

**Romans 7:14-25**

**Town North Presbyterian Church – Rev. David J. Rogers**

**March 24, 2024**

300 years ago a pastor named **John Bunyan** wrote a book titled: **The Holy War.**

It was an allegory – similar to Bunyan's book titled: **The Pilgrim's Progress.**

**The Holy War** is the story of a city called "**Mansoul**" – in the country of "**Universe.**"

The founder and builder of the city of Mansoul was King Shaddai.

King Shaddai built this city for his own delight. And in the midst of the city Shaddai built a palace. It was a palace so strong – it was like a castle.

The builder, King Shaddai, built this palace as a place for HIMSELF alone because He Himself delighted to live there – and so that no strangers would terrorize the palace or the town.

The walls of the city were thick and strong so that nothing could penetrate them. The only way an enemy could take over the town would be to enter one of the gates – which was opened by the townspeople.

There were 5 gates in the city of Mansoul:

**Ear-gate, Eye-gate, Mouth-gate, Nose-gate, and Feel-gate.** These were the only gates an enemy could enter.

One day an ENEMY came and made an attack on the city of Mansoul. The enemy's name was Diabolus. Diabolus was a might giant – and he wanted to take over the town of Mansoul to make the city his own and live in the palace himself.

So Diabolus planned his attack. It was not forceful attack against the city walls. But it was a subtle and "crafty" attack at the Ear-gate.

The attack of Diabolus was successful. The men of the city willingly let

Diabolus into the city of Mansoul and Diabolus set up his residence there.

Diabolus set up his own Mayor in the town named: **Lord Lustings** – and he put in place several alderman: **Mr. Haughty, Mr. Hard-Heart, Mr. Pitiless, Mr. Fury, Mr. No-Truth, Mr. False-Peace, Mr. Cheating,** and **Mr. Atheism** (who was the youngest alderman).

A messenger was sent to King Shaddai to tell Him what Diabolus had done in taking Mansoul. Shaddai was deeply grieved. But King Shaddai set a time when the King's Son would take a journey to the country of Universe – when He would make amends for the foolishness of Mansoul – and deliver the city from the tyranny of Diabolus.

You will have to read the book to discover all the details, but the bottom line is that the King's Son DID take that journey to the country of Universe to BEGIN the rescue of Mansoul.

And you can see a quote from the book which describes the Son's attack to RESCUE the city of Mansoul. Turn to the second page of your Worship Guide and I will read it.

*“Emmanuel again, knowing that the next battle would issue in his being made master of the place, gave out a royal commandment to all his officers, high captains, and men of war, to be sure to show themselves men of war against Diabolus [the Devil] and all Diabolonians...*

*So the day being come, the command was given, and the Prince's men did bravely stand to their arms, and did, as before, bend their main force against Ear-gate and Eye-gate. The word was then, “Mansoul is won!”; so they made their assault upon the town. Diabolus also, as fast as he could, with the main of his power, made resistance from within; and his high lords and chief captains for a time fought very cruelly against the Prince's army.*

*But after three or four notable charges by the Prince and his noble captains, Ear-gate was broken open, and the bars and bolts which were used to*

*shut it up against the Prince, were broken into a thousand pieces. Then did the Prince's trumpet sound, the captains shout, the town shake, and Diabolus retreat to his hold."*

That is a picture of Jesus Christ breaking into the human heart to DELIVER it from sin.

Jesus breaks through the Ear-gate with the GOSPEL!

Jesus breaks in – shattering all the Devil's defenses – and begins His takeover of the city. As you read **The Holy War** – you see that there were still many battles left to fight in Mansoul – but the point is that the King's Son was now in the city – and the city WOULD BE WON.

That's the point we need to consider in our text this morning.

This is an allegory of Jesus Christ DELIVERING human beings from captivity and death.

This work of Jesus to DELIVER necessarily brings a WAR into the human soul.

But we must understand as God's people that Jesus not only STARTED the WAR – but Jesus will SURELY WIN the WAR.

