

Romans 7:22-23 Every believer has an unchanging problem to solve. Pentecost 7 July 31, 2011  
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Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from Jesus Christ who leads us in the battle. Amen.  
The Apostle Paul wrote about his own personal struggle with sin in Romans 7:22-23  
Lord Jesus, the victor over sin and death, move us to seek Your help daily in our battle against our sinful thoughts and actions. May Your Word not only guide us, but help us grow in faith through Your forgiveness and truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Warriors in Christ in the battle,

Two weeks ago we read from Romans 5 that all people have inherited a sinful nature from Adam. It hurt us individually and it has brought devastation and death to the entire world. Only Christ could reverse this curse, which He did when as our Savior He died and put an end to the power of sin and death. In Christ we will enjoy the final victory when he makes us perfect in heaven. Last week we read in Romans 6 that Christ's victory makes a difference for us now. Through faith we are united with Christ so that we may live a new life. God has given us the privilege and ability to serve Him with a new heart. But in Romans chapter 7, Paul describes the conflict that rages within us between the new godly nature and the sinful nature. As much as we want sin to go away, it is like a chronic disease or injury, with us for life.

### **Every believer has an unchanging problem to solve.**

**Only believers have this problem.** Unbelievers might have a guilty conscience from the knowledge of God's law. But only Christians have the gift of a new nature that is ours by the Holy Spirit the moment we come to faith in Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 7 about the new nature: "*I have the desire to do what is good*" (v.18) and "*In my inner being I delight in God's law.*" (v.22) Paul also told Christians: "*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.*" (Ephesians 2:10) He wrote, "*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*" (Ephesians 5:8-11) Jesus said, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:16) With our new nature, we want to know and do God's will. Every one of us according to our new nature delights to find ways to express love to our God who saved us from death and hell. If only old nature was gone or at least powerless, what joy we would have every day in praising and serving God.

**But, sin within us opposes our new life.** Paul and we can reflect on our lives and see a pattern. The good he wanted to do, he didn't do. The evil he didn't want to, that he did. Picture someone in a river with a strong current trying to swim upstream. It would be hard to stay in the same place, and worse move forward. Every time Paul wanted to good, his evil nature worked against him. (v.21) Paul wanted to serve God, but nature wanted to be self-serving. He wanted to honor God with his mouth, but instead he had a tongue too quick to condemn or say hurtful things. His eyes wanted to see things God's way, but instead he desired to follow the sinful temptations. The real trouble was not in his mouth or eyes but in his heart.

It's the same for us. Jesus warned, "*You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.'* But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28) "*Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder ...theft, ... and slander.*" (Matthew 15:19) Here is our Christian challenge: We are to fight against and overthrow the evil desires that so often control us so we can live for God. This is sanctification for Christians. We're already saved by faith in Christ. God declared us innocent because of His completed work. Now we are told to live as God's people in Christ. How are we doing? Maybe we don't swear as much as we used to. Maybe we are learning to be more patient. Maybe our eyes don't lead us to covet as often as in the past. Maybe we've learned to be

more content and not to complain about life. But, that still doesn't take away the evil in us or our selfish desires and attitudes. Even if we could have an ideal day when we accomplished much good, sinful pride would give the credit to us instead of God.

Paul pictures sin working against our new nature like someone who has captured us. We're like prisoners under sin's control. So, picture a family. They want to encourage each other or have some fun together, but tyrant makes them fight. Picture people! Instead of doing work and helping one another, the tyrant commands them to be lazy and not do anything for anyone. We can recognize the problem of sin, but we often don't have the power to go against it. Paul wrote that it was "*waging war against the law of [his] mind and making [him] a prisoner.*" (v.23) As Christians, many times we have planned to do something good, but evil, like a watchdog, is fully alert and too often stops us.

We can relate to Paul's words: "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*" (v.24) I read of a new competition where people race carrying tree trunks and have to compete for days without sleep. Many of those racing give up. They don't have the endurance. What can we do as Christians as we carry the dead weight of our sinful nature? Should we give up our life of faith or set lower expectations for our lives than what God demands? By no means! We cannot be satisfied with a lack of sanctification even though we will never live perfectly in this life.

**Jesus has a solution to our unsolvable problem.** We trust in Christ's full and free forgiveness so we can say, "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (v.25) God's help was there for Paul the moment that he despaired of his own power. Earlier we pictured a swimmer trying to go upstream against a strong current. What a difference if that swimmer was thrown a life-line so he could be pulled to his destination! That is what God has done for us through His Word.

He works in us so we repent of our sins. The Holy Spirit convicts us and troubles our conscience so that we long for Jesus' forgiveness. His death daily creates us in a heart clean from sin and His perfection covers our failures of Christian living. Also, God's Word guides us and gives power to our faith. So we read and hear it as often as we can. Paul wrote that through the Word "*We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" (2 Corinthians 10:5) The Bible also reminds us of our baptism, where our old nature should be drowned by daily repentance so that the new nature thrives. (Rom. 6)

The Bible states, "*We do not lose heart... Inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*" (2 Corinthians 4:16-17) On the last day the Savior will provide us with glorified bodies with no sinful natures. On that day we will serve God perfectly with our whole being. We will not be restrained by sin any longer. His will shall completely be our will. And with Christ as our Savior we will share in His victory forever!

All credit goes to God, who guaranteed our triumph through Jesus. Christ by His life and death has defeated sin, our constant enemy. God provides us with the means grace to remain steadfast in our faith and even to gain small victories over sin. In Christ there is no unsolvable problem. Trust in Him and live. Amen.