

THE CIVIL WAR INSIDE YOU

Romans 7:14-25

Good morning! How's everyone? We missed you all! Hope you missed us, too. There's no place like home. I watched online all our church services and you all look like you were having a good time worshipping and fellowshiping.

Thank God, we made it back safely. Thanks for your prayers. And thanks much to our directors for holding the fort while I was gone. I would say it was really a great vacation. The last time I was in the Philippines was 10 years ago. My wife and Nanay Monet, I think was 5 years ago. For Ally it was 17 years ago. Eze and Eza, first time ever. It was great for the kids. They bonded with their cousins. It was fun and tiring. As you can imagine, it was very hot in the Philippines. It was hot even in Baguio but we enjoyed all the tourist spots, especially SM Mall.

But I'm glad I visited the Philippines. I just discovered that I could enjoy polvoron again. You know why? They sell polvoron with stevia. Here's a sample. So, I could eat polvoron now without guilt. I've been set free. Before, every time I eat polvoron, I felt like I was sinning. It was a struggle. But now I can enjoy it again. I've been set free. Just like what we're studying in the Book of Romans.

So, we're continuing our series on **"Power to Change"**. BTW, I hope the just-concluded 3-part series on spiritual growth was helpful. I watched online and I thank God for our three young guest preachers who were ready, willing, and able. Now, I can take more vacations.

Today, our message is entitled, **"The Civil War Inside You"**. You know, I'm experiencing that quite literally right now. My mind says it's morning. But my body says it's evening. My mind tells me that I should be awake right now but my body is urging me to lie down and sleep. There's a battle happening inside of me at present, and I hope my mind wins.

It's just a few days since we arrived from the Philippines and I think you'll understand if every now and then I yawn. But if you're the one who yawns, then I'm in trouble.

Ok. Now, please listen carefully to this message because if you grasp what I'm going to talk about today, it's going to save you a lot of heartache and confusion in your Christian life. Today, I'm going to share with you **Key Truths About the Christian Life**.

Typically, when you first become a Christian, everything is going great. Things begin to turn around. There is victory, joy, peace. But after a while you start having problems again. You start going through some struggles. The old habits start coming back. And you think, "I thought I was through with all that. Maybe I'm not even a Christian." Many new believers say, "I want to do what's right, but I lack the ability. I don't seem to have the ability to do what I know is right". And there's the lack of discipline. I know what's wrong and I don't want to do what's wrong and I know God doesn't want me to do what is wrong. Then why do I do what's wrong. We sometimes feel like there are two "me"s inside of us -- one wants to do good, one wants to do bad. Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Part of me wants to live for Christ and part of me doesn't want to live for Christ. Why is that the case? The answer is because

I. YOU HAVE TWO NATURES

Let us read **Romans 7:14-25**. We'll read it slowly because it's a tongue-twister.

In this passage, Paul explains that, as a Christian, you have two natures within you. There is a new nature that's talked about in Ephesians. This was given to you by God when you became a Christian. The new nature wants to do what is right. The new nature wants to please God, to live for God.

But the Bible says that you also have an old nature, the nature you had before you became a Christian. It didn't go away when you became a believer. You still have it.

So, you have two natures in your life. A new nature that wants to do what's right and an old nature that wants to do what's not right, the old way.

Galatians 5 says there is a conflict between these two natures. v. 16 (NLT).

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions."

Folks, there is a civil war in your life if you're a believer. Part of you is the old nature, wanting to do your old ways. Part of you is your new nature wanting to do your new ways. They are in conflict with each other so that you don't know what to do.

Now, what can we say about the old nature? It only wants to sin, it never wants to do right. It couldn't do right if it wanted to. It doesn't have the power to do what's right. And your old nature will never change. You can't whip it into shape. You can't discipline it. You can't, by your own power, change it. It's going to be there. As long as you live on this earth you're going to have some old desires. You just have to learn how to win the battle, the civil war in your life.

Romans 7 gives us a portrait of a struggling Christian. It's Paul's autobiography. It's comforting to know we're not alone. Paul uses some gut level honesty here. He shares his feelings, his struggles. He writes them down for posterity. He bares his soul. He's talking about the Christian who tries to live under the Law. What does it mean to live under the Law? Trying to please God on your own effort.

