

Romans 7

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service this morning.

Those who are watching online, those who are listening in on the telephone, it's good for us to be able to come together in worship of God. Intimations just to say that the evening service should be online just before 6pm this evening.

The YF will meet on Zoom at half past 7 as usual and the prayer meeting again on Wednesday at half past 7 on Zoom. Be encouraged to come along to that meeting.

We'll begin our time of worship now and we'll sing to God's praise. We sing from Psalm 25, we sing from verses 4 to verse 9. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy path so teach thou me, and do thou lead me in thy truth therein my teacher be.

Down to the end of verse 9 to God's praise. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy path so teach thou me, and do thou lead me in thy truth therein my teacher be.

[1 : 34] For thou art God that dost to me salvation send, and I upon thee all the day expecting to attend.

Thy tender mercies, O Lord, I pray thee to remember.

My sins and faults of youth do thou, O Lord, forget.

After thy mercy, O Lord, I pray thee to be. After thy mercy, think on me, and for thy goodness great. God good and upright is, the way he'll send us show.

[3 : 04] The meek in judgment he will guide, and make his path to know.

Let's unite to our hearts and bear. Let's pray together. Our heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, and we thank you for your word once more as we open it, and as we sing it, and as we take some time to study it and meditate upon it.

We thank you, Lord, that you are the God who has revealed yourself to us. You are the God who shows us the way and who shows us your ways.

We thank you, Lord, that we open Scripture, not simply for our intellectual stimulation or for our entertainment, but we open Scripture with a view to knowing the ways of God.

And we ask, Lord, that you would indeed be our teacher as we sang in the psalm, that you would guide us and lead us so that we would know the way that you are guiding us in.

[4 : 12] We thank you that the Lord Jesus himself, he is the way, and he is the truth, and he is the life. And there is no way to the Father, there is no way to heaven, except in and through Jesus.

We thank you that he is the one who took from us the sin that was barring the way, that kept us out of heaven. We thank you that Jesus took sin upon himself, took the punishment in our place.

We thank you that he died on that cross so that we could live. We thank you that he fulfilled the law that we keep on breaking. And we thank you that our hope is in Christ, as we so often sing, in Christ alone our hope is found.

So help us, we pray, in this day in this service to see Jesus, to hear Jesus, to fix our eyes upon Jesus. And we pray that we would know the presence of Jesus, even as we meet together in a sense, as we sit in our homes, watching screens and listening in on telephones.

Something that's very strange to us in many ways. And yet we know that even in these peculiar circumstances, you are the God who has promised that you will be with us. Where two or three even come together in your name, you are with us.

[5 : 34] So Lord, we pray for households where families gather together just now around your word. We pray for us as a congregation, Lord, as we gather in our respective homes and we seek to worship you.

Enable us, we pray, on this, the Lord's day, to worship you in spirit and in truth. We thank you for the gift of prayer. Not only do you reveal yourself to us and speak to us through your word, but we

thank you that in Jesus' name we are promised that we can come to the God of heaven and earth in prayer.

We thank you that we can draw near to the God who has promised that you will not drive us back, but that you will take us close. And we thank you that you are the God who helps us, the one who sends to us salvation in that eternal sense, and who sends to us salvation, sustaining grace day by day, as we come to you asking for it.

So we pray, Lord, for those who are in particular need this morning. We thank you that you know our hearts, you know our circumstances, you know the things that trouble us. And so we ask, Lord, for your help.

We pray that we would know you as our refuge and our strength. We pray for those who are sick this morning. We think of those who are struggling, those who have been in hospital, even in past days.

[6 : 58] We pray for those who are receiving treatment. And we thank you for the effectiveness of that treatment in many cases. We pray on for Ian Davidson as he receives treatment and as he awaits a consultation this week.

And we ask that your hand would continue to be upon him and upon Shona. And, Lord, that they would know your presence and that they would know your peace. And we pray also this week for John Norman in Larboea.

We pray that you would help him as he's received bad news about his medical condition. We ask, Lord, that you would draw near to him, that your hand would be upon him and that he would know your strength, that he would know your comfort.

Lord, that he would know your constant presence. And we pray for Nanny as well. We ask, Lord, that you would be ever-present as a helper to her.

