

Have you ever noticed that there often seems to be a contradiction... in what the Bible says about us... and what we know about us...? Do you see a difference between what God says we are... and what we appear to be?

(Here is what I mean by that.) The Bible says that we are complete in Him... and yet (is it not true) that most of us feel incomplete? The Bible also says that we are overcomers... and yet don't many of us feel overcome? The Bible says that we have peace that passes understanding... and yet... many of us are worried... and distraught... and upset.

Are you starting to see what I am asking...? Scripture tells us that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us... and yet many believers are living lives of defeat. ... He says that by faith we have overcome the world... and yet the world seems to be overcoming us.

The Bible says one thing about us... and yet our experience says something else about us. ... The Bible describes us one way... but experience tells us that we're not that way.

Romans seven directly tackles the most difficult dilemma that Christians face: If we are redeemed... why do we fail to live up to the Bible's clearly-stated expectations? ... Why do we fail to live up to the standards that we expect of ourselves? ... Why are the pathways of our lives strewn with so many potholes that jar our anticipation of a smooth journey? Is something wrong...?

Before we get into the answers that we will find in Romans chapter seven... let me tell you that the first part of the answer takes us back to the discussion we had two weeks ago... when we looked at verses 1-14 of Romans chapter six. ... As we open chapter seven... it will continue Paul's exhortation for us to consider our selves as being "*dead in Christ.*"

Do you remember this discussion two weeks ago...? (Go ahead and nod your head...) ... When did we die...? ... As believers... you and I died when Jesus died. We died with Him. His death had our names on it. We were crucified with Christ.

We will get to Romans seven in just a minute (I promise you)... but first I want you to look at Colossians 3:3-5 with me for a moment.

Colossians 3:3-5 (ESV)

³ *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

⁴ *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* ⁵ *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Verse three here and verse five sound like they contradict one another. (Verse 3 says: "*For you **HAVE** died...*" – then verse 5 tells us: "*Put to death what is earthly in you...*") ... Well... which is it...? ... (I mean)... How can we put to death - what has **already** died...?

The answer to that ("*How can we put to death what has already died?*") will help us understand what Paul is saying in Romans chapter seven. ... So let me explain. ... Yes... We have indeed died with Christ. It is done. But this death is not ours in reality... until we personally appropriate it to our life. ... It will not have an effect on us unless we appropriate this truth. ... You may say... "*OK... I'll appropriate it... if you tell me what that means...*" ... (We

really need to understand what appropriating His death means... in order for us to gain the most benefit from Romans seven. ... So let me go there.)

The best way to explain “appropriate” would be for me to call your attention back... to when God gave to the Jews the Promised Land... and He spoke to Joshua... (who was leading the children of Israel out of the wilderness... and into the Land of Canaan.) ... He said to Joshua... “*every place that the soul of your foot shall tread upon... **that** have I given to you...*” ... Very interesting. He said, “*go in there and possess your possessions.*” ... He didn’t say... “*every place that the sole of your foot tread upon I **will** give you...*” ... He said, “it’s already yours...”

So let me ask now... was it theirs? ... Well... it was... and it wasn’t. ... I mean... they were outside... (they had not possessed it.) ... Was it theirs? ... Sort of. ... God had given it to them... but yet they did not have it in experience. (It was not real to them... until they put “*the foot of faith on the work of God*”... until they entered it and defeated all their enemies. ... (You see)... they had to “appropriate” what was already true!

Now coming back to Romans chapter seven. Paul wants his readers to appropriate their death with Christ. (Take personal possession of it!) ... **THIS**... and a right understanding about the Law... is part of the answer to - “*Why do we fail to live up to the Bible’s clearly- stated expectations?*” ... Romans chapter seven’s answer... is that we must make sure that we have appropriated the right MOTIVATION and DYNAMIC of our Spiritual life. ... (LISTEN FOLKS! - “*Make sure that your ladder is leaning against the right wall.*” Have the right drive... energy... and enthusiasm!)

Romans 7:1-4

Now... here's an interesting thing. I thought that chapter seven would be a discussion about living a life of victory. Why(?)... all of a sudden... is Paul writing about a man... and a woman... and marriage... and death... and adultery...? ... Has Paul changed topics on us... and now wants to teach about marriage...? ... No! He is only using this as an illustration... as a means for us to see that there is a death that we must appropriate... and it is a death to the law.

Well... why do I need to die to the Law? I'm not a Jew. I can see why this may have been meaningful to the Jews who were in Paul's original audience... but what does this have to do with me...?

ANSWER: The law that Paul is writing about... represents all of our self efforts to please God. It is not just the Jewish Law that is being discussed. (LISTEN!) Even if you are not Jewish... there are several laws of nature that all of mankind tries to abide by... as though we expect some reward or payoff... by obeying it.

