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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 23, 2017
7th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 33:12-23; Matthew 11:25-30

Hymns: 11; 421; 360; 54

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 7:15-25a

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: It's been said, "You're nothing but a bunch of hypocrites!"

Why is it that this often repeated charge thrown at those who go to church stings so much? Could it be that we are afraid that it has some element of truth within it? Could it be because there are times that we in our own lives see such glaring inconsistencies with what we know a Christian should be that we fear that our own faith is not totally secure? Is it that we don't like what we see when we look in the mirror? That is in the mirror of God's holy law?

I also recall another sayings that goes something like this: "Every good lie has an element of truth within it." You see that's what makes it believable. We would do well to remember also that the devil himself is the father of lies. He is a liar from the beginning. He would lie to you concerning your faith, and he would not hesitate for a moment to use a friend, or acquaintance or a beloved family member to serve as his spokesman, not if it would serve his end and goal of shaking you in the certainty of your faith.

We are blessed that the Holy Spirit directed the Holy Writers to reveal their own struggles of faith; that we might learn from them and not be unduly shaken in our own faith; that we might learn from them how we should turn to the Lord. And so it is that in today's text the Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to open his heart for our edification that we might better understand --

THEME: The Conflicted Christian!

Yes, Paul is very open in our text revealing --

I. The Inner Conflict of the Christian Heart.

The Christian, that is one who truly and sincerely believes in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, feels a tremendous debt of love and gratitude toward his Savior God. God didn't have to send His Son into the world to save a wretch like me! Jesus was under no debt or obligation to me that He should lay down His life to save mine; that He should endure the shame and the sufferings of scourge and rod, of the cross, of the curse of God to deliver me from death and hell. The Spirit was under no obligation to call me to faith when I loved darkness rather than light. The Spirit called me to faith

through the gospel, making within me “**a new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**” (Ephesians 4:24) Our God did all this for me and you! What an amazing salvation has come to us by the grace of God! It is from this new man that this tremendous love and gratitude spills over into our lives with righteous behavior, so that all might know and see just how much we love and honor our Redeemer Lord!

And yet what do we ourselves find? All too often what do the people around us see in our lives? Sin! SIN! Here we are, going around talking about how much we love Jesus, and how these other people in our lives should stop sinning, and then they see us speeding, or hear us gossiping, or see us leering, or witness us drinking too much, or see us losing our temper; and on and on. Then the word hypocrite comes to mind, theirs and ours.

Romans 7:15-16 “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is good.*”

What Paul confesses in these words is true for each and every child of God still walking on the face of this earth. We know that what God says in the Ten Commandments, what He spells out for us throughout the Scriptures is right and good. Indeed that new man within us desires to do what the Lord tells us we ought to do. We freely promise to amend our sinful lives. What is going on?

We still have our sinful flesh. We are stuck with our sinful flesh as long as we walk in this world. Paul states with certainty a truth that none of can escape:

Romans 7:18-19 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.

That is the conflicted Christian! We can identify with Paul’s frustration, more than that with his disgust with what is going on in his life, which is supposed to be a sanctified Christian life. What does Paul conclude? He sees this principle, like a law of nature

within himself: **“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”** (v. 21) This is the way it is as long as I am in this body in this life in this world, **“evil is present with me!”**

That is as true for you and me as it was for the Apostle Paul. So we have this conflict, this extreme turmoil constantly going on within us. We love Jesus and because we love Him who died for us to save us from sin, we want to serve Him, We know to serve Him we must hate sin, and we do hate sin! We do! Honestly and fervently we do! We confess with Paul:-

Romans 7:22-24 “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

It’s a war! We are embattled even within our own hearts and lives and minds. Why does this evil persist? Why is this evil present with me when as a child of God I delight in the law of God? It made Paul recognize just how wretched a sinner he was, and that he was still confined to a body not only tainted by death but captive to sin. In desperation Paul cries out: **“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** (v.24)

We need conflict resolution. That --

II. Conflict Resolution is with God in Christ.

You know I can’t count how many times someone has said to me, because I’m a pastor, “The best way to get rid of a temptation is to give in to it! Ha! Ha!” The problem with that not so funny joke is that is the way too many, far too many people, even Christians, maybe sometimes tragically, ultimately, former Christians have found their conflict resolution for that struggle between righteousness and sin. I’ve been told that it is very liberating to throw off the shackles of Christianity and live like the world.

That is just another lie of the devil and a matter of self-deception. Paul spelled out the actual truth of the matter in the chapter leading up to our text. He wrote by inspiration:

Romans 6:16, 20-23 “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? ... “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

To resolve the conflict by caving in to temptation, to the desires of the sinful flesh, to the ways of the world around you is to enslave yourself once again to sin. In the end one then finds eternal death, for the wages of sin is death!

Paul couldn’t see his own way out of this conflict. Paul was not evading personal responsibility. He was confessing personal liability, and the incapability to save himself, even as a disciple, even as an **apostle** of Jesus Christ! But then he declares the wonder of grace; **“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** (v. 25)

The resolution for the conflict, the way to peace and hope and life and salvation it all remains with God. Who shall deliver **me** from this body of death? God, my gracious Father in heaven, through “Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty!” (The Apostle’s Creed) There is the conflict resolution. There I find the assurance of sins forgiven, for **“if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9) He renews me according to the inner man day by day with this blessed gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. He grants me His peace. **“We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”** (Ephesians 1:7)

Now we know where we need to turn each and every day as we struggle with sin in our lives. It is the burden of our hearts that we sin against the God who loved us, who called us to faith that we might love Him. We carry the weight of disappointment and frustration as we struggle with the weaknesses of our flesh, and that inevitable certainty, that law which is as absolute in this world as the law of gravity, **“evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”** (v.21) That’s our burden. That’s OUR burden. Jesus says:

Matthew 11:28-29 “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

And that is our peace.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.