You can't please God by trying to be good on your own effort, your own willpower, your own dedication. That just leads to frustration. So, Paul continues by sharing that

II. There are 3 things that Christians struggle with.

If you study this text, you'll find that it falls into three parts. Three different times Paul confesses his own personal struggle with sin. Each one of those confessions reveals a different aspect of the struggle we face as believers to live victoriously for Jesus Christ. First, is

A. The struggle to live up to what you know you ought to be. 15-17

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."

Paul says in verse 15, "I do not understand what I do." That's an amazing confession. You hear children say that all the time. They will throw a rock through a window, they will break a plate, they will hit their brother hard. When you ask, "why did you do that?", they will give you the one absolutely dependable answer: "I don't know."

What Paul is saying is that's true for all of us. There are times in life that we do or say something stupid. When somebody asks us why did we do that, the only answer we can come up with is, "I don't know why I did that." "I don't know why I said that." Well, you're in good company because that's what the apostle Paul said. He said, "Many times I do things and afterward I don't understand why I did them."

Then here's his confession, "For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do." Paul is here confessing the struggle within his own soul. He is saying that he feels like a split personality. He feels that there is a continual civil war going on inside his heart.

It's almost as if he feels two people inside him or as if he hears two voices, one calling him this way and one calling him that way, and he says, "I want to do good, but I don't do it. But the thing that I don't want to do, I do anyway." William Barclay entitles his commentary on this passage *The Human Situation* and he's right. This is truly the human situation. We know the good, but we don't do it. We know what's wrong and we fight against it and then we do it anyway. We say "I will" and then we don't. We say "I won't" and then we do. We make a promise and then we break it. We set a goal and we don't go after it. We say "I'll never do that again" and we do it. We get on our knees and say, "Oh, God, I'll never do that again." And then the next day, we do it or we say it again. That is the truly human experience for all of us. If anybody here says that's not true of you, let me tell you something. I simply will not believe you. I simply will not believe you because that is the human experience for you and it is the human experience for me.

Somebody once said that Paul must have been a golfer because a golfer can understand this principle. Kuya Elvin, tell me if I'm wrong. You line up the putt and you see it's supposed to break to the right. So you hit it to break right and it goes left. That which you would do, you don't do. The thing you don't want to do, you do. It's the human situation.

Let me draw a conclusion from this first confession. Knowing and doing are two different things. You can know the right thing and you can still do the wrong thing. That leads me to make this obvious point: Knowledge will never save anyone. Knowledge alone will not save us. There must be something else, something deeper working within us. That leads me to make this conclusion. Even if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you're not as good as you think you are, and you're worse than you'd like to admit. That's the first struggle. The struggle to live up to what you know you ought to be. Second is

B. The struggle to come to grips with repeated personal failure. 18-20

“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 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. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

Look what Paul says in verse 19. “The evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” Paul was saying this as an apostle and as a follower of Jesus Christ. If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, you can understand these words. They’ll make sense to you. If these words don’t make any sense to you at all, it may be because you’ve never come to Jesus Christ at all, because those who are truly born of God develop in their heart a deep and honest and holy hatred of sin. It has been said that the closer you come to God, the less you will sin and the more of a sinner you will realize yourself to be. When you come close to God, you will sin less ... and the greater will be your understanding of how deeply sinful you have been and you truly are.

There are times when people call me or message me to confess to me deep personal failure or share with me their problems. Sometimes they’re new Christians, but more often they’re not. Sometimes it’s for a first-time sin. More often it’s for a sin they’ve been struggling with for a long time. You know what? After 18 years as a pastor, and I say this thoughtfully, it’s almost impossible to shock me now. I have heard so much, I have listened to so many confessions, I have heard the people of God confess their sins but not much surprises me anymore. Just because you are a Christian doesn’t make you immune to temptation and immune to the pull of sin in your life.

You don't have to convince me of the reality of indwelling sin, not in the lives of believers of this church and not in my own personal life, because I see too much and I hear too much and I experience too much. When I stand in front of the mirror what I see is a man who struggles with sin every single day.