C. S. Lewis argued that all persons recognize and feel bound to live by a certain moral standard. Lewis called it "*the law of human nature*," and he illustrated it from the way people argue. They say things like, "*How'd you like it if anyone did the same to you?*" ... "*That's my seat, I was there first*" ... "*Leave him alone; he isn't doing you any harm*" ... "*Give me a bit of your orange; I gave you a bit of mine*" ... or "*Come on, you promised.*" ... Lewis believed... (and I am sure he is right)... that statements like this show that all people (everywhere) recognize a standard of behavior to which they and others are supposed to measure up.

These facts of human behavior show that (in a certain sense) the Gentile... as well as the Jew... is "under some sort of law" ... and knows himself to be condemned by it. ... Therefore the problem that Paul is dealing with in Romans 7 is a universal human problem. We must appropriate our death to the law.

What exactly does it mean that we are dead to the law? ... To be "dead to the Law" does not mean that we lead lawless lives. It simply means that the motivation and dynamic of our lives... does not come from the Law. ... We do not draw our life and peace from it. Our motive used to be FEAR... (fear of not performing well enough.) ... But now... our motivation comes from our union with Christ... we have been resurrected with Him unto new life. We have experienced His grace.. and the Holy Spirit uses THAT to energize and now motivate us. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... this is only part of the answer that we are seeking from Romans chapter seven this morning. ... Another part of the answer comes from a right understanding of the law. ... (You see) being dead to the law does not mean that the law is worthless. The law didn't die. We died to it... and we should understand why the law didn't die... The law is still good. It still serves God's purpose. ... (Let's see what that is.)

Romans 7:5-7

(LISTEN!) The Law reveals sin. The Law (whether it is the Mosaic Law... or human conscious)... shows that the bad things we do are an offense to God. ... (You see)... the problem is... that if left to ourselves... none of us would ever conclude (on our own) that we are sinners. ... Who believes

that his or her every inclination is to do evil? (ANSWER) - No one believes it... apart from a supernatural illumination of his or her mind.

#1. The Law reveals sin.

#2. The Law arouses sin. (“Huh?”)

This one will take some explaining. (I mean) Why would God want to have sin in us aroused...? But first let me read the verses that tell us that this is true.

Romans 7:8-9

The law arouses sin... but let’s all realize that the rebellion has been in our hearts all along. When the law comes... this dormant rebellion is aroused from it’s slumber... and we discover who we really are at heart. ... [PAUSE]

So far... we see that God gave the Law to accomplish two objectives.

First... the Law exposes our sins. God gave His Law to confront us with our sin... so that we might repent and come to Him in faith. ... Second... the Law calls up what exists inside our hearts... to show us our utter inability to help ourselves... and it proves our need for God to change our hearts.

Years ago... one of the first high-rise hotels to open in Galveston, Texas, sat directly above the Gulf — so close to the water (in fact)... the staff worried that people would want to drop their fishing lines into the water from the guest-room balconies. ... First-story glass windows... high winds... and large lead sinkers were certain to be a bad combination... so the management placed a sign in each room facing the ocean: “Absolutely no fishing from the balcony.”

What happened? ... You guessed it. ... Guests in the first-story restaurant dined... to the frequent smack of lead weights against the plate-glass windows. ... Sometimes the glass literally cracked. ... Finally... the people managing the hotel realized their error... and made a wise decision. ... They removed all the signs in the guest rooms. ... (And Just Like That !) Problem solved! ... No one ever fished from the balconies again.

- #1. The Law reveals sin.
- #2. The Law arouses sin.
- #3.** The law kills.

This third one will also require a little explanation... as to why it is good.

Romans 7:10-11

The third good thing the law does... is that it brings us to the end of ourselves — to "death."

There was a time in Paul's life when Paul was certain that he was in good standing before God... even though he wasn't. ... We know what Paul thought of himself before God began to work with him... because he tells about it in the third chapter of Philippians.

Did Paul think he was a sinner in those days (when he was going around hating Christians and killing some)...? – No! Not at all! ... On the contrary... he thought that he was a very moral man. ... He says that as far as "legalistic righteousness" is concerned he considered himself to be "faultless" (Phil. 3:6). ... But what we just read in Romans 7... is that it was **only** as the law began to work on him — starting with the words "*Do not covet*" — that he saw himself as a sinner.

Paul gives his personal testimony here in Romans ... saying that this commandment came home to him.

He had known it before. (He had known not to covet from his youth.) ... But now he began to understand the commandment... and with this... all of his self-righteousness and self-confidence... began to melt away. The words he used at the end of verse 11 are - "It killed me."