That is what Paul leads to in the conclusion to this WAR in **verses 24-25.**

*"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" <sup>25</sup>  
**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."*

Notice the question: *"WHO will DELIVER me? WHAT HOPE do I have in this WAR?"*

The answer is given LOUDLY and CLEARLY:

*"THANKS be to GOD through JESUS CHRIST!"*

In other words, THANKS be to GOD for Jesus Christ!

I had NO HOPE against the enemy SIN – and the DEVIL. I would have

willingly PURSUED SIN to my own destruction. I would have remained LOCKED in my sinful DESIRES. I would have remained LOCKED in my pursuit for all those things that would have led to my eternal death.

But THANKS be to GOD – for sending a RESCUER...a DELIVERER!

And that's what Jesus Christ was sent into this world to do.

Jesus Christ was sent into this world to DELIVER people from this terrible slavery to SIN and DEATH.

As believers we know this is true.

But we can often become confused and discouraged, because it surely doesn't FEEL like a great victory! At times in our day-to-day lives it doesn't seem like there is much progress at all. Much of the time we feel like I imagine a soldier from Ukraine must feel in the trenches.

He has been fighting the Russians for two years. There have been ups and downs – but in the past year he has not seen much headway. There are days when he must believe he is simply locked in a “stalemate” – or worse...that he is locked in a WAR he may never win.

There must be days when he is discouraged and depressed.

That's the way we can feel at times as followers of Jesus Christ, isn't it?

We can know this great truth that Jesus came into the world to DELIVER us from SIN and DEATH. But it doesn't look that way in our experience. Instead, it feels like we are locked in a “stalemate” with sin (at best) – or will simply LOSE the WAR (at worst).

But if you feel this way at times – there is something in our text that may help you.

One thing that may help you in this discouragement is to consider WHY you are in this WAR in the first place. And that's what I want to consider from our text this morning.

But first, I need to point out that there has been some disagreement about this text among believers throughout the years. The disagreement is over the situation Paul is describing here.

Some believe Paul is describing his experience **BEFORE** he was converted.

And some believe Paul is describing his experience **AFTER** he was converted – when he was a believer.

I take the view that Paul is describing his experience **AFTER** he was converted. I believe Paul is describing his experience as a BELIEVER. It will become clear why in a few minutes.

I am not going to spend time describing the arguments on both sides.

But I will say that nearly all believers agree – no matter which side they fall – that there is SOLID exegetical ground for believing Paul is talking about the experience of a BELIEVER in Jesus Christ. And that is the position taken by our church. Part of our church constitution – the **Westminster Standards** – understand the text in this way. So we are on safe biblical grounds to understand the text in this way.

With that said, I want you to notice that Paul is describing a WAR...a CONFLICT.

And the WAR is within himself.

We see that clearly in **verse 15**, **verse 19**, and **verse 23**.

**Verse 15:**

*“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”*

And **verse 19:**

*“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”*

And notice Paul even uses WAR language in **verse 23**:

*“...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.”*

Notice the WAR.

On the surface of it - it sounds like a STRANGE and ILLOGICAL WAR. But in our experience as believers we know exactly what Paul is talking about.

On the surface it sounds STRANGE and ILLOGICAL because of the way DESIRES work. DESIRES usually determine what we DO.

If you DESIRE to have a piece of cake for dessert – then you eat the piece of cake.

But if you DESIRE to lose 5 pounds – then you DO NOT eat the piece of cake.

Whichever DESIRE is strongest at the moment determines what we do. So our DESIRES DRIVE our actions.

But here Paul describes a situation in which he DOES NOT DO something he DESIRES to do. And he DOES the very thing he DOES NOT DESIRE to do!

And LOGIC would say that doesn't make sense.

If you DESIRE NOT to DO something – and no one is holding a gun to your head making you do it – then DON'T do it.

WHY would you NOT DO the thing you DESIRE to do?

But Paul's point is that there are COMPETING DESIRES inside him.

WHY these competing DESIRES? WHY this WAR within us a believers?

And that is the whole point I want you to consider this morning.

The point Paul is making is this:

Since Jesus started a WAR within us, we must trust Him to finish it.

So WHY is there a WAR in us as believers?

We see two reasons in our text:

FIRST, because CHRIST RESIDES.

SECOND, because SIN RESISTS.

