

Every Justified Sinner's Sorrow

Studies in Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 7:17-25

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Take your Bibles this morning and turn back to Romans chapter seven. Now I know many people in religion, they want their pastor to be a person who is above reproach and **that is required of a pastor**. But we need to be very careful when we think about men, whoever they are and whatever position they are put in as a pastor or a preacher of the gospel. You need to always keep in mind as to who and what they are.

As I stand here before you this morning, just like you, I am a sinner, a justified sinner redeemed based on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just like you, I am a man of like passion, subject to all the frailties of human nature. Like you, I am forced to confess I do not love God like I should. Now I know there are some people that hear that kind of a statement and they say, "Oh, you just shouldn't say things like that." Listen, the thing about true religion is we are not hypocritical in what we say. The long and the short of it is, we have problems with sin. Now we do, even your pastor. And I hope you understand what I'm saying. I don't say it to pat ourselves on the back and I certainly don't mean it as an excuse. It is wrong and it is evil, and but for the grace of God it deserves condemnation. But, thank God, there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. The long and the short of it is still all I can ever be in this life is a sinner saved based on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's it. And when I get to the end of this life, if the Lord lets me live 20, 30 more years, the struggle is not going to get any easier. At no point in a believer's life do they reach or achieve a point where they quit struggling with sin. We will all wrestle and fight and struggle and agonize while we are in the flesh.

Now, that being said, we might still be in the flesh now. We still live in these bodies of sin. But, listen. We are not in a condition where we are separated or alienated or can ever come back under the condemnation of God. Nothing that you do or nothing that you do not do can ever bring you back into a position of being in bondage to sin. "He that is dead," Paul said in Romans chapter six, "is freed from sin." **WE ARE FREE**. In other words, like I told everybody Wednesday night, that word "*free*," it means he that is dead is justified from sin. In other words it cannot be brought back up. And that is what Paul is dealing with here in **verses 20**. We are just going to cover five verses this morning. We will finish up this seventh chapter this morning.

I want to talk to you about the justified sinner's warfare. You know, everybody talks about we are in a warfare. Well, we are. Notice what Paul says here in **verse 20**.

*Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 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.*¹

Now here in **verse 20** the apostle Paul starts off and he makes this statement. And these are hard verses to read. They almost get confusing when you try to read them. But he is making a point. He is emphasizing to our hearts and to our minds, the Holy Spirit is, as he moved the apostle Paul to write these things, this ongoing struggle that the justified saint experiences while they live in this earth and in this body that we live in. He says, "Now I find that I do that I would not." Paul says, "I do the things I don't want to do." In other words, what God forbids and even what the law forbids, what do we find ourselves often doing? Now, again, this all boils back down to this idea that men and women think we can achieve sinless perfection, somehow or another or that we can eradicate or remove sin from your life. But, listen. That is totally contrary to any scriptural concept. John wrote in **1 John chapter one**, "He that says he has no sin makes God a liar and the truth is not in him." Now I don't think you can get any more clear cut than that. If you want to sit there and talk about sinless perfection or sinless perfection even in you, you need to take and rip 1 John out of your Bible because you are denying the Scriptures. And, listen. John was not at odds with Paul nor vice versa. They believed the same gospel. They had the same hope. Again, when the apostle Paul says here, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."² he is not saying, "Well, since it is something I can't control, I don't have any responsibility." Paul is not denying his responsibility. What he is doing here in **verse 20** is he is identifying the source of sin, where it comes from, the old corrupt sinful principle which continually dwells in us. And, listen. How long is it going to be there? Until you die. God didn't take it out of him. And I tell you what. There is a reason why God didn't take it out of him. Do you know what it does? It makes me cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"³ I tell you what. In this old world of sin it makes us detest what we are in. I can promise you. By the time you get to the end of this life, you are going to be fed up with sin. Now that doesn't mean go out and do more sin where more grace can come. That is... if you do that, if you take that approach that you think that the more sin you do the more grace you are going to get, **you don't know God**. Now you can take that to the bank. I've heard people say, "Well, you don't promote enough holy living." If you use the gospel as an excuse or a cause for your disobedience and your lack of responsibility, **you have not learned Christ yet**. Now you haven't. But I am also not saying that if you do those things by way of obedience and responsibility that you know Christ. That is not truth either. It is a very fine line. This is a two edged sword, is it not?