When the law finally began to get through to Paul... he saw (1) that he was guilty... and (2) that his nature was such that (instead of wanting to keep it)... he actually wanted to break it. ... Instead of driving sin out... the law awakened sin. ... And Paul saw how hopeless his sinful condition was.

You see! As long as Paul thought he was doing all right... he was (actually) on his way to hell. ... It was only when he learned he was lost... that he was ready to hear God's words about the Savior.

The law can never save anyone. Living up to your own moral code (whatever that is) will not save you. ... (LISTEN!)... if you have been thinking of yourself as a fairly decent person who has never sinned all that badly — who generally measures up to whatever moral standards seem reasonable — and believe that God should bless you in life... (and maybe even receive you into heaven)... sin has deceived you and you have not even begun to understand the law. Sin has made you think that everything is fine... when actually you are perishing.

And Christian(!) If you are reading your Bible... and seeing rules and regulations that you need to muster all of your own strength to obey... your ladder is leaning against the wrong wall! If you read such things as "Love

your enemies”... or “consider others as more important than yourself”... your first thought needs to be “I can’t do this on my own! I must come to an end of myself. I must die and be united to Christ, so that I can!”

#1. The Law reveals sin.

#2. The Law arouses sin.

#3. The law kills. (It brings us to an end of ourselves.) ... NEXT

#4. (from verses 12-13)... The Law shows the dreadfulness of sin.

Unsaved people know that there is such a thing as sin... but they do not realize the sinfulness of sin. Many Christians do not realize the true nature of sin. ... We excuse our sins with words like "*mistakes*" or "*weaknesses*"; but God condemns our sins and tries to get us to see how catastrophic they really are. ... Until we realize how wicked sin really is... we will never want to oppose it and live in victory. Hmmm... "*Why do we fail to live up to the Bible’s clearly- stated expectations?*" ... Until we realize how wicked sin really is... we will never want to oppose it and live in victory.

Romans 7:12-13

Not very long ago... people didn’t find out about their cancer until it was too late. The first symptoms usually led to very bad news from the doctor. Then someone invented the MRI (a marvelous machine that quickly and accurately probes the patient’s flesh... and yields a detailed image of his or her body.) ... A trained eye can then examine the image and locate cancerous tumors - long before the patient presents any symptoms.... If the MRI leads to a diagnosis of cancer... the patient would be foolish to blame the machine for the illness. ... If anything... that patient should be thankful that the problem was discovered early enough to be treated.

In essence... Paul said...

“I did not know that I was dying from the disease of sin... until the Law revealed my terminal condition. Furthermore... the Law showed me that I loved my disease... and that I would do anything to keep it. ... I was like a living dead man! ... By pointing out my problem... the Law demonstrated that I was living under a death sentence.”

The Law is God’s diagnostic tool. Its purpose is to expose the disease of sin and to confront us with the prognosis: The disease is **deadly** if not treated... but it’s completely curable. ... Does the Law cause death? ... No more than the MRI causes cancer. ... [P A U S E] ...

Once the Law has done it’s job... by bringing us to an end of ourselves... showing us the need for a savior... and once we have come to Christ)... the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the believer. ... And **so begins** the internal struggle. ... (LISTEN!)... The flesh continues to serve sin... while (at the same time) the Spirit serves righteousness. (Look how this is...)

Romans 7:14-24

Paul’s description of his personal struggle with the old nature paints a bleak picture of the future - for the average Christian - doesn’t it? ... The struggle Paul speaks of... is a struggle we all face and will continue to face — if we are Christians. ... And the defeat he speaks of... is the experience of us all (as we acknowledged at the beginning of this message.)

Most experts agree that cold-turkey withdrawal from heroin addiction is one of the most excruciating ordeals a person can endure. Bone and muscle pain... insomnia... diarrhea... vomiting... and shock-like symptoms usually peak two or three days after the last dose... and usually take more than a

week to subside. ... The physical anguish would be enough without the psychological trauma the addict suffers. ... Yet... even after enduring the torment of withdrawal and moving beyond physical dependence upon the drug... many return to using. ... The problems that encouraged the addict to escape into heroin... are still present. ... And the craving for relief becomes too much to bear alone.

Anyone who has experienced physical dependence upon anything will affirm that the craving is never far away. Even chronic smokers who have kicked the habit tell me that, years later, they sometimes long to enjoy a cigarette after a good meal. That's why drug treatment experts are unanimous in their opinion: Treating the body to overcome physical dependence is only a beginning. The key to lifelong sobriety lies in treating the mind, which is itself a lifelong endeavor. The addict is never really "cured." The addiction will always be a part of his or her life. However, addicts can remain "in recovery" forever.

