

Main Idea: In Romans 7:14-20, we hear an honest confession about the struggle within. The confessor, Paul himself, shares two convictions about the struggle within which are vital for us to know if we are to experience joy in life as God intends.

- I. This is what we know – the bottom line (14).
 - A. We know that God's law is spiritual.
 - B. We know that we are of the flesh.
 - 1. I am carnal.
 - 2. I am sold under sin.
- II. This is what we experience – the battle (15-20).
 - A. We battle the flesh (15-18).
 - 1. Our problem is ignorance (15a).
 - 2. Our problem is failed intentions (15b-16).
 - 3. Our problem is an indwelling opponent (17).
 - 4. Our problem is a lack of ability (18).
 - B. We battle indwelling sin (19-20).
 - 1. I want to do good, but can't.
 - 2. I don't want to do evil, but do.

Make It Personal: Let's be honest about the struggle within.

- 1. The problem is in us.
- 2. The solution is not in us.
- 3. Only Christ can deliver us.

Scripture Memory Song: Psalm 9:10

Today we're going to hear "*An Honest Confession about the Struggle Within.*"

We are about to look at one of the most helpful, eye-opening, shocking, controversial, convicting, comforting passages in the Bible. Each description is true. This passage, Romans 7, does all this and much more.

Why is it that we so often fail to do the good things we intend to do in a day and end up doing the bad things we didn't intend to do? Let's read the words that the Holy Spirit directed Paul to record, and then let's ponder them carefully, inviting the same Holy Spirit to use them for our good and our Savior's glory.

Scripture Reading: Romans 7:14-20

In the late 1800s, the Russian author, Anton Chekhov, wrote a short story called "The Bet." The plot involves a wager between two men regarding solitary confinement. A wealthy banker believed that the death penalty was a more humane penalty than solitary confinement because "an executioner kills at once, solitary confinement kills gradually". One of his guests at a party, a 25-year-old lawyer, disagreed, saying, "To live under any conditions is better than not to live at all." Donald Whitney tells what happened:¹

Angered, the banker impulsively responded with a bet of two million rubles that the younger man could not last five years in solitary confinement. The lawyer was so convinced of his endurance that he announced he would stay fifteen years alone instead of only five.

The arrangements were made, and the young man moved into a separate building on the grounds of the banker's large estate. He was allowed no visitors or newspapers. He could write letters but receive none. There were guards

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, pp. 173-5.

watching to make sure he never violated the agreement, but they were placed so that he could never see another human being from his windows. He received his food in silence through a small opening where he could not see those who served him. Everything else he wanted--books, certain foods, musical instruments, etc.--was granted by special written request.

The story develops with a description of the things the lawyer asked for through the years and the observations of the guards who occasionally stole a glance through a window. During the first year the piano could be heard at almost any hour, and he asked for many books, mostly novels and other light reading. The next year the music ceased and the works of various classical authors were requested. In the sixth year of his isolation he began to study languages and soon mastered six. After the tenth year of his confinement, the prisoner sat motionless at the table and read the New Testament. After more than a year's saturation of the Bible, he began to study the history of religion and works on theology. During the last two years his reading broadened to cover many subjects in addition to theology.

The story is a classic and ends on a shocking note, which I'll share with you towards the end of this message. But you've heard enough to know that this is not just a story. It's a story intended to make us think *about ourselves*. Here's the truth about human beings. We love superficiality. It took fifteen years of solitary confinement to teach a young lawyer a lesson a lot of people have yet to learn. The things of this world do not satisfy. Only a personal relationship with our Maker brings true satisfaction, and He offers this to us through faith in His Son.

Most of you know what I'm talking about, don't you? You know that it's great to be a Christian, to have peace with God, forgiveness of sin, a Savior who has given us His indwelling Spirit to guide us through life and lead us to an eternal home with the Living God. Indeed, it's wonderful to be a Christian.

