

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Tenth Sunday After Trinity, August 9, 2026

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 289, 5:3, 378, 320, 320:6-7.

Lessons: Numbers 21:4-9; Galatians 5:16-26; Luke 17:11-19

Sermon Text: Romans 7:14-25.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Hearers in Christ:

There are two classes of perfectionists in the field of religion. The one class is like the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They pay much attention to outward ceremonies and forms. They lay heavy emphasis on their own works and their own man-made commandments. They want to appear as the most holy people in the eyes of others. Such people, of course, are not really perfect or holy or righteous. It is as Jesus said to the teachers of the law and Pharisees in the days of His earthly ministry, ***"In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness,"*** Matthew 23:28.

The other class of perfectionists consists of those people who believe that they are perfectly holy and without sin after being converted. They believe that a Christian does not sin at all. But, the Bible tells us, ***"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,"*** 1 John 1:8.

Both of these classes of perfectionists are wrong in their religious beliefs, and those who teach so are false prophets. The truth of the matter about sin and a Christian is told us in the words of our text, where we learn about:

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE SINFUL NATURE AND THE NEW MAN IN A CHRISTIAN

1. There is a struggle because of our sinful nature and our inability to satisfy the Law's spiritual demands.
2. A description of the constant struggle the Christian experiences.
3. The Christian's thankfulness for the final victory over sin through Christ.

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual (made of flesh), 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." St. Paul wrote these words by inspiration. The Holy Spirit moved him to write exactly what he wrote. Yet, at the same time, the apostle wrote in clear, realistic words about his own personal experiences as a Christian. The struggle, which the apostle experienced, is the same struggle that every true Christian experiences, the struggle between the sinful nature and the new man.

Every person, as he is born, is totally corrupt and sinful. This is the result of Adam's fall into sin. All his descendants (all mankind) have inherited the same condition. When a person is brought to faith in Jesus a great change takes place in him. By faith he becomes a child of God. As a result of his faith he can do God-pleasing works. When a person is converted by the Holy Spirit he becomes what the Bible calls a ***"new creation"*** 2 Corinthians 5:17. He then has what is called ***"the new self"*** in him. A Christian is exhorted, ***"Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*** Ephesians 4:24.

But, there is no perfection in the Christian in this life. Indeed, God does forgive all his sins, for Jesus' sake, so that no stain remains. But, his fleshly nature remains. As long as a Christian lives in this wicked world and has his natural body, he also has his sinful flesh to contend with. This is called in the Bible ***"the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires,"*** Ephesians 4:22. A Christian is described as one who has ***"taken off (his) old self with its practices and ... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*** Colossians 3:9-10. This explains, then, why there is in the Christian a struggle between the sinful nature (Old Adam) and the ***"new self"***.

When a person gives in to his sinful nature, this is not the fault of God's Law. Paul says, ***"We know the Law is spiritual."*** The Law is good and holy, for it comes from the holy God. The Law demands the holy behavior that is pleasing to the holy God. When we do what our sinful nature desires, then the holy Law condemns us. We find out what is wrong from the Law, for Paul says, ***"Through the law we become conscious of sin,"*** Romans 3:20. The Law is holy and good, but Paul says: ***"I am unspiritual (literally made of flesh), sold as a slave to sin."*** We always have the sinful flesh clinging to us. Therefore, when we want to do good, we often do evil instead. We are sold under sin, something like an unwilling slave, in that we often find ourselves doing what we don't want to do.

This is described in greater detail now in our text and we learn about **the constant struggle between the flesh and the spirit that the Christian experiences.**

2.

Paul says, ***"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 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."*** Paul makes a distinction here between his real, regenerated self, his real spirit, and his sinful nature, which he still has. His regenerated self agrees with the things of the Spirit of God, and he wants to do what the holy God demands. But his old Adam fights against the Spirit and wants to do what pleases the devil and what is contrary to God's Holy Law. This struggle between the sinful nature and the Spirit is described in these words in Paul's letter to the Galatians, ***"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."*** Galatians 5:17

How strange some fellow believer looks to us when see him behave according to his sinful nature! We want to point the finger at him. But that is how you and I look when we give in to the desires of our sinful nature and do what is wrong. This is a constant struggle. It goes on as long as we live on this earth. Every day we want to serve the Lord according to his Word. That is our will and desire as Christians. But, the actual doing of it is not carried out. Instead we show lack of love for the Lord and our fellowmen. We are lazy and do not do all we ought to. We are proud and boastful when we ought to be humble. We fight with one another when we ought to live in peace and harmony. We are too much of this world, loving the things of this world, instead of loving our heavenly Father. We in this generation have more leisure time than ever before, but we find little time for God's Word. The Lord tells us we should not lust after evil, but our flesh is often weak and we long for more than the Lord has given us in material blessings. What we know is wrong and what we hate as Christians, is what we find ourselves doing often. This bothers us constantly. So with the best of intentions we fall far short of pleasing the Lord.

Only a believer in Christ has these experiences. No unbeliever has such a struggle, because the unbeliever is ruled over entirely by his flesh. There is no ***"new self"*** in an unbeliever to fight against the temptations of Satan. In a way, this is a comforting thought. If we daily experience this struggle with our Old Adam, then it is evident that we are in the faith. If we were not believers, there would be no struggle with our flesh. That does not mean that we should be pleased with our Old Adam. No, we need to be admonished daily, as Paul writes, ***"...Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for***

God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1. We also should realize that we have need to pray daily: “*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” Furthermore, we should use the Sword of the Spirit (God’s Word) as a weapon against our sinful nature. We should also use the Word of God as a guide to direct us so that we live according to the will of our dear heavenly Father.

The struggle is great and severe, but in the end there is victory for the Christian by God’s grace. Let us learn how Paul expressed himself when he thought of how wretched he was because of his sinful nature, and how **he thanked the Lord for the final victory over sin through Christ.**

3.

Paul exclaimed: “***What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!***” Paul summarizes the main thought of our text when he says: “***So I find this law at work: 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.***” The Christian is constantly aware of his sinful flesh, and he struggles day after day in his effort to please the Lord and overcome his flesh. He longs to be free from the power of sin. Paul speaks of himself as a wretched creature, a miserable, afflicted man. And he sighs: “***Who will rescue me from this body of death?***”

This was not the sigh of a man who was giving up in despair. No, Paul knows the answer to his question. The answer in a word is CHRIST. Jesus Christ has won the victory over Satan and sin when He suffered and died on the cross. His death as God’s sacrificial Lamb was the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of all people. John the Baptist’s words direct us to Christ. “***Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,***” John 1:29. The sinless life of Jesus, his suffering and death, the shedding of his precious blood, accomplished our redemption. This satisfied the demands of the holy God that man’s sin be atoned for. Therefore, God declares the sinner righteous for Jesus’ sake, and no longer counts his sins against him. This is the salvation that Jesus has won for us already in this life.

The final deliverance from our daily struggle between our flesh and spirit will come only when we go to heaven. This eternal salvation in heaven we have through faith in Christ. With Christ’s robe of righteousness on, we can stand before the judgment throne on the Last Day without any fear. So we too should join Paul in saying: “***Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord,***” and say with the poet:

*“O my Savior, help afford by your Spirit and your Word!
When my wayward heart would stray, keep me in the narrow way;
Grace in time of need supply while I live and when I die.”* Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 342:5, revised)

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