

# 12/31/23 - Romans 7:14-25 - "We're at war...Thanks be to God"

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn to Romans 7, verses 14 to 25. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

[ 1 : 05 ] For 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.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

The word of the Lord. All right, good morning. My name is Carmen Arroyo and I'm a pastoral apprentice here at Steel Valley Church.

And this is my first sermon. So, let's go. Oh, thank you. I'm going to start off today's sermon with a quote from Charles Spurgeon.

There is an essential difference between the decease of the godly and the death of the ungodly. Death comes to the ungodly man as a punitive infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his father's palace.

[ 2 : 16 ] To the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing from his sins and infirmities. Death to the wicked is the king of terrors.

Death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory. So, thinking about this today. Death. How often do we think about it? Are we afraid of it? We see it in the news.

We see it on television. We see it in the movie screens, in the books we read. And we'll even see it in our own lives. Whether it be a death of a friend, a brother, a sister, a grandparent, a mother, or a father.

We will experience it in one way or another. Even if it's our own. As a child, one of my most vivid memories is laying in the hospital bed with my grandmother while she spent her final days at my aunt's and uncle's home.

[ 3 : 29 ] She was frail, skin on bone. And as cancer ate away at her body, still she comforted me as I played with a toy. Over the years, I've attended many funerals of loved ones, seeing their cold, hardened bodies lying in the coffin, faces painted with makeup, wearing beautiful jewelry, clothes, and surrounded by flowers.

It always seemed a little weird to me that we go through such great effort to try and mask and make the shell of the person now gone physically more presentable as the masses line up to say goodbye one last time.

Right? However, it wasn't until this year that I came face to face with watching a loved one die uncensored. Normally shielded from the grueling effects of death as a child, I saw firsthand the pain, agony, humiliation, and battles my father-in-law fought.

As those he loved and ones he once took care of himself rallied around him, comforting him and taking care of him as he passed from this life to the next.

Very similar to my grandmother, my father-in-law was a shell of a man he once was. He was debilitated, crippled, and chained to a bed due to his disease.

[ 4 : 56 ] It was during these hours, days, and weeks, as I held his body while we cared for him, I was introduced to the sight and the smell of rotting flesh, the feel of skin as thin as paper, and the brittle bones protruding from his body.

It was then, as I held him, he would cry out for release, reach for a hand to hold, and pray to God for strength and mercy.

His body was turning against him. Everything he wanted to do, he couldn't. Everything that he did do, he didn't understand why it was happening. He knew in his mind what he wanted, but at every turn, every moment, his body was becoming dead weight.

And it battled against him. He was at war. So you may ask, why I would bring up such a painful thing?

Because this illustration is a reminder our bodies are mortal, temporary, and that the pains of this world are real. That we will have to face battles, both physically and spiritually, as Christians, being born, created in Adam, in full rebellion against God.

[ 6 : 19 ] And as a new creation in Jesus Christ, on our journey to being reunited with him once we die. I mean a lot of Christians today who aren't on their deathbeds, who have dead weight chained to them.

They carry their guilt, their shame, bitterness, resentment, anger, and a host of other rotting attitudes around because of something they did, or they said, or they thought a month, a year, a half a lifetime ago.

Over time, these things have slowly infected them and leaked their poison into them. And I have watched in unbelief as it bends them over with sickness of isolation, pain, and unsatisfying bitterness and anger.

So what about you? Is there something you continue to battle with, agonize over, feel guilty for? Are you so afraid that if anyone were to find out what you've done, said, or thought, that you wouldn't be loved or forgiven? Or do you not battle with your thoughts?

[ 7 : 38 ] Do you give in to your bodily and fleshly impulses? Is there a war within?

Now, before I get into today's text, it's very important to realize the context of the verses as it ties to the chapters leading up to Romans 7, verses 14 through 25, and those thereafter.

Because, well, this can be a little bit of a downer. Let's not lose sight of what Paul wrote in chapters 1 through 8, where he made a strong case toward the need for salvation in chapters 1 through 3, the plan of salvation in chapters 3 through 5, and the life of salvation in chapters 6 through 8.

It is important to note that before we were saved, sin was the master of our lives. That when we were saved, salvation was received as a gift, not on our own work, but that of Jesus Christ.

And that after we were saved, our response of faith towards sanctification is a lifelong war full of temptation and sin between our old sinful nature and our new nature in Christ Jesus.

[ 8 : 57 ] In this sermon titled, We're at war, thanks be to God, we'll be launching an effort to join the ranks of the Apostle Paul to the front line of the war within ourselves to examine this life, the Christian experience, as a born sinner in Adam and a new creature in Christ.

