

“Thanks Be to God”

Sermons on Romans # 18

Texts: Romans 7:14-25; Psalm 119:137-144

According to the apostle Paul, the normal Christian life entails an intense struggle with sin. Although there are times of great progress in the Christian life, these momentary victories serve to point us to that glorious day when we will completely triumph over sin. But until that day comes—at the time of our death or the Lord’s return, which ever comes first—every Christian must certainly empathize with Paul when he laments that even though he delights in the law of God, he still does the very thing he knows is wrong. Even though he has been set free from sin, death and the condemnation of the law, Paul knows himself to be a wretched man, sold as a slave to sin.

Beginning in Romans 5:12-21, Paul contrasts what we are “in Christ” with what we were “in Adam.” Thus all believers have been transferred from the dominion or realm of Adam to the dominion or realm of Christ. But even though this transfer is a reality for all Christians (not just those who supposedly live victorious Christian lives), in Romans 7:14-25 Paul tells us that because we remain in “the flesh,” we will struggle with habitual (or indwelling) sin until we die. Having been set free by Christ from those things that once enslaved us in Adam, the struggle that each one of us now faces is to act like the free men and women that we are. We must stop acting like the slaves to sin we once were. This is the essence of the struggle with sin described by Paul in Romans 7:14-25. And this struggle is one important characteristic of the normal Christian life.

As you may recall, last time we tackled the critical question to be faced by all those who encounter this passage. Is Paul talking about his own experience in these verses, or is he describing a hypothetical Jew struggling with the conviction of sin brought about by the law, which provides no relief from sin’s guilt and power? If Paul is indeed talking about his own experience, then the question is whether or not Paul is describing that time *before* his conversion (as he did in Romans 7:7-13), or his present struggle with sin, even though he be an apostle. Since we discussed this in some detail last time, let me simply state here that in my estimation, the evidence is overwhelming that Paul is speaking of his present experience as an apostle, and that the struggle with sin depicted in this passage is that of the normal Christian life.

Having addressed the critical interpretive question regarding this identity of the “wretched man” last time, we now turn our attention to the details of this passage and we will also address some of the ramifications of the inevitable struggle with indwelling sin.

As we turn to our text, it is vital to notice that Paul speaks throughout in the present tense, indicative of the fact that he is talking about his present struggle with sin. Paul does so both as an apostle and as a representative of every Christian believer. The apostle’s struggle with sin is a vivid picture of our own struggle with sin.

Verse 14 of Romans 7 is very striking because “this verse marks the change from the past tense so common in the previous section to the present [tense], which is equally characteristic of the verses to which we now come.” As Paul now states, “*We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.*” As we pointed out last time, the most natural way of understanding this change from

the past tense to the present tense “is to see it as pointing to Paul’s present experience.”¹ Clearly, Romans 7:7-13 is Paul’s discussion of his experience of the conviction of sin under the law *before* his conversion, while verses 14 ff. are a description of how the law continues to effect him as a Christian, after Paul has come to faith in Jesus Christ. According to Calvin, in this section “Paul now begins to make a closer comparison between the law and the nature of man, in order that the origin of the wickedness which leads to death may be more clearly understood. He then sets before us the example of a regenerate man, in whom the remains of the flesh dissent from the law of the Lord in such a way that the spirit would gladly obey it.”² Says Calvin, there is no greater disagreement in a person than that which exists between the fallen nature of man and in the righteous requirements of the law.³