¹ Romans 7:20-23.

² Romans 7:20.

³ Romans 7:24.

Look over at Galatians chapter five. Paul is describing for us this spiritual warfare that you and I go through between the flesh and the Spirit. Notice what he says here in Galatians chapter five. Look at **verse 16**. He says, “*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*”⁴ **Verse 17**. “*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.*”⁵ And underline this if you don’t have it underlined.

*...so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*⁶

Now what is Paul telling us here? He is telling us here that there are **two powerful principles** that are at work influencing our mind and our affection and our wills. Now here is the thing. What most professing Christians call this spiritual warfare that they are all in, because they are all out there in false religion they talk about a spiritual warfare, do they not? But what most of them call a spiritual warfare, do you know what it is? It is just no more than natural conscience conviction. That is all it is. All of us, now think about it. Just think with me for a little bit this morning. All of us when we were in the state of lostness, when we had not been regenerated and converted, before true faith came into our lives, before God revealed Christ in us, the hope of glory, did you not have a conscience that accused you and excused you? Didn’t you? Before you knew, even before you knew this gospel, didn’t you when you did something wrong, didn’t you feel guilty? Or when you did something good, didn’t you feel proud? Well, what did that do to you? That is just your conscience is what it is. And, see, whenever we had unlawful thoughts, when we were in that state of lostness or we uttered unlawful words or we did unlawful acts and committed sinful acts, what did our natural conscience do? It witnessed against us, did it not? Natural conscience can make you do a lot of things. I remember an old friend of mine in high school years ago, his girlfriend one time just made a comment that she thought that he had been dating around on her and he confessed everything. And she was just making a joke. And she went to crying. And he said, “What is the matter?” She said, “I was just picking.” But he had really been fooling around on her, but his conscience got the best of him because he thought what? **He had been caught.** And that is the way we are. Our consciences work that way. All of us have a natural conscience warfare even while we are going about to try to establish a righteousness. That is what made Jimmy Swaggart stand down there in front of that congregation and act like the fool he did when he knew he was about to get called out on all those things that he did. It was just his old natural guilty conscience.

⁴ Galatians 5:16.

⁵ Galatians 5:17.

⁶ Galatians 5:17-23.

But listen to me. Even when we were in that, it evidenced that we had no fear of God before our eyes. That isn't the conflict between the flesh and the spirit that Paul is talking about here. That is natural conscience struggles in the flesh and all of the flesh. And, listen. There is no spirit involved in that. The drunk... that is where the 12 step programs are born from, folks. That is where that all comes from. And, you know, you establish something higher than you and then you get your buddies to call and confirm the problems that you are having. And yet it is all just natural conscience conviction. But now listen to me. Every justified, redeemed sinner even now we still have a conscience, do we not? My conscience didn't change. And many things are very similar. But, listen. There are certain plain distinctions which identify our spiritual warfare and distinguish from merely natural conscience conviction. There is a big difference. Only those who have true faith, they are the only ones who are capable of this warfare that we are talking about, that Paul is discussing there, because only they have that new principle or spirit to war against that old principle that Paul refers to as the flesh.

The natural conscience, do you know what it does? It speaks peace and seeks to maintain peace based on something other than the blood and imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is motivated to avoid sin and walk in obedience based on legal mercenary principles that always exalts self. Everybody who has natural conscience conviction, when they go through these things and they rectify whatever problem or condition they have got, they want to be applauded for it. Now they do. They want somebody to pat them on the back and say, "Look at what brother so and so or sister so and so. He used to be a drunk." I am going to tell you that every child of God, do you know what? You don't want any praise. Now you just don't. God's children... I think the hardest thing for us to take and I know it is so in my life. It is hard to be praised for anything. It is. See that is the child of God approaches everything in their lives as this. I am what I am how? By the grace of God. If God had not worked this in me, look, I would be nothing. One old author saw a drunk going down the street or lying on the curb and he said, "There go I but for the grace of God." If God removed his hand from any one of us, even the greatest saint, we'd fall. God took his hand off of David for one second, did he not, King David? And what did he do? Just a second. Adultery with Bathsheba, murder of her husband and numbered Israel against God's clear cut revealed will by way of commandment. Do not ever number Israel. And he did all three. I will tell you what. God don't let me go. Huh?