All of us are chronically addicted to sin. Long after we are saved... our bodies crave that which gave us short-term pleasure... and caused long-term anguish. ... And the pull to indulge the craving for sin... will always be a part of our lives... until we get to Glory.

Paul is not writing these words to excuse our defeat... still less to encourage it. ... He is thinking of the victory that can (and will) be ours (which is the subject of Romans chapter 8)). ... He wants us to achieve victory in the struggle against sin by the Holy Spirit. ... But the point here... is that the victory we want... comes only through this struggle (and not by some secret formula for success... or by some easy way of avoiding it.)

This is so important that I need to repeat it. ... The victory we want... comes only through this struggle

But Boy(!) do we have our ways of trying to avoid this struggle. ... One of the primary ways that we try to avoid struggle in the Christian life... is by hunting for some easy formula that will bring victory. ... This takes various forms: discovering a Christian book that will tell us what to do... following a three-step or four-step recipe for growth in the Christian life... ceasing to do some easy things (like going to movies)... or starting to do more difficult things (like attending seminars).

The underlying motivation for these attempts is what we should call "lazy optimism." By that I mean — the expectation that life is meant to be easy... not hard. ... So... if we do find the Christian life hard... we assume that we are merely missing the right formula. ... Someone should be able to tell us what the formula is. If we do not find it... (and we never will... if ease is what we are seeking)... we tend to get angry with our instructors or even with God.

(LISTEN!)... there is no substitute for... or an escape from... the fight against sin. ... It is an inescapable part of the lifelong process of becoming more and more holy.

(PLEASE HEAR ME!) ... Growing in holiness is the process of increasingly coming to see how sinful we are... so that we will depend constantly on Jesus Christ. We are to appropriate our death... and union to Christ. ... Daily coming to an end of ourselves and learning to depend on Christ ... is why the Christian life is a warfare. It is extremely important that we see this.

1. *When God called us to be united to Christ... He called us to lifetime struggles against sin.*

2. *Although we are called to a lifetime struggle against sin... we are nevertheless **never** going to achieve victory - by ourselves.*

Our primary purpose is to know Jesus Christ personally with ever-deepening intimacy. If we read Scripture... pray... meditate... journal... or fast... let us do it for the sole purpose of knowing the mind of Christ. ... If we worship... serve... partake of Communion... or spend time in the company of believers - let us learn more (and more) about Christ from observing His transforming work in others. ... If we feed the poor... defend the weak... comfort the lonely... or proclaim the gospel to a broken and needy world - let our walking in His sandals give us firsthand knowledge of His character.... Let every trial or triumph bring us closer to knowing Christ's nature... and understanding His purposes. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

The Christian life is not easy. No responsible person ever said it was. It is a battle all the way. ... But there is deliverance!

Romans 7:25

Imagine a boxer after a fifteen-round pummeling. With months of training... hype... and dreams of championship glory down the drain... he stands exhausted... demoralized... barely able to see through the swelling around his eyes... and barely able to breathe with a couple of ribs fractured. And to make matters worse... he must take his place in the middle of the ring to hear his defeat announced to the crowd.

The fight Paul described had left him wretched. Unable to defeat his flesh by means of his flesh... that is... by his own ability — he cried out for help. What... (other than death)... can free him from a body that craves sin more powerfully than his mind craves righteousness? ... Who will rescue him from his misery? ... The answer comes quickly (verse 25 here): "*God through Jesus Christ our Lord*"

In the midst of our struggles we are sometimes brought to the very edge of despair... to use Paul's word in 2 Corinthians. ... But if you are close to that point and are thinking negatively (as most of us do at times)... I want to say this: *Although the struggle is a real one and difficult... the outcome is not bleak or uncertain but glorious — **because of God.***

That is what Paul comes to at the very end of Romans 7. After he has reached the absolute low point... asking, "*Who will rescue me from this body of death?*" he answers with a strong and sudden emotion of gratitude: "*Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" ... That is... although the apostle was not able to find even the smallest ground for a hope of victory within himself... even at his weakest point... the end is not grim... because (as a Christian)... he knows that God is for him. ... God has assured every believer victory through the work of Christ.

If you are struggling against sin — as I know you are... if you are a true Christian — that is what I want to leave with you from Romans 7. *The reason for your struggle is to teach you to rely - not on yourself - but on God... Who raises the dead. ... And what I want you to be assured of is that He has already delivered you from "deadly peril," and that He will deliver you again.*

Because the believer is united to Christ... he is dead to the Law and no longer under its authority. But he is alive to God and able to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit. The explanation of this victory is given in Romans 8... where we will pick up next week... and continue this discussion.