

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
July 27, 2014**

Romans 7: 15-25

The Christian Battle

- 1. A Common Frustration for the Christian**
- 2. A Principle from Paul's Struggles**

Hymns: Morning Praise – 372 – Closing: 765

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

“Peter Piper picked a pair of pickled peppers.” Say those words three times fast, and they become nearly impossible to string together and understand. But slow it down, and there is nothing difficult about it at all. Slowing down is the secret to speaking your way through an alliteration. Today, as we look to another section in Paul’s letter to the Romans, we have the equivalent of a Scriptural tongue twister.

It is a section of Scripture that you’ve probably read through before, and after doing so, have probably thought, “I have no idea what Paul is actually saying there.” What is that section of Scripture, let’s go to Romans 7:15-19. **¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ 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, did you get what Paul was saying there? This is certainly a section of Scripture where you have to slow down, read through it a few times, and when you do that, you understand just what Paul is saying, because you’ve felt the same way.

Paul begins by making a confession about his Christian life. And there are two details that we don’t

want to glide past there: 1) Paul is speaking to fellow believers about a problem that is unique to believers. We need to remember that, as we look at what he is saying; 2) And Paul is willing to admit that he has struggles; failings that he can’t figure out. How important it is to be honest with our problems.

The confession that Paul makes is that his life is one of frustration. **“I do not understand what I do,”** Paul says. Paul looks at his works and actions, and what he literally says here is that he doesn’t want to take account for them because he can’t believe he would actually do them. And the whole rest of this paragraph then, is Paul working through his frustration, trying to find an answer for it. He begins by explaining why this doesn’t make sense to him. 1) First off, Paul says in the 2nd half of verse 15 that as he looks at his heart, his Christian heart, he sees that it is filled with good desires. As Paul lives his life, he genuinely wants to do good and he genuinely wants to stay away from bad. So his desires are good.

He gives the 2nd reason for his frustration in verse 16. Now, verse 16 might be the trickiest verse in this section. It is important to remember that in Romans, and chapter 7 in particular, Paul is defending the Law as a good guide for the Christian life. So what Paul says here is that the Law tells Paul that certain things are good to do, and certain things are bad to do. When Paul’s desires follow the Law, it shows the Law to be good, even if his actions rebel against the Law.

So Paul has given us two reasons for his frustration. He has good desire from his heart (He wants to do good); and he has good guidance for doing this good (because the Law provided by God is also good). So, Paul should have everything he needs to produce good results...but, they just aren’t there. He sees nothing but bad outcomes.

That makes no sense to Paul, and I’m certain that each of you can empathize with Paul’s frustration; that feeling that comes over you when you are once again doing what you said you wouldn’t do anymore. It’s infuriating. It’s frustrating. Because we are told that we are a new creation. We are told that we are created to do good works. We are shown the way to do them as we look at the Word. We are motivated by the forgiveness and freedom that we have been given. And what happens, good works everywhere? Hardly. Instead we join with Paul in admitting, “What I hate, I do.”

And that brings Paul to a point. If it is not his heart and desires that are to blame; and it is not the Law of God which is to blame; then it must be something else. And in verses 17-20, he identifies the source of the problems, **“It is sin.”**

Now, that Paul says that sin is the source of the problem shouldn’t surprise us. But where that sin comes from should, especially when you recall what Paul said to us last week. Last week, Paul talked about

sin and our sinful nature being put to death and buried with Christ. But now, what does he say? Verse 17 and 18: **“¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”**

Paul says that these bad outcomes are a result of sin living in me. And what depressing news that is. The source of so much bad, the source of so much guilt, the source of so much regret, which Paul said had been buried with Christ through baptism; it is not just alive, but is living and dwelling inside of us! It has a permanent home inside these bodies. And because Paul knows that we Christians will say, “It can’t be,” Paul repeats his proof. Verses 19 and 20 offer us nothing new, but Paul wants us to hear it again. The proof of the sinful nature that remains in you and me are the desires to do good but which aren’t carried out. The proof is the evil you and I keep on doing each and every day in your lives. The proof is the sin that is all over our lives.

So, the big question is what is Paul’s purpose in delivering this terrible news that our sinful nature is still a part of us? Is it to offer us an excuse for our failings? Is it to ease our consciences and lessen our expectations for our Christian lives?

No, the purpose of this tongue twister of Scripture is to get us to verse 21-23, where Paul concludes: **“So I find this law (really it is a principle or truth) at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 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.”** Paul speaks about his own frustrations so that we will be left with no doubt about two truths in our own Christian lives.

The first truth is that while we certainly have been given a New Man - that loves the Word, that cherishes the Sacrament, that is moved by the message of God’s grace; we must not be deceived or have any grand illusions for life. We also still have an Old Adam – a sinful nature that loves sin, that wants to pursue cravings/desires, that wants to rebel against the noose of God’s Law. As Christians in this world, we have a dual personality.

And if we have two natures inside of us that are polar opposites, we can be sure that there is, and will be, a battle waging between the two as they battle for control. Each and every day, the battle wages, the new man which delights in the Law of God because it sees the good guidance which it provides, is attacked by the old Adam, the sinful nature which hates the law of God

because it keeps sin from reaching its desires. Back and forth, the pull happens. And it is clear that it is happening as we look at our lives. And this battle is not the one sided rout that we would hope.

The results of the battle caused Paul to cry out, **“What a wretched man am I!”** And we all know that cry of guilt and helplessness, don’t we? We each know how often the sinful nature seems to have control of us, the evidence is all over our lives. And that evidence is embarrassing for people who call themselves Christians. It is frustrating. It is tiring.

Paul felt the wear of battle in his life, just as we feel the wear of battle. It got Paul to the point where all he could do in his battle with sin was plead for help: “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” And that’s it, isn’t it? Rescue is what is needed. As long as we are in this body, with this sinful nature, with the ugliness that it produces and craves and chases, we won’t have rest from the war. Who can rescue us from these bodies of death?

Join with Paul, “Thanks be to God” – the victory comes “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The work of Jesus is where we look, not because he gives us the power to overcome ourselves, or the push to be perfect in this world. Jesus promises to give us rest that is eternal, Jesus promises to give us rest that is complete; Jesus promises to give us an end to the battle.

May that promise that it will end because of Jesus work keep us battling each and every day. As you face that battle, do so with two encouragements. Don’t expect perfection in your Christian life. Doing so will only leave you dejected and frustrated when your sinful nature does not allow it. But though you don’t expect perfection in this life; don’t accept defeat, thinking that there is no point in fighting. While there is not perfection in this life, there is also not defeat. You have eternal victory, through your Lord Jesus Christ!