

“The Christian’s Battle with Sin”

(Romans 7:15-25 – Pentecost 7 – July 12, 2026)

Romans 7:15-25 – ¹⁵*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.* ¹⁶*If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.* ¹⁷*But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* ¹⁸*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.* ¹⁹*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.* ²⁰*Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* ²¹*I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.* ²²*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.* ²³*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* ²⁴*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵*I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

Dear Redeemed sinners, whom God has made His saints through faith in Jesus Christ:

When some people hear the apostle Paul’s words in our text, they think he must be describing his life before he was a Christian. How could such a Holy Spirit-filled man have such a personal struggle with sin as he describes? Perhaps this view is promoted by some who falsely teach Christian perfection, as if believers can become so filled by the Spirit as to rise above sin. Sometimes people think Christians claim to be perfect. But Paul describes his life in the present tense as a battle with sin. Yet he also describes his hope in Christ who has brought deliverance, salvation, and eternal life for sinners.

As Christians, we can relate to what Paul is saying. We say with him in 1 Timothy 1:15: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* Despite our best efforts to live holy lives to God, we feel the daily struggle with our sinful nature. In every worship service, we bow before God confessing our sins in thought, word, and deed. We take to heart His promise in 1 John 1:8-9: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* As we bow in repentance confessing our sins, God lifts us up in His Absolution, declaring us forgiven all sin and cleansed by Jesus’ blood shed on the cross for us.

As the apostle Paul writes these words by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, let us consider how these truths apply to us in **“The Christian’s Battle with Sin”**: **1) We have two natures in us, 2) We feel the struggle between them, 3) We trust in Christ alone for deliverance.**

1) We have two natures in us

Natural man, born as a fallen child of Adam, has only one nature – the sinful nature. Ephesians 2:1-3 describes unbelievers as following the evil spirit Satan who works in the sons of disobedience, and following the lusts of their flesh. Romans 8:5-8 says: *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh”* and *“To be carnally minded is death... Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* Unbelievers have only one nature – the sinful nature, the flesh, the carnal mind at enmity with God, the nature that brings death.

But as believers, we are given the Spirit-led nature, as Romans 8:9-11 says: *“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

The Holy Spirit gives us faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin (1 Corinthians 12:3). We were baptized by the Holy Spirit and given what Scripture describes as *“the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (Ephesians 4:24); *“the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”* (Colossians 3:10). The new man is the Holy Spirit-led nature. Through the Spirit and faith in Christ, God has made us His new creation. He renews us in His image as He no longer counts our sins against us, but only the righteousness and holiness of His Son, Jesus. As such, according to the new man, we desire to live holy lives to Him who loved us and saved us.

Here, when Paul refers to himself as *“I,”* he speaks in terms of the new man as his real self. He calls it *“the inward man,”* *“the law of my mind.”* It is the Spirit-led nature that agrees that God’s Law is good. It hates sin and wants to do God’s will. Paul says: *“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”* (vs. 22).

But at the same time, Paul laments to see that other nature at work in him, what he refers to as *“sin that dwells in me,”* *“my flesh.”* The sinful nature is like an uninvited stranger taking up residence in a believer. It leads us to do what we do not want to do. Paul says: *“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”* (vs. 23).

2) We feel the battle between them

Like Paul, we feel that battle between these two natures. The new man led by the Spirit dominates in us, but we still feel the struggle against the sinful nature. Galatians

5:17 says: *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*

Consider how this battle looks in daily life. According to the new man, we delight in the Law of God. Led by His Holy Spirit, we want to obey His commandments. We want to love God above all, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So at the beginning of the day, we resolve to put God first – to be in His Word, to call on Him in prayer, to entrust all things to Him, to serve Him. But through the day, we quickly forget His Word or fail to apply it in our lives. We forget to call on Him in prayer and entrust all things to Him. By the end of the day, we see how many ways we have put ourselves first before God, serving our own will and desires instead of His.

According to the new man, we resolve to love others as ourselves, to serve the needs of those God puts around us. But through the day, we get so inwardly focused, selfishly serving our own interests. At times, people seem to get in the way of our plans and we get impatient, and it comes out in our words and actions. By the end of the day, we see we haven’t always been there for our spouse, children, parents, friends, and others.

Or led by God’s Spirit, we resolve to forgive and love a difficult person. We resolve to think and speak well of them, to put the best construction on their motives, words, and actions. But before we know it, we are dwelling on their faults, imagining the worst about them, holding onto unforgiving grudges, anger, hatred.

Or according to the new man, we resolve to keep ourselves chaste in body and mind. But the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own flesh set in; and we entertain unclean thoughts and images, we lust in forbidden places, we commit shameful acts.

The battle with sin is not easy. How many souls has Satan led to give up the fight, to seek false liberty by giving themselves over to the old man and the lusts of the flesh. How many have lost the battle by hardening their hearts against God’s Word, living in unrepented sin, grieving the Holy Spirit until they drive Him away and lose faith (Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 6:4-6).

But by the grace of God, we fight the good fight of faith. Our conscience is tender, formed by God’s Word and His Spirit. At times, we may be so vexed by our sins that we say with Paul: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (vs. 24). Yet we live in the power of our baptism into Christ. By daily contrition and repentance, we drown the old man with his sins and evil lusts; we crucify the flesh. According to the new man, we daily come forth and arise in Jesus’ cleansing forgiveness, to live before God in the righteousness and purity of Christ in which He clothes us, to walk in newness of life by His Spirit (Romans 6:1-4).

3) We trust in Christ alone for deliverance

Certainly as believers, we do experience victories over sin as the Spirit leads us; but we are not saved by our life of sanctification, which is imperfect this side of heaven. We are saved through faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us. Our justification in Him already is perfect. When it comes to the question, "*Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" with Paul we say: "*I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*"

Thank God, He sent His Son into the world to save sinners! By His sinless nature, Jesus kept the whole Law for us – loving God His Father above all, loving every neighbor as Himself and giving His life for all. It is His pure and holy life alone that God counts to us for righteousness. Jesus also went to the cross to win our forgiveness. By His innocent suffering and death for us, He paid the full wages of our sin, thus delivering us from eternal death and hell. Then He rose from the grave in victory to give us His blood-bought gift of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven.

Now Jesus brings this gift to us through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament. His Church is a refuge for all who are weary of fighting the battle with sin. Jesus says: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). We come to Him weary and burdened by another week of doing wrong things we should not have done, and failing to do good things we should have done. We plead only His precious blood to cleanse us and His perfect life to cover us; and in Jesus' name, God the Father forgives and restores us. We come as penitent sinners to the Lord's Altar, and we receive Jesus' Body and Blood for our forgiveness.

So the Holy Spirit continues to strengthen us in faith that clings to Christ alone for deliverance; and the Spirit strengthens the new man to fight the good fight of faith.

One day, we look forward to being perfect in heaven, like Jesus. We say with Paul in Philippians 3:12-14: "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

As Christians, the battle with sin is real; but Jesus came as the Savior of real sinners. He has delivered us from sin and death. He has won for us eternal life in heaven! Therefore we say: "*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.