picking back up where we left off in chapter 7 of Romans. In this section Paul here is addressing another false accusation that likely has risen up. As we all know Paul in his letters is pretty obvious and intentional in his teaching that we who are alive in Christ, through faith are dead to sin, and the law. He makes this comparison in most, if not all of his writings in one form or another. Many to whom he writes are Jews, still trapped in the old way, or to gentiles who are being oppressed by those who would seek to subject them to the law. So in the human way of thinking, we tend to swing from one extreme to the next and often times need to be reminded, or instructed otherwise. It is implied with the inclusion of this text that there may have been some in Rome making a claim that the law itself was sinful which is a bold claim seeing how it was God who gave it. In some ways we as new covenant Christians deal with some of the same criticism by our law minded brethren, we are seen as antinomian, against the law as if we believe that the law itself is bad. I don't think that there is a single one of us who would make such a statement, but rather the law is no longer necessary to those who are faith, which is Paul's point. Just because it isn't necessary, doesn't make it wrong, or bad, or sinful and in fact though it is unnecessary as a rule and guide for the believer it still has a purpose and a role to play.

Let us go ahead and read our passage this morning, we are going to be looking at verse 7-13, but I want to go ahead and start back at 6:19, so we can get the entire context and flow of thought from Paul. ( READ 6:19-7:25) The role, and purpose of the law is to bring about the knowledge of mankind's sinful nature, exposing our fallen nature and inability for righteousness within ourselves. The law does not produce sin, the sin is already there within the hearts of mankind, rather the law is like a flashlight into a dark room exposing the evil and ugly things that hide in the darkness of our heart and mind. The law which was given by God to Moses and the people of Israel stands as a litmus test to humanity, God demands perfection, and try though you might the righteous perfection that God requires is unattainable. And Jesus in his teaching shows that the law runs deeper then mere actions, but at the heart, goes to the motives and thoughts of mankind, the very core of our being. Again exposing the darkness that is inherit in our nature. Paul actually spends some time here defending the law and its role toward humanity in the conviction of our sinful nature. Though as Christians the law has no bearing upon us, we are no longer under its rule and guide for one greater then Moses has come, and we are bound by a law far greater in the love of mercy of Jesus Christ which accomplishes righteousness that the old law never could. Yet, that does not make the law of no use, or bad in of itself. If it was totally unnecessary for today, God would not have included it in his scriptures, the teachings of the law and the righteous requirements of God have not been lost, and are still apart of the word of God.

Now there is always some debate on whether the law is required for ministry to the unbeliever, and in many ways I think even that has sort of passed, we are entering into a post-moral society where increasingly the concept of even natural goodness that is, morality and uprightness of thought and action has been skewed. There has been a meteoric rise in paganism, satanism, and an embracing of what was even within our own lifetime had been considered debased and vile practices. More and more what has been historically seen as immoral, and improper is being celebrated and held up as a form of anti-righteousness.

By that I mean, what is right and moral in the view of the world stands in direct opposition to what is right and moral in the eyes of God. We have reached a point in our society where the 10 commandments and the law of God are of little consequence upon the mind of the unbeliever, for their idea of morality has shifted, to approve that which is condemned by scripture is to be righteous in the mind of unbeliever today. Isaiah wrote warning of such a thing, ( 5:20 ) he said, “Woe to those call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness to light and light to darkness, who replace bitter with sweet and sweet with bitter.” This really is nothing new, and it is something that humanity has been doing from the fall, celebrating sin, rejecting God, and reveling in their rebellion. Though they are not mindful of the law, and though they would reject it outright when confronted with it, it still stands as a judgment against them. But those who are in Christ, who have the spirit, against such there is no law for in him, there is no judgment, no condemnation, no fear or dread. Where there would be judgment, in him we find love, where there would be condemnation, in him we find mercy, and since these are the realities of our life in him, we have no need to fear or dread his wrath. But as this world turns increasingly dark, as evil is more and more celebrated as good, it becomes all the more apparent that this world is not our home.

Jesus warned as recorded by John, which we read this morning, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated e before it hated you. If you were of the world the world would love its own, yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefor the world hates you.” You Christian stand as a testimony to all that is wrong in this world, your belief, your life is a reflection of God's nature working through you as you reject and deny the sinful practices and nature of the fallen world. The world loves its own, and despises and mocks God, and all those who follow him. There are only 2 outcomes, you are either saved from the wrath of God, and subject to the wrath of man, or you are subject to the wrath of god, and spared the wrath of man. There is a temptation in the modern church to appeal to the goodness in mankind, to sort of bate and switch in the ministry, look and act like the world to attract the world and surprise them with religion, I say religion and not gospel because many modern churches who practice such ideas, seem to actually lack gospel teaching and rather focus on outward actions and appearance, creating a christian like religion that is devoid of the gospel and conviction of sin. And the outcome of such a ministry is the spiritual zombie, who from the outside may look the part, but inside they are still dead for there has been no conviction, no repentance, and no true rebirth.

