**Lesson 18: You Are the Problem!**

Text: Romans 7:15-25

**Introduction**

If a child is not feeling well, a parent will use a thermometer to detect a temperature. If the child indeed has a fever, it would be wrong to conclude that the thermometer produced it! It simply reveals that the child has a fever. Neither is the thermometer the solution to the child’s fever. The law works in a similar fashion. It reveals the fact of man’s sin. It did not produce man’s sin problem. Neither is it the solution. Paul has presented this fact in Romans 7:7-14. Some wrongly concluded from Paul’s teaching that the law must be the problem since it brought forth sin and death. Paul defended the law as holy, just, good, and spiritual. We will see in this lesson that Paul used his own experience to demonstrate that man is the problem, not the law. We will also see the only solution to man’s problem. How can you be delivered from the ruling power of sin?

1. **The major question in this section of Romans is whether Paul is describing his experience prior to or after his salvation.** 
   1. Some hold that Paul is describing his miserable state as a Jew who tried to meet the demands of the law in the power of the flesh. It was miserable indeed because it is impossible!
   2. Others hold that Paul is describing his ongoing struggle against sin as a believer. Paul uses present tense verbs throughout this section. While it could be that he is describing his past, it seems to fit best to understand that he is describing his daily battle with the flesh.
   3. While I don’t want us to get bogged down in the debate, it makes a huge difference in the interpretation of the passage. A case has been made on both sides of the issue, but it is beyond the scope of our study to dive into this debate.
   4. In both scenarios, our sinful condition serves to highlight the goodness of the law. This is Paul’s main point. The law is good. I am bad. We can all agree to that!
   5. Additionally, those who hold to the position that it describes his experience prior to salvation also acknowledge that those who have been born again still struggle with sin.
   6. Therefore, we will focus on our ongoing struggle with sin as believers.
2. **Paul’s description of his struggle against sin demonstrates that the problem rested with him rather than the law.** 
   1. There was a major conflict between what he wanted to do and what he actually did. (v. 15) Paul said he didn’t know what he was doing at times. The word *allow* means to understand. Have you ever been asked, “What were you thinking?” If so, I’m sure you had a difficult time giving a valid excuse for your actions. Have you ever asked a child, “Why did you do that?” If so, you most likely received an answer similar to this: “I don’t know!” The things he wanted to do, he did not do. The things he hated, those he did! Can you relate? We all struggle between “willing” and “doing.”
   2. When he did that which wasn’t right, he agreed that the law was good. (v. 16)
   3. When he broke God’s commandments, it was the indwelling power of sin that ruled. (v. 17) Don’t misunderstand. Paul is not finding a way out of personal responsibility. Too many people are shifting blame to their own demise. This is certainly not Paul’s intent in this verse. Rather, he is pinpointing the indwelling power of the sin nature that is within him.
   4. There was nothing good in Paul’s flesh. (v. 18; John 6:63; Philippians 3:3) That goes for all of us for that matter!
      1. He had a desire to do right, but doing it was a different issue. No doubt, as a believer you have desired to read your Bible, pray, witness, and live for the Lord—only to find the pull of your own sinful desires to be against you at every turn! Good intentions are not enough. Will power is insufficient.
      2. You don’t realize how strong your flesh is until you try to go against it!
   5. In the power of the flesh, he failed to do right and instead did wrong. (v. 19)
   6. It is not a problem with the new man, but yielding to sinful impulses that leads to wrongdoing. (v. 20)
   7. He came to this conclusion: When he wanted to do good, evil was present. (v. 21) The reference to a *law* here is not referring to the law of Moses, but rather a life principle.
   8. He was only able to rejoice in the law of God according to the inward man. (v. 22)
      1. It is true that unregenerate Jews have a zeal for the law (Romans 10:3). However, their zeal is not for God as much as it is for their own righteousness (Romans 3:11; 10:4).
      2. The word *delight* means to rejoice in an object. In this context, Paul said that he rejoiced in the law after the *inward man*. This is where the Spirit of God works in us (Ephesians 3:16).
   9. While he rejoiced in the law of God, he encountered serious opposition from within. (v. 23)
      1. Sinful desires waged war against godly desires. This is not an isolated battle. Rather, it is a military campaign. (1 Peter 2:11)
      2. The word *warring* is a military term that means to take the field against an opponent (Friberg).
      3. Your flesh takes a position against everything that is right and good for you! It battles to take you captive. It wants to subdue you! Paul also describes this intense battle in Galatians 5:17.
   10. Left to himself, Paul was in despair. (v. 24) The word *wretched* refers to a feeling of being tormented, miserable, and distressed (Friberg). It can be used to describe believers since it is used to describe the state of the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:17). As long as we are in this body, we will have a continual fight against sin. The battle is often overwhelming!
   11. Thankfully, he was not without hope. He found his hope in Jesus Christ. (v. 25a)
   12. Paul drew this part of his discussion to a conclusion.
       1. When he was thinking right spiritually, he did what God wanted him to do. (v. 25b)
       2. When he was obeying the lusts of the flesh, he did what sin wanted him to do. (v. 25c)
       3. He described the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit. This wonderful truth is developed in chapter 8.
3. **Central Idea: Paul’s description of his struggle against sin demonstrates that deliverance is only possible through Jesus Christ.**
4. **Application: Our struggle against sin demonstrates that deliverance is only possible through Jesus Christ.** 
   1. Until we arrive in God’s presence, we are subject to sin’s influence. It is all around us and in us!
   2. If the study of this chapter did not produce in you a strong desire to depend on Jesus, then you missed it. You have either underestimated the power of your sinful desires or overestimated your ability to overcome them. Your only hope is in Jesus Christ our Lord! You will live a frustrated live until you submit to this truth.
   3. Spiritual growth results when we recognize the truth of this passage. “Recognition of our inability to live up to our deepest spiritual longings (chapter 7) leads us to cast ourselves upon God’s Spirit for power and victory (chapter 8)….Sanctification is a gradual process that repeatedly takes the believer through this recurring sequence of failure through dependency upon self to triumph through the indwelling Spirit.” (Robert Mounce)

**Conclusion**

The law is not the problem. You are. The quicker you arrive at that conclusion, the better. Then, and only then, will you turn from self-reliance to utter dependence upon Jesus Christ. We will see the blessed state of the believers who apply this truth in chapter 8.