

**Sinning After I Have Said “Never Again”
Romans 7:14-25**

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Introduction:

I want to begin this morning by reading part of a letter from a pastor. All of you know this pastor. Some of you can name the books that he wrote, and many of you have read his books. Others of you can name the churches that he has started. Some might even call him the most famous pastor of all time.

Here’s his very personal letter to his congregation.

I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.

17-20 But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

21-23 It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

24 I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

Some you recognize these words now. The pastor is the Apostle Paul. The letter is the book of Romans. The words that I have read come from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*.

Open now your Bibles to this text in Romans 7. Unfortunately, this text that seems to have so much to say to us is a bit complicated. There is a great amount of debate and disagreement as to the exact interpretation of this text. In fact, if you go to commentaries, you will find that the writers are nearly equally divided over the meaning of this text. Half suggest that Paul was speaking merely of his pre-Christian experience; the other half will argue that Paul was speaking to his life as a Christian. Though there are good arguments on either side, my aim today is not to give you a lot of evidence on either side. You can do that for yourself, if you like. Rather, I would want this text to speak to you as all Scripture should—right where you are. If you are an unbeliever, this text speaks. If you are a Christian, this text speaks to you.

Text: ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am made out of flesh, sold into sin's power. ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but it is the sin that lives in me. ²¹ So I discover this principle: When I want to do what is good, evil is with me. ²² For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God's law. ²³ But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dying body? ²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh, to the law of sin.

Body:

Paul's experience and my personal experience lead me to conclude that this teaching is for the believer.

Though there is good evidence on either side of the pre-conversion/post-conversion question, I see in this text that Paul is speaking in a most transparent way about his present life as a believer. Two things lead me to conclude this. First, Paul's experience and his comments in other letters reflect the spiritual tension described in the Romans passage. For example, In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul wrote, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." Likewise, Philippians 3:12 says, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

The second thing that leads me to conclude that Paul was speaking of his present condition as a Christian is my own personal experience. I confess to you that my experience is just as Paul states in Romans 7:15, "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate that I do." Or as he stated in Romans 7:19, "For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice."

You can think of me what you wish, but I confess, "Sometimes I feel just like Paul." I want to do what's right. I have promised myself and God that I would do what's right, but I do what's wrong."

This passage is a little tough to outline in as nice and succinct a pattern as usually I wish to do. As a result, this message may seem a little different from our typical pattern. My attempt this morning is to provide a level of understanding about this text, then give a couple of practical points of application to take with you.

Two Powerful Analogies

I think to begin to understand this text, we must notice the two very powerful analogies that Paul is using. One analogy is implied, the other is more direct.

The Analogy of Slavery: The implied analogy that Paul uses is to draw an analogy between his struggle with sin and the experience of slavery. When someone was a slave they did things being under the direction of someone else. They did not want to do these things, but they did them. When we are a

slave to sin, we do things we don't want to do. Now, some of you have jumped ahead of me to raise the question, "Can a true Christian be a slave to sin?" Some of you have even already turned back to the preceding chapter in Romans. Indeed Romans 6 has much to say in regards to the fact that in Christ, we should be "dead to sin, and alive to God."

Consider these verses from Romans 6....

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

20 For when you were slaves of sin,

22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life

So, which is it Paul? Are you free or are you a slave? I ask you, Christian, "Are you free or are you a slave?" Or, are you like Paul, living with this tension every day in your life.

The Analogy of Warfare:

The second analogy is that of warfare. You ever feel like there is a battle going on for your obedience? There is! Paul describes it for us in verse 23 of Romans 7. There is a "Not-So Civil War" going on for your obedience every day. This text screams at us that we are having a "tug-of-war" of the soul.

For those of you still wondering how a Christian could possibly struggle so with sin, let these two analogies continue. History records that once some slaves were freed, they remained with their so-called masters. They were free, but they remained slaves. Likewise, many wars have continued once the truce was signed. So, it is with our struggle with sin. Though we are free from sin and the victory over sin has long since been won by the cross and our response to the cross, we still struggle with sin. So, notice on the heels of these two analogies, Paul gives a ...

A Powerful Answer

The confusion of this text is relaxed when it come to the answer. I'm glad that Paul asked a question and gave the answer in verse 24-25. This text causes us to see one significant truth: *We cannot fight the*

battle of sin on our own. Christ is our only hope. Christ is the only way to salvation, and He is the only way to victory over our sin. How is it that we think that we can be saved by grace, but battle sin on our own? Paul's personal struggle is answered with the declaration that Christ is the only answer. Just as God saves us by His grace, we must walk by His grace to win this battle with sin.

A Purposeful Application: So, where do we go from here? Well, regardless of your take on this passage, there is an application. In order to win over sin, we must...

Be Unwilling to Surrender to Sin.

One of the wrong interpretations of this passage is to give up. We must not accept our sin. We must not say, "Well, Paul sinned, so I can sin." If we are going to win this battle, we must be unwilling to surrender to sin. We must never wave the white flag of surrender to sin.

- I must desire not to sin. (7:15)
- Remind myself daily that Christ demands obedience.

Be Willing to Surrender to God.

We must realize that our ultimate victory comes through our surrender to God.

- Decide that Christ is the only one who can take away my sin. (7:25)

You don't need more will power, you need another power working in your life. John R. W. Stott, on this text in Romans: "Indeed, an honest and humble acknowledgment of the hopeless evil of our flesh, even after the new birth, is the first step to holiness. To speak quite plainly, some of us are not leading holy lives for the simple reason that we have too high an opinion of ourselves." John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New*(Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), p. 74.

- Determine daily to renew my mind. (12:2)

We renew our mind by watching what comes into our mind. We must keep some things out and other things in. We must, for example, renew our minds by reading God's Word every day, joining others for the study of God's Word, and praying for the power to avoid temptation.

Sometimes we must fight sin. Sometimes we must flee sin. Always we must focus upon our Saviour.

John Owen was a Puritan. In the 1600's he wrote a series of books on sin. The first he called The Mortification of Sin. (Putting Sin to Death)

As John Owen puts it, "If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish . . . can we expect a comfortable event?"