That our only way to salvation, sanctification, and glorification is by grace through faith in Christ. In doing so, we'll see that we will need help.

As we dredge forward to the promises our God has in store for us to be sanctified and glorified, once we leave our mortal flesh, this broken world, and are reunited with Him in heaven.

So let's learn what battles Paul, as a Christian, is talking about in this passage by first looking at the battle of the spiritual versus the physical, second, the battle of good versus evil, and third, the battle of the law of God versus the law of sin.

Before we do, let's go to God in prayer. Father, you spoke the world into existence. You speak new life into your children to give us the light of the knowledge of your glory in Christ.

[ 10 : 29 ] Give us the grace to receive your word and rejoice in it. Convict us of our sins and Christ's sufficiency so that the sinners will be converted, the weak strengthened, and the Christ's body built up.

Amen. First, we'll be looking at the battle of the spiritual versus the physical.

Let us notice the number of times Paul calls out the differences between spiritual desires and physical desires. In verses 14, he says, For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh. In verse 18, For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. In verse 23 through 23, he says, For 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.

Church, what we see here is that when Christ Jesus saves us from our sins, the change that takes place in us at that moment, in the here and now, is a radical change of our spirit, the disposition of our soul.

[ 11 : 55 ] Our heart has been altered. As a result, portions of our physical lives should change because of it, because we have been changed from the inside, spiritually.

Now this, of course, isn't taking away from the fact that one day we will also experience a dramatic physical change when Jesus comes back and makes us new and gives us glorified bodies.

But, at this very moment, while we are here on this earth, chained to our mortal flesh, the biggest changes we see taking place in us by our Savior are spiritual.

Leaving us with what Paul describes in these verses as a war waging against the spiritual and the physical. Between the desires of our old sinful nature, what he calls the flesh.

Between that and our new nature's desires. To be righteous and to please God, of which he calls the mind.

[ 13 : 12 ] Let's look at the nature a little bit closer, shall we? These two natures that he's describing. The old nature is your first birth. It's your birth that's on your birth certificate.

The birth that's the birth date on your birth certificate. Driver's license, what have you. It is this physical life. This is why you can breathe, walk, talk.

It will suffer a lot of diseases and eventually die. Our old nature is in Adam. It's born under sin.

Under condemnation. It will face death and the wrath of God. They will spend eternity separate from him. This old nature loves sin.

It hates God. It delights in breaking the law of God. However, it may not like the consequences of the sins they're committing. This old nature is a sinful nature.

[ 14 : 14 ] It cannot do anything but sin. Totally depraved and wrapped up in it. Whereas now we have a new nature. This new nature is our second birth.

It is a regenerated person. It is a new creation. Saved by the work of Christ alone and they believe the gospel. They are radically changed and the disposition of their heart yearns for God and runs to his law and takes the light in him.

This new nature is a spiritual life that properly relates to God in the Spirit. A real relationship with God.

Knowing God. Yearning to approach God. And it's written in John chapter 3 verse 6. We are born again by the Spirit. It is the sovereign will of God to give us new life.

And for true believers, it will live far beyond our physical life for eternity and union with him. This new nature is in Christ.

[ 15 : 21 ] Saints, no longer under the condemnation of the law but under grace. You are favored and accepted in the beloved. This new nature loathes sin. It hates it from its deepest core.

We do not want to sin at all. This is the life that cries Abba, Father. Every time it thinks of God. This new nature is a sinless one that yearns for the eternal to obey God, to praise God, to glorify him and his righteousness.

This is something God has planted into your lives. This is the struggle. This is the conflict.

This is the war. Is there a war waging inside of you? We see this war further described in Galatians 5, verse 17.

For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

[ 16 : 37 ] What are the things that you continue to do that you know you probably shouldn't? There is a war taking place, church.

The physical side of our bodies, what Paul calls the flesh, was once ruled by sin. Sin controlled what we did. However, what Paul is also saying here is that even though we have been set free and have become aware of our sin, we still have desires in our flesh.

That even though the spirit of God lives in us, we do things that we know we ought not to do. Now, since New Year's is coming up, I'll give you a silly illustration.

In 2024, I am going to resolve to lose 10 to 15 pounds. Right? Since I've been married, I have put on what they call happy fat. And with this New Year resolution, I am determined to lose 10 to 15 pounds.

However, compounded with that, we also have two toddlers in our home. And now, my diet mostly consists of half-eaten chicken nuggets, french fries, and goldfish crackers.