In direct opposition to this the Spirit of that new principle continually influences the justified saint to one thing. Do you know what it always drags your mind to? It drags us back to the imputed righteousness of Christ. I cannot state this enough. This thing of salvation is a legal and judicial matter, period. Now it is. One man said, I heard him on tape with my own ears. He said, "If you think that imputed righteousness is enough to get you to heaven, you are a fool." He said, "It is going to take something more than imputed righteousness to get you there." I tell you what. Lost people hate the doctrine of imputed righteousness. They will tolerate election. I am talking about lost folks. They will tolerate election. They will tolerate limited atonement. They will tolerate the five points. But when you stress and you put before their minds and before their eyes clearly

based on God's testament, that salvation is based on Christ's imputed righteousness alone, period, they will turn on you. Now they will, because they always come back with that stupid statement: "Well, what about this?" Well, what about it? Lost folks have to bring man into this thing. That is what Paul is dealing with. Self is messed up. Self, is a failure. That which is flesh, our Lord says what? It is flesh. And that which is spirit is spirit. And do you know what? I am going to have this flesh till I die. And then it is gone. But I am going to have that struggle. See, it motivates us, the truth of the gospel motivates me and you to avoid sin and walk in obedience. And, listen, it does motivate us to walk in obedience. If you don't want to love God and you don't want to love your neighbor, I don't care how loudly you talk about the love of God in Christ, even based on the imputed righteousness of Christ, **you don't know him.**

Now am I emphasizing obedience enough? It is the grace of God in you. That old principle has no fear of God, no regard for the honor of God's redemptive character and glory and honor. And, therefore, it loves any system which promotes and exalts self. Most religions I know—and I was involved in false religion—they want somebody to tell them: Look at these churches with these big buildings and all these big activities, you don't think they don't just relish people saying, "Well, my, my, my, my. Look at what they have done." And I will tell you... Henry Mahan said long ago, "Men are proud of face, proud of place, proud of grace." And they are. They are very proud. And they want to be applauded for it.

That new principle, it desires to see God's character and honor gloried and to see Christ exalted as the only Saviour of sinners. See, that is all I want. I want Christ exalted. I want God glorified and honored. I want man put in the dirt. I want you to realize this morning that we are but small dust in the balance. And all of us in this building are like a fading flower and we are going to wilt and we are going to grow old and we are going to die. Now that is just what we are. We cannot do what we should. Self,, i.e., the flesh, that old principle, it won't let us fear God perfectly. And we are often tempted to speak peace to those who have no peace in order to promote ourselves. Self influences us to envy and to murmur and to harbor malice and desire our own way. That is where that comes from. Self does this even in the child of God. I can't blame it on somebody else. It is me that gets angry, you know. It is me that is prejudiced. It isn't somebody else. It is me. And that is not what Paul is saying here. He said, "Well, I have no control. I can't handle it. It is me." Paul said, "The problem is with me. It is not with God and it is not with his grace and it is not with his gospel. The problem is with the recipient of God's grace."

The Spirit influences to keep God first in our heart. The warfare is more than just right or wrong. Do you hear me? It is right and wrong enlightened by God's glory revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is a higher warfare than that of mere natural conscience. Natural conscience warfare, Paul is going to describe it for us where we are going to go in a couple of weeks.

I am going to preach something different next week. We are going to leave Romans next Sunday and we will come back the week after.

