

WALKING THROUGH ROMANS - PART 13

ROMANS CHAPTER 7:14-25 - FREEDOM AND THE LAW: THE INNER CONFLICT

The driving question remains: Has God remained faithful in a fractured world?

Paul wrote Romans from a mature theological position to believers living in a fractured world. His writing addresses the pressures, divisions, and struggles they faced while affirming that God remained faithful. The message of Romans is not limited to the first century. It also speaks to believers navigating the difficulties of the present world. The circumstances may be different, but the question remains the same: Has God remained faithful in the middle of our brokenness?

In the previous lesson, Paul explained that the law was not the problem. The law revealed God's standard and exposed the human condition. It showed people what a life aligned with God should look like, but it also revealed how frequently humanity fell short of that standard.

That discussion raises another important question: If we know what is right, why do we still struggle to do it?

Romans 7:14-25 explores that tension. Paul describes the internal conflict between knowing what is right and actually doing it. He gives readers access to one of the most personal and challenging discussions in Romans.

Interpreters have debated Paul's repeated use of the word "I." Some believe Paul is describing his own personal struggle. Others understand the "I" as representing Israel or humanity collectively. Rather than becoming trapped in that debate, the goal of this lesson is to follow Paul's argument as it unfolds and allow the text itself to shape our understanding.

BUCKET ONE - ROMANS 7:14-17

Paul begins by describing the tension between the goodness of the law and the weakness of human nature.

He declares that the law is spiritual, but he is of the flesh and sold into slavery under sin. He then admits that he does not understand his own actions because he does not consistently do what he wants to do. Instead, he sometimes practices the very thing he hates.

The Greek word translated law is *nomos*. It refers to law, instruction, or an established standard. In this context, the law is the collection of instructions God gave Israel through Moses to show them what a life aligned with God's will should look like.

The law served as Israel's blueprint for living. It revealed God's expectations and provided standards intended to guide the people toward a life that honored God.

Paul has already established that the law is holy, just, and good. The problem is not found in the law. The tension is found in humanity.

The holiness of the law exposes the weakness of the human condition. The law says what people should do, but humanity repeatedly struggles to live according to that standard.

Paul says, "I am of the flesh."

The Greek word translated flesh is *sarx*. In Paul's writing, flesh does not refer only to the physical body. It describes humanity in its weakened condition when it is influenced and controlled by the power of sin.

The flesh is the part of the human condition that continually pulls people away from God's purposes. It describes the weakness that makes humanity vulnerable to desires, attitudes, and actions that are out of alignment with God.

The Greek word *hamartia* means sin or missing the mark. Sin occurs when a person moves outside God's intended direction, purpose, or standard.

The law clearly identified the mark.

The flesh continually struggled to reach it.

Paul describes sin as more than an isolated mistake. Sin operates like a power that influences behavior, shapes decisions, and pulls people away from intimate alignment with God.

This is the conflict Paul places on full display. He recognizes what is good, but his actions do not always match what he recognizes.

The issue is not ignorance.

Ignorance means not knowing. Paul is not saying that he lacks information. He knows what is right. He recognizes God's standard. His struggle is that knowing what is right does not automatically give him the ability to do what is right.

Recognition does not automatically produce ability.

Knowing the right path does not always provide the power to walk in it.

A person can possess accurate knowledge while continuing to practice the wrong behavior. Head knowledge alone does not always produce heart-level action. Knowing God's standard is important, but information by itself cannot overcome the weakness of the flesh.

Paul is honest about the gap between what he knows and what he practices. He recognizes the good, but the weakened human condition continues pulling him in another direction.

BUCKET TWO - ROMANS 7:18-20

Paul now distinguishes between desire and ability.

He explains that he has the desire to do what is good, but he does not possess the ability within himself to carry out that desire consistently. He does not do the good he wants to do, and the evil he does not want to do is what he finds himself practicing.

Paul is repeating the conflict he introduced in the previous verses, but the repetition adds clarity and emphasis.

Wanting to do what is right is not the same as consistently doing what is right.

Desire is important, but desire alone is not enough.

Paul is not excusing his actions or avoiding responsibility. He is being transparent about the depth of humanity's struggle apart from the power necessary to overcome it.

The problem is deeper than isolated behavior.

It is connected to the human condition.

The human condition can be compared to software installed on a computer. A computer operates according to what has been placed within its system. In the same way, people often operate according to the patterns, desires, experiences, and influences that have been deposited within them.

When sinful patterns are allowed to operate unchecked, they function like corrupted software. They continually produce actions that move people away from God's purposes.

This is why good intentions are not enough.

A person can intend to change.

A person can desire to improve.

A person can sincerely want to do better.

However, transformation requires more than intention.

Transformation means being changed from one condition into another. It is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly—moving from crawling to flying. Genuine transformation requires movement from desire into action.

Paul reveals that humanity needs power beyond human willpower. That power comes through the presence and activity of God.

