

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, February 20, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**The Biggest Troublemaker - Romans 7:14-25**

**Introduction:** Before I begin the message, there's something I want to say. I've been your pastor for almost 6 years and there is one member of this church who gives me more trouble than anybody! He's hard to figure out, difficult to deal with, and sometimes he does things that just don't make sense. He's my biggest troublemaker, and I guess that's why I stay angry at him. In fact, sometimes, I just can't stand to be around him. This man is such a problem, and he really gives me fits. And I'm just sick and tired of his wishy-washy, two-faced ways. So I've decided that it's time for me to do something about him. I'm going to point him out this morning, and expose him for the hypocrite he is. I think it's time we all see this charlatan for who he is and see if there's anything that can be done about him.

The guy I'm talking about is my wife's first husband! I'm my chief troublemaker and my own worst enemy because sometimes what I do doesn't match up with what I want to do. So, I'm letting you know that I've got a problem. You probably already knew that, but it's always good for the person to admit his or her problem, because that's the first step in finding a solution to it or a remedy for it. What's my problem? Well, it's the same problem that a guy in the Bible had, and the same problem a lot of people have.

You know, at AA meetings a member stands up and says, *"Hello, my name is so-and-so, and I'm an alcoholic."* Well, today I'm here to stand up and say, *"Hello, my name is Steve, and I am a sinaholic."* I'm a sinner, who has been saved by the grace of God. That means I'm still in recovery. And because I'm still a recovering sinner that means I have *"I"* trouble. I've got a sinful nature which I still struggle with, even though I am a believer. And my problem is also everyone else's problem. If you don't think you've got a problem with yourself, then maybe you've learned a secret the apostle Paul and the rest of us have not.

Let's read about this problem Paul had with himself. Here, he uses the first personal pronoun (either I, Me, My or Myself) 40 times! **READ Romans 7:14-25**

Before we go any further, you need to know that our salvation is in three tenses. **Past, Present and Future.** First of all, if you are a Christian it's something that **has** happened to you. You have experienced **"justification"** by faith. That means that God looks as you He declares you *"legally righteous;* not because of your own righteousness, but because one day you put your faith in Jesus and God covered you with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And He says, *"You are not guilty."*

Justification means you've been delivered from the penalty for sin. (Death, hell, separation from God). When you become a Christian, God says, *"The penalty for sin? POOF. It's gone!"*

But salvation is also in the present tense. That is a process called **"sanctification"** through which God is trying to clean us up and make us more like Jesus Christ. That is why Paul could say in **Phil. 1:6 (NIV)** that he was, *"confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Paul knew that sin was still present in our lives, and God was in the process of delivering us from the power of sin because sin is still in our lives.

But salvation is also future tense because one day, when we die and meet Jesus face to face, we'll experience **"glorification."** That's when we will be delivered from even the presence of sin because in heaven there is absolutely no sin.

But for now, let's look at the present tense of salvation, because that's where we are right now. Every believer is in that place where God is trying to work on us to clean us up.

One of the biggest problems we need to understand is what Paul wrote about here: Wanting to do the right thing, and knowing what the right thing is, but stumbling and doing the wrong thing.

Now, if you ever have the same kind of problem here's a word for you from the word of God about how to deal with that.

Remember that it is the Apostle Paul who is writing this. Paul was saved in about 35AD. He wrote this letter to the Romans in about 57AD. That means he had been a believer for 22 years, and after knowing Christ as a maturing Christian, he says, *"I still have to deal with and confront sin."*

He's describing three characteristics of a "maturing Christian." I say "maturing" because maturity is something you'll never reach this side of heaven even though you strive for it. First, Paul is saying that a maturing Christian will have:

### **1. We'll Always Struggle with Sin**

He says, "*There's this war inside my mind and body and personality. There's a good nature and there's an evil nature—and they are fighting against each other.*"

#### **A. The Old Nature: Carnal Christian**

You see, before you became a Christian, you have the old sinful nature that is dominating your life. But when you become a Christian, you still have that sinful nature that's there, but God creates within you a new nature.