It's hard for us as believers to come to grips with what Paul is saying here. We try to come up with spiritual formulas that get us out of Romans 7. But I don't see anything like that in the text. What I see is that you've got to face the reality of Romans 7 or you'll never get to Romans 8. You've got to come to grips with repeated personal failure. The first step in healing is to admit that you are sick. Healthy people don't go to doctors. Only sick people do. The people who are made better by the power of God are the people who are not ashamed to admit the weakness and the failure and the struggle that they are undergoing in their own personal lives. That's the second struggle. The struggle to come to grips with repeated personal failure. And the third is

C. The struggle to admit the true nature of the war within. 21-23

“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.”

We move to the next level—the intense struggle to own up to the war within. In verse 21 Paul says, “Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” The Greek word for “right there with me” means right beside me. It means I am here and evil is glued to my side. It means I'm joined with sin as to a Siamese twin. Everywhere I go, evil goes with me. Even when I want to do good, all I have to do is reach out my hand and I can touch evil. It's right there beside me.

Then he uses military terms to describe the struggle—“waging war”, “making me a prisoner.”

The Greek word for “waging war” means to line up the troops and go out on a military campaign. Paul is saying that indwelling sin is constantly lining up to do battle with us, to pull us down, to destroy us, to discourage us and to pull us away from God. Evil is not only with us, evil is also waging war inside of us all the time.

That leads me to say this. You are going to struggle with sin as long as you are in this body. There’s no amount of going to church that is going to change that fact. I stopped believing in miracle cures years ago. I no longer believe in three-step or 10-step programs that will free you from sin forever. I read Romans 7 and I see a most godly man admitting the truth about the struggle within his own soul. If Paul struggled, it will probably happen to me and you too. We’re going to struggle. You know the real battles are not the ones on the outside. The real battle of sin is the one on the inside. It’s the one that nobody else ever sees. It’s the struggle that goes on in your mind and your heart, between the pull of the flesh and the pull of the Holy Spirit.

That battle goes on every Sunday morning. We’re a good-looking congregation. We look nice in church. We’re cleaned up. We’re dressed up. But behind every smiling face is a story of struggle, heartache, despair, defeat, victory, cowardice, bravery, fear and courage all mixed up together. Though we look very good when we come to church, in truth, if we could see our souls, it would be more appropriate to picture us as a group of soldiers staggering out of the jungles of Guadalcanal.

That’s what life is like. Some of us barely make it to church because it’s been a difficult week. Spiritually, emotionally, physically, and in every way we’ve struggled through the last six days. You know what? That’s OK. It’s a struggle to come to church and admit the truth. The truth of the matter is that healing cannot begin until we can say, “There is a battle inside of me. I am really struggling and I can barely make it.”

When people talk to me and say, “I’m really struggling,” I’m always encouraged because I can go back to Romans 7 and say, “You’re in good company. If you’re really struggling, if you feel there’s a war within, you have a lot in common with the greatest Christian who ever lived.”

That leads me to say something else too. Most of us are going to struggle with some sins for many, many years. We’re going to win some battles and through Jesus Christ we’re going to win a lot of battles. We’re going to know significant amounts of victory. Don’t let anything I said mislead you. If it seems incomplete, remember, Romans 8 is just around the corner. I’m not giving you the whole story in this message.

What I am telling you is this. We’re going to win some and we’re going to lose some. Because that’s life. It’s not smooth sailing all the time. Like when we were on vacation. There were days when things were going great and there were days when it was a mess. Like the time we went to Batangas hoping to enjoy the beach at Laiya. We were also hoping to enjoy the resort where I made a reservation. I actually made a reservation for a two-bedroom apartment which was a few minutes’ drive from the beach. I had high hopes because one reviewer said it was exceptional. Well, it was exceptionally bad. There were cockroaches around the place, the bathroom faucet wasn’t working, the kitchen was dirty and dusty. The only saving grace was that the two bedrooms were quite clean and air-conditioned. But Eza said, “I thought we were going to a fancy resort”. I felt so bad because I let my family down. And I said to Eza, “Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Tonight, we lose. Tomorrow, we’ll see”. Afterwards, I prayed that the beach was good.