But he is about to describe for us the difference between walking after the flesh and walking after the Spirit. Natural conscience warfare, that is walking after the flesh. That is walking after the flesh, minding the things of the flesh. And spiritual warfare is described as walking after and minding the things of the Spirit. And notice what he says in **verse 21**. He says, *“I find then a law, that, when I would do good,”*⁷ what does he find out? *“evil is present.”*⁸ Paul says, he says, *“I find a law...”*⁹ And it is interesting that he uses this phrase “law.” He says... and listen. This is why he uses this word “law.” What is a law? A law is a powerful principle. A law tells you, if you murder somebody in the state of Louisiana, what does that law demand? You go to jail. Law demanded what is going to happen to you. You killed somebody, you are going to be killed. So it is a powerful principle. And, listen. He says, “I find this law, this powerful principle of evil.” And what does he say? He said, *“It is always present with me.”* In other words he said, “It keeps me from loving God supremely and loving my neighbor as myself and being subject to God’s will in every faculty of his being.” And listen. If there is any doubt that this sin is a powerful principle in the life of a believer, you have got to always remember how the apostle Paul refers to this evil principle, as a law. And he changes. Notice **verse 22**. *“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.”*¹⁰ Now what is this? What is the inward man? The inward man is that new principle that is imparted into us in regeneration and conversion. And this describes those holy principles which attended Christ’s sinless humanity and which are given to every one of God’s elect in time. It is that principle that causes us to fear God with that reverence and respect for his redemptive glory and honor and character. It causes us, upon hearing the gospel preached to believe and repent and rest where? In Christ. It causes us to turn our back on everything else. It is that principle that caused the apostle Paul in Philippians chapter three to call everything that he did before Christ was revealed to him, what did he say it was? He said, *“I call it dung and I call it refuse and I call it loss.”* Oh, that I might find Christ and be found in him.

Look at **verse 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.”*¹¹ In **verse 22** Paul called this new principle the inward man. Here he calls it his mind. Now directly opposed to that new principle he calls the old principle of evil his members. Look at what he says, now. *“But I see another law [in my what?] in my members.”*¹² Now this is important.. Notice Paul says that that old principle is a law which means it is powerful. This old principle makes him captive to the law or literally to the power of sin. Again, we have to remember that Paul was dead indeed because he has already said in chapter six he is dead, indeed, to the guilt of sin. Why? How can he be dead, indeed, to the guilt of sin? Based solely on the blood and imputed righteousness of Christ!

⁷ Romans 7:21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Romans 7:22.

¹¹ Romans 7:23.

¹² Romans 7:23.

But listen. He is not dead to the power of sin which kept his personal character and conduct captive from being what he should be. This is what we are dealing with.

And then, thank God, look at what he says in **verse 20**. Here is our conclusion. That is a pitiful state. Now when you think about, we want to do, but can't, don't want to do, but do. And that is rough, isn't it? I so desperately, I want to love God and I know you do, too. And I want to love my neighbor. I want to be able to love my enemy. But I tell you what. A person is a hypocrite who can say they can just outright love everybody. I mean, just think about the reality of that. I can't do that. I can try. I just try and I might could do it outwardly. But, see, that is the thing. Even if I could love somebody who hated me the most and be cordial and kind to him outwardly, do you know what is going on in my mind? If we are just honest what is going on in your mind? Oh, you might shake their hand and say "nice to meet you", or "it is so good to see you again." But what are you thinking in your mind? And that is where the law comes in. Where does it stretch? It doesn't make any difference how much you clean up the outside, where is the problem at? It is in your heart, i.e, your mind, your will, your understanding.

Verse 24 says, "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me...?*"¹³ And notice what he calls this old evil principle, "*the body of this death,*"¹⁴ Do you know what causes all the misery of this world? I am telling you what. There isn't anything in this world that has ever caused the problems. Do you hear me? I am going to state that one more time. Nothing in this planet has ever caused any problems. It just didn't. The problem came from the creature that was in this world. Henry Mahan told me long ago and it has always stuck in my mind. Adam was in a perfect place with a perfect life and had nothing to entice or influence him. He did not have a liquor store. He didn't have a house of pornography. He didn't have a picture show. He didn't have a heroin patch, a poppy field. He didn't have anything in this life. Dear people, what did he do to us? Now tell me that sin is out there. Sin starts in man's heart. You take man out of this world and I tell you what. Sin goes with it. I know a lot of people who want to deny original sin. You cannot deny what the reality of the matter is. I will tell you, this phrase, "*O wretched man that I am,*"¹⁵ it has to do exclusively with our personal character and conduct because of that powerful influence of that old sinful, corrupt principle of sin.

Paul is saying... and notice what he says. He says, "*O wretched man that I...*"¹⁶ underline this, "*am.*" Some people say, "Well, this was talking about before he was saved." **NO, NO, NO, NO, NO.** "*O wretched man that I am,*"¹⁷ not that I used to be. That is not what he is talking about here. He is speaking of his present experience as a justified saint, as a believer. And that is what he is right now and listen. That is what he was going to be till he came to the end of this life.