And we ask, Lord, that your hand would be upon the family and your arms would be around the family at this time. And we are conscious of so many who struggle with different conditions and illnesses and trials in life.

[8 : 10] But we thank you that you are the God who is able to help us in our time of need. We pray, Lord, for those who are lonely, for those who are old, and those who feel the reality of the years that we are upon them.

And we ask, Lord, that you would sustain them, those who are in their homes and their own, Lord, that you would draw near to them. We thank you that we have a friend in Jesus who sticks closer than a brother.

As we pray for those who are elderly, we pray for our young people. We thank you for your protection over them, even in these months of lockdown. And as they come close now to their summer holidays, we pray that you would continue, Lord, to draw near to them, to speak to them. We thank you for the Sunday school and for the YF and for the teaching that they're receiving. We thank you for the youth fellowship as they meet together on Zoom and are able to have fellowship together in these meetings.

And we ask, Lord, for our young people. We pray that they would remember their Creator in the days of their youth. We are so conscious of so many influences that would want to take them away from you.

[9 : 25] But, Lord, as we have prayed, you are the way. You are the truth. You are the life. You are the one in whom there is found abundance of life. And we ask that our young people would come to know you in their early years, that they would walk close with you and that they would glorify you with their lives.

Pray for Gordon as well in the job that he has as a youth discipleship worker. And we ask that as he oversees the youth work in the presbytery, that you would give him vision and that you would give him opportunity to share the gospel with those that you have put him in contact with.

So hear our prayers. Continue with us. We pray on for our nation. And we ask, Lord, that in the turbulence of these days that we would be caused to look to the God who is able to bring peace.

And we pray for those that you have allowed to be in authority as we are called to week by week.

For those in government, for the royal family, for those in positions of influence, we ask, Lord, that you would cause them to look to you, the source of all wisdom.

So hear our prayers. Continue with us, we ask. Help us as we focus upon your word. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. And for Jesus' sake. Amen. Girls, good morning.

[10:46] I hope you're well today. And I hope you're having fun. I hope you're not working too hard. Only one more week and you're finished home schooling. Just dropped my pencil. One second. Got it.

Now, another week, another children's talk. You know, one of the things I miss about these weeks and these children's talks is being able to hear what you're up to.

The most interesting thing often about the children's talks is your answers and the things you're telling me about your week. And I know I'm talking to you, but I miss hearing back from you about all the things that you're doing.

I think that's the door. Hang on a second. Sorry about that. Sorry about that. There wasn't very much.

It was just picky with a parcel. Now, what was I saying? What was I doing? What have I been doing? Well, I haven't been doing very much, if you're watching my news. I've been... I painted the fence.

[11:48] I painted it grey. I painted a wee bit of the fence before I got in trouble for seeing. I painted the whole thing. I was strumming the garden. I did that today. Got absolutely eaten alive by the midges.

I've been preparing sermons. Just that kind of stuff. I've dropped my pen again. Sorry. Got it.

Now, what else have we been doing? Well, I had a game of tennis with Andrew and Hugh. I lost all the games. I've been doing a bit of running, very slow running.

You've probably overtaken me when you've been walking. I've been walking shortness. And really, really, that's about it. Let me just go and read you a little bit from the Bible.

Wait a minute. I need to get my Bible. Right, good. Got my Bible. Now, before I read the Bible, boys and girls, did you notice anything funny about that chat that we were having over the last few minutes?

[12:52] Well, I'm sure you did. Everything was changing. Every few seconds, something else was changing. Something was changing about my clothes. Something was changing, you know, that was in my hand or whatever.

If you were trying to do a kind of spot the difference game, you'd have seen lots and lots of differences over these couple of minutes. And I know that in your life and in my life, everything's been changing the last wee while.

Things have been very different in our lives. The way we do school has been different. The way we've been or not able to be with our family and our friends, that's been different.

Not being able to play football like you always used to play, that's something that's different. Not being able to come to church and Sunday school like normal, that's different.

You're getting bigger and taller. I've seen some of you in the distance. I can see a difference. I'm getting a bit wider and chubbier. That's a difference too. Everything seems to be different just now.