When Paul states in verse 14, that “*the law is spiritual*,” the apostle is speaking of the divine origin of the law. This point can be illustrated by looking at passages such as: Matthew 22:43 and Mark 12:36, where we read, “*David, speaking by the Spirit*”; Acts 1:16; 4:25— “*the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David*”; Acts 28:25— “*The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet*”; 2 Peter 1:21— “*for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” All of these texts connect the Holy Spirit with the inspiration of the Scriptures. Since the law has its origin in the will of God, now revealed by the Holy Spirit, this means that the law possesses a divine authority and majesty, “with which it confronts men.”⁴ There is another implication to be drawn from this as well. Since the law is spiritual, “it cannot properly be understood except by the help of the same Spirit by whom it was given (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16). It is only those who have the Spirit who can truly acknowledge the law and consent to it with their minds (cf. vv. 16, 22, 23 25b) and also in their lives make a beginning of real obedience to it (cf. 8:1 ff). Those who do not have the Spirit grasp only the letter (cf. v. 6—the new way of the Spirit v. the old way of the written code). We may also note the associations of *pneuma* with life (e.g. 8:1ff, 6, 10ff, 2 Cor 3:6b) and compare v. 10 (the commandment which was intended to bring life).”⁵ Because the law is spiritual, this means that the law has its origin in God’s will and character and is therefore, spiritually discerned. Only a Christian—indwelt by that same Spirit—can be said to delight in the law. This is a very strong argument that Paul is speaking as a believer, and not of his pre-Christian experience.⁶

When Paul views himself in light of the righteous requirements of the law, he admits: “*I am unspiritual*,” literally, I am “carnal” [*sarkinos*—σάρκινος]. The term carnal is indicative of the “weakness of mankind and to the sin we so easily commit because we are weak,” which is a consequence resulting

¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 290.

² Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, pp. 146-147.

³ Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 147.

⁴ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans I.355-356.

⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans I.355-356.

⁶ According to John Murray, Paul is referring to the law’s “divine origin and character” (cf. Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 254).

from the Fall.⁷ “The first person singular is again used, but now for the first time in this chapter in the present tense. The only natural way to understand this,” notes one writer, “is surely the way indicated by Calvin’s comment on the following verse: ‘Paul . . . is depicting in his own person the character and extent of weakness of believers.’”⁸ Thus all believers are “carnal” because they remain in the flesh until the resurrection. Paul knows nothing of the so-called “carnal Christian” teaching held by so many evangelicals. For Paul, there are only two categories in view: non-Christians (those in Adam), and Christians (those in Christ), all of whom remain “carnal” in some sense until death or the Lord’s return.

But Paul goes on to say that “he is [*sarkinos*], *sold as a slave to sin*.” It is this comment which leads so many commentators to reject the historic Protestant interpretation of Romans 7:14 ff as depicting Paul’s experience as a Christian. According to Doug Moo—the author of an outstanding commentary on Romans—“‘sold under sin,’ . . . clinches the argument for a description of a non-Christian here.”⁹ The issue is simply this—if, in the last half of verse 14, Paul says that the Christian is carnal and sold as a slave to sin, why did he go to such great lengths to speak about the Christian’s victory over the flesh, sin, and death in chapters 6-7? This seeming contradiction leads Moo and others to conclude that Paul cannot be talking about his present struggle with sin, but his struggle with sin before his conversion, as the apostle looks back at this earlier time in his life from the perspective of faith in Christ.

But this argument is easily refuted. The language Paul uses is that of the slave market—a reference which would be more obvious to Paul’s original audience than to us. Paul’s language is graphic and vivid.¹⁰ When examined closely, this image does not at all contradict what Paul has said previously. In fact, it actually serves to describe what happens to the believer who has been delivered from the flesh, sin and death, but who must await the resurrection at the end of this age for ultimate deliverance from the flesh and what has been described as “indwelling sin.” This is clearly a description of the liberated slave [a Christian] who sins between the time of their liberation—their transference from Adam to Christ at the time of conversion—and final eschatological deliverance from the sinful nature on the day of the Lord Jesus. According to Leon Morris, “this is a vivid way of bringing out the truth that Paul sins, though he does not want to. It does not mean that he never does the right as he would like to do.”¹¹

This is a very important point. Before conversion, sin was characteristic of the non-Christian. Now, as a believer, sin is completely out of character. This is why the presence of sin in the life of a Christian is such a disturbing matter—sin characterizes what we were in Adam, not what we are in Christ. This, then, is not the sentiment of someone who is still enslaved to sin. Such a person would never have such a struggle. But this struggle is characteristic of all those who have been liberated from the guilt and power of sin, and who are then constantly reminded by their own failure to do what God requires, of what it was like to have been a slave to sin. Although we have indeed been liberated “in Christ,” we remain “in the flesh.” We still feel like slaves to sin, since indwelling sin remains until the resurrection.

