

Delight in the Law**COMMUNION**

July 5, 2026

Scripture: Romans 7:15-25

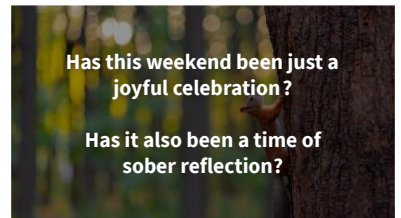
¹⁵ I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. ¹⁶ But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right. ¹⁷ But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. ¹⁸ I know that good doesn't live in me — that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. ¹⁹ I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. ²⁰ But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it. ²¹ So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. ²² I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, ²³ but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. ²⁴ I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? ²⁵ Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I'm a slave to God's Law in my mind, but I'm a slave to sin's law in my body.



250 years. That feels like a long time, relatively speaking, doesn't it? But in some ways, that is barely a blip in on God's timeline of eternity. In the scriptures, our lives, even at 80, are but a wisp of smoke from God's perspective. Yet, in other ways, 250 years is a long time. Imagine living for that long! And in reality, much has happened in the last 250 years. If one were to make a timeline of the major events and movements in US history, it would be a pretty crowded timeline. Even so, 250 years is relative even in America. For example, the town in Connecticut that I grew up in for most of my childhood, youth, and college years celebrated their 350th anniversary just before Kristin and I moved to South Dakota in 1991. That's 35 years ago. So they are now quickly approaching a 40th anniversary celebration.

As we gather on this holiday weekend, to begin a month in Romans 7 and 8, walking with the apostle Paul, we rejoice that we are able to gather to worship the Lord our God. Over the past day or two, we have likely spent some time with family and friends. We have probably all eaten some good food – possibly too much. And maybe a few of us even joined kids of all ages as they hollered, “Miss Small!!” at the parade that made its way through Piedmont on Saturday. Here in our little community, there is close connection. There is a “we know our neighbor” feel to living here.

But we do not celebrate this holiday in this small microcosm. We are part of a larger, national celebration too. When we step into that bigger arena, we acknowledge that not everyone is in the same mood, so to speak. From this larger perspective, two questions to consider: Has this weekend been just a joyful celebration? Has it also been a time of sober reflection? If I had to guess, my guess is that most of us connect to both of these questions to one degree or another. But no matter which question resonates the most with you, let us be clear: our primary allegiance, our most important connection, both belong to Jesus Christ.



We can enjoy both a joyous celebration and also have some sober reflection time. It is very possible to do both. In our life of faith, we can sing in prison like Paul and Barnabas did. In our faith life, we can be grateful even when we are afraid or anxious. On our journeys of faith, we are always on a journey towards perfection and we are constantly battling sin and temptation, often feeling at war within. In today’s text, Paul addresses this very thing. While he delights in the Law, he also knows that evil is always right there with him.

As we prepare to celebrate God’s guidance, direction, and instruction, even while we get sober about the battle with evil within our fleshy side, let us pray...

God of grace, God of mystery, there is so much of our lives, so much in the world, that we do not know, that is beyond our understanding. We come to you in humility and trust, surrendering our desire to judge and to control. Bless us now in our worship, and in all our lives, so that we may devote ourselves to your will and your wisdom alone. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

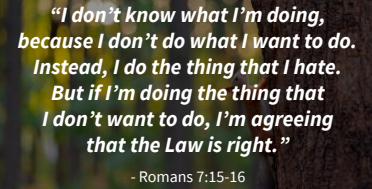


Please turn with me to Romans 7, starting in verse 15, as we begin this time together. As we do so, a little background on Paul. You might recall that he grew up as Saul. Born in Tarsus, Saul was a

very good student of the scriptures. He learned the holy scriptures inside out and soon was considered an “expert” in the Law. Saul became a Pharisee at a very young age and quickly rose in prominence within this group. The Pharisees were the dominant religious group in the time leading up to and during Jesus’ days. This group came into being in response to Roman and other pagan cultures that were chipping away at Judaism. The Pharisees were very orthodox and believed it possible to keep or obey all of the Law.

There were about 613 laws. The Pharisees sought to know and keep every Law of Moses. In their eyes, failure to keep one Law equated to a failure to keep any of the Law. Just imagine for a moment, taking a 100-question quiz – spelling, math, whatever. Now imagine being told that if you get just one answer wrong, you fail the whole quiz. Now make that a 613-question real-life quiz with the same grading criteria. Fail at one Law, fail the quiz. Until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and learned about grace, this was Saul’s whole world.

