

The War Within, Part 1

Romans 7:14-25

Intro

All religions are essentially the same...

Is a popular sentiment at least in the West. At the end of the day we are all just making our way up the same mountain to God

Scratch a little and it all falls apart. Radically different views about who God is - is he one? Is he many? Simply a divine flow? Or consider Jesus - mere prophet of the Muslim? created being of the Mormon? Or the eternal, second person of the Godhead of the Christian? POP QUIZ - YES

No, no silly on the face of it and one of those massive differences is the idea of sin

Hinduism - there is no concept of "original sin" - that we are born in sin and - rather sin is a violation of moral codes which brings negative consequences upon the sinner that effect one's Karma and the idea of sin being against God in any absolute sense

Buddhism - sin is completely disconnected from God and again is simply actions that create negative consequences that affect one's karma and sense of spiritual well-being

Rise of Witchcraft and Paganism - no meaningful concept of sin at all

Even atheists wrestle with good and evil - no sin just societal goods or harms - pragmatic - malleable moralities - utterly incomprehensible

The Bible teaches though that sin is not simply unethical or immoral actions that bring negative consequence into my life - though that can certainly be true. Sin is any and every violation of God the Creator's will for our lives that places us in opposition to God and therefore under his judgment.

Goes even deeper. As we explore Scripture, we discover a dire diagnosis. We are sinners because we commit sin - we commit sin because down in the deepest core of our existence we are sinful - we are born in sin

These are not easy things to understand and are difficult to speak of. There is much to wrestle with and we should avoid cheap answers to real doubts and questions. Insomuch as we present a simple, faithful teaching of Scripture by explaining that sin is wrong done in violation of God's will that brings his righteous and holy judgment - we have spoken truly but the reality goes far deeper - the reality is far more pervasive and awful

Objectively sin is rebellion against God BUT it also an active force, an oppressive power, a tyrant that wars against us!

We don't have the resources in and of ourselves to wage war. Trying harder to be good can't cut it. Working to do good things can't overcome this enemy.

THERE IS A WAR WITHIN! That's what our text is about. This week and next week - resume in the new year. Let's read our text - these divinely inspired words that reveal the realities of sin and the war within. Prepare our hearts and minds to hear and receive for this is the Word of God

READ TEXT

God tells us the unvarnished truth about sin because wants us to understand the seriousness of our problem for only then will we cry out for his solution - the Christ and know the fulsome liberation and salvation of his grace

3 observations about sin: 1. Sin Deceives Us 2. Sin Exerts Influence Over Us 3. Sin Incapacitates Us

I. Sin Confuses Us (14-15)

- A. At the beginning of chapter 7, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, presents the law of God - his commandments and requirements as an entity that holds us in captivity
 - 1. A reality that we are only able to die to in Christ - an overlord from which we must be released so that we serve God - not by checking off to-do lists in order to gain his acceptance but from the heart - in the power of the Holy Spirit
- B. In v. 7 Paul answers an obvious objection - is the law then sin? After all, in Chapter 6 he declares that all of us born in Adam are slaves to sin - that in order to be set free from sin we must trust Christ and find liberation in his death and resurrection - sounds a little bit like the way Paul describes the Law.
 - 1. "by no means" and he explains v. 7-13 - in essence the problem is not inherent in the law - no it is holy, righteous, and good - the problem lies within us - the problem is the reality of sin in our lives and the way we, in our sin, respond to the law
 - a) The commands of God arrive in our lives and instead of saying "yes Lord" - the internal reality of sin is awakened and aggravated and more sin is produced and death blossoms it's putrid flower of destruction in our souls
 - (1) The law does not solve the problem of sin - it wakes us up to our sin
 - (a) You shall not covet - fundamental - the command comes and we see violation of God's commandment all over the place

Illustration: that which we thought was a treasure - Spotlight on the cockroach - pincers snatching at our faces

- C. The Law puts the darkness of deadly sin in stark relief so that we see just how exceedingly sinful it is - v. 13 shown to be sinful beyond measure
- D. Our text v. 14 "for we know the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin"
 - 1. "We" know - invites his readers into this discussion
 - 2. but I "am" - the tense changes - in v. 7-13 Paul speaks in the present tense "I would not have known sin," "sin came alive and I died," "sin seizing an opportunity killed me" - in v. 14-25 Paul speaks beings speaking in the present tense - I "am."
 - 3. So, begins in v. 14-25 what is broadly understood to be one of the most controversial passages in the whole letter. What is Paul describing here? Set aside presuppositions in my study of 12 commentators, 12 smart guys — A few options - 2 main ones