And it's also hard. That might sound contradictory, but it's not. It is *hard*, not to become a Christian (that's a free gift), but to live the Christian life. Indeed, it involves fierce personal struggle which unfortunately we don't talk about enough. And because of the superficial silence, a lot of people are limping along in their Christian experience.

There's one person who was not afraid to bare his soul and talk about the struggle within, and he was one of the greatest Christians the church has ever known. His name was Paul, and he recorded the vivid description of his struggle in Romans 7.

Romans is a gospel goldmine. Paul takes us deep into theology and explains the who, how, and why of God's salvation. Who? All of us need to be saved (Romans 1-3a). How? By grace through faith in Christ (Romans 3b-5). Why? For the glory of the Giver of salvation, God Himself (Romans 11:33-36).

In Romans 6-8 we learn how to live a vibrant Christian life. To do so, chapter six informs us we need a proper understanding of grace. But we also need a proper understanding of God's law, as chapter seven reveals. Chapter six corrects the abuse known as license, while chapter seven checks the extreme of legalism.

There are two grammatical shifts that we must not miss. The first is the tense-shift in the verbs. In verses 7-14, Paul used the past tense (verse 9 "Sin came alive and I died," and verse 11 "For sin deceived me...and killed me"). But in verse 14, he changes to the present tense, "But I *am* of the flesh." And present tense verbs fill the section to follow (verse 15 "I *do*...I *do*...I *do*"; verse 17 "Sin dwells within me"; verse 19 "For the evil I do not want is what I keep on *doing*").

The second shift deals with the change of pronouns from “we” to “I.” Over 36 times Paul uses the personal pronouns “I, me, my” in verses 14-25. *I* am struggling! Who does Paul have in mind? He’s not talking about other people, but himself. Or is he? What would seem to be a simple question to answer is not.

Who is this man in Romans 7? Cranfield identifies seven different views.² Some look at Paul’s statement in Romans 6:6 (“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin”) and conclude Paul can’t be talking about himself in Romans 7. They suggest that the “I” refers to Adam, or to Israel, or that the “I” refers to Paul the former Pharisee, or to an unbeliever who is attempting to justify himself, or to a believer who has not moved from law to grace.

Essentially, there are two categories of options. The first says Paul is using “I” to refer to an unsaved person (possibly himself earlier in life), and the other view sees the “I” as the self-portrait of Paul the Christian (Stott).

Then there are variations of the two categories. I read St Helen’s Bishopsgate commentary which says, “Stott’s solution is to suggest that Paul is imagining he were an Old Testament believer who is regenerate, but who does not yet know anything of the indwelling Spirit and so struggles as he tries and fails to live according to the Law (Stott, pp. 205-10). Moo concludes that Paul is looking back, with his Christian understanding, upon his own plight and that of the Jews, all of them living under the Law (Moo, pp. 443-51). Neither commentator, however, takes account of the tension that exists between the inner being and the outer flesh.”³

So what’s going on in Romans 7? There’s an unfortunate chapter break that prevents us from seeing the unity of thought between Romans 7 and Romans 8. Romans 7 and Romans 8 must be viewed together. The emphasis in chapter 7 is on “I”, while in chapter 8 it’s on the “Spirit.” On my own, the “I” always fails in the Christian life. But God has provided the “I” exactly what he or she needs, the personal enablement of the “Holy Spirit.”

Too often we put Bible characters on a pedestal, believing that the Christian life was easier for them than for us, assuming they must have had access to some mysterious power from God we lack. That’s why we need Romans 7. In Romans 7 Paul opens up his soul and shows us he was not a super-Christian. The struggle was real for him, as it will be for every follower of Christ. I’ll repeat. Every believer. And the solution for the struggle is the same. For every believer. It’s not a law, or six hundred laws. It’s a person.

In Romans 7:14-20, Paul shares two insights that are vital for us. The first pertains to what we *know*, **the bottom line** (verse 14). The second pertains to what we *experience*, **the battle** (verses 15-20).