[17:58] And it is I thought I wasn't a fan, but I really am. It's really, really good. So, yeah. So, keeping in mind my New Year's resolution, if you were to ask me right now at this very moment, Carmen, do you want a chicken nugget?

I'd say no. Not at all. Not at all. However, if you were all seated around my kitchen table, the dinner table, and you would see one of our toddlers reach out his hand and give me a slobbery, half-eaten chicken nugget, you better believe I'm going to have this urge inside my body to want to grab that nugget and chow down.

because, I mean, pretty good. Brothers, sisters, we still, there will still be evil desires that emerge in our hearts and minds because we are still chained to this physical flesh.

this side of our beings that long for and relish in the old ways of life, this life, this world, is full of temptations and sins far worse than chicken nuggets, french fries, and goldfish crackers.

And these temptations and sins are constantly at war against our new nature and our desire to be holy and righteous beings who want to obey and praise and glorify God, who follow Jesus and his ways.

[19:44] Amen. The Apostle Paul understands this. He understands this struggle. He understands this battle between the spiritual and the physical because that's what he's writing about in today's verses.

leading us to our second point, to our second battle, the battle of good versus evil. Let's take notice of what Paul describes as the battle of good and evil and looking back at the text we see in verse 16, now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good.

Verse 17, so now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Verse 18, for I know that nothing good dwells in me.

Going further into 18, for I have the desire to do what is right. 19, for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Verse 20, now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. And finally in verse 21, when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

[21:08] What Paul is talking about here is trying to do good based on his own power. He wants to do good, but evil is creeping at every corner, every door, and is clinging onto anything it can get its hands on.

You see, when we try to do good without relying on the Holy Spirit of God, it is a struggle. We see the struggle play out in Paul's own life.

He cannot do it alone. What are some of the struggles in your life that you try to handle alone? We live in a broken world and we're chained to a body that's still subject to worldly desires, temptations, and sin.

We cannot give evil any quarter. We cannot give it an inch because to the Christian, this evil is a cancer. It is the enemy.

It is lurking in secret places. It waits. It schemes. And it is through God's great mercy that as we dredge through these battles and that we aren't bombarded, nor are all of our sins revealed to us at once, that as we get closer and closer and closer to our sanctification, the more clearer and clearer we become of our sins.

[22:32] It's like coming out of a dark room and wearing a white shirt full of stains. And as you're in the darkness, you come forward closer and closer to the light. The more and more your stains on your shirt are apparent to you.

That's what it's like. Day by day, this battle we wage on. This will be a lifelong battle, one that will not be completed until our flesh is dead, lying in a grave, and then will our sins and human desires be gone.

Listen, church. There is a war raging for good and evil taking place inside our hearts, minds, and souls. And if we try and fight that battle on our own, we will not be victorious.

We will be like Paul who says in verse 18, for the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.

Are you catching on yet? leading me to our third battle, the battle of the law of God versus the law of sin.

[ 24 : 00 ] If we take a quick look back to Romans chapter 7 verse 12, Paul writes, therefore the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good.

Then in verse 16, Paul writes, now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. What Paul is doing here, he's setting up the differences between the law of God and the law of sin. Now of course the law of sin doesn't exist, however, everything that we're talking about here is a communication of what sin represents. Everything against the law of God.

We see this in verse 21. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. Then again in verse 22 and 23, for 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.

[ 25 : 07 ] And finally in verse 25, so then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Church, we have to remember that the law of God has exposed our sins to us before we were in Christ. And it is a constant reminder of how we sin and how often.

We're going to do a little test today. I'm not a professor or a teacher or anything like that and it's a little bit of a pop quiz, but let's do it. How long do you think we could last without sinning?

A month? No. Almost everyone's head's shaking no. A day? Probably not. An hour?

If you're sleeping? Eh, maybe. Maybe if you tried really hard and went to sleep, maybe.

[ 26 : 16 ] But how about a minute? 60 seconds? Do you think it's possible? If you went away, threw your phone across the room, went to a dark corner, didn't talk to anyone, didn't look at anyone, didn't see anyone, and just huddled away in a corner like, I'm not doing anything for 60 seconds.

You think it's possible? No? No? I don't think so either. I don't think it's possible at all. Because that's because none of us can truly obey the law.

And as Paul describes it in Romans 3 verses 10 through 12, all of us are under sin, writing, as it is written, none is righteous, no, not one, no one understands, no one seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become worthless.

