

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME VII // CURE OF THE STRUGGLE
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GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: How would you advise a new Christian to battle against temptation and sin in his/her life?

Key Text: *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,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.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ 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.”* (Romans 7:21-25)

Many are familiar with the Italian Renaissance sculptor/painter Michelangelo. He is best known for painting scenes from Genesis on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome and for his marble sculpture of David from the Bible. When Michelangelo died, he intentionally left a series of four sculpting projects unfinished. He made four figures—The Bearded Slave, the Atlas Slave, the Awakening Slave, and the Young Slave—stuck in the very stone they were carved from. The series was called “The Prisoners.” Their bodies merge from the marble, muscles flexing, but they are not completely free. Michelangelo wanted to show what it might feel like to be forever enslaved.

The plight of these sculptures depicts what Paul experienced—and what we experience as well—in our struggle with sin. We’re like the “Prisoners” sculpture—unable to set ourselves fully free. In last week’s lesson (Romans 7:13-20), Paul described this plight. In today’s lesson, we find Paul, with intense honesty and transparency, continuing to share his struggle with sin. It seems hopeless! But Paul concludes Chapter 7 on the victorious note that our deliverance comes from Jesus Christ! Unlike Michelangelo’s unfinished “Prisoners,” God promises to finish the good work He has started in us (Php.1:6)!

- 1. There is a law—separate from Moses’ law—that describes a universal principle of human behavior: Even when we intend to do right, evil can easily take over (v.21).**

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.” (v.21)

Notice that in describing his inclination to sin, Paul does not alibi it by calling it a bad habit or by saying, “That’s just the way I am.” Rather, he describes his desire to sin as “evil”—the opposite of good! Paul acknowledges that when he wants to do good, the sin waiting inside nearby can easily take him over, and he often ends up choosing to do evil. After we receive Christ, we are freed from the power of sin, but not from sin’s presence or pull. Our inner self agrees with God’s ways, and we desire to do what is right, but it seems that sin is all we can manage to do!

Discuss: How is acknowledging the truth of God’s law and our own spiritual weaknesses a sign of maturity?

2. Good intentions are not enough to keep us from doing wrong (v.22-24).

“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,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.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v.22-24)

Paul expresses his frustration that sin continues to trip him up even when he sees it for the evil it is. Deep down in his spirit, Paul really does love God’s Word and God’s ways. But Paul acknowledges four “laws” at work:

- **The law of God** “...the law of God...” (v.23a) This is a reference to God’s Word. Psalm 1:2 says, “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” Paul loved God’s Word.
- **The law of his body** “...in my members another law...” (v.23b) This law of his old self—the flesh—will not come completely under God’s rule until the rapture when Paul’s body is resurrected and glorified and made fit for heaven, like Jesus’ glorified body (1 Cor.15:42-57; Php.3:21).
- **The law of his mind** “...the law of my mind...” (v.23c) The law of his mind wants to obey God and do good. Paul well knew the importance of having a “renewed mind” (Rom.12:2) fully committed to Christ.
- **The law of sin** “...the law of sin...” (v.23d) The law of sin refuses to let go of the flesh. It takes the mind captive and wars against the spirit, pulling the believer toward sin. Paul is free from sin’s authority, yet he sometimes gives in to sin and ends up trapped.

Discuss: How can we learn to hate our own sin? Why is hating our own sin important?

3. Only God can give us the strength to set aside our desire to sin (v.25).

“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.” (v.25)

In v.25, Paul answers the question he raised in v.24! Our only hope for victory over sin is Christ. Paul affirms in v.25 what he said in v.22-23—that he serves God with his mind, but also that his not-yet-glorified flesh (his old nature) still gives in to the law of sin.

Discuss: What is it about Christ that makes Him our only hope for victory over sin?

For Further Study:

“Do Christians Sin?” article at www.gotquestions.org

“How Can I Learn to Hate My Own Sin?” at www.gotquestions.org

Free online commentary on Romans at www.enduringword.com