[13:57] But you know who's not different? Do you know who never changes, who's always the same? Jesus. In Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 8, it says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

And do you know whose word will never change? Well, God's word, the Bible. This book, God's word, it will never change.

It will never pass away. Jesus said in Matthew 24 and verse 35, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

And that's a reassuring thing for us to know, isn't it? Lots of things are different, but Jesus never changes. And the words of Jesus never change.

We can always, always, always trust him. And that's good news. So let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you love us. We thank you that you are the God who is unchanging.

[15:03] We thank you that your love for us never changes. We thank you that we can always trust you. And we can always trust your word. So we pray that you would help us to trust you. And help the boys and girls look after them, be near to them.

And as they go to Sunday school now, we pray that they would hear clearly about the good news of Jesus. Help their teachers, we pray. And help us and look after us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's turn now to God's word. And we turn to Romans chapter 7. Paul's letter to the Romans and chapter 7. And we read the whole of this chapter.

Do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to men who know the law, that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives. For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive.

But if her husband dies, she is released from that law of marriage. So then if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress even though she marries another man.

[16:13] So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit to God.

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions arised by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not. Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, do not covet.

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

[17:31] So then the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. Did that which is good then become death to me? By no means, but in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful.

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do.

And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. But I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do, it's not the good I want to do, nor the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work.

[18:45] When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin. Amen.

And may God bless that reading of his word to us. Okay, as we turn back now to God's word, let's open Romans 7. And as we go there, we'll pray for a moment.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you once more for your word. And we thank you once more for the Holy Spirit, who is our teacher. We ask that we would know his guiding and his leading in our preaching, in my preaching, in our listening, and in the application of these truths to our life.

[19:54] We pray that you would be at work in us and amongst us and through us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. And for Jesus' sake, Amen. A few weeks ago, I was given a gift.

And it was a gift of a new barbecue. It came in a big box. And on the first sunny day, I was looking forward to having the barbecue. So I opened the box.

I thought I could lift out the entire unit and just fire it up and enjoy the burgers. But to my dismay, I realized it came in 57 different pieces. So I spent an afternoon trying with not much success to put the barbecue together.

To cut a long story short, eventually I got it together. All the bits from the box were, they seemed to be fitting in the right positions. But I was left with one bit and I still have that one bit.

And after everything seemed to be installed, I was looking at the barbecue and I was looking at this bit and I was turning it over. And I was asking the question, and I suppose I'm still asking the question, what is this for?

[21 : 04] I think it's probably just a spare that was put into the box that shouldn't have been. I think I probably could throw it away, but I'm not exactly sure. I'm not exactly sure what this is for, what its purpose is.

Now as we turn to Romans chapter 7, what is Paul looking at in this chapter? Well it's very clear from this chapter that Paul, he's looking at the law of God, he's showing us the law of God. And in this chapter he takes time to explain the purpose and the place of the law of God in the life of the believer. Because we might be asking the question, what is the purpose and place of the law of God?

Already in previous chapters, Paul has made clear that the law doesn't save us. We're not saved through our efforts to keep the law, which is just as well because we know if we're honest that none of us can keep the law.

So if the law doesn't save us, what's it for? You know, we can end up looking at the law of God a bit like I was looking at this bit from the box and wonder what's it for?

[22 : 20] What's its purpose? How does it relate to us? Do we throw it out? Do we keep it? What do we do with God's law if we are those who are Christians?

How do we relate to? What can we say about the law? There's four things I want to look at in the time that we have this morning. The first thing to say is that we have been released from the law. That's the note on which Paul begins this passage and he uses an illustration to make his point. Verse 1. He says, Do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to men who know the law, that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.

For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she's called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress even though she marries another man.

[23 : 31] So there's Paul's opening illustration. And it's not an illustration that's difficult for us to understand. It's a clear illustration. Paul is saying a woman who is married is bound together with her husband in marriage.

And as long as she's married to her husband, she is obligated to be faithful to him. And that obligation at last remains for as long as she is alive and married to her husband.

But if he dies, says Paul, then she's released from that obligation. She's released from that marriage. So that's the example that Paul gives.

And then he moves from the example to the explanation or to the application. Verse 4. So my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions that arise by the law were at work in our bodies that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law.