¹³ Romans 7:24.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Romans 7:24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Talk with somebody who is a true child of God that is old. Go and meet saints in Ashland KY at 13th Street Baptist and talk with those dear brethren up there that are older. They have been around this gospel all their lives. And listen to them talk. I receive letters from them and talk to them on the phone. I am not talking about somebody my age, 50. I am talking about men and women in their 80s, godly men and women, I might add, as far as we look at them outwardly. Love God, love the gospel, character and conduct above reproach. Talk to them and see what they say about themselves. And you ask them, “Dear brother or dear sister, do you love God like you should?” And then just sit back and listen. Been walking with the Lord. How long have you been walking with the Lord? Fifty years. How do you feel about yourself? “*O wretched man that I am!*”¹⁸

I don't have a problem with that. A lot of people do. Paul knew that he and this is what I know. Look at Psalm 130:3. “*If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,*”¹⁹ in other words, charge them to me, hold me accountable for them, “*who shall stand?*”²⁰ We'd all be goners. But thank God - “*But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*”²¹

Verse 25. “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”²² In other words he says, “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*”²³ And then he answered Who delivered? “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”²⁴ We have been delivered. But what is the result? “*So then with the mind I myself [what do I do? I] serve the law of God; but with the flesh,*”²⁵ this old principle that I am forced to live in every day, what do I do? “[I serve] *the law of sin.*”²⁶

Paul makes it very clear that he doesn't expect to receive final glory, final deliverance, final relief from this warfare as long as he is in this life. It is just not coming. That is tragic. This great man of God and he says, “You know what? I am going to fight this thing tooth and toe nail till I die.” And do you know what? It never got any easier. And this is so important. We will quit right here this morning. The apostle makes absolutely no implications nor does he give us any indication whatsoever that he himself is in the flesh one day and in the spirit the next day. And I know some people say, “Well, I am in the flesh. I had a fleshly experience.” No. You are not in the flesh and in the spirit. Read Romans chapter eight. You can't be both and you cannot. And he is not saying I am wretched one moment and I am pious the next. That is not what he is talking about when he says, “O wretched man that I am.”²⁷ He concluded, first of all, as concerning his character and his conduct in light of the perfect conformity of Christ, that is the standard.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Psalm 130:3.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Psalm 130:4.

²² Romans 7:25.

²³ Romans 7:24.

²⁴ Romans 7:25.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Romans 7:24.

He was continually what? “*O wretched man that I am.*”²⁸ I’m not comparing myself to you. If we compare ourselves to one another, we can feel pretty good. I am a preacher. But that doesn’t count. Right? You might have walked with the Lord 30 years. That doesn’t count. It always comes back to this. “*O wretched man that I am.*”²⁹

But he also concluded at the same time that he was continually blessed of God and always rejoicing in his salvation through Jesus Christ his Lord based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. Let me read you this. One old author wrote concerning Romans seven. A lot of people have trouble with Romans seven and I think this is good. Now listen to this.

He said, “Blessed be the God for the seventh chapter of Romans. God the Holy Spirit has clearly set forth the experience of Paul to reveal that this spiritual warfare and our being still subject to the power of sin is in every way consistent with the absolute certainty and assurance of our possessing or obtaining eternal life. This chapter is recorded for our comfort and for encouragement. The reign of sin has forever ceased and all those who truly recognize the power of sin over their personal character and conduct which causes them to find all their peace and all their comfort and all their joy and all their assurance in their union with Christ and a view of God’s law and justice. Law and justice are now and forever completely satisfied by the imputed righteousness of Christ and, therefore, demands our eternal blessedness even while we yet cry, ‘O wretched man that I am.’”

That is grace. Grace is God giving me what I don’t deserve. Mercy is him not giving me what I do deserve. That is... what a marvelous thing that a sovereign, omnipotent, almighty, eternal, everlasting God could condescend to take into union with him sons and daughters of Adam. If he hadn’t have determined to save we would have all been lost. If he hadn’t been determined to create, folks, none of us would have been here. And we are His to do with as he sees fit. May we always give all glory and honor and praise and thanksgiving to him who loved us and sent his Son to put away our sins from us perfectly and completely and eternally.

Let’s stand together and we will be dismissed. I appreciate your presence this morning. The Lord bless you and keep you until we see you next Sunday morning at 10:30. Ok? No midweek service this week.

David Rogers, would you dismiss us, please?

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.