We as Christians must accept the reality that we are not going to be liked, we are not going to be loved by the world. But that does not give us a license to hate back. In fact we are called to the opposite, to love those who hate us, and we show that love, not by the acceptance of their sin as some would argue, but by sharing the gospel with compassion, and patience, understanding and love, in hopes that they to may be counted among his children. As Paul wrote in verse 9, “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” You Christian, have the law of Christ written upon your heart, it is apart of who you are, it is intrinsically a part of your new nature in him, and you are a living, breathing, walking reflection of Christ in whom you believe and seek to please. If Christ is in you, then you will naturally reflect his nature, and we can begin to see why the world will hate you, as your very existence stands in opposition to their own nature, when confronted by the living and breathing word that abides within you they are faced with their sin and conviction. To the world, what you believe and rest in, the very thing in which you find hope and peace, to them invokes fear, and shame, and is the stench of death.

There is this idea that to share the gospel we must first share the law, to bring about conviction and expose mankind's fallen nature. This thought is not necessarily wrong, but it is not the only method of gospel ministry as some would argue. The weakness of this method is its appeal to man's logic, it often times is seeking a mind change instead of a heart change. The reality is, we only need to share the gospel and let the spirit do its work in conviction. The law has its place, and yes can be used as a tool for discussion about God's nature and man's place within that reality but ultimately it is the spirit that convicts, it is the spirit that renews, and without the spirit there will be no new birth, no belief, no turning from the old nature, because these things are not physical as the law points to, but spiritual. The law is rooted in a very physical aspect, the law reads as a list of commandments, do and do not, but Paul in verse 14 that the law is spiritual. So it is not merely some physical outward reformation, but there is also a spiritual element to the law as well and I think that element is as Paul writes in this section we are looking at this morning, the spiritual aspect is that of conviction, and instruction not in how to reform and live a righteous life, but it exposes the sinful nature and points to the hopeless state of mankind without Christ.

Paul's argument here is that the law is what made Paul realize what sin is. He being a Jew, was born and raised under the law, by his own confession he studied it under the instruction of some of the greatest most esteemed men, he sought to keep it in all of its requirements and it was the law mindset that drove him to persecute Christians, seeing them as heretics and blasphemers worthy of death. And now, God has made him the apostle to the gentiles, and he finds himself persecuted by the very belief system he strived for most of his life to uphold. This gives Paul a unique experience and insight into the law and its inner workings within the hearts and minds of people, for he lived it, daily as his sole focus and purpose believing that salvation was through its commandments. His conclusion now about the law is in verse 10, "And the commandment came, which was to bring life, I found to bring death." There is a debate whether true and total adherence to the law would bring about salvation in mankind. Paul argues though in the law is life, it truly only brings death, because of the spiritual nature of it, mankind by nature through the fall of Adam are incapable of truly keeping the law, this thing which was as he said, to bring life, only brings death. What I think Paul is attempting to do here, is to bring a sense of peace between the Jews and the Gentile believers, on one hand the law is dead, now that Christ has come and fulfilled it on the behalf of all who believe it's righteous requirements and subsequent condemnation no longer apply to those who are covered in the blood of sacrificial lamb of God.

Yet, that does not make the law itself bad, or wrong, or sinful, for it is still the holy and just word of God, given to mankind so that we may know and understand him more, and see in a way that we may understand his righteousness, and our vile state before him. Both the Jews and the Gentiles are guilty of bringing in some preconceived ideas to the faith, the Jews continue to cling to the law and the traditions, and the gentiles it would seem by Paul's writing here were making claims that the law itself and adherence to it is sinful. So in his explanation he is seeking to correct both of these false notions. The law is indeed holy, and righteous, but its holy and righteous effect on mankind is conviction and death, and this is no fault of the law, this is not some flaw in its design, but in fact the very purpose and nature of it was to point to mankind's need for a savior. Paul never attributes the law to sin, but rather the sin that is within himself that is exposed by it, and he recognizes, sin isn't the action, but the desire. And it is the desire, the thoughts that by nature are impossible to control, and by which we are judged. As was mentioned before this was the point of Jesus' sermon on the mount, showing that the law was never about outward reformation, but rather pointed to the necessity for spiritual rebirth and awakening.