- a) The most natural reading is that this is Paul's current experience with sin in his life and he is presenting himself as an example of what the Christian life looks like
 - (1) Difficult because he says for instance in v. 14 - I am of the flesh sold under sin - a slave to sin, or v. 18 I do not have the ability to do what is good - and one must ask Paul - aren't we set free from slavery to sin in Christ as stated in chapter 6? Don't we now by the Spirit have the ability to do what is good 7:6?
- b) A second option is that this is Paul before he became a Christian
 - (1) Is a Christian sold under sin? Doesn't talk about the Holy Spirit in v. 14-25
 - (2) It is a bit confusing to read as he speaks in the present tense but more he speaks of being aware of sin and opposed to sin aware of his wretchedness in sin and desiring to come out of it - which is not the psychology of those outside of Christ Further he speaks in v. 16 that he agrees the law is good and v. 22 I delight in the law of God in my inner being

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (Romans 8:7)

- (a) The difference between a theologian and a pastor is that a pastor needs to make up his mind!
- c) A helpful place to land to inform how we read and understand our text
 - (1) We see in Galatians 5:17 that Christians do experience a continuing war with sin within ourselves even after our conversion

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5:17)

- (a) The difference is that for the Christian as opposed to the non-Christian - there is not utter defeat in our war against indwelling sin - there are victories and progress as move towards the absolute and total cleansing from sin at the return of Christ
- (2) Paul has been engaging with the Law and it's utter inability to free us from our sin - so it is important to see that one main thing Paul is after is to show us the impotence of the Law in our fight against sin in order to prepare us for the way we can fight and kill sin in Chapter 8 when he highlights the reality and the effect of the Holy Spirit's power at work in our lives in the war against sin - in fact he has already directed us to this in 7:6
- (3) Proceed with 2 things in mind
 - (a) Those apart from divine grace experience the realities of sin without deliverance from sin
 - (b) Those in Christ experience the realities of sin but with hope and deliverance in this war within
 - i) I hold to the broadly held, classic, reformed view that this is Paul the Christian

- E. Back to v. 14 (this is why 2 weeks- could be 2 months) - the law is spiritual but I am of the flesh, sold under sin
 - 1. The law comes from God - out of his spiritual existence and is therefore itself spiritual as delivered by God

2. I am of the flesh - a human with passions and desires that still experience the corruption of sin - and though the Christian comes out of Adam and into Christ by faith we are still in the flesh with its passions and desires at work until Christ returns
 - a) Those outside of Christ enslaved to sin - those in Christ while a justified, new creation - continuing to experiencing the oppression of sin - don't need to tell you!
- F. v. 15 This being in the flesh and sold under sin expresses itself in psychological disorder and confusion - I do not understand my own actions
 1. I don't do the good that I want to do
 2. Rather I find myself doing things that I hate
 - a) And all the people say "amen" for surely everyone in this room know this experience
 - (1) I can't believe I did that!
 - (2) Why did I say that?
 - (3) What was I thinking?
 - (4) I was so resolved against clicking on that website but suddenly my resolve evaporated. I was going to be so careful about what I ate today and then I alighted upon a cache of Twix bars and the next thing I knew I have a right Twix and a left Twix - one for each grubby, little paw

Illustration: Making a list at my job - nothing came of it - utter defeat - as a Christian still experience the realities of sin that is still present

- G. Truly the road to hell is paved with good intentions
- H. We resolve to do what is good and right but there's this other - in effect "mind" at work - confusing and subverting our will - Paul says that is the presence of sin
- I. Application
 1. Sin confuses us - it deceives us as it works within us - covers over and justifies wrong and masks reality
 - a) I'm not angry I'm just frustrated
 - b) I'm not lusting I'm just enjoying beauty
 - c) I'm not coveting I just like the finer things
 - d) I'm not selfish - I'm being wise with my money
 - e) I'm not harsh and self-righteous - I'm standing up for what's right

II. Sin Exerts Influence Over Us (16-17)

- A. v. 16 if I do what I do not want to do - I agree the law is good - what's he saying here
 1. If I see the Law and desire to do it than I acknowledge that it is good objectively by my right desire to do it
 2. I don't do the good than that objective standard is violated and the law remains good but I myself am a sinner
- B. V. 17 now it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells in me - SORT OF A HEAD SCRATCHER - Paul are you saying that I am off the hook - not responsible for the wrong I do - sort of like "the devil made me do it"
 1. "I" in the sense of the intellect - I don't want to do that which is sinful but I still do which means there's something else at work in me beyond mere intellect

