**Winning the Battle Against Sin**

August 22, 2021

Romans 7:1-25

Key Verse 7:25a “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Lazarus in John 11 offers a graphic illustration of our spiritual condition. We died with Christ and we have been raised with Christ. We are new creations, but we are covered by the remnants of our fallenness, and so we stink. It is as if we are bound in our own grave clothes. As long as the stinking grave clothes clung to us, we would be unable to express the freshness of our new life. That is the reality of our spiritual condition. But it is much deeper and difficult than Lazarus’ case. In Lazarus’ case, it was just a linen cloth, and once it was removed and discarded, the stench was gone and the corruption of death no longer was clinging to him. But our condition cannot be so easily resolved. It is not a linen cloth that clings to us, it is a full-fledged carcass. In verse 24, Paul says, “What a wretched man I am!” Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Literally, he is saying, “I have a corpse tied to me.” We cannot get rid of it as long as we live. How I wish to get rid of my body of death! We will have to wait for the full and glorious redemption of our bodies when Jesus comes again and gives us resurrection bodies and removes sin completely. Sin’s mastery has been broken. Sin’s power has been broken. But sin’s presence is still a reality. We still struggle with sin. We still have a corpse tied around our back. Like Paul, we say, “Why do I sin again and again though I died to sin? Why does my old habit pop up again though I died to sin? What’s wrong with me? I am frustrated!” Though we were freed from the power of sin, sin still exists and makes every effort to come into our new life. How can we win the battle against sin? The answer will come in the next chapter. In today’s passage, Paul gives his own example of battling against sin, especially sin of covetousness.

**First,** now we belong to Jesus (1-6). Look at verse 1. “Do you not know, brothers and sisters–for I am speaking to those who know the law–that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?”Paul is speaking to those who were once observers of the law but who are now Christians. The law has authority over a man as long as he lives. The law cannot punish the dead person. Many violent criminals bypass the law’s authority by committing suicides. The believers in Rome knew the authority and the limits of the law very well. Therefore, Apostle Paul speaks to them in terms of the law. After justification, many young believers think that they have to keep all the law and become perfectionists to maintain their salvation. They suddenly began to point out other’s weaknesses and try to correct all the problems, saying, “Why is my Bible teacher not perfect in everything?” They began to condemn everybody starting from their parents. They acted as if they were religious cops like the Pharisees to enforce the requirements of the law. This is a trap for us to fall into. But Paul explains that we don’t live under the law any more but live under the grace of Jesus by giving an example of the law of marriage.

Look at verses 2-3. “For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.” Apostle Paul used the law of marriage to explain our new relationship with Jesus after our justification. Everyone understands the law of marriage very well because each of us has a dream of a wonderful marriage. In this example, one woman married Mr. Law. Everything he does is perfect, good and right; He is always on time. He is always clean cut; he cannot be faulted at any point. This couple gets married and the woman feels secure with the man’s disciplined life. On the first day of the marriage, Mr. Law tells the woman, “I want you to behave exactly as I would. I have a checklist of all the things I want you to do. At the end of the day, I am going to check and make sure you have done everything on this list.” When Mr. Law returns from work, he demands, “Bring me the checklist. Let me see how you have done.” Mr. Law goes over the checklist and notes the ones that are okay, but most are not done well. “Where is my dinner? How come you did not clean the house today? Look at the dust on the bookshelf. What did you do all day long?” Poor Mrs. Law. She worked hard all day long, but she still could not please her perfectionist husband. Mr. Law never once asked how the woman is doing. He never showed any love. He just makes demands and the woman becomes exhausted. She develops a huge inferiority complex, becoming full of guilt and failure. She is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. She thought about an alternative. How could I end this miserable marriage? If she marries another man while Mr. Law is alive, people would call her an adulteress, and her life would be worse off than before. But if Mr. Law dies, she is released from her marriage vow to him and is free to marry another man.

Spiritually speaking, all believers were released from their demanding husband, Mr. Law and they married another man, Jesus Christ, called Mr. Grace. As a result, we also became Mrs. Grace. Her life with Mr. Grace was like a dream. Even though she burned the dinner, Mr. Grace would say, “That’s all right, honey. I like my food well done. You are too beautiful and precious to me to worry about food.” The new life with Mr. Grace brought her new meaning and joy and happiness. Like Mrs. Law, we were bound to the law. But as hard as we tried, we could not satisfy the demands of the law. The more we tried, the more we felt insecure and fearful of failure. Finally, we gave up trying, and we were subject to the condemnation of the Law. But we have good news from Jesus Christ our Lord. Look at verse 4. “So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.” In this verse Paul explains that we are freed from the demands of the law through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Paul doesn’t nullify the law; instead, he explains the relationship between the law and grace. When Paul said, “you died to the law,” he meant that when Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins, we also died with him. Thus we are set free from bondage to the law. Note that the Law never dies. It is we who have to die. Then we are free from the Law. And when Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised also. In this way, we have an inseparable relationship with Jesus Christ. (Ro 8:38,39) We no longer belong to the law but we belong to Jesus, our bridegroom. Then we bear fruit for God. One day Mrs. Grace happened to look at the list Mr. Law gave her to do. As she looked at it, anger and resentment came back momentarily but soon smile returned to her face. She realized that she was doing all that and more now. When she was Mrs. Law, she was forced to do all the chores out of duty and became miserable. Mr. Law’s demands bore fruit for death. Now as Mrs. Grace, it was her joy to do all that and more since she was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and she bore fruit for God.