[24 : 51] And what's Paul saying here? Well, he's saying where there's a death, in the illustration he uses, he says, where there's a death, the marriage is over.

And then he applies it to the Christian. He says, you, the old you, were by nature married to the law. You were obliged to be faithful to the law, but he says, remember, looking back at the last chapter, he says, remember what we went over?

You, through union with Christ, you, the old you, you died with him. And because you died with him, says Paul, you are released from that marriage to the law.

You don't belong to the law anymore, says Paul. You belong to, you are in union with, you are married to, Jesus. So that's the teaching that Paul begins this chapter with.

And we might respond, even at this point, by saying, well, if we're released from the law in this, in this way, does that mean that we're free to do what we want and we can just, we can just throw the law away?

[26 : 08] That the words of that song in the 90s come to mind. I'm free to do what I want any old time. Can we say that as Christians, that the law is set aside and we're free to do what we want any

old time?

And Paul's response to that would be, well, no, not, it's not what he means at all. He says in verse 6, we are released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Now, what does that mean? Well, let me share an illustration that some of the commentators use from another age, from another era, from the Victorian era. Picture it, there's a single man. He's a very well-to-do man and he lives in a stately home and like many men, he can't keep it well. He's untidy, he's a bit slovenly and so he realises that he can't manage this big home so he employs a housekeeper and he gives her the rules.

Breakfast will be at 8, lunch will be at 1, dinner will be at 7, the house is to be kept tidy etc, etc. He gives her the rules by which she's employed and she works away at these rules and over time this man, he falls in love with a housekeeper and they marry and now he's, she's no longer his housekeeper but she's his wife and now he's no longer her employer, that employment is terminated, she's released from that and yet, if we look in the window of this Victorian mansion, we see that sometimes she still makes some meals, sometimes she's still making us breakfast at 8, sometimes she's still preparing us lunch at 1.

[28 : 11] now why is she doing that? Is it because she's contracted to do that? Well no it's not because the contract of employment has been terminated so why does she do these things that previously she was contracted to do, why does she do them?

Well the answer to that question is because she loves him, there's been a change because she loves him and that's a picture of a Christian in relationship to Jesus.

Do we throw away God's law? Do we take it like an obsolete piece from a box and say that's no longer relevant to us, we're not saved by the law so we don't want anything to do with the law? Do we disregard it? No we don't because the law is now the means through which we express our love for God.

It's the means by which we serve the Lord not because we have to in a legal sense but because we want to in a devotional sense.

[29 : 21] Let me give you a quote from John Stott that's a bit longer than I would usually use as a quote but I find it very helpful just in cementing things in my own mind.

Stott says so is the law still binding upon the Christian? And he answers the question yes and no. The law is not binding in the sense that our acceptance depends on it.

Christ in his death has met the demands of the law so that it has no claim on us but the law is still binding in the sense that our new life is still a bondage we are still slaves.

What has changed is the motive and means of our obedience. The motive we don't obey the law because it is our master and we have to but because Christ is our husband and we want to.

The law says do this and you will live. The gospel says you live so do this. This means we serve not by obeying an external code but by surrendering to the indwelling spirit.

[30 : 27] the Christian life is serving the risen Christ by the power of the indwelling spirit. So to come to the end of this point we are released from the law through our marriage to through our union with Christ.

The old self died it was crucified with Christ and we were released from the law through what Jesus has done in his union with us as we believe in him.

But although we are released from the law we don't throw it away. We follow it and we want to keep it in order to express our love for and our faithfulness to Jesus.

some people express their love for one another with flowers or with chocolates or with lavish gifts or with eloquent poetry.

How do we express our love for Christ? We express our love for Jesus as we seek to obey his law.

[31 : 44] Jesus said in John chapter 14 and verse 15 if you love me you will obey what I command. So that's the first point.

We're released from the law. The second point is the law if we're asking this same question what's the purpose of the law what's it for? Well it reveals our sinfulness.

Ever since the beginning of time the introduction of rules or laws or commands seem to take the worst out in us.