Paul says in vs. 14: "*I am unspiritual.*" What he means is, "*I still have this old, sinful, and worldly-minded heart within me that still wants to control me.*" And that's what happens as we listen to our old sinful nature. We find ourselves falling into an unspiritual life and if we're not careful, we'll grow worldlier in our behavior and attitudes. And the result is, we'll have "I" trouble, because our lives will mostly be about us. But as Christians, God has given us a:

#### **2. The New Nature: Spirit-filled Christian**

God has given us a clean heart - a heart that has been crucified with Christ. Our old heart and life falls under the lordship of Christ, and the results of the new nature are what is called, the fruit of the spirit. And the more the fruit of the spirit we demonstrate, the more like Christ we are.

So, a "*spirit-filled Christian,*" is someone who is not giving in to the demands and the desires of the flesh but who obeys the demands and desires of the Holy Spirit.

Paul speaks of this struggle in **Gal. 5:16-17 (NIV)**. But instead of talking about it as happening to him, he gives a remedy and a solution: "*So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*"

In other words, living according to our sinful nature keeps us from doing what we want to do, but living according to our new spiritual nature will keep us from satisfying our sinful nature.

So even if you are a maturing Christian, there's still this tug of war going on between your old sinful nature, and the new nature that God created within you. Now here's the second characteristic of a maturing Christian. As maturing Christians:

### **2. We'll Desire to Serve God**

The desire of a maturing Christian is to obey God. A backslidden Christian will have the attitude, "*Well, nobody's perfect, so I'm just going to go ahead and sin, because I can't help it!*" A backslidden Christian will always try to find some justification for their actions, and they simply accept it as a part of their life. But a maturing Christian is never satisfied with sin in their life. They will always hate it. As a little test, let me ask you three very personal questions that will measure your maturity level:

#### **A. Do you have a desire to obey God?**

**Romans 7:18 (NIV)** says, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*" It's so important to have a desire to please God. You see, some people will do good things, but it's may be because they want to be seen doing good things, and if that's the case, then their motivation is self-centered. But God has the ability to read our thoughts, to judge our motives, to know why we do certain things. I can't do that. I don't know why you came to church today, I just know you came. But God knows why you came. I don't know why you did or did not give an offering today, but God knows. You see, God can judge your desires. He knows your thoughts. As human beings, we can't do that. We can only look at performance, but God looks at the desire and our motives. And it counts for something. So, first, do you have a desire to obey God? Secondly:

#### **B. Do you delight in obeying God!**

**Romans 7:22 (NIV)** "*For in my inner being I delight in God's law.*" When was the last time you obeyed God and just said, "*That was delightful!*" When you pay the tithe, do you say, "*I'm so glad to be able to do this because it's a delight to be obedient to God?*" When you love someone who has been unlovable to you, do you

say, “*Now that was delightful—I’m obeying God.*” When you forgive someone who has hurt you and wronged you do you say “*Oh this is so delightful!*” A maturing Christian experiences delight when they obey God as much as they experience disgust when they disobey. The last question is:

### **C. Do you seek ways to strengthen your new nature?**

There once was an Indian who became a Christian and after he’d been a Christian for a number of years he told a missionary, “*I’ve got a problem. It’s as if on the inside of me there are two dogs! One is a dog who tells me to do wrong and one is a dog who tells me to do right. These two dogs are constantly fighting for control.*” The missionary asked the Indian, “*Tell me, which dog wins the fight?*” And the Indian said, “*The dog I feed the most.*” That is the way you can strengthen your new nature. “*Feed it!*” Feed it daily with God’s Word. Feed it daily with prayer. Feed it daily with good works. Feed it daily and starve the other.

By the way, you can’t properly feed your new nature by hanging out with the wrong crowd. That is feeding your old nature. You can’t feed your new nature by drinking, sleeping around, using bad language, being in places you shouldn’t be. That’s feeding the old sinful nature. Feeding our new nature will involve things like worshipping with God’s people, studying the word in Sunday school and Bible study, and prayer. Doing these things will eventually choke off and starve the old sinful nature so your life won’t be dominated by it.