⁷ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 290-291.

⁸ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans* I.356.

⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 454.

¹⁰ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 291.

¹¹ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 291.

We also cannot ignore important parallel passages such as Galatians 5:16-17 and Philippians 3:3-6, which clearly indicate that Paul taught that such a struggle with sin was characteristic of the Christian life, and that he knew the difference between true righteousness—that which comes from God and is by faith—and a “legalistic” righteousness typical of human effort. Thus the struggle with sin is a sign that conversion has truly taken place! The struggle with sin is not a sign that the person struggling is unconverted or else not living in the victory over sin which is supposedly promised in the next chapter! Far too many Christians have been spiritually bludgeoned with false promises of immediate and total victory over sin. Such false expectations always lead to disappointment and even despair. Paul, on the other hand, is a realist. He teaches that the struggle with sin is life-long and extremely difficult. Although progress will be made, final victory over sin will not be ours in this life, even though such victory is a certainty in the next.¹²

Describing his present experience in verses 15 and 16, Paul now explains what it means to be “*sold as a slave sin to sin.*” According to Paul, “*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.*” When Paul says “I don’t understand why I do these things,” the verb Paul uses indicates that he is utterly perplexed about *how* it is, that even though he has been delivered from his the guilt and power of sin through the saving work of Christ, yet he still continues to do that which is evil.¹³ How can Paul be free from the dominion of guilt, sin and the condemnation of the law “in Christ,” and yet still behave as a slave to sin, like one still “in Adam”? Paul does not fully understand this and seems genuinely perplexed by the struggle. He knows what is right and earnestly desires to it. But, contrary to his genuine desire, he does just the opposite. “*For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*”

It is clear from the next chapter of Romans that only a converted person can speak of hating sin in the manner that Paul does here—yet another important reason why this text is describing Paul’s present experience as a Christian. As Paul goes on to say in Romans 8:6-7: “*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so!*” But his own repeated failure to obey God’s law demonstrates that the problem (which he does not fully understand) lies within him and not with the law. “*And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.*” The term for “good,” [*kalos*], can mean moral beauty or nobility.¹⁴ Thus the law, which is morally beautiful and noble in terms of its virtue, stands in stark contrast to the fallen human nature which is ugly and depraved. Paul does not fully understand how this takes place. But he is clear that it does, and that the fault lies with him, not with God or the law!

¹² The *Heidelberg Catechism* puts it this way: 114 Q. But can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly? A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God’s commandments. 115 Q. No one in this life can obey the ten commandments perfectly: why then does God want them preached so pointedly? A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

¹³ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 291.

¹⁴ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 292.

In verse 17, Paul now speaks directly about the dilemma he is facing. “*As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*” Why does Paul the apostle still sin? Why is it so difficult to understand the reasons for his actions? The answer is that in one sense indwelling sin is like a power or force which suddenly takes control of the individual who is its victim. Indwelling sin is habitual, it lives in Paul. Indwelling sin lives in all of us!

As Cranfield points out, “both [*nuni*—as it is] and [*ouketi*—no longer] are used here in a logical, rather than a temporal sense, the meaning of the first four words of the verse being ‘But, this being so (that is, in the circumstances indicated by verse 16—“*I do not do what I want to do*”), it is then not I who.’ This verse is not intended as an excuse, but is rather an acknowledgment of the extent to which sin, dwelling in the Christian, usurps control over his life.”¹⁵ Therefore, the problem is that even though the power of sin has been broken when the believer is moved from the dominion of Adam and sin to the dominion of Christ at the moment of conversion, at times, it still *seems as though* sin is in control. Because of sin’s habitual and abiding nature and character, we still feel enslaved to it, even though we are not! This is why Paul’s first imperative in his discussion of sanctification is to “*count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus* (Romans 6:11).”