**MP1: Christ RESIDES in us.** (22, new desires)

FIRST, because CHRIST RESIDES in us.

All that Paul is saying in **chapters 5-8** tells us that Christ lives in us.

In **chapters 5-6** he described the TWO Adams. The FIRST Adam in the Garden of Eden – and the LAST Adam – Jesus Christ. And we are now UNITED to the LAST Adam – Jesus Christ. As believers we are IN CHRIST – and HE is IN US.

Paul will go on to say the same thing in **chapter 8** (which we will see in a few weeks) – telling us that we are NO LONGER “*in the flesh*” – but “*in the Spirit*.” And the Spirit is the Spirit of CHRIST. Christ LIVES IN US by His Spirit. Paul will say anyone who does not HAVE the “... *Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*”

But I contend that Paul makes it clear again –in these verses– that Christ RESIDES in us.

Look at **verse 22.**

*“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being...”*

Notice Paul says he “DELIGHTS” in the law of God in his INNER BEING.

Paul is explaining what he just said in **verse 21:**

*“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”*

Even though he PURPOSED to do what was RIGHT – EVIL was present in him.

Then he says: “*FOR... I delight in the law of God, in my inner being...*”

Paul is saying there were two CONFLICTING DESIRES in him.

The **ONE** being this “INNER BEING” (or “INNER MAN”) – and the **OTHER** to the SIN that resides in him.

Up to this point Paul has been contrasting what HE WILLED – with what He DID NOT WILL. What he **WILLED** was the **GOOD**. What he **DID NOT WILL** was the **EVIL**.

And we see that he **IDENTIFIED** himself with the **GOOD**.

In **verses 18-19** he said:

*“For I have the desire to do what is **RIGHT**, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the **GOOD** I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”*

In other words, (and this is very important) Paul identified himself in his DEEPEST self – with the Law of God which is the GOOD. In the DEEPEST SENSE of WHO HE WAS – Paul saw that He DESIRED – and DELIGHTED in the law of God. In his HEART of HEARTS – he LOVED God and WANTED to OBEY God.

That is WHO he is as a human being. He is a NEW MAN.

He is a NEW MAN because Christ now lives IN HIM.

In other letters Paul refers to this “INWARD MAN” is the RENEWED SOUL of a BELIEVER. The NEW MAN is the SOUL made NEW by Jesus Christ.

So Paul is saying here it is that **INNER MAN** – who is **RENEWED** by **Christ’s presence** in Him – which causes him to **DELIGHT** in the law of God.



In other words, Paul DELIGHTS in the law of God – because Christ RESIDES in him.

It is Jesus Christ IN HIM which is the CAUSE of this CONFLICT in him.

WHY does Jesus Christ IN HIM cause a CONFLICT?

It's because Jesus Christ brings NEW LIFE and NEW DESIRES to the soul.

**Illus:** I know many of you have been to Hawaiian Falls Water Park – or some other Water Park with your children. In most water parks they have a “*Lazy River.*”

You just sit in the river and the current just carries you along.

If you are going along with the current – it is nice easy.

But I remember one time I went in the Lazy River when the children were young – and I had to keep an eye out for them. At one point I looked back and one of the children was falling behind – so I turned around to go back upstream. I quickly found out that the “*Lazy River*” isn't so “LAZY” if you try to go UPSTREAM!

Suddenly the “*Lazy River*” became “violent” – since I was near the jets and had a massive RESISTANCE of water pushing against me! There was water splashing against me – and I had to FIGHT to go upstream.

That's what Paul is describing here.

When Jesus Christ came to RESIDE in his soul He brought violence to Paul's soul.

Suddenly that sinful nature was giving a VIOLENT PUSH against CHRIST in his soul.

**App:** The same is true for you – when you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

Because Christ has come to RESIDE in your soul you will find much RESISTANCE – much TURMOIL – and many WARS in your soul.

Christ in you will DESIRE Christ-likeness – and godliness – and truth and righteousness. In God's law you will see what it means to LOVE God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You will see what it means to LOVE your neighbor as yourself. And you will DEEPLY DESIRE to BE all that God designed you to be. You will DESIRE to live for the glory of God.

But you will also find MASSIVE resistance –and TURMOIL– in your soul because of it.