After admitting that he kind of still delights in the spiritual side of the Law, Paul admits that he now knows that he is made of flesh and blood, which tilts him towards being sinful. This admission leads into the opening two verses in today's passage: *"I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right."* Living a long time as a Pharisee, Paul knew that the Law was given by God as guidance and direction for all of life. Paul knew that the Law was good, something to delight in.



*"I don't know what I'm doing,
because I don't do what I want to do.
Instead, I do the thing that I hate.
But if I'm doing the thing that
I don't want to do, I'm agreeing
that the Law is right."
- Romans 7:15-16*

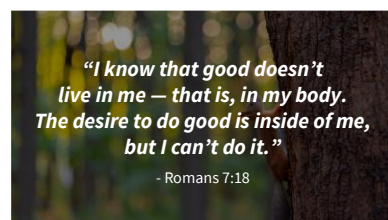
But Paul also knew his own struggle within. In his mind he knew the Law inside out and wanted with all of his being to keep the Law. His heart was set on keeping God's laws, but he often found himself not doing that. In fact, he often found himself doing just the opposite. Paul loves God's law and wants to obey and follow God's will and way. But he struggles to always live his life in accordance with God's will and way. Do you ever struggle with this too?

I know the right thing to do so that my life is pleasing to God. I know the phone call to make, the text to send, the visit to complete, the apology to offer, the help to extend, the invitation to give. I know the right things to eat, the right things to drink. I know the need to exercise and to get good rest and to take time off. While many of these things cannot be found explicitly in the 613 Laws, all of the Law had the same intent: to live a holy life, a life that is pleasing to God, and strives to love God and neighbor. I know that living a holy life is God's intent for my life. I know that it would be pleasing to God if I did this thing or that thing. I know that God and neighbor would feel more loved if I did "x" or "y." I know what I am supposed to do and be to live a life worthy of Christ. And, yet, I too do the other thing.

In that moment, I like you probably do, realize that I should have done this thing or that thing that would have been pleasing to God. And, a lot of the time, I even want to do that thing – at least the Christian part of me wants to do that God thing. I want to, we all want to, do the right thing because when we do, life is better. It is better for me, it is better for you, it is better for the stranger amongst us, it is better for our neighbor. Living in accordance with God's will and way is how we were created to live. We understand that living a faithful life is the right way – and the best way – to live this life. We know this from experience. But this is not our whole story.

As we continue in Romans 7, Paul offers this truth: *"I know that good doesn't live in me — that is, in my body. The desire to do good*

is inside of me, but I can't do it." Here Paul is speaking of the battle that we all fight. In our bodies, in the fleshy, human part of us, good does not dwell there. On the basic human level, we are driven by our appetites, by the need to survive, by the felt need to gather and store up. From a faith perspective, when we give into this fleshy part of us, nothing good happens. It is usually just the opposite. Being selfish, greedy, power-hungry – not good for anyone.



But there is this other part in us, the spark of the divine, that naturally seeks to want good and to be good in this world. It is that part of you that makes you want to reach for your wallet or credit card or payment app when you see pictures of the Venezuelan earthquake or of some other natural disaster. It is that part of you that wants to speak up when someone is suffering an injustice or another abuse. It is that part of you that wants to hug or comfort that crying child who you don't know but is lost in the store. It is that part of you that wants to share half of that last brownie because someone is sad that they did not get to try any. We all have this desire to do good that Paul is speaking of in this verse.

At this point, if he were living in our time and place, perhaps Paul would share that he tried harder, that he pulled himself up by his bootstraps, that he just toughed it out. These are things that we are taught to do, encouraged to do by our culture. But Paul does not do this. He recognizes that this war inside of him – make no mistake, it is a war – this war cannot be won by flesh and blood. At the end of verse 20, Paul acknowledges what it is that makes him do what he does not want to do and that prevents him from doing what he wants to do. Here he writes, *“It is sin that lives in me that is doing it.”* It is this fleshy, human, sin-prone part of him at war with the divine, holy part of him. We all experience this battle, this war within.

As we continue in Romans 7, Paul fleshes this idea out some more.