No one does good, not even one. It's here we see Paul combining a series of Old Testament passages that when combined emphasize the universal nature of human sinfulness, depravity, and condemnation for all mankind.

This sinful nature, this depravity has been evident since Adam and has plagued those all throughout human history, even a man after God's own heart, King David.

[ 27 : 42 ] King David, who authored many of the Psalms we see in the Old Testament, shared the same love and longing to obey the law of God just as Paul did. In fact, in his longest Psalm, Psalm 119, with 176 verses, David repeatedly expresses his desire to live in keeping with the law of God.

A few examples of these are verse 1, blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Verse 25, my soul clings to dust, give me life according to your word.

Verse 33, teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep them, or I will keep it to the end. Verse 81, my soul longs for your salvation, I hope in your word.

And the crescendo of 119, verse 97, O how I love your law, it is my meditation all the day.

David truly saw the law of God as holy, just, and good. The lighting in it, as Paul describes here in today's text. However, if we were to read all the way through 119, you'd notice the very last verse, verse 176, that after 175 verses praising the law of God, he writes, I have gone astray like a lost sheep.

[ 29 : 20 ] Seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments. How many of us so desperately want to please God, but our old ways in life are fighting back?

The flesh is fighting back, evil is fighting back, the law of sin is fighting back. Church, listen to me. there are some battles taking place in our lives, even at this very moment. I'm not talking about battles against this broken world, but the battle, the war between godliness and sin within our own hearts, minds, and bodies.

Wake up. These battles will not be fun, they will be hard, and we will lose again and again and again.

We'll have this constant pulling and tearing of our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. Oh, what kind of life is this? What is it that I, that we, can do?

[ 30 : 28 ] I try so hard to be a follower of Jesus Christ, but I fail. As Paul writes in verse 24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

We receive an overwhelming answer, a cry out for help, a hand is given, a savior was born, he came down from glory, was born in a trough, lived as a poor man, was truly both man and truly God, knew no sin, but still obeyed and glorified our God, and bore God's wrath for every sin, and died on a tree for everyone that belonged to him.

He bore it all who cry out, Abba, Father. You, Christian, he bore it for us.

in verse 24, Paul answers this cry, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ's cross was the devil's undoing, and in his resurrection, Christ was exalted over every created being, visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly.

[ 31 : 53 ] at Christ's second coming, Satan's defeat will be completed, but the peace of the cross is experienced in the meantime, in the midst of our spiritual struggle.

The forces of darkness are defeated, but they are not yet harmless. Church, we need help in this war. We need help in this life.

We need Jesus. Jesus. Jesus is the answer. Jesus is the help. What we've read here today is that Paul and every Christian is completely unable to fight these battles on our own.

We need reinforcement. That we are filled with the Holy Spirit of God, secured by the works of Christ Jesus, and solidified by the promise of God our Father.

As Paul ends Romans chapter 7 in verse 25, so then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

[ 33 : 14 ] So then, let us too go to war. let us live this Christian life not on our own, but in the power of God.

As John Calvin once wrote, true repentance is firm and constant. It makes us war with the evil that is in us, not for a day or a week, but without end and without intermission.

may we all as children of God continue to break the bonds of our sin. We are a slave to sin no more for our Savior reigns and in his blood and as his beloved we can have great assurance that if we truly repent of our sins, that is if we realize we're guilty and vile sinners in the presence of our Lord, our God, that we deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that we are hell bound, that we begin to realize that this thing called sin is in us, and that we long to get rid of it, that we turn our back in every way, shape, and form, that we renounce this broken world whatever the cost, as well as its ways, that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and go after

Christ, this kind of repentance, that if we truly repent, our sins will be forgiven with a promise of being rejoined to him upon his return or our death.

So I ask again, is there a war within you? Now maybe you're here today and you heard this message and can relate.

[ 35 : 18 ] You, Christian, you too struggle with sin. It leaves you completely wrecked and you fall to your flesh. It is a front against you and your God.

there is a war inside of you. Brothers, sisters, if this is you, let me congratulate you if it is truly a conflict.

You, Christian man, you, Christian woman, you, Christian child, may I continue to encourage you on your road to sanctification and warn you to not play with sin or temptation will get you.

If you struggle with greed, lust, anger, or addicted to alcohol, drugs, pornography, if you struggle with envy, gluttony, or boasting, please continue to pray without ceasing about the hideousness of your sin and the beautiful forgiveness that is in Christ.

Find an accountability partner who will call you out and truly hold you accountable. Talk about your sins with your elders.