I. This is what we know – the bottom line (14).

Verse 14 begins, “For we know.” This is not speculation. This is what we know. “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh [AV “carnal”], sold under sin.” There’s the bottom line. There are two clear-cut issues.

² See C. E. B Cranfield, p. 156.

³ St Helens Bishopsgate, *Romans: Read, Mark, Learn*, p. 134.

A. We know that God's law is spiritual. Interesting word choice. The law is *spiritual*, says the apostle. Does that word surprise you? It might, in light of what Paul just said in the previous verses about the law. In what sense is the law *spiritual*?

He could have in mind the origin of the law. The law (just like every portion of the Bible) came from God the Holy Spirit. The law came when the Spirit of God revealed the truth of God to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Also, to say that it's *spiritual* means that the law can't be understood apart from the help of the Holy Spirit who gave it. This is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Furthermore, only those who possess the Spirit can obey the law as God intends. He's not interested in mere external conformity. When it comes to the law, the heart matters too, as Jesus made clear again and again in His sermon on the mount. And it's the Holy Spirit who produces this heart-felt obedience. Enablement comes from Him.

In verse 12 we were told that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good. Now we're told that it's spiritual. So, no, our problem isn't the law. The reason we struggle in the Christian life isn't because the law is faulty.

What's our problem then? It's the second, clear-cut bottom line issue.

B. We know that we are of the flesh. You and I have two predicaments that create a constant internal struggle this side of glory. According to Paul's own admission, here they are.

1. *I am carnal.* Carnal is the term the AV uses. What is "carnal"? The ESV says, "of the flesh". Carnal stands in stark contrast with "spiritual" as the NIV demonstrates by translating the verse, "We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual."

This is where the tension begins. God's law is good for it tells me what our good God is like and what God expects, and as such it is spiritual. But I am *of the flesh*. I'm not *in the flesh* any longer but *in Christ*, as Paul explained in Romans 6. But I still battle this *of the flesh* propensity that I inherited from Adam to resist against God and His good law. There is something within every person, even a regenerate person, which resists God and seeks to be independent of Him.⁴ I'll battle it until I am clothed in my glorified body, and so will you.

"'Fleshly' people cannot fulfill a 'spiritual' law, no matter how much they want to,"⁵ says the Douglas Mangum. He's right. Then there's a second predicament.

2. *I am sold under sin.* What does that mean? Paul personifies sin here. Sin is not only what I do, but it's also an entity that I fight. Sin is a power, an opponent, a proclivity that threatens me to which I am sold. It's as if sin holds a price over my head and tries to enslave me.

Remember, as a person who is now in Christ, I have been set free from sin's penalty. That's Romans 6. But I still struggle with sin's power. That's Romans 7.

This is the bottom line. This is what I know. God's law is spiritual, but on my own I am not. When I forget that, or worse, foolishly deny it, I am in serious trouble.

John Stott offers a needed warning. "To speak quite plainly, some of us are not leading holy lives for the simple reason that we have too high an opinion of ourselves. No man ever cries aloud for deliverance who has not seen his own wretchedness."⁶

⁴ Observation by Bruce, p. 153.

⁵ Mangum, D., ed. (2020). [*Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Ro 7:13–20). Lexham Press.

⁶ John Stott, p. 74.

You say, “I don’t like that word *wretchedness*. How can I have good self-esteem if I use a word like *wretched* to describe myself?”

Answer this. Do you want to be like Paul? Paul was a very joyful person, content, secure, stable, who also said, “*Wretched* man that I am!” as we’ll see next week in verse 24. The problem isn’t the word. The problem is that most of us are far more influenced by psychology than we are by Scripture when it comes to how we think about ourselves. It shows up when we say things like, “I need to get out of this marriage. It’s ruining my self-esteem.” Or, “I choose the gentle-parenting approach. I want my child to have a good self-esteem.”