If we go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis to the Garden of Eden God says to Adam and Eve here's the garden you can enjoy it you can taste of any of the fruits in this garden

there's just one tree that you must not touch it's just one tree that I don't want you to eat from it's just one rule one command one law but what happens next what tree is it that Eve and then Adam is drawn towards well that's right it's the one tree that was against the rules and ever since then ever since that fall we have inherited that rebellious streak from Adam we don't have to teach this to a child if you tell a child don't touch that it's hot and the child will immediately want to touch this thing that you've forbade them from touching just to see how hot it is if you put a sign up no fishing then the very loch that we want to fish is the one that we've been told we can't go near it's just our nature Augustine shares a story from his childhood in his writings he says near our vineyard there was a pear tree loaded with fruit though the fruit was not particularly attractive either in colour or taste I and some other youths conceived the idea of shaking the pears off this tree and carrying them away we set out late at night and stole all the fruit we could carry it's a bit like ancient poaching fruit and this was not to feed ourselves says Augustine he says we may have tasted a few but then we threw the rest to the pigs our real pleasure was simply in doing something that was not allowed and we know exactly what he means as soon as we are given a law we want to do the opposite and so the question that follows from that and the question that Paul is addressing is can we then blame the law for our sin verse 7 what shall we say then is the law sin

[34 : 55] Paul responds certainly not and then in verse 7 as it continues Paul makes clear that the law is not the culprit of our sin but the law it does reveal our sinfulness indeed he says in verse 7 I would not have known what sin was except through the law for I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said do not covet sin in verse 8 Paul goes a step on and he says that the law it not only reveals our sinfulness but it provokes our sinfulness but sin in verse 8 he says seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire apart from the law for apart from the law sin is dead then in verses 9 to 12 Paul shows how the law condemns us because of our sin so the law it reveals our sinfulness shows us that we are sinful it actually provokes us to sin more as we see this law and then the law turns around and condemns us for the very thing that we do and that's verses 9 to 12

I'm not going to go there because I have to watch time now one commentator Sinclair Ferguson he hints that as Paul has gone through these verses from verse 7 down to verse 12 he says that Paul possibly here is speaking personally he's sharing testimony of how he came to faith and when we think this through and we think about Paul as we meet him in the book of Acts that that seems to fit if you go for a moment to Acts chapter 6 in Acts chapter 6 we see a situation there and it's a situation where Stephen the first Christian martyr who was recently converted in Acts chapter 6 he gets into a debate with a crowd and that crowd almost certainly included Saul and it follows in verse 8 through to verse 10 that this record is given to us it says there now Stephen a man full of God's grace and power did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people opposition arose however from members of the synagogue of the freedmen as it was called Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia Paul was moving in Cilicia these men began to argue with Stephen but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the spirit by whom he spoke now when this happened this record of what was going on in Acts 6 when this happened that Paul was a rising star in the world of the Pharisee he was a learned young man he was showing immense promise he was the guy who was always top of the class he was winning all the theological arguments he was used to being the wise one and yet when he was faced with

Stephen who was as we see here full of God's grace and power he could not stand up to him and this perhaps was one of the first times in Paul's life when he realised he could not stand up to this character his wisdom was not sufficient to be a match for this man now how would that have made the young proud Saul feel well I think it would have made him feel angry and what would it have stirred up within him well I think it would have stirred up within him covetousness so for Paul now converted looking back to the days before he was converted he can see I think that it was that particular law do not covet that revealed his sin to him and provoked him to sin more and more because that's what we see in Paul's frenzied attack on

Christians and on Stephen in particular we fast forward a little as Stephen has been stoned to death who is there giving his approval well solace fueled by a covetous heart so I think it was that specific law do not covet that condemned the apostle Paul as we now know him the law it reveals our sinfulness to us for Paul it was that law do not covet for me it was that law do not steal that's what revealed my sin to me at age eight for you it may have been something different but the law of God

it reveals our sin to us and often as our sin is revealed to us we are more and more provoked to sin and then when we do sin we realize with God's law in front of us that we are condemned for our sin but we need to see here that the law is not to blame for our sin imagine seeing a man in prison and he's been caught red handed and whatever crime he's in there for he's clearly guilty of this crime that he's behind bars for and you go into the prison and you come to his cell and you stand on the other side of the bars and you say to him why are you here and he answers