The response to this struggle with indwelling (or habitual) sin is to repeatedly remember what we are in Christ—dead to sin, but alive to God. This is the reason why the gospel, not the law, should have the final word, and why the gospel, not the law, is our primary means of empowerment to continue on with the struggle. For if we don’t have the gospel repeatedly proclaimed to us, we will despair and give up when the law does it work, which is to excite and expose our sin. It is the gospel—not the law, that makes us desire to obey the law, as well as giving to us the power to obey the law, even if imperfectly!¹⁶

Morris describes indwelling sin continually which plagues the Christian using an interesting metaphor—that of an unwanted tenant. Says Morris, “sin is pictured as having taken up residence in Paul. This is not the honored guest, nor the paying tenant, but the ‘squatter’, not legitimately there, but very difficult to eject. Paul is personifying sin again; it is in some sense a separate entity, even though it is not the real Paul, is what produces the acts which the real Paul hates so much. Sin is out of character for the believer, even though it is so difficult to be rid of it entirely.”¹⁷ Morris’ point a good one, and helps to explain why so many popular commentators and preachers tend to speak of a Christian as having two distinct natures—the “old man” and the “new man,” who continually fight it out within us for control. This is why Romans 8 is often misread as though Paul were saying that a Christian has the option to let the new man rule and to walk after the Spirit, or to let the old man have his way and walk after the flesh. As we will see in future sermons, the contrast between the flesh and the Spirit in Romans 8, is a contrast between a Christian and a non-Christian, not an option for a Christian to live in victory or not.

Indeed, Paul’s anthropology [doctrine of man] clearly teaches us that a person has a single nature, which is either fallen or redeemed. And yet, on this occasion, indwelling sin is personified by Paul. Here he

¹⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.360.

¹⁶ This is the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. 65 Q. It is by faith alone that we share in Christ and all his blessings: where then does that faith come from? A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through our use of the holy sacraments.

¹⁷ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 293.

speaks of indwelling sin almost as a person or a “force” against which the believer must continually fight. It is not that the Christian’s struggle with sin is explained by the fact that he or she has two natures within struggling to gain control. Rather, the old man is made new at the time of conversion, and indwelling sin continues to raise its head, so that it seems like there are two natures. And this is how Paul describes the state of affairs here. *“It is not I who do it.”* In other words, since I have been made new in Christ, it is not the new man who sins. Rather *“it is sin living in me that does it,”* i.e., indwelling sin (the unwanted tenant), which refuses to leave the premises, even though it has no legal right to be there, and which will eventually be destroyed. But indwelling sin puts up one heck of a fight in the meantime!

In verses 18-20, Paul repeats much of what is said in verses 14-17. *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”* Although in verses 14-17, Paul speaks of how he could not stop doing what he knew was wrong and sinful, here he laments that he seems incapable of doing the good which he knows he should do. At times, Paul cannot stop sinning and at times he feels incapable of obeying God’s law. He feels like a slave to sin, even though he has been liberated from sin.

The reason for this is spelled out in verse 18. Paul now confesses the truth about himself: *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”* Unlike modern Americans, Paul is not much of an optimist about the sinful human nature, i.e., “the flesh.” His doctrine of sin is stark but utterly realistic about fallen human nature. Because of fallen human nature, i.e., “the flesh,” our bodies become the vehicle for sin to express itself. Thus the body, which is good, becomes the instrument of evil. Paul is not a gnostic. He clearly states that he does not sin because he has a body, which because material causes him to sin. Rather, as sinful in his orientation, “fleshly” he is weak and unable to do the good in which he delights, and yet continually fails to do.

Thus Paul laments, *“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”* We should not take this to mean that Paul is never able to obey the law and that he only sins. Rather, we should take Paul to mean that what he knows he should do as revealed in the law, and what he is able to do, because of the weakness of the fallen sinful nature, are two different things! Hence the great dilemma that every Christian faces, no matter how pious and godly they may be. The Christian delights in the law just as we read in Psalm 119:137-144 (our Old Testament lesson) because they are in Christ and have been delivered from sin’s guilt and power. Yet they come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, brought about through that same law, whenever they fail to obey it! And this is exactly what Paul says in verses 19 and 20: *“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”* While this is a virtual reiteration of what was said in verses 14-17, Paul now speaks of “sin living in him,” and that this is source of his present woes.

