

Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out. ¹⁹So I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is sin living in me.

²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is present with me. ²²I certainly delight in God's law according to my inner self, ²³but I see a different law at work in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin, which is present in my members. ²⁴What a miserable wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Rescue

I.

All his life he meticulously followed the proper moral code. He wasn't just your run-of-the-mill practitioner, he was deeply embedded. He was totally committed to the cause. His side was right. It was obvious. There was no question about the authenticity of his position and his way of life. His way wasn't just superior, it was the *only* way. All the documentation was there to support him. They were the chosen ones.

Those who chose a different way were doomed to destruction. It was bad enough that they, themselves, were doomed, but it got worse—much worse. Their lies and false message were pulling still more people aside from the truth and into following the lies. He had to stop it. At all costs.

He poured all his resources into the effort. He might not have had much personal wealth, but he certainly had time and pride and zeal to make sure these propagators of falsehood were put to a stop. He summoned every ounce of effort to make sure this new faction would be nipped in the bud before it could spread and do more damage to his society.

He was on his way to continue his efforts to keep this falsehood in check when everything changed. “Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’” (Acts 9:3-4, EHV).

Perhaps you know the rest of the story. The man known as “Saul” had been a Pharisee persecuting people belonging to a thing called the Way—people who followed Christ—Christians. The event on the road to Damascus to persecute some more Christians forever changed him. No longer was he a persecutor of Jesus and those who followed him, he was one of Jesus' most ardent supporters.

He became known as the greatest missionary of all time. There may be more who, in their lifetimes, have apparently converted more people to follow Christ, but every missionary of every generation since the Apostle Paul has used his letters extensively to explain who Jesus is and what he has done for all people.

Before his conversion, Saul was a bad, bad man. He did things that were reprehensible.

II.

But it isn't *that* person who wrote the words of our text today. It was the man he became—it was the Apostle Paul. Sure, it was the same human being, but a vastly *changed* human being. The new guy, Paul, *lived* for Jesus; he *loved* Jesus; he wanted nothing other than to show others that Jesus loved *them* and gave his life for them, so that *they* could have what *he* had. *Paul* was the one who was writing, not old *Saul*.

Paul had been changed. Irrefutably changed. Irreparably changed. There was *no way* he could go back to the way he had been before; he understood Jesus and Christianity now.

“I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not keep doing what I want. Instead, I do what I hate... ¹⁹ I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing” (Romans 7:15, 19, EHV). If there was no *way* Paul could go back to the way he was before, what's up with things like this? How could he write such things? How could *he*, the model of Christianity many believers aspire to, say these things about himself?

“But now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out” (Romans 7:17-18, EHV). Paul's words speak a very important truth: inside every believer a little unbeliever is living. Every believer still has a sinful flesh—the Old Adam or the Old Self, we sometimes call it.

The old self, the sinful flesh, still likes to talk the believer into doing the reprehensible things every human being is born into. The sinful flesh loves to adopt wholeheartedly whatever fad is currently in vogue. Go along with popular culture. Get sucked in to the rioting and the looting and call it justified. Don't bother to look at history honestly, just go along to get along with what the mob is saying. Be certain not to call identify certain behaviors of the moment as sin, because the cancel culture will get you—you might lose your job; in extreme cases, you might lose your life.

“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is sin living in me” (Romans 7:20, EHV). The *desire* to do the good thing, the Godly thing, is in there, but the sinful flesh is still in there. Sin lives in each one of us.

“I certainly delight in God's law according to my inner self, ²³but I see a different law at work in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin, which is present in my members” (Romans 7:22-23, EHV). There is a conflict inside every believer.

Part of Paul was irrefutably changed. But until the day he died he couldn't get rid of the other part—the sinful flesh. He was a sinner-saint; a sinner: a person who still has the sinful flesh, yet is holy and set apart for God, whom God identifies as “saint.”

Part of every believer has irrefutably changed. But until the day each one of us dies, we won't be able to get rid of the other part—the sinful flesh. Each one of us is a sinner-saint; a sinner: a person who still has the sinful flesh, yet is holy and set apart for God, whom God identifies as “saint.”

III.

The conflict is real. “What a miserable wretch I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24, EHV).

If all we look to, if all we notice, is the sinful flesh that still exists within us and at times seems to control us, we will be filled with despair. Paul recognized that. He wanted to

identify for his readers that this is normal for *every* Christian.

We *need* rescuing. Even a casual look at your own attitudes and actions and words and thoughts will leave you reeling. Even a casual look will find so many times—day after day—that you *don't* do what the believing self knows is right, but you fall into what the sinful flesh wants. The conflict is real. You can fight and fight and fight, but you can't break out of the prison house of sin.

“Who will rescue me?” *Paul* was not filled with despair, even though he had to admit himself a miserable wretch. He doesn't want you or me or any other Christian to be a miserable wretch that is filled only with despair, either.

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25, EHV). The last sentence of our text is the most joy-filled gospel in the whole lesson.

Jesus did it! *Jesus* won the victory over sin and Satan. *Jesus* paid the price for sin on the cross. *Jesus* paid for all our fears of the cancel culture and all the times we went along to get along.

Who will rescue you and me? *Jesus*. *Jesus* *gave* us the victory and gives us the strength to continue in our faith, despite the conflict within us.

IV.

Nobody said you have to be perfect. Well...check that. *God* said you have to be perfect, but he rescued you in Christ *Jesus* to *give* you the very perfection you needed. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Does all that *Paul* said mean that we should stop trying so hard to avoid evil and do good? No. But it *does* mean that we should forget the idea that we can do anything good by our own power and strength. The good that we actually *do* is Christ living in us.

The sinful flesh is always going to be there. Keep looking to the cross for the forgiveness you *know* your Lord *Jesus* has won for you and has given you. Don't lose hope. Don't be a miserable wretch, but thank God that he sent *Jesus* to be your Savior.

Nobody is perfect. But we live in the perfection and holiness of *Jesus*. Grow continually in the faith in *Jesus* God has given you so that you will find yourself ever stronger for the war inside between your sinful nature and your new self. Amen.