

**Romans**  
**Chapter 7:1-25**  
**“Starving the Beast”**

**\*All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted\***

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Boiling down the **first 6 chapters of Romans** ... here's what Paul's taught us so far:

- 1.** Mankind is sinful and eternally lost. We're condemned by the sin-tainted blood we inherited from Adam and further condemned by our own rebellion.
- 2.** God's love, mercy and forgiveness are greater than all our sin combined ... but that forgiveness is only offered through the person of Jesus Christ and must be accepted by faith.
- 3.** Forgiveness results in, what Paul called justification, (defined as ... being made to look as if we've never sinned).
- 4.** And finally ... after we've been justified ... a process known as sanctification can begin. And sanctification, you may remember from last week, is the process by which God sets us apart from our old, sinful nature and establishes us in the center of His will for the fulfillment of His purposes.

Now, as we jump into **chapter 7** ... Paul builds upon those points in a very personal way. He really pours out his heart ... lamenting the fact that the process of sanctification in his life seemed so back and forth!

His life had been set apart for God ... and his old, fallen, sinful nature had been replaced by the spiritual life of Christ ... and yet ... his thought life and his actions were still so far from what he wanted them to be.

A lament that we can all, no doubt, relate to ... let's see ...

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**Verse 1:** Paul's speaking here about the civil law of the land ... not the Mosaic Law of God.

In most translations, you can tell by the first letter; if the "L" is capitalized, it's referring to the Law of God, but if it's a lower case "l", then it's referring to the law of man.

In any case, the point Paul's making is that ... if a man's convicted of murder and sentenced to death ... but happens to drop dead of a heart attack as he's on his way to the place of execution ...

**Q. Do you think they'll go ahead and strap him to the gurney and kill him again?** --  
No ... he's already dead. Man's law no longer has any authority over him. They could do their very best, but no matter what ... they won't be able to make him more dead.

Dead people, and only dead people, are not subject to civil laws. And in the same way, our old, sinful natures are no longer condemned by the Law of God and are no longer subject to the whims of Satan ... once they've died to his authority.

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**Verses 2-4:** Notice that we're now dealing with "Capital-L Law" ... the Mosaic Law of God ... given to the Hebrews on Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19-40**).

Paul's point is simple enough ... while it would be wrong for a husband or wife to be joined to another ... it's perfectly acceptable for a widow or widower to do so.

Yet another reason that, as Christians ... our old natures have to die. Before making a commitment to Christ, everyone is, by default, joined to Satan and therefore literally bound to a life of sin. And that relationship is dissolved when the old nature ... the one that stood at the altar and said "I do" to evil ... dies!

When the one who was bound by the Law and joined to Satan is dead ... there is freedom ... specifically ... freedom to marry another. And, as you know, the Bible, repeatedly refers to us as the Bride of Christ (**Revelation 19:7**).

Set free from Satan by death and joined to Jesus by marriage ... "So that", Paul says, "we might bear fruit for God's glory."

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**Verses 5-14:** "Before I knew about the Law ... it was all good. I didn't break the Law, because I had no Law to break. But once I learned about the Law, two things happened ...":

**1.** "I learned that breaking the Law brings about death, because death is the wage of sin." Not usually physical death, but as we talked about last week, death of relationships and opportunities and ministries etc...

"So", Paul goes on to say, "now knowing the consequences of righteous behavior and the consequences of unrighteous behavior, I had the liberty and the ability to choose ..."

**2.** "Because I knew I couldn't do those things that were contrary to the Law ... and because I still had a fallen, sinful nature within me ... I began to want to do those things. The passion for them grew within me and I fell to them."

But these things are not the Law's fault. The Law didn't put that sin nature in Paul ... it only exposed it. And indeed, that was, and is, the purpose of the Law of God.

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**Verses 15-16:** Here begins Paul's expressions of frustration over the war of these dual

natures within him. The old man and the new creation ... the sinful man and the righteous one ... the man who was joined to the enemy of God and the one who's now joined to the Son of God.

And despite how difficult and circular Paul's words are here ... we get it ... "I do what I hate, and I don't do what I want to do."

My old man does what the new man hates ...

and the new man fails to do what he should because of the opposition from the old man.

And all of this is proven by the Law which tells me right from wrong."

And most of us confess ... "Me too Paul!"