- a) There are desires, emotions, feelings that are twisted and manipulated by sin that dwells within me - sin that lives, resides, dwells inside of me exerting influence over my actions
- b) The commands of God come and we may say yes that is good and right - even the most skeptical agnostic hears "Love your neighbor" and agrees that this is a good idea
 - (1) We often fail in our execution of doing what is good - our will is affected by indwelling sin - it exerts influence over us
 - (a) We must be aware that sin dwells in us - for the Christian the power broken and the presence remains - God wants us to be aware of what's going on within us in our struggle against sin

Illustration: Monster within that effects our will. In Costa Rica there is a massive arachnid called the golden orb weaver spider - yellow with pincer like legs and as wide across as an adult's fist but in Costa Rica there is another creature known as the "zombie wasp" who preys upon the golden orb weaver spider. The zombie wasp uses this spider as the host for its larvae. Here's how she does it: She finds a spider, injects it with a mind-altering toxin and then attaches an egg to the host. The egg hatches unbeknownst to the host and it begins to feed on the spider and inject it with a different chemical that puts the spider under a kind of spell - a chemical that exerts influence over the mind of the spirit - the spider actually changes its normal way of weaving its web and creates a new kind of web that serves as a cocoon for the baby wasp. Sin injects its poisons into our wills - it lives within us.

2. Sound horrific? IT IS!

- C. Doesn't mean that no one ever does good or noble things - even the hardened atheist - does mean that the reality of sin is always at hand - often functioning in the background corrupting even our best efforts with selfish self-interest - sometimes coming to the fore and presenting itself in all its ugliness
- D. Application
 - 1. We must know this enemy - that we would not be deceived about what we are up against - how kind of God to show us what we are up against.
 - a) Sin deceives us, sin exerts influence over us

III. Sin Incapacitates Us (18-20)

- A. v. 18 - I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh - in and of myself outside of Christ
 - 1. I have the desire to do what is right - most people aren't sociopaths - not the ability to carry it out
 - a) In and of ourselves - apart from divine grace - we are unable to do sufficient good to please God - ultimately unable to muster up enough innate resources to obey God sufficiently.
 - (1) Remember the context - using the Law - using adherence to rules to fight sin and gain God's acceptance

Illustration: Massive horde arrives on the horizon and charges us and seeking to use the Law to fight that terrible enemy is like pulling out a cork-gun - pop...

- B. The problem is deeper and direr than we naturally assume - I do wrong things sometimes so I'm sometimes a sinner - here we find that I sin because of an inherent reality of sin within me - it renders me in myself powerless

- C. Apart from the grace of God we are utterly unable to ultimately do what is right with perfect consistency - unable and apart from grace unwilling - a terrible plight - utterly needy and insufficient to fight this war within. We are incapacitated

D. Application

1. In the face of the terrible realities of our sin We need someone to deliver us! WE NEED A SAVIOR!

a) Can't restrain myself - can't wait till next week to get to these verses

[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! (Romans 7:24-25a)

2. OH, HOW PRECIOUS CHRIST IS TO US IN THE FACE OF OUR SIN. THE SON OF GOD - THE SINLESS ONE WHO RANSOMS THOSE ENSLAVED TO SIN AND SETS WITHIN US HIS SPIRIT!

a) CALL TO UNBELIEVERS - if God is showing you something of the reality of your sin this morning it is his mercy - FLY, FLY TO CHRIST AND trust in him - his substitutionary death on the cross where he bore the wrath of God for your sin

3. BELOVED Don't coddle sin - don't mess around with this dread enemy who deceives, exerts its evil influence and incapacitates - it aims to kill you - FIGHT! MAKE WAR! More in future weeks

a) Not more law - accountability - no ability to arm us with strength

(1) Cast yourself daily upon Christ - he is the one who is able - the Spirit supplied to empower us in this war within

Application: Tug of war against a giant - then Christ enters the scene - wraps his arms around us and grabs the rope

(2) Today I will go to war

4. Those of sensitive conscience pursuing holiness

The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact of his continuing sinfulness, the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is offend more subtly disguised than formerly. (Charles Cranfield, ICC: Romans, p. 358)

5. Not condemnation - Christ would be more precious - the gospel more glorious

a) Not a Christian - a war that you cannot win - Christian - a war you cannot lose

6. He is coming - when we see him, we will be like him - he will hold us fast - he will strengthen us to endure and persevere to the end

7. Oh, come Lord Jesus - freed from sinning O the glorious thought!

Close

Sin is far worse than we are inclined to imagine but listen - where sin abounds God's grace super-abounds

Take sin seriously - not become complacent

Alert and aware - yes of our sin - but more his grace - his power at work in us - his arms of mercy upholding us.

Until the day he comes. Let us be those who stand in the fight displaying the victory of his grace in our lives - magnifying the goodness and glory of Christ. Amen

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