According to God’s Word, what your child needs, what you and I need, is not *good* self-esteem, but *correct* self-esteem. What we need is not to feel good about ourselves, but to learn to see ourselves the way God does. And frankly, I may not feel too good about myself when I see what God sees. But I will most certainly feel wonderful when I discover what He did for me to address the problem He sees.

This is the bottom line, says Paul. God’s law is spiritual, but on my own I am not.

II. This is what we experience – the battle (15-20).

According to Ephesians 6, we are in a battle with the forces of darkness. But that’s not the battle in mind in Romans 7. Here the battle is internal. Paul identifies two fronts involved in this personal struggle.

A. We battle the flesh (15-18). Look ahead to verse 18 where Paul identifies this opponent. “For I know that nothing good dwells *in me*, that is, *in my flesh*.” What does Paul mean by “flesh”? I’ve been thinking about that question for five decades. It’s not easy to answer. When Paul says “flesh”, we know he’s not merely talking about the body, although the flesh uses the body. Cranfield explains, “By ‘flesh’ here Paul means not some lower self as a part of the man...but the whole fallen human nature as such—in Calvin’s words, ‘all the endowments of human nature, and everything that is in man, except the sanctification of the Spirit’.”⁷

If we are a Christian, flesh is where we were. We were *in the flesh*, and now we’re in the realm of the Spirit if we know Christ (see Romans 8:1-5). But we still battle the flesh, and this internal battle affects every person in the room. In four ways, which Paul identifies in verses 15-18.

1. *Our problem is ignorance (15a).* Ignorance feeds the flesh. In verse 15 Paul says, “For I do not understand my own actions.” Then he adds, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

Can you relate? I can. Why do I do the things I do? There’s mystery in this, in every argument, in every decision to look at inappropriate things. Don’t miss the present tense, “that which I *do* (lit. “am doing”). Paul admission is almost staggering. “What I am doing I don’t understand.” This is a huge contributor to the battle. Ignorance. We struggle because we don’t understand.

2. *Our problem is failed intentions (15b-16).* Hold on to your thinking caps as we move through the tedious, yet revealing testimony in the next section. Paul confesses in verse 15b, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”⁸

⁷ Cranfield, p. 167.

⁸ I first learned this in the AV which puts it this way, “For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.”

Paul is being brutally honest. “What I wanted to do, I didn't do. What I didn't want to do, I did anyway.” Can you relate? We move through life with failed intentions.

Young people, did any of you lose your temper this past week, maybe at school, or at home? Was it because you got up that morning and said, “I think I'm going to blow up at my sister today at 10:47.”? No. Our lives are full of failed intentions.

Any married couples have conflict recently? “I sure didn't plan on yelling at my spouse last night. It's just that one thing led to another, and out it came.”

There are times that we plan on doing evil (Proverbs 11:19), but often it's simply a matter of failed intentions. Think of the woman who standing by the casket of her mother says to herself, “I had every intention of visiting her, but now it's too late.”

Or the workaholic father who says, “It was my intention of taking a day off from work to spend with my son, but I just didn't.”

Most of us know what our problem is. I remember a man looking at me across his dining room table, and asking in all sincerity, “Pastor, I know I should be in church. Why is it I can't seem to get there? What's my problem?” The Phillips Modern English paraphrases verse 15, “My own behavior baffles me.”

Why is it we do the things we hate? Why do we buy new furniture on credit when we know we won't have the extra money in ninety days any more than we do today, especially when we know the debt is just going to raise the anxiety level in our home?

Why do we eat that extra piece of pie when we know we'll be kicking ourselves tomorrow when we stand on the scales?

Paul tells us. “What I would that I do not; but what I hate, that do I.”

And every time that happens, what am I proving? Paul gives the answer in verse 16. “Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.” Every time I sin, I am consenting that the law is good. Indeed, I am proving the goodness of God's law. It's not the law's fault I sinned, but my own. But there's more.

3. *Our problem is an indwelling opponent (17).* Notice verse 17, “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” Why do we sin? Paul says it's because we have an opponent. What opponent? Sin, specifically, indwelling sin.