In verse 21 he shares that, as a general rule, when he wants to do what is good, *“evil is right there with me.”* Paul shares that he would gladly agree with the Law, that idea or thought hanging on his left shoulder, whispering kindness or mercy or love into his ear. This voice calls him to live out God’s will and way. He would gladly agree and even comply with this voice because the Law is good and right and just. Yet at the same time, a hot voice is whispering into his right ear. That voice tempts him to be selfish, greedy, power-hungry. That voice appeals to his fleshy, human nature. To Paul, it feels like a war is being waged in his head and in his heart. When we find ourselves in this place, feeling the pull of good and of evil, yes, it feels like a battle is being fought in our hearts and minds.



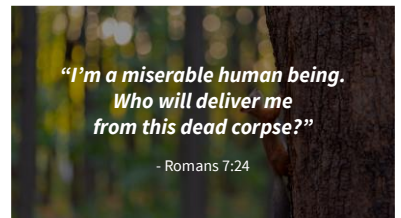
My friends, this is the reality for everyone living in this world as it now is. This is the inevitable consequence of living in this broken, fallen world. This was not how God designed or intended the world to be. But it is the result of sin running loose in the world. This is the universal human condition. Now, some people hear the voice of the angel a little louder and try and follow it a little closer. These folks seek to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Others hear the voice of the devil a little louder and walk this path more frequently. They are not necessarily entirely evil, but they tend to focus on loving themselves way more than on loving others. Here we can be tempted to think that we can make a difference. Maybe we fall into that try harder, work more trap. Or maybe we seek some steps to take to avoid falling into temptation. Maybe I'll just not get on the internet. Then porn won't be a problem. Maybe I'll just avoid that coffee group. Then gossip won't be an issue. Maybe I'll just...

"Whoa!" says Paul. Stay off the internet. Stay out of that coffee shop. Do whatever, my friends. But know that sin will just find another way to start whispering in your ear or to begin knocking at the door of your heart. No behavior modification, no self-help book or guru, no self-esteem raising scheme will ever entirely silence the voice of the evil one. There is nothing in this world that can defeat the power of sin and evil. Nothing. So, is it a hopeless situation? Are we doomed to a life of sin?

Yes, it is and yes, we are, unless we come to the place where Paul came to. Paul arrives there in verse 24, where he writes, *"I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse?"* That is about as hopeless and doomed as one can sound, isn't it? But this is also the necessary place of heart for one to be in order to find real help in this battle with sin. Left on our own, dead in our sin, there is no hope. In this miserable place, only death awaits. But we are not left on our own. We are not idly waiting for death to come. We do have a choice, an option, a hope, a way to life abundant and wonderful.

Paul celebrates and rejoices in the next verse. Paul knows the answer to the question about who will deliver him. In verse 25 he writes, *"Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*



Through Jesus Christ, Paul can be delivered from his sin. Through Jesus Christ, Paul can be delivered from death. Through Jesus Christ, Paul can find hope. As we continue into Romans 8 these next few weeks, we will dive deep and will unpack what it means for Christ to rescue us from sin and death. We will come to better understand how Jesus sets us free and gives life to our human bodies. We will come to know more of God's plan for the redemption of all of creation, starting with us. And we will come to understand the sweeping victory that can be ours through living faithfully as the community of faith.

Today is just a foretaste. Today we came to understand our basic problem: we want to follow God's will and way, because deep down we know the goodness and joy of a life lived for God but... But... No matter what – no matter how long we walk with God, no matter how hard we try to be good and righteous, no matter how many tempting situations we avoid, no matter what – sin is always there, always lurking, always seeking to drag us right back to that miserable place of sinful living.



While Paul recognized sin's pull on his life, he also chose to delight in the Law. For Paul, the Law was no longer the 613 laws that he had adhered to as a Pharisee. Through and after his encounter with Jesus, the faithful witness of Abraham, Moses, and other prophets became important. But it was Jesus' words, examples, and witness to God's love that became Paul's focus. As it was for his Lord and Savior, to love God and neighbor had become the supreme law of God for Paul. He understood Jesus' unconditional love for him and for everyone. That is why when he asks the question, "Who can and will rescue us?" he knows the answer: "Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior." May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Think back to the times when you were dead in your sin. How was Jesus your deliverer, your rescuer? How can gratitude for these times strengthen and encourage you for the battles that surely lie in wait?
- 2) *Pray*. Fighting the battle with sin is regular, constant. What is currently your greatest battle – ego, pride, control, gossip, addiction, lies? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 119:169-176. What words of hope does the psalmist give to you in the constant battle with sin? What honesty is revealed here that might also help?