Initially I intended to split this up, and go to verse 13 this week and continue this next week, but I think its important to jump ahead to Paul's conclusion to the point that he is making. In this last half he expresses something that all of us believers experience, the inward struggle and conflict with the remaining sinful nature of the flesh. For me one big stand out in this passage, is it shows us the humanity of Paul, he is, like us, dealing daily with the conflict of sinful desires and thoughts, and he says that this struggle is like a war going on within. Verse 15, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do no practice, but what I hate, that I do. But look at what he says in verse 17, "But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." This is an interesting statement and I think to understand it we have to remember what he was saying about our sinful nature, though it is present with us in the flesh, he says, reckon yourself dead to it. This reckoning is an active pursuit of putting to death the sinful flesh. In Christ our sin, and the flesh no longer have control over us, we have been given the power and the ability to wage war against it and we no longer need to allow it to control us.

Without the spirit's new birth and indwelling of the spirit we would have no power over sin for we would still be slaves to it. Christ's death, did not just merely forgive us of our sins and trespasses, but through him we have been given the power to wage war against the desires of the flesh and our fallen nature. So much so, that Paul in chapter 6 says that we should consider that part of ourselves dead. Yet he shows here in chapter 7, that this is not a simple process but instead creates a war within ourselves as we seek to constantly put to death that sinful nature. In verse 18, is a reflection of the reality of mankind, "I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but cannot carry it out." This statement shows the utter despair in the realization that in all of the greatest achievements of mankind, it is yet corrupted by sin. There is no part of the human experience our culture, education, music, art, politics, commerce, religion, psychology, ethics, ever single bit of the human experience has been defiled, corrupted, and is flawed because of sin. The condition of mankind in Adam pushes us to pursue that in life which will never satisfy. In our hearts we seek rest, peace, and a longing for paradise but in sin we seek it in this world and reject the creator.

Paul paints this absolutely wretched picture of humanity, and with it the struggle of Christians against that fallen nature, but his conclusion is not one of despair focusing upon the failures, nor is it a pick yourself up and try harder attitude but it is a realization of his condition verse 24, he cries out, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" this thought of Paul's is one which is brought about by the spirit, and is a reality that is spiritually discerned, for it is through the spirit that God works in us conviction of our sins, and it is only by this spirit that we can see sin for what it is. This sets up a test of faith, for those who have been given a new nature in Christ recognize their sins and are eager to confess them, actively pursue to flee from them, and are not held slaves to them. In short, if there is no repentance, if there is no war, no struggle, there is no spirit, and if no spirit there is no true faith, and no faith, there is no new birth and you are still lost in your sins separated from God. This experience that Paul is describing here in the last half of this chapter is the very real human experience of the believer, he has put down in writing the emotional, and very real struggle that each of us Christians deal with daily as we wrestle to reckon ourselves dead to our old nature.

But he closes with this thought here, and in this conclusion he builds upon even further going into the next chapter, verse 25, "I thank God- through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the answer to his question, who will deliver me from this wretched body of death? Our hope, our strength, our all is in Christ Jesus. The one who took the punishment and bore the weight of our sins upon himself on the cross.

And Paul recognizing that until that day that we are reunited with him, when this body of sin is laid to rest, this nature will remain a part of us, and this war will wage on until that day so he concludes, "with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." The NIV words it like this, "In my mind, I am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." Deliverance from sin, and our wretched condition can only come from God, and God alone. It has taken a miraculous work of God to achieve the redemption of his people through his son Jesus, an achievement that no man can accomplish himself by law keeping or reformation, but it is only through the work of Jesus Christ through the spirit that we may find peace within ourselves knowing that this sinful nature that we have been born with will one day be put to rest and we can live as our heart desires, in the very presence of God, just and holy no longer being weighed down by the flesh. And in closing this morning a little teaser into next week, since God, through Jesus Christ has delivered this us from the wretched body of sin, there is therefore now no condemnation, no judgment, no punishment to those who are in Christ Jesus. We have been freed from the righteous requirements of the law, free from the everlasting punishment of sin in hell, and we will one day shed this dead weight of sin and flesh to be reunited with him in paradise. The plead here is the same, oh sinner, repent, believe and call upon the name of the lord to be saved, reckon yourself dead to the flesh and the old nature and be reborn into the new for hope and deliverance is only found in Christ.

May God be pleased to bring ever more into his house of grace, and may he grant us his children the grace and mercy we need to wage this war against the flesh, daily putting to death this body of sin, so that we may serve him all the more while we await that great day of his return.