[ 36 : 35 ] We're all in this together, united in Christ. Who knows? They may have gone through the very struggles you're going through right now, and at the end of the day, freedom from the chains of sin will only happen with a change in the heart, a renewing of your mind, and as a family united in Christ, we should seek guidance from matured Christians to provide practical and radical amputations of the temptations they see in our lives to help cleanse and change the desires of our hearts.

Because our sin may be a part of us, but it is not all of us. You, Christian, can live in the joy of knowing that you are a new creation and that this earth is not our home.

Thanks be to God. Maybe you're a Christian here today that has said a prayer, made an altar call, proclaimed that Jesus Christ is your Lord, but you're unbothered by some of the sins that you've done and continue to do in your life, or you believe that you don't sin at all.

Is this you? Do you believe the things you aren't doing aren't that bad? I mean, I'm not killing anyone, right? Or would you, or do you think that God would understand because he made you this way?

Right? Right? Or do you think that you'll become a better Christian later on when I'm older, but right now, I'm going to have a little fun?

[ 38 : 37 ] Is there a war within you? this stagnation is one of the worst things that could happen to you, and as a result, you are never secure because everyone sins, and all sin is an abomination to God.

An unrepentant sin will need to be answered on the day of judgment. And if your sin doesn't rattle you, I would have to question whether or not you're a true believer at all.

Now, don't get my words twisted. We Christians are not perfect. We sin again and again, but it is the response of true repentance to that sin that is important because the only thing greater than our sin is the forgiveness and mercy of our God.

Thanks be to God. For the unbeliever, I simply ask this, what do you do with your guilt? What do you do with the guilt that despite not being illegal in the laws of man, you still feel a little anguish, a little pain, and a little grief?

You're unable to explain it. And even though you sought out comfort in worldly things, whether not be spiritual healers or celebrities, the internet, I implore you, I beg you, stop.

[ 40 : 17 ] This world and our actions can have catastrophic consequences of which you're probably living through right now.

There is no coincidence evidence that you're hearing this message because our God, whether you acknowledge him or not, is here.

The reality of our God is plain to see. He has shown you day after day and you benefit from his mercy. This has been evident since the foundation of the earth was laid because this you know he exists and there will be no excuse.

Again, I implore you, I beg you to please forsake the foolishness of this world and instead of having trust in the creation, realize lies the creator.

This world is broken. Our bodies are temporary and to get through this life we're going to need help because we have no ability to do this on our own, to be holy and to live up to God's law.

[ 41 : 33 ] We must understand what God has done for us sinners and the more we do, the more willing we'll be able to do whatever he requires until his return or our death.

A true believer is at war with his sin. A false believer is at peace with it. We're at war.

Thanks be to God. God's love. I'll leave you with this. Another story. Again, with my father-in-law, who so happened to also be named Paul.

Now, the thing that you need to know about Paul is that he was an engineer, worked in the oil industry, and like me, he's a talker. There were countless hours of conversations we had, ranging from politics, history, technology, to how the best bang for the buck regarding energy was still coal, most of which, he talked circles around me.

A lot. He had a wonderful and inquisitive mind that drove him to seek out information beyond just headlines and blurbs for the topics he found interest in.

[ 42 : 59 ] However, there was one conversation that sticks out and I'll remember for the rest of my life. It was Christmas Eve 2022. As we normally did, my wife and I flew down to Texas from Ohio to spend this special time of the year with her side of the family.

After the Christmas Eve party and while everyone was tucked away asleep resting, Paul and I stayed up talking. In his living room, we sat back on the sofas and as the TV hummed in the background, we started to reminisce about more personal matters.

With his mother and brother recently passing, our conversations mostly centered around family and then relationships, which led to discussions on how fortunate and blessed we are.

We started talking about the gratitude we had for the undeserving lives God has given us, the people, the friends, the family. family. It was then he stopped, got up in his chair and said, Carmen,

one of the greatest things I love about our God is his forgiveness and mercy.  
We continued to talk about some of his shortcomings, our shortcomings in life and that despite doing wrong, God's forgiveness remained and that he, Paul, could never repay.  
[ 44 : 29 ] Then, looking at me, he asked, what about you? The air fell quiet.

Once reclined, I sat up, almost at attention in our sofa, and as the TV echoed in the background with my mind racing, I thought and I thought and I answered.  
probably one of the more daunting questions I've ever been asked. Well, Paul, I would have to say it's a combination of what you've just described, his amazing grace.  
Looking at me, going back into his chair, leaning back, looking up the ceiling, he said, ah, that's it.  
How sweet the sound.  
Let us pray. Thank you.