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**Verses 17-18:**

**Q. Remember the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord asked His disciples to watch and pray, but then came back and found them sleeping?**

**Q. Do you remember what He said to them the first time that happened?** -- He said, "... the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41).

That's the same struggle that Paul's expressing ... a willing spirit, but very weak flesh.

And in his despair, he reached this conclusion ... **"Nothing good dwells in me"** ... and I pray that you've come to realize that about yourself as well.

That's why our flesh can't be reformed or made better. It's eternally corrupt. It cannot be cleaned up ... only destroyed.

**"The willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not"**. Paul really wanted to do what was right. But it just never seemed to happen.

We also have the example of King David. He was a murderer and adulterer and yet he was also a man after God's own heart (**1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 13:14**). David wanted to do good ... he just blew it ... a lot! **"The willing was present in him, but the doing of the good was not"**.

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**Verses 19-23:** If you're a Christian ... then you can understand Paul's anguish. If you can't ... you honestly need to question your salvation.

**Q. Do you know what war cost more American lives than any other?** – The Civil War. It started on April 12th, 1861 and ended four years later, almost to the day.

So, it wasn't a terribly long war, but it was one of the most bitterly fought and it was the single costliest in terms of American lives in the history of our nation. It threatened the very existence of the United States.

Many of us grew up in homes with unhappily married parents. Some of you have experienced marital discord first hand; tension thick in the air and peace nowhere to be found.

Well what Paul's describing is that kind of tension and discord ... that kind of all-out war ... contained within his own body.

Jesus said ...

**Luke 11:17 ... Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and a house divided against itself falls.**

And these two natures that battle within us certainly do have the potential to bring down the house.

**Q. So, when will it end? – Well ... when does any war end?** – Not until one army overwhelms the other. But as long as each army has the strength to contend ... the battle will rage on.

In fact, the Code of Conduct that every member of the United States military must memorize says this ...

*I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist. If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available.*

The most powerful word-picture I've heard for these two natures that war within us is to think of two, 140 pound Rottweilers that really hate each other, but happen to live in the same backyard ... my backyard or ... your backyard.

They're always fighting. All the time you hear them barking and growling and snapping and frequently you hear the yips of one that's been bitten. They're rough and battle scarred. There's always a fresh wound here and new bald spot there.

**Q. Who can rest with those two mortal enemies at it that way day and night?** –Not only are they exhausted, but everyone who lives within earshot is exhausted as well.

It makes for a pretty good description of what I feel within me anytime both of my natures are strong. Those two natures, just like the Rottweilers, live in the same place ... my body. And not until Heaven will I be free of those dual natures ... but that doesn't mean that I have to put off the fighting.

Consider again the dogs in my yard. If every day, I feed dog "A", five pounds of beef and dog "B", five pounds of beef ...

**Q. Guess what's gonna happen?** -- We're gonna have a war ... a very long war!

If both dogs are feeling strong ... neither will surrender and neither will be utterly conquered ... they'll just fight on.

**Q. But what if I were to feed dog "A" the usual five pounds of beef, but dog "B" goes hungry? What if I did that day after day?** -- It wouldn't be long before my backyard was quiet.

Dog "**B**" would grow weaker and weaker and weaker and peace would begin to reign. No more snapping and snarling. No more turmoil-filled, sleepless nights.

See ... we haven't been given the authority to kick either one of our natures out, but we have been given the authority ... in fact, the responsibility ... of feeding them. And ... if we do that with some spiritual wisdom ... we literally get to choose who wins the war and how soon peace begins to reign.

Paul says in **Romans 13:14** to ... "**Make no provision for the flesh**", or in other words ... "Starve it to death".

**Q. But how do we do that?** -- Start with this ... make a list of some of your flesh's favorite meals:

**1. How about the music you listen to? – I'm not asking what label it wears; "Christian" or "country" or "R&B"?** – I'm asking ...

**Q. Which dog does it feed?**

**2. Q. Or television and movies ... and video games?** – It's been scientifically proven that the most direct route to the human brain's storage cells is through the eyes.

Meaning that even a small meal of visual unrighteousness will strengthen your bad dog more than you ever intended.

