Every Christian's Struggle

(The frustration & futility of living in the flesh)

Romans 7:14-25

3-9-2024 - HRM

INTRODUCTION: V. 14

***We cannot do good (do right, please God) by the power of the flesh!**

I. Trying to Do Good "in the flesh" is <u>FRUSTRATING</u> (v. 15-20)

A. A Frustrating <u>Paradox</u> - Spiritual Desire but no Power (v. 15-16)

The Testimony of a struggling Christian is four-fold:

1. "I don't <u>know</u> what I'm doing" (v. 15a)
2. "I don't <u>do</u> what I want to be doing" (v. 15b)
3. "I don't <u>like</u> what I'm doing" (v. 15c)
4. "I don't <u>agree</u> with what I'm doing" (v. 16)

B. A Frustrating <u>Problem</u> - Indwelling Sin (v. 17-20)

II. Trying to do good "in the flesh" is <u>FUTILE</u> (v. 21-24)

A. The Enemy does not Leave (v. 21-22)

B. The War does not End (v. 23)

C. A Cry of Despair (v. 24)

* You find deliverance when you yield to Christ (v. 25).

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INTRODUCTION: V. 14

Verses 14-25 have been debated for centuries regarding whether Paul is describing the experience of a believer or non-believer. The reference to being "sold under sin" (v. 14), the mention of "war" and captivity" (v. 23); the admittance of "wretchedness" (v. 24); and the seeming inability to do right (v. 15-21); coupled with the proneness to do wrong seem to support the view that the struggles of an unbeliever are in view.

However, a closer look reveals that Paul, on the contrary, is describing the life of a believer (but a believer depending on the strength of the flesh to live victoriously).

Proofs that a believer is being described:

1. Personal pronoun "I" - indicates that this struggle was Paul's own experience. (the word "I" appears 30 times in this chapter) - cp. v. 25 "I myself" - emphatically Paul's personal testimony.

2. The evidence of a hatred for sin (v. 15) is indicative of a believer (unbelievers love sin - Rom. 3; Jn. 3:19 - "Men love darkness rather than light...").

3. Godly desires are evident throughout the context. Constant references to not wanting (desiring -) to sin, while wanting to do right, are made.

   In reference to sin, the reply is "I allow not" (v. 15); "I would not" (v. 16,19, 20). NOTE: The speaker's longing to be free from sin altogether - v. 24.

   In reference to doing right, the one described admits: "The Law is good" (v. 16); "to will [to do good] is present" (v. 18); "the good that I would" (v. 19); "When I would do good" (v. 21).

4. Spiritual perception ("For I know...in my flesh dwelleth no good thing" - v. 18; "I see another Law in my members..." - v. 23).

5. The existence of two natures - "inward man" (v. 22); "mind...flesh" (v. 25). (an unbeliever has one nature).

V. 14

When Paul says, "I am carnal" (fleshly), he is referring to his "old man"; his "old nature"

(SEE Eph. 4:22-24 for a description of the believer's two natures).

This passage "describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin" (Thomas, p. 191).

Just as the Law offered no power over sin (7:1-13), Paul now shows that the flesh offers no power over sin (7:15-25).

EX: of people who tried to do God's word by man's strength and failed.

***We cannot do good (do right, please God) by the power of the flesh!**

I. Trying to Do Good "in the flesh" is FRUSTRATING (v. 15-20)

A. A Frustrating Paradox - Spiritual Desire but no Power (v. 15-16)

Paul describes a duel life, that every believer can relate to.

God is not teaching that a believer has a split personality, nor suffers from schizophrenia, but that within his one personality reside two natures.

Verses 15-25 describe a man i conflict. Someone struggling. Someone who has a war going on inside of him.

The Testimony of a struggling Christian is four-fold:

1. "I don't know what I'm doing" (v. 15a)

   "I allow not" = lit. "I know not"

   Sin dulls our perceptions. It is blinding (II Cor. 4:4).

   Have you ever done something, then realized it was foolish and wrong, asked yourself: "Why did I do that?"

2. "I don't do what I want to be doing" (v. 15b)

3. "I don't <u>like</u> what I'm doing" (v. 15c)

"Self is unable to hinder (stop) what it disapproves" (Thomas, p. 194).

4. "I don't <u>agree</u> with what I'm doing" (v. 16)

Both the believer's <u>desire</u> to obey God's Law, and even his <u>failure</u> to obey God's law reveals the Law to be good (beneficial).

ILLUS: How good we feel about ourselves until we realize what sin is. Do you ever notice that the more you know about God and His standards, the more aware you are of your own shortcomings? A new believer may view himself as doing quite well, when in actuality he still is committing sin that he is unaware of.

ILLUS: Talking to people who are obviously living in direct disobedience to God's Law, yet they think they are right with God. What would cause such deception? <u>Ignorance</u>. They are totally unaware of God's Law.

The more one sees the straightness of God's standards, the more he will see his own crookedness in comparison.

The closer one gets to God, the more conscious he becomes of his own imperfections, limitations, and shortcomings.

The more spiritual one is, the more <u>heightened</u> his awareness of sin will be.