**Second,** the law is holy and we are sinners (7-13).Look at verse 7. “What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” Some people cannot discern between the power of sin and the law. Some think that the law is sinful and the law is bad. One young man had a Bible teacher who helped him realize what sin was. Soon the young man began to dislike his Bible teacher because he felt condemned whenever he saw him. In fact, it was because he remembered his sin. We must know that the law is holy and we are sinners. The law exposes sin to lead us to repentance.

Paul was an eminent Pharisee. He was well disciplined to keep the law. However, there was one commandment that he could not keep: “Do not covet.” The tenth commandment, “Do not covet,” is somewhat different from the others because it concerns the motives of the heart. It is easy to overcome visible sin but hard to overcome the invisible sin like covetousness. Nobody knows when we covet someone’s shining car or his wife. We try to suppress our covetous desire. But the more we try to suppress our desire, the more we covet. Look at verse 8. “But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting.” The sinful nature is like a sleeping dog. When the law comes and says, “Don’t,” the dog wakes up and goes on a rampage doing excessively whatever is forbidden. We know in our heart that it is wrong to covet. But we cannot stop coveting. The law forbids coveting but it does not give the power to overcome it. We come to realize that whenever something is forbidden, our fallen nature wants to do it all the more, as Proverbs 9:17 says, “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” Here comes our spiritual struggle. Instead of suppressing our desire with human efforts, we must come to Jesus and overcome sin by faith. The more we realize the depth of our sin, the more we realize the marvelous grace of Jesus.

Look at verse 13. “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” The law exposes sin and it brings death. There is a story of two men in Korea in 1960s. They left for work before dawn and came home after dark. In the kitchen there was a jar of soy sauce. They ate the soy sauce every day with rice. One day they had an off-day. They decided to clean the house. To their amazement they saw something in the soy sauce jar. It was a skeleton of a dead mouse. As soon as they saw it, they were violently sick and had to go to an emergency room. They were perfectly fine when they were ignorant of a dead mouse in the soy sauce. But as soon as they were aware of it, they almost died. Sin is like the dead mouse, and the law exposes the dead mouse in us. The more we study the Bible, the more we are convicted of our sin and we feel condemned. As long as Paul compares himself with others, he felt fairly respectable. But as soon as the demands of God’s law came in convicting power, he stood speechless and condemned. He said in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” The more he realized the depth of his sin, the more he realized the depth of God’s grace. Therefore, we should not dislike our Bible teachers for exposing our sins. Instead, we must acknowledge our sin, repent, and thank God for our Bible teachers.

**Third,** victory in Jesus (14-25). In verses 14-25, Paul shares his personal struggle with sin and the way to victory. Paul’s description of his condition is very vivid. He was like a prisoner in his own body. Look at verses 21-23. “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” We understand Paul very well. In our hearts, we want to do good. We want to have many Bible students. We want to be faithful to early morning prayers. We want to study hard and master our field of study for the glory of God. But when we want to do good, evil is right there with us. Instead of doing these good things, we lay down to sleep or sit down to watch Youtube or some other evil things. When Paul discovered his own wretchedness, what did he do? Did he despair? No. He cried out to God. Look at verse 24. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” The moment of discovering our wretched sin is the moment to cry out to God for help.

Look at verse 25a. “Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Paul found victory, not in himself, but in our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was totally helpless. But when he looked at Jesus, he found God’s salvation for sinners. Paul simply believed in Jesus. Then Jesus forgave his sins and poured out the Holy Spirit upon him. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to overcome his wretched self and serve God until he bore abundant fruit for God. Paul teaches us how to overcome our wretchedness and live victorious lives. We must not look at ourselves. We must look at Jesus and ask his mercy and grace. In verses 9-25, notice that the 1st person pronouns—I, me, my, myself, occur over 40 times. When Paul struggled with sin with his own willpower, he completely failed. He tried to achieve holiness by his own efforts. But the more he struggled, the worse his condition became. It was a losing battle. Likewise, if we take an overdose of “Vitamin I,” and search for victory in self, we will never find it. Focusing on our sin problems adds to the problem. Sadly most modern Christian counseling focuses on the counselee’s attention on himself. It is a big mistake. Instead, we must not look at ourselves. Someone said, “For every look we take at ourselves, we should take 10 looks at Christ.” We have to know that we have died with Christ and rose with him to walk in the newness of life. Instead of trying to improve the flesh, we need to die with Jesus and rose with him. Jesus is our victory.

Today’s passage is for Christians who are struggling to overcome sin and live a holy life. Unbelievers may not understand this struggle. Jesus already won the war through his death and resurrection. But our battle with sin is still going on. In order to win the victory in our battle against sin, we should not look at ourselves, but to look at Jesus.

Big Idea: In order to win the battle against sin, we need to look at Jesus Christ