[41 : 06] I'm here because of the law that's his bitter response if it wasn't for the law I wouldn't be here and actually if he was to answer that way that's perfectly true if there was no law saying do not murder he wouldn't be behind bars for murdering but you would say to him the reason you're in prison is not because of the law the reason you're in prison is because of your crime it's because of what you did it's because of the murder you committed and so Paul wants us to see the law itself is good the law reveals to us the holiness and the righteousness of God we see that in verse 12 but the law also reveals to us by contrast how sinful and how guilty you and I are so the law it's something that we are released from by means of our union with Christ we are trusting the law is something that it did reveal and it still reveals to us our sinfulness our sinful hearts our sinful lives and the law thirdly reveals an ongoing struggle that's within us now some people keep diaries or journals and they give a record of what they do and what's going through their minds what's going on in their thought life

I'm reading a book just now called the pastor of Kilsith the life and times of W.H. Burns it's a really interesting insight into the life of a very honest pastor in the 1800s he doesn't just write about the things that were encouragement in his ministry he writes about his struggles as well if all you ever look at is social media if all you ever do is Instagram you never see the struggles we never see the struggles on these platforms do we we see the perfect house we see perfect skin we see a perfect family but the reality is that's not real life now Paul in Romans 7 as this chapter goes on he gives us real life he gives us a look at the diary entry that he shares with us of his own real spiritual life he gives us in verse 14 through to verse 22 a window into the struggles of his own

Christian life now if you do your own reading and you read some other commentators you'll find that some commentators like to argue that this is Paul in verses 14 to 22 this is this is Paul sharing some of his experience of what his life was like before he was a Christian and I think that's a lot of rubbish I think that's totally wrong that's not this is not Paul in these verses sharing what life was like before he was a Christian this is Paul sharing what his life was like as a Christian this is Paul telling us about his struggle now why do I say that why do I say this is Paul speaking about his life now well for two reasons firstly look at the tense that he uses if you look at the actual tenses within the chapter in verses 1 to verse 13 Paul is looking back he's using the past tense but in verse 14 and following when he goes into this struggle he uses the present tense it's actually the present continuous tense he's showing us a page from his diary that's happening today it's in the present tense this is his present continuous struggle with things as a

Christian we see that in the tense that he uses he's not looking back he's talking about now and secondly think about the insight that the apostle Paul writes with the way that he writes in these verses 14 through to the end of the chapter he's not writing from the perspective of someone who's not yet a Christian he's writing from the perspective of someone whose eyes are wide open he says in verse 18 I know that nothing good lives in me how many people who are not a Christian would say that he says in verse 24 what a wretched man what a wretched man I am only a Christian would write that way I remember old Roddy Mackay from the East Church he was an elder in the East Church in Inverness and to me he seemed like such a holy and godly man and he was he'd been many years on the road as a Christian as I was getting to know him but when he spoke about himself what struck me time and time again was he was so conscious of his sin to me he looked such a holy man but as he looked at himself he was so conscious of his sin he was so conscious of how wretched he was how can that be how does that work well we know how it works I think the closer you get to the light the more clearly you see the stains and Paul freely confesses here that as he comes closer and closer to Jesus he sees the stains in his own life and he writes about them here

[47 : 19] Paul doesn't say I'm doing fine I have my Christian life all buttoned down sin is not a problem for me no he he says very candidly and very honestly and repeatedly he says I'm struggling with sin he says I've got a war going on in my life between the spiritual and the unspiritual between what I want to do and what I actually do between the old man of sin and the new man in

Christ between sin living in me and the spirit living in me he says there's a struggle going on in my heart and you can see that in verses 14 through to to verse 23 I haven't got time to read these verses again perhaps the core of it we could see in verse 18 into 19 Paul says for I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out for what I do is not the good I want to do nor the evil

I do not want to do this I keep on doing you get such a sense of the struggle in Paul's life and I don't know about you but aren't you thankful that Paul shared this diary entry aren't you thankful that Paul is humble and he is honest enough to give us Romans 7 show us what's going on in the dark places sometimes of his heart I often meet people in that pastoral sense who come and they're struggling and they say I don't know if I'm a Christian I'm starting to question if I'm a Christian at all I keep on sinning I do believe I do ask for forgiveness I do delight in God's law but there's a war going on in me there's not a day when it's not a struggle can I really be a Christian when I'm experiencing this kind of struggle whenever I hear that