In verse 21, then, Paul now explains what he means “by sin living in him” when he says, *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”* First of all, it must be pointed out that there are several difficulties raised here by Paul’s use of the term [nomos] or “law.” Does he mean “a law,” in the sense of a rule or principle, in the sense of something like, “so then, I find the principle to be true . . .”? Or is Paul here referring to the law itself (i.e., the ten commandments), in the sense of, “so then, I find the law at work . . .”? Charles Hodge is probably correct here when he speaks of [nomos] in this instance as meaning “a controlling principle,” since in the following verses Paul will speak of a “law

of sin.”¹⁸ If true, we would take Paul as follows: “So then, I find this controlling principle [law] at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” While this is probably the best way to go, it does mean that this use of *nomos* is quite distinctive and uncharacteristic. But the point is that as Paul struggles to obey the law, he finds a particular pattern, or a “controlling principle” at work. When the desire to obey the law is present—something which can only be predicated of a Christian—evil is also present. The unwanted tenant shows up at the worst possible time.

Verses 22 and 23, then, are most likely explanations and elaborations of the “controlling principle” set out by Paul in verse 21.¹⁹ Says the apostle in verse 22: “*For in my inner being I delight in God's law.*” Again, according to Paul’s comments in Romans 8:6-8, this delight in God’s law, literally “rejoicing in” God’s law [note the shift back to *nomos* in the sense of the commandments here—more on this below], is something only a Christian can experience, for the non-Christian mind is hostile to God’s law. As C. K. Barrett points out, this too, makes much sense in an eschatological context: “The ‘inward man’ belongs to the Age to Come, just as the ‘outward man’ belongs to the present age, and is therefore doomed to perish. That is, the ‘inward’ or ‘invisible’ man is also the ‘new man’ implied by vi.6.”²⁰ If true, this means that the new man, created in Christ Jesus, delights in the revealed will of God as found in the commandments. This delight in the law is, therefore, a fruit of regeneration—cf. Paul’s comments about the “Fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22 ff. But the ‘new man’ remains flesh [sarx] until the resurrection, and this is why there is such a struggle.

Though the new man, the “real Paul,” as Morris calls him, rejoices in God’s law, something else is also part of the equation, namely this “controlling principle,” which Paul will now identify as the law of sin.²¹ According to verse 23, “*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.*” For Paul, then, another law—not the law of God—is at work with him at the same time he is delighting in the law of God. Paul’s use of *nomos* here, certainly reinforces Hodge’s contention that Paul did not mean “Ten Commandments” when he spoke of the law in verse 21. What, then, is this “other law” and how does it relate to the “law of my mind” and “the law of sin,” also mentioned here.

Simply stated, this “other law” is the “law of sin,” which is the principle or power of sin (our unwanted tenant), which seems to take control at the very moment we seek to do good and avoid doing evil. At times, the power of sin usurps the desire to obey the law. This is “the law of my mind,” and is that which we know to be right and in which we delight.²²

¹⁸ Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, pp. 234-235.

¹⁹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.362.

²⁰ Barrett, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 150.

²¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 295.

²² According to Cranfield: “That by [*heteros nomos*] a law different from, and contrasted with, the law of God mentioned in verse 22 is meant, is clear enough....It is quite natural to understand [*tou noos mou*— “of my mind”] to mean ‘which my mind acknowledges’ and to identify the [*nomos tou noos mou*— “the law of my mind”] with the [*nomos tou theou*— “the law of God”] of v. 22. Understood in this way, vv. 22 and 23 depict two laws in opposition to each other. The identity of one of them, the ‘law

Here we have the contrast set forth between Paul's delight in the law of God—what he is in Christ—with the law of sin, or this “controlling principle” which opposes him every time he tries to obey the law of God—he remnants of what he was in Adam. Paul knows what is right and delights in it—the law of his mind, the law of God. And yet sin—as a controlling principle (the unwanted tenant)—opposes him, fighting him every step of the way! This is why Paul can describe sanctification as “warfare” between that in which he delights (the law of God, and his desire to obey it) and the “controlling power of sin” which periodically erupts into flames because it continuously smoulders within. That fact that Paul emphasizes the mind here, means that for Paul, sanctification begins with correctly understanding the nature of this struggle, and resolving to do as he has commanded back in Romans 6:11. “Reckon yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God!”