You will find RESISTANCE that you never imagined – because you are seeing the depth of God's law – and the true DEPTH of what it really means to LOVE God – and LOVE other people.

And the point is this: Remember that your DISTRESS over your sin – and the state of your soul is all because CHRIST Himself RESIDES in you. He has broken into Ear-gate – and is now TAKING OVER. And that necessarily means VIOLENCE to the status quo in your life.

And the GOOD NEWS is this: When Jesus STARTS a WAR – He will be FAITHFUL to END the WAR and WIN IT!

That is what Paul says in **verses 24-25**.

*“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>  
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.”*

When you see the state of your soul as a believer in Jesus you can be THANKFUL! This WAR against sin WILL END one day – and JESUS will WIN IT.

And the reason why your CONSCIENCE is in turmoil because JESUS lives there.

So you keep up the FIGHT. Jesus never BEGINS a WAR He will not FINISH!

So FIRST, we see here that Christ STARTED this WAR within us BECAUSE He RESIDES in us. He has made us NEW people – and now RESIDES in us.

**MP2: SIN RESISTS in us.** (18-20, 21-24)

SECOND, because SIN RESISTS in us.

We see this in what Paul tells us in **verses 14-17.**

*“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.  
<sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”*

Notice Paul says he does NOT DO what he WANTS to do. Instead, he does the very thing he HATES.

What does he WANT to do?

He WANTS to do what God commands. He WANTS to obey GOD’S law.

So WHY does he DO what he does NOT want to do?

He tells us in **verse 17:**

*“So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”*

Paul says it is SIN in him that does it.

Notice Paul distinguishes between HIMSELF – and SIN.

He speaks as if SIN is this ALIEN thing in him. And rightly so!

He sees that the TRUE Paul – the REAL Paul – is a NEW MAN in whom Christ LIVES.

But there is an INTRUDER who still LIVES in him as well. And it is that INTRUDER – whom he calls SIN – RESISTS Christ and His work.

HOW did this INTRUDER – SIN – get in?

Paul tells us in **verse 14**:

*“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.”*

This is the verse which causes some to say that Paul is talking about himself BEFORE conversion in all of these verses. And it is surely true that these are strong words – that go AGAINST what Paul says about the BELIEVER in the previous chapter.

In **chapter 6** Paul said the *“We know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”* Paul says we are NOT SLAVES to sin.

So how can he say here:

*“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.”?*

But it appears the “*captivity to sin*” Paul is talking about here is something that is OUT OF PLACE with who he TRULY IS. It is CONTRARY to who Paul TRULY IS – as we see in the following verses.

The REMAINING SIN willingly GIVES itself to sinful desires.

But the TRUE PAUL (the NEW MAN) SCOLDS himself for the SIN he commits – and complains that he is carried away captive by it.

That REMAINING SIN that still lives in Paul IS SURELY “*sold under sin.*”

That REMAINING SIN SURELY DOES always DESIRE what is EVIL.

But Paul says that this REMAINING SIN is ALIEN to who he TRULY is.

SIN is the INTRUDER – and as a NEW MAN Paul wants to EXPEL that remaining sin!

And that is the way it is for us as BELIEVERS.

We see this REMAINING SIN in us – and it RESISTS God's will.

This is one big difference between a true BELIEVER and an UNBELIEVER.

SIN can live COMFORTABLY in an UNBELIEVER – but SIN cannot live COMFORTABLY in a true BELIEVER.

**Illus:** One puritan preacher said it like this.

There is as much difference between SIN in a BELIEVER and an UNBELIEVER as there is between VENOM in a SNAKE – and VENOM in a HUMAN BEING.

VENOM in a human being will make a man miserable. He will use every ANTI-VENOM or do anything to get it OUT.

My son-in-law once told me how miserable it was when his friend was bitten by a rattlesnake. The man was miserable and nearly died. Rattlesnake VENOM is terrible in a HUMAN BEING.

But VENOM in a SNAKE is in its NATURAL PLACE. It is NO PROBLEM at all.

So also SIN in an UNBELIEVER is in it's NATURAL place.