The Holy Spirit is described in Scripture as God's breath and wind. The Greek word *pneuma* means spirit, breath, or wind. The Hebrew word *ruach* carries a similar meaning. The Holy Spirit is also called the Paraclete, meaning the One who comes alongside to help, strengthen, comfort, and guide.

Transformation requires more than a desire to change. It requires surrender to the power of God, who enables believers to move from intention to actual obedience.

Without that power, people may repeatedly desire change while remaining trapped in the same patterns.

BUCKET THREE - ROMANS 7:21-23

Paul now introduces another use of the word law.

He says that he discovers a law at work within him: whenever he wants to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. He delights in the law of God within his inner self, but he also recognizes another law operating within his members and waging war against the law of his mind.

In these verses, Paul uses the word law in two different ways.

The first refers to the law of God—the instructions and standards God gave through Moses.

The second refers to a governing principle or operating power.

Paul is not describing another written collection of commandments. He is describing an internal force that continually operates within the human condition.

One influence draws him toward the will of God.

Another influence pulls him away from the will of God.

Paul describes an internal war between what he knows is right and the power that continues opposing what he knows.

His primary purpose is not to announce which side has won. His purpose is to expose the conflict.

Every person eventually encounters this struggle.

There is a conflict between good and evil.

There is a conflict between righteousness and unrighteousness.

There is a conflict between holiness and unholiness.

There is a conflict between transformation and stagnation.

Paul was courageous enough to place his struggle in writing. His honesty teaches us that recognizing an internal conflict does not mean we have already lost the battle.

Reflection is not defeat.

Reflection is necessary for righteous living and spiritual transformation. A person who refuses to reflect is often headed toward careless, undisciplined, and destructive living.

Reflection allows people to recognize what is happening within them.

It helps identify patterns.

It reveals weaknesses.

It exposes the influences that are shaping decisions.

Awareness is the first step toward freedom.

A person cannot become free from something they refuse to acknowledge. Many people attempt to appear perfect while ignoring the attitudes, desires, habits, and wounds that continue separating them from God's purposes.

Honest reflection requires asking difficult questions.

What is stopping me from progressing?

What is preventing me from living in holiness?

What continually interrupts my obedience?

What patterns keep pulling me away from God's will?

What is causing me to lose the battle within?

The purpose of these questions is not condemnation. The purpose is awareness. Once the struggle is identified, believers can invite the power of God into the specific area where help is needed.

Paul's transparency challenges believers to move beyond simply talking about victory. Victory must become visible through actions, choices, habits, and obedience.

Recognizing the conflict does not mean the battle is lost.

It may be evidence that a person is finally becoming aware enough to begin fighting effectively.

BUCKET FOUR - ROMANS 7:24-25

Paul concludes this chapter with both a cry of frustration and a declaration of hope.

He cries, "Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

The word wretched expresses the misery, exhaustion, and frustration produced by the unresolved human condition. Paul recognizes that humanity cannot resolve its deepest problem through human effort alone.

This is more than an emotional outburst.

It is an acknowledgment of human limitation.

If Paul depends only on himself, the same struggle will continue. Human desire, discipline, information, and effort cannot fully rescue humanity from the power of sin.

The human condition cannot cure itself.

Before the tension overwhelms the reader, Paul immediately declares, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul provides the answer before fully explaining the process.

He identifies Christ as the source of rescue, but he does not yet explain in detail how that rescue works within the believer. That fuller explanation will emerge as the argument moves into Romans 8.

Paul creates anticipation.

He refuses to leave the reader trapped in frustration. The struggle is real, but the struggle is not the end of the story.

The mind may delight in God's law while sin continues revealing itself through human weakness. That reality proves that humanity needs more than knowledge, recognition, encouragement, or religious instruction.

Humanity needs rescue.

The greatest breakthrough begins when people stop pretending they can fix themselves.

A person may desire to be fixed, but that person must submit to the Fixer.

Jesus Christ is the One who provides access to the power of God. The gospel announces the good news that Christ died, was buried, was raised from the dead, ascended, and now reigns as Lord and Savior.

Romans 7 does not minimize the goodness of the Mosaic Law.

It also does not minimize the seriousness of sin.

Paul reveals the reality every person eventually encounters: knowing what is right does not always produce the power to do what is right.

This realization is not the conclusion of the story.

It prepares the reader for the power and freedom Paul will explain in the next chapter.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Paul exposes the internal conflict between knowing what is right and consistently doing it.

The law is spiritual, holy, just, and good.

The problem is not the law.

The problem is the weakness of the human condition under the influence of sin.

Knowledge reveals the right path, but knowledge alone does not provide the power to walk in it.

Desire identifies what we want to do, but desire alone does not create transformation.

Reflection exposes the struggle, but reflection must lead us to seek help beyond ourselves.

Paul's cry, "Who will rescue me?" is answered with hope: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The struggle is real, but Christ is greater than the struggle.

The final question is this: If the law can reveal what is right, where does the power to actually live it come from?