So, a mature Christian is someone who will still struggle with sin, but their desire will be to obey and to serve God. The third characteristic of maturing Christians is that:

### **3. We’ll Surrender to God’s Spirit**

We read in Gal. 5 where Paul talks about the old nature and the role of God’s Holy Spirit in combating the old nature, but here in this passage in Romans, Paul doesn’t say anything about the Spirit. In fact, he’s only talked about his I problem, and how his ego was in control. In fact, he’s so miserable about this he expresses a sense of agony over it.

#### **A. The agony—Who will set me free?**

Look at verse 24 (NLT) where Paul says, “*Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?*” Do you know what he’s talking about when he says, “*life... dominated by sin and death?*” He’s talking about something that historians tell us was that was a means of punishment back before the time of Christ. They wrote that there were some kings that were so cruel in the way they would execute prisoners and criminals. They would take a corpse and literally, chain it to the criminal to be executed! The corpse would be wrapped around a living person. Within just a matter of a few days, the living person would die because the corruption of that dead body would be so bad, it would infect the living body! What a terrible way to die! That’s exactly the word Paul is using here. He says, “*It’s so awful—it’s as if I’m carrying around a corpse that is dominating and corrupting me! This is so awful I can’t stand it!*” That’s the kind of agony Paul is feeling about his dilemma. But here’s the answer.

#### **B. The answer—Jesus already has!**

Vs. 25 (NLT) says, “*Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.*” He’s saying that first; Jesus had already set us free when Jesus died on the cross to take away this life dominated by sin and death. Then he says, “*The Spirit will do it whenever I allow the Spirit to do it.*” The Spirit will keep on putting to death his old, sinful nature. You may say, “*I haven’t read anything about the Spirit here in chapter 7.*” But look at the last verse of chapter 7 and then tie it in with the first verse of chapter 8. The translators made a break between chapter 7 and 8, but there should be no break because 8:1 begins with the word, “*So.*” Now you never start a new thought with “*So,*” When you see that word, it is always tied in with what has just been said. You see, Paul knew that everyone was like him and would struggle with sin sometimes. We all do things we don’t want to do, and we don’t do things we know we should do. So Paul doesn’t want us to think that God is condemning us for having that problem.

Look at what he says in **Romans 8:1-2 (NLT)** “*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.*” It’s God’s Holy Spirit living in us who says to us “*Don’t do that!*” when our old nature says, “*Do wrong,*” And when we surrender and yield to God’s Spirit, He comes in and takes control and sets us free.

**Conclusion:** Let me close by trying to make this concept simple. I grew up in a home where we had a dog or a cat most of my childhood and teenage life. Mostly I remember our little Chihuahua dog named Sissy, and our cat named Calico. Now Sissy was our actually grandmother’s dog, but since she lived with us, she was the family dog

too.

These pets had some kind of spell on the whole family because all they had to do was sit in front of us and whimper a little bit, and somebody would get up and feed them or take them out to follow nature's call. No growling, no loud meowing, no jumping up on you or licking you, just sitting, staring and whimpering as if to say, "I'm hungry! Feed me!" or "Pour me some fresh water, dummy!" or "Can't you see that I gotta go?" It seemed as though they ran the house because they got what they wanted most of the time.

Now thank goodness that was not the case all the time and with everyone. Sometimes, my Dad or my older brother would take control and they would control the pets! Dad wouldn't like for the cat or the dog to sleep in their bedroom, so he'd take those animals outside before bedtime, and my brother would just as soon let them stay outside even when they'd whine and cry and want to come in.

So it was like a mini conflict. Sometimes the pets controlled us and sometimes we controlled the pets. It was like we we're at war with each other.

Now here's the point: When we vacated the premises, and were away from the pets, we didn't think much about them, and they didn't control us. But when we were at home, they had some control over us.

Here's the lesson we can learn: In every one of us there is a troublemaker – a sinful nature, and there's a peacemaker – a good nature. Now this troublemaker fights against the peacemaker all the time. But the only way to overcome the sinful nature is for us to vacate the premises. And we do that by considering ourselves crucified with Christ, so that the Holy Spirit can move in and take over. When we say, like the apostle Paul said in **Gal. 2:20 (NIV)**, "*I (the big I) have been crucified with Christ! And I no longer live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" It's our choice. Which nature will we listen to– the big troublemaker or the big peacemaker?