**3.** Mind altering, and addictive substances ... they have to make the list. In particular ... things used as a crutch for our anxieties. Because scripture tells us exactly what to do with those anxieties and it's not, "Bury them under a blanket of chemicals." It says to ... **cast [...] all ... [of them] on Him, because He cares for you (1st Peter 5:7).**

**Q. So, which dog is strengthened by the choice you make?**

**4.** This one can be subtle, but it's a huge problem in our self-oriented society and that is ... the amount of rest and relaxation and sleep and entertainment we feed our flesh.

Because it's never the spirit that's lazy ... it's the flesh.

**5. Q. How about the company you keep? Do the people you hang out with encourage your growth in God or do they feed snacks to the dog of your flesh?** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:33)

**6.** And from there I'll leave it up to you, but the original challenge remains ... make a list of your flesh's favorite meals and then take them off the menu!

The problem is that most of us feed a little to both dogs and then feel proud because we've "done a little better". But all that really means is that the battle within continues. But we can end the battle by strengthening one dog to the point that the other is overwhelmed.

**Q. But ... is all that deprivation worth it?** – Well ... we could say that it depends on whether or not you want inner peace, but in reality ... we all do ... so, ya! It's worth it!

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**Verses 24-25:** So, there it is! Not "how" can I be set free or "what" will set me free ... no ... Paul asks the right question ...

**Q. Who will set me free?** – It's not merely a question of avoiding temptation or doing more of this and less of that ... it's a question of drawing close to Jesus because He's the WHO!

And that wraps right back around to **verse 4** ...

**... be joined ... to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God**

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**Conclusion:** Paul declares in **chapter 5** that we've been granted peace with God, but as we spoke of then ... peace with God is not the same thing as the peace of God.

Peace with God is granted by the blood of Christ, but the peace of God is a choice that we must make subsequent to salvation and relates to the process of sanctification ... the process of being set apart for His purposes.

But His desire for us ... is both ... peace with and the peace of, God.

**Q. Do you remember Stephen, the first Christian martyr?** – Well, the **last verse in Acts chapter 6** makes an interesting comment about him. It says that as he was preparing to speak boldly of Jesus to the council that would ultimately have him stoned to death ... the Council members saw his face to be like that of an angel.

Stephen was serene and cheerful and yet confident. His face showed evidence of peace and boldness at that same time. Even as he faced this council that had earthly power over

his life. A council that, it is widely believed, the Apostle Paul was a member of.

**Q. And you wonder ... how could anyone be serene under such circumstances?** - Stephen was simply modeling there what Paul's teaching here.

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You can hear it in his words ... Paul was tired when he wrote **Romans 7**. He was tired of the pain and anguish from the civil war taking place within him.

They say that one of the most exhausting of all sports is boxing.

**Q. So ... what if all that jabbing and dodging and counterpunching were taking place within you?** -- No time limit. No breaks at the bell ... in fact, no bells! Just an incessant battle internally.

That brings on the kind of exhaustion that a night's sleep or round of golf, or a night out with the girls or even a full-on vacation ... won't cure.

**2nd Peter 2:20 ... if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. 21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away ...**

I'm convinced that the most miserable person on the face of the earth is a Christian who's not walking with God, because they, above all others, feel the war within.

Too much of the world to really enjoy the Lord and too much of the Lord to really enjoy the world. It's civil war without end!

So here are the facts:

- 1.** Every Christian has two natures ... one of flesh and one of spirit.
- 2.** Those two natures are involved in a civil war. A civil war that's anything but civilized and that we can all feel.

**James** says as much in ...

**James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts ... [en' = within] you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ... 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? ... 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: " He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? ... 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. ... [explanation added]**

**Q. Did you know that every 40 seconds ... someone commits suicide?** – Every 40 seconds someone reaches such a point of hopelessness and despair that they take their own life ... seeking relief.

And I strongly believe that a major source of that despair is the civil war that Paul's been telling us about here.

But God offers us a much better solution ... He says, "Just starve the dog of your flesh!"

**Q. How?** – Just as He says in **James** ... "By drawing close to Him". And just as He says in this morning's text ... "**Through Christ Jesus our Lord!**"

Draw close with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and as a consequence of that closeness you'll begin to hear Him give counsel. He'll begin to point out where the dog of your flesh is finding his food and strength and He'll give you the strength to resist those sources.

And if ... if ... if you choose to walk in that counsel and strength ... peace will begin to reign within you.