At first glance, verse 17 seems confusing. Is Paul passing the buck when he says it's not me, but sin? Like the shoplifter who's caught red-handed but whines, “I didn't steal the watch. My hand did.”

Is that what Paul is saying when he says, “I don't do wrong. Sin does.?” Not at all. He's not talking about personal accountability. In God's eyes, I am responsible for my sin, and so are you. Every sin (see 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Paul knows what I need to know. My problem isn't just the “sins” I commit (plural), but the “sin” that indwells me (singular).⁹ I have a bent, a proclivity, a tendency to sin, and so do you. Sin is our indwelling opponent.

4. *Our problem is a lack of ability (18).* Paul says in verse 18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

I can know *how* to play golf, but that doesn't keep my ball out of the lake. We understand this. It takes more than knowledge to succeed at something.

There's a big difference between morality and Christianity.¹⁰ Morality is knowing the instructions. Christianity is knowing a person. It's only once we know Christ that we

⁹ The literal rendering of the last phrase in verse 17 is, “the dwelling in me sin.”

¹⁰ See Barclay, p. 100.

have the ability to do what's right. But even then, we still struggle. Why? Because we are prone to take our eyes off the person and try to live the Christian life on our own strength. And anything we do in the flesh, God hates. And anything we do in the flesh is doomed to fail. Our problem is ignorance, failed intentions, an indwelling opponent, and at its root a lack of ability.

Let those words sink in. *Nothing good dwells in me*. The psychologist won't tell you that. The self-help best seller won't tell you that. The theology of the humanist insists says that we are good and have infinite potential for good. But God's Word says my problem is a lack of goodness.

Who will you believe? This is critical, brothers and sisters. Parents, we are not preparing our children for life in God's world if we don't help them grasp this. Our children are not little angels. They are vipers in diapers, as a friend of mine used to say. Oh yes, they are special and should be cherished, absolutely, because they are created in the image of God. But they're also depraved, a condition they've inherited from us. It's our parental assignment to help them see themselves as God does, and then show them the solution He has provided.

This is the first front in our battle. We battle with the flesh. Here's the second.

B. We battle indwelling sin (19-20). We can sum up the essence of the struggle within by using two statements.

1. *I want to do good, but can't.* Verse 19 begins, "For I do not do the good I want." In the AV, "For the good that I would, I do not." In his own strength, Paul knew he would lose the battle with sin every time.

2. *I don't want to do evil, but do.* Again verse 19, "but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." In the AV, "But the evil which I would not, that I do."

And verse 20 reiterates that our foe is not external, but internal, "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

I found this helpful explanation by Hendriksen and Kistemaker, "The Christian is living in an era in which two ages, the old and the new, overlap. There was a time when Paul was *exclusively a sinner*. There will be a time when he will be *exclusively a saint*. Right now, as he is dictating this letter, he is a *sinner-saint*. A "saint," to be sure; but also still a "sinner"; hence the tension, the inner conflict. It is a struggle which every true believer experiences."¹¹

The name R. C. Sproul is well known in our circles. He's in heaven now but was a wonderful Bible teacher for decades. I decided to listen to this brother's sermons on Romans 7 to see how he approached this challenging text. What I heard was helpful, and quite shocking. I was surprised to hear Sproul's confession about his own struggle within. I think it would be helpful for us to hear it in his own words.¹²

In the early days of my conversion, I longed for that second work of the Spirit. I had some close friends who were from Holiness churches. Even though they did not think they had reached a level of total perfection, they still believed in the second work of grace as sanctification. Martin Luther said that if there ever was a monk who sought his way into heaven through monkery, it was he. I have to say to you if ever there was a Christian who more earnestly sought after the second blessing than I did, I would like to find out who they were. I had good

¹¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [*Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*](#) (Vols. 12–13, p. 232). Baker Book House.