B. A Frustrating Problem - Indwelling Sin (v. 17-20)

V. 17

"Now" - now that I am a Christian, in contrast with my former unconverted days.

"No more I that do it" - not excusing sin, but showing who the real culprit is.

Paul is explaining his problem, not justifying his problem.

Many Christians attempt to excuse their sin and exempt themselves from responsibility and accountability for it by saying, "Oh well, that's just the way I am" "I can't help it."

"No more I . . ." (same phrase appears in verse 20). Paul is saying: "The true I or the real me (in Christ) is not sinning. The internal ("inward man" - v. 22) person is the real you!

When a believer sins, what aspect of his being sins? Is it the natural aspect of man or the spiritual aspect of man? [Natural] The flesh or the spirit? [flesh]

"Sin that dwelleth in me" - lit. "the dwelling in me sin"

Sin is viewed as an unwanted tenant who lives at home inside the believer.

V. 18

"Flesh" = the physical nature of man that motivates him to gratify self with sin.

NOTE: the physical body is not inherently wicked. Its our carnal nature that is housed in the body that is sinful.

Everything the Bible says about the old nature is negative:

"No good thing" (Rom. 7:18)
"The flesh profiteth nothing" (Jn. 6:63)
"No confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3)

(cited from Wiersbe, p. 538)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it" (Jer. 17:9)

Eccles. 9:3 - "This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: year, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."

(Cp. Is. 1:5, 6)

The works of the flesh are outlined in Gal. 5:19-21 as being: "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness (lewdness), idolatry, witchcraft (drug usage), hatred, variance (strife), emulations (jealousy), wrath, strife (rivalries), seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings..."

"For to will" - "for" = introduces the <u>proof</u> that the "flesh" has nothing good about it.

"For the will (desire to do good) is present (within my reach; next to me), but how to perform that which is good is not to be found (in the flesh)."

V. 19

A believer relying upon himself may have <u>good intentions</u> but will inevitably produce <u>bad actions</u>.

II. Trying to do good "in the flesh" is <u>FUTILE</u> (v. 21-24)

A. The Enemy does not Leave (v. 21-22)

V. 21

"Evil is present" - evil is right next to me.

Whenever we want to do good, an evil, tag-along enemy is right there also.

V. 22

"I delight" - I am joyfully agreeing with God's law (cp. v. 16), after (according to) the inner man (in contrast with the flesh, which hates God's Law).

II Cor. 4:16 - "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Eph. 3:16 - "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

B. The War does not End (v. 23)

"Another law" - another of a <u>different</u> kind

"Warring" = to carry on a military campaign against.

"The Law of my mind" - (synonymous with "the inward man" - v. 22) a spiritual mind. A mind that loves God. A mind that knows God's Word. A mind that desires to do right.

"Bringing me into captivity" - to subdue by force and carry away. Sin desires to fire its arrows at us and then draw us away with the lines that are attached to the arrows (ILLUS: whale hunters capturing a whale)

SEE: Gal. 5:16-17 "Spirit vs. Flesh"

C. A Cry of Despair (v. 24)

From the depths of despair, the soul cries out, "O wretched man that I am!"

"Wretched" = miserable; distressed.

The picture is of a tired, worn out, warrior who in himself is helpless.

NOTE: The Apostle uses the word "wretched" rather than "guilty" because he is describing a struggling believer, not a condemned unbeliever.

"Deliver" - to rescue. The word is used to denote the act of a soldier who runs at his comrade's cry to rescue him from the hands of the enemy (Godet).

CONCLUSION:

* You find deliverance when you yield to Christ (v. 25).

Just as there exists real agony for a struggling believer, there exists a real answer!

I Cor. 15:57 - "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The answer to deliverance is "through Jesus Christ our Lord." He is our means of victory - Thank God!

It is our union with Christ (via the Holy Spirit) that gave us the power over sin (Rom. 6:3-11), and now it is our yielding to Christ (and the Holy Spirit) that unleashes the power over sin (Rom. 6:13).

Remember, Jesus said: "Abide in Me . . . for without Me ye can do nothing." (Jn. 15:4, 5).

Note contrast between "I" (ch. 7) and the "Holy Spirit" (ch. 8) (cp. Thomas, p. 193).

While chapter 7 emphasizes what "I" am struggling to do, yet utterly failing in my own strength; chapter 8 emphasizes what the "Holy Spirit" (over 20 times) can and does do when yielded to.

EX: How we determine:

"I'm not going to lust any more" (Yet we forget to ask God for His grace in this matter).

"I'm not going to think evil anymore" (jealousy, anger, etc.) (yet we fail to seek God to cleanse our minds)

"I'm not going to miss personal prayer, Bible reading, or church attendance" (yet we forget to seek God's face for the ability and continued desire to do so)

"I'm going to be a different husband, father, wife, or mother, son or daughter (yet we don't cry out for God's gracious power to so change)

As Christians, we must come to the point (like we did before salvation), and admit: "I can't do it" Then look to the One who can! Jesus Christ.

Yield to the Lord daily, and He will win the fight over sin
for you!