But SIN in a BELIEVER is an INTRUDER. It is OFFENSIVE and BURDENSOME – and he will use any holy means or antidotes to EXPEL it and GET RID of it!

That's why there will be a continual WAR within us as believers until we go to glory.

There will be a continual WAR – because **SIN still remains and RESISTS Christ and His kingdom in our hearts**.

**App:** This is important for all of us.

It is important for you to know if you are a person who is living in SIN and you are okay with it.

Maybe you know what you are doing is wrong – but are not bothered by it.

Maybe you LIE to customers in your job – or lie to your boss. That's the way everybody does it – and it doesn't bother you.

Or maybe you HATE someone and won't FORGIVE.

Or maybe it's GREED, or LUST, or ENVY, or SELFISH AMBITION.

Whatever it is, it finds a "NATURAL HOME" in you. Nothing troubles it. Nothing disturbs it.

If so, then these words from Paul should perk up your ears and make you take notice.

Paul is saying you are in a DANGEROUS situation if SIN finds a "NATURAL HOME" in you. You are in a DANGEROUS situation if SIN can remain in you UNDISTURBED.

It's a DANGEROUS sign that Jesus Christ is NOT living in you.

But knowing SIN still REMAINS and RESISTS in us is also important for you to know if you are person who easily SHOCKED or ANGERED by SIN in others – especially in the church.

I have seen this can be a danger in the church. Some believers are shocked when they see sin in other believers. And it brings a COLDNESS and JUDGMENTAL tone to a church. Or – worse – it can create a group of PHARISEES who put on a MASK of goodness and faithfulness on Sunday mornings. REAL SIN is never admitted or confessed. So it teaches everyone in the church to HIDE. It pushes SIN into the HIDDEN and DARK corners.

That doesn't mean we all need to "broadcast" our SINS to the whole congregation. But there should be an atmosphere where people feel SAFE to confess their REAL SIN struggles – and find HELP and ENCOURAGEMENT to press on against it.

From what Paul says here it is clear that EVERY believer has REMAINING SIN.

That should give us a certain amount of compassion – and empathy – when we see SIN in others – or others sin against us.

Yes, we must confront sin and seek repentance.

But we do this with empathy and compassion – because we too have REMAINING SIN.

When we do this it creates a church environment where we are able to be OPEN, HONEST, and VULNERABLE about our SIN.

That is NOT easy to do. The SINS with which we REALLY struggle are most often EMBARRASSING and PAINFUL for us to talk about.

But when there is an environment in the church that truly believes what Paul is telling us here – it will go a long way toward helping us be more open about our SIN and our BATTLES against SIN.

What Paul says here should cause us not to hold ourselves – or any Christian – up on a pedestal. Instead, we BELIEVE what Paul says about REMAINING SIN in ourselves and other believers.

I sometimes wonder if I would have looked at the Apostle Paul DIFFERENTLY if I had known him personally.

Would I have been disappointed to see these SINS with which he struggled? Would I have been surprised or disappointed when I saw arrogance in him?

Would I have been surprised or disappointed at the sins of **John Calvin**, or **Martin Luther**, or **Billy Graham**, or **Sinclair Ferguson**?

We shouldn't be, because we know they are people who have REMAINING SIN – JUST LIKE we do.

## **Conclusion:**

The reason Jesus Christ came into the world was to DESTROY the work of the DEVIL – and CONQUER the city of Mansoul for Himself.

Jesus Christ CONQUERED our SIN and DEATH on the CROSS.

Then – by His Spirit – He broke through your Ear-gate to announce that He has TAKEN AWAY SIN at the CROSS.

And because He broke through your Ear-gate – you have HEARD and BELIEVED.

He has RE-TAKEN the city of your heart – and that is why there is a WAR in your soul.

But take heart! The reason why you are in this WAR is that Jesus is your KING!

Jesus Christ is now KING of your heart – and as the KING who BEGAN this WAR – He will SURELY be FAITHFUL to COMPLETE the WAR and WIN!

And we are reminded of that whenever we come to this table of the Lord Jesus.

At this table Jesus tells you He has WON the VICTORY over your SIN. The SIN that REMAINS in you will NOT REMAIN forever. But it will finally be destroyed one day.

Let's pray...