In verse 24, Paul laments: “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” Although many argue that this is not the cry of a Christian struggling with sin, but the cry of a non-Christian crushed by the demands of the law, as we have seen, the former, not the later, is certainly the case. But how can a Christian who has been set free from sin, death and the condemnation of the law, offer such a woeful lament? They offer such a cry because they know what is right and they delight in God's law, which they know to be holy, righteous and good. And yet, even though they are “in Christ” and not “in Adam” they remain flesh, and fail to do the righteous things they desire. Therefore, this is the cry of every Christian stuck in this present evil age, even though they are already citizens of the age to come. Because they are in Christ, they desire to obey God, but repeatedly sin.²³ This is why we long for the resurrection, when we will indeed be finally and gloriously rescued from our the guilt of our sins and the slavery of our fallen human nature. But until that day, we all know that we are wretched sinners!

Although there are some with tender consciences, who find the struggle with sin debilitating and who need the constant reassurance of the gospel, there are many more who are erroneously told that the struggle with sin is the sign that they have not yet made Jesus Lord over every area of

of God' is not in doubt; but the identity of the other, 'the law of sin,' requires some clarification. It would seem that Paul is here using the word 'law' metaphorically, to denote exercised power, authority, control, and that he means 'the law of sin,' the power, the authority, the control exercised over us by sin. It is a forceful way of making the point that the power which sin has over us is a terrible travesty, a grotesque parody, of that authority over us which belongs by right to God's holy law. Sin's exercising such authority over us is a hideous usurpation of the prerogative of God's law.” Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.364.

²³ Cranfield puts it this way: “The farther men advance in the Christian life, and the more mature their discipleship, the clearer becomes their perception of the heights to which God calls them, and the more painfully sharp their consciousness of the distance between what they ought, and want, to be, and what they are. The assertion that this cry could only come from an unconverted heart, and that the apostle must be expressing not what he feels as he writes, but the vividly remembered experience of the unconverted man, is, we believe, totally untrue. To make it is to indicate—with all respect be it said—that one has not yet considered how absolute are the claims of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The man, whose cry this is, is one who, knowing himself to be righteous by faith, desires from the depths of his being to respond to the claims which the gospel makes upon him (cf. v. 22). It is the very sincerity of his love to God which makes his pain at this continuing sinfulness so sharp. But, be it noted, v. 24., while it is a cry of real and deep anguish, is not at all the cry of despair” (Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.366).

their lives, or that they walking after the flesh when they need to be walking after the Spirit. But the fact of the matter is this—If you are struggling with sin as described here by Paul, rest assured. God is sanctifying you. The struggle is itself the definitive proof that you are “in Christ” not “in Adam” and that God is purging you of indwelling sin and preparing you for the final victory, which is certain to come. Christ’s bride will be spotless, without stain or blemish. You are struggling because you are being cleansed. Jesus Christ is preparing you for the wedding yet to come.

The person who should be worried is not the heart-broken, worn-out, struggling sinner, but the person who hears this description of this intense struggle with sin, and cannot at all relate to that which Paul describes in these verses. It is not struggling sinners who need worry. All sinners need do is look to Christ who is their righteousness. It is those who don’t struggle with their sin, who need to be worried!

Remember, the same apostle who cries out because of the difficulties of the warfare between the law of his mind and the law of sin, also knows from whence his deliverance comes! *Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.* In his mind, Paul delights in the law of God. But since he remains in the “flesh” until the day of Christ Jesus, he will always find sin present when he wants to obey the law. And this beloved, is the normal Christian life, and with Paul, our only hope of deliverance is “through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Therefore, let us not take the intensity and difficulty of the struggle to mean that God has cast us away or that we are not Christ’s! Rather, the struggle is but one more proof that the day of Christ Jesus is coming. For he is making all things new. The master sculptor is molding us into the image of Christ. And while every piece he chips away certainly hurts, let us not forget what the finished product will be like—the very image of the sinless Son of God.