I'll get the Bible and I'll open Romans 7 and I'll say do you recognize this this is the diary of a Christian the Christian life life is a struggle all the way home to heaven yes we have been saved from the penalty of sin Paul has made that clear yes we have been saved from the power of sin but we haven't been saved yet from the presence of sin sin is around us and sin is in us there is the remnant and it causes a battle it causes our hearts and our lives to become a war ground and as long as we are in this world we will know that in our warfare the apostle Paul gives us a snapshot of and that struggle that Paul writes of that's the evidence of salvation that's that's not something that calls our salvation into question this struggle is the evidence of salvation the person who looks at Romans 7 and says I don't know anything about this the person who says

I don't know what it is to battle with indwelling sin I don't know what it is to feel the attacks of the world and the flesh and the devil if somebody says that that's the person whose salvation I would question the law reveals an ongoing struggle in the heart of the believer so as we finish what is our response to be to all of this how does Paul bring this section to a conclusion how does he tie it all together how are we to respond to the law of God as it works within our lives revealing to us our sin revealing to us on a daily basis that ongoing struggle that's going on within our lives how are we to respond what are we to say in response to all this what's our prayer to be but Paul gives us a model prayer for us to take for ourselves

Paul's response verse 24 and verse 25 what a wretched man I am he says and not not just the way that he's so ready to confess that doesn't make excuses he doesn't try to deflect some of the blame he just confesses readily what a wretched man I am who will rescue me from this body of death that's his prayer and for those who have prayed that and for those who are continuing to pray that what is God's answer that comes to the apostle we have it in verse 25 he says thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord that's Paul's response what a wretched man

[53 : 08] I am no excuses who will rescue me from this body of death thanks be to God I can't do it but thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord some people have drawn parallels between Romans 7 and that little novel that Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the strange case of Dr.

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde if you read that story you probably have in school days it's the story of an inner battle between the good Dr. Jekyll and the evil Mr.

Hyde and it's a grim story because what we see as the story develops is that the evil within him was so strong that this battle that was going on between Jekyll and Hyde was a battle that Dr.

Jekyll the good Dr. Jekyll he just could not win and for the Christian although we know the reality of the struggle in this world although we know something of that Jekyll and Hyde experience although we know the reality of that struggle although we see our own wretchedness we have a saviour that we can cry out to Jesus and because of him this battle that we know this struggle that is ongoing it's a battle it's a struggle that we cannot lose Keller says there is a war between the selves that happens before you meet Christ and there's a war between the selves that happens after you meet Christ the war between the selves that happens before you meet

Christ is a war without hope that you cannot win but the war after you meet Christ you cannot lose so can I encourage you as I take the encouragement for myself if we know our sin if we can feel the finger of the law so often pointing at us can I encourage us whether for the first time or for the umpteenth time to pray Paul's prayer and simply say what a wretched man I am and then look to and meet with and trust in Paul's saviour Jesus Christ our Lord he took our wretchedness upon himself on the cross he rescued us from our sin he met all the requirements of the law for us and he promises eternal victory eternal rest from the struggle to all those who are trusting in him so may we

be trusting in him we'll pray heavenly father we we thank you for your word we thank you that as we look in your word we see a mirror into our own lives and we ask lord that you would help each one of us to to confess with the apostle

[56 : 51] Paul our own wretchedness our own sinfulness and then and enable and enable each one of us to look in faith to Jesus our savior and to know the assurance of his salvation of us and we pray this in Jesus name amen we'll conclude by saying to God's praise the hymn hear his love vast as the ocean loving kindness as the flood when the prince of life our ransom shed for us his precious blood who his love will not remember who can cease to sing his praise he can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days here is love vast as the ocean loving kindness as the flood when the prince of life for ransom shed for us his precious blood who his love will not remember who can cease to sing his praise he can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days on the mount of crucifixion mountains open deep and wide through the flood gates of god's mercy go the vast and gracious tide grace and love by mighty rivers born in cess and from above heaven's peace and perfect justice waste a guilty world in love and may the grace of our lord jesus christ and the love of god the father and the fellowship of god the holy spirit be with us all both now and forevermore amen sh you you you