That night, it rained. It rained the whole night, in fact. Will we ever get to the beach at all? Well, the sun came out the next day. **We went to the beach and the smile came back to Eza’s face.** The beach was gorgeous.

It was almost white and not crowded. In fact, only a few families were there. And the water was fantastic. It was warm and calm, clean, and clear. My kids immediately jumped into the water and enjoyed it. Later on, I said to Eza, “Today, we win”. Why? Because God is in control.

My point is, life is really a struggle. We’re going to be knocked down and we’re going to get back up. We’re going to keep on struggling and, with the help of God, we’re going to one day win the battle. Even the best saints of God are going to struggle. How else can you explain pastors that fall? How else can you explain seemingly godly people going into adultery? How else can you explain Christian leaders and Sunday School teachers who admit heinous sins? How do you explain the people of God who end up in jail? How do you explain God’s people giving in to anger, bitterness, rage, gossip and all the rest? The only way that I know how to explain it is the reality of indwelling sin and the struggle we all face.

What will help us in our struggle with sin? Paul suggests three things in verse 24. Understand that these are only the first steps. We’re going to discover other steps as we move through Romans 8. But this is where we must begin.

III. 3 Things That Will Help Us in Our Struggle with Sin. 24-25

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

A. Honesty. 24a

“What a wretched man I am,” he says. That’s a Christian man talking. He is being honest. He admits the truth about his condition. You know, the Bible says: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Let me add, “... but it will hurt you first.”

The reason many of us never grow as Christians is because we hear the truth intellectually, but we won't let it get close enough to hurt us. It comes in, we put up the deflector shields and it bounces harmlessly away. We get good at deflecting the truth because the truth often hurts. The truth never really changes us because we won't let it get close enough to hurt us. Honesty is the first step to admitting your true condition.

B. Humility. 24b

Paul says, "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" The difference between honesty and humility is that honesty says "I am a wretched man" and humility says "I cannot save myself." As far as I know there are only three things you can do with your sin. Number one, you can deny it. Many people do that. Number two, you can try to deal with it on your own. That doesn't work. Or number three, you can admit it and turn to God and Jesus Christ and there find forgiveness. Which leads us to the third thing.

C. Complete Dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ. 25

Here we come to a wonderful verse of Scripture: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" That's the answer to everything he's just said about his struggle with sin. All of chapter 8 is comprehended in that one tiny statement. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We're going to discover that there's a provision for victory, there's a provision for walking in the spirit, there's a provision to help you win the struggle with sin. It's all right there. Just remember this. It's not a formula; it's a person. It is not something on the outside. It is a moment-by-moment dependence on Jesus Christ and realizing that his power is enough to rescue you. You don't have to be defeated, although sometimes you will be. You don't have to stay in the muck and mire, although that's where you may find yourself. Through complete dependence on Jesus Christ, there is the possibility of significant victory in your life.

Romans 7 lies along the pathway of spiritual blessing. It is not the whole story, but it is the place where you must begin your spiritual walk with God. God wants you to go through Romans 7. He wants you to struggle with sin because that experience is meant to drive you into the arms of Jesus Christ. The struggle that you are undergoing in your life now doesn't mean you're a failure. It doesn't mean you're a bad person. God intends for you to struggle with sin so that in your struggle, you would be stripped of your self-reliance and begin to trust in God and God alone. Does the fact that you struggle make you a failure? No. Does it make you a bad person? No. Does it make you a loser? No. Does it make you a sub-standard Christian? No. Do you know what it makes you? It makes you an excellent candidate for the grace of God.

If you are struggling with sin, first, turn your life over to Jesus Christ if you've never done so. Then number two, if you are a believer, hold on to Jesus and never let go. Hold on to Jesus. Run to the cross and there find forgiveness and strength and healing. Cheer up! Your struggles are part of God's plan to make you holy. Your struggles are his strategy to make you like Jesus Christ. Remember this. When you fail—when, not if, but when you fail and when you struggle and when you fall, remember, you've got good company. His name is the apostle Paul and he didn't do so badly. Do you feel like you're trapped in the muck and mire of sin? Run to Jesus Christ and embrace the cross. Turn to him with your whole heart and you will discover that through Jesus Christ, you can become more than a conqueror through him who loves us.