¹² <https://learn.ligonier.org/sermons/law-cannot-save-sin-part-1>

reason to seek it because I brought so much baggage into my Christian life. I knew the power of the flesh, and I knew that it was a power I had no ability in and of myself to overcome.

On the day of my conversion, I went through a radical change in my behavior. My language changed instantly, and other areas of my life changed dramatically. For the first time in my life, I had a thirst and, indeed, a passionate hunger to learn the truths of the Scripture. For the first time in my life, I enjoyed prayer, and I actually liked to go to church and sing hymns of praise to the Lord God. But I had sins that were besetting and ongoing.

I will never forget sitting in the local college grill within the first few months of my conversion, and my math professor, who was a Christian, was sitting across from me while I was smoking. He took a straw, held it like he was holding a cigarette, and he then put it to his lips, pretending to inhale on the straw and exhale. He said, "Let me tell you about my experiences with the Holy Ghost. That was his way of rebuking me for my failure to clean up my life as a new Christian with this business of smoking.

It was because of smoking that I was on a lookout for instant sanctification. If ever a new Christian struggled with that, I think I set the world record. I tried everything. One evangelist gave me this clue: "If you want to stop smoking, put a picture of Jesus in your cigarette package. Every time you want to smoke, take that pack of cigarettes out, look at the picture of Jesus, and you say, 'I love you, Jesus.' Then you will not be tempted to smoke." I tried to take that advice. By about three o'clock in the afternoon, nothing was more repugnant to me than the picture of Jesus, and I had to take it out. I cannot tell you how serious that struggle was for my soul. I would come to the text of Scripture that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and say to myself: "I can't say that. I can't do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

I had people lay hands on me. I had a Holiness minister pray for the second work of grace and for my instant sanctification. It did not work. For the first time in my life, I heard someone pray in tongues over me to deliver me from this problem. Another minister gave me a nail and told me to put it in my pocket. He said: "Every time you're thinking about smoking, think of the death of Jesus. Pull out that nail and think of what Jesus did for you." That lasted a few hours, until I threw away the nail.

From the day I became a Christian to the first time I went twenty-four hours without smoking, twenty-five years had passed. It took me twenty-five years to go one day without smoking. Then it took me another ten years after that to go a month, and it was at least another ten years after that to get rid of it all together. All that time, I listened to the accusation of Satan. I struggled with my own spiritual state because I had an addiction to the flesh, and I simply could not get rid of it.

I know I am not alone with that sort of thing. In a sense, though it should not be, it becomes a normal dimension of the Christian life that we all are faced with besetting sins. We come before God and we seek to get rid of them, and sooner or later we have to hear the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

I can feel Paul's anguish. I do not mean to cheapen that colloquial statement about feeling one's pain, but I can feel the anguish of the Apostle in this text, as elsewhere in his letters, where he talks about the war that goes on in the

soul of the Christian between the spirit and the flesh, between the old man who does not want to die and the new man who is working for inward renewal and maturing in Christ. I cannot tell you why sometimes the Lord allows us to struggle for years and years before liberation comes. But He does. Yet at every moment, the grace is there to overcome, no matter what it is.

My friends, all Christians struggle, including R. C. Sproul and even the apostle Paul himself. Why? Because we're at war on two fronts, with the flesh and with sin.

At the beginning of this message, I shared the first part of Anton Chekhov's short story, "The Bet," and left you wondering about the outcome of the banker's bet with the lawyer. The lawyer did spend fifteen years in solitary confinement, and was one day away from receiving the prize of two million rubles. Let's listen as Donald Whitney tells us what happened next:

The second half of the story focuses on the night before the noon deadline when the lawyer will win the bet. The banker is now at the end of his career. His risky speculations and impetuosity had gradually undermined his business. The once self-confident millionaire was now a second-rate banker and to pay off the wager would destroy him. Angry at his foolishness and jealous of the soon-to-be-wealthy man who was now only forty, the old banker determines to kill his opponent and frame the guard with the murder. Slipping into the man's room he finds him asleep at the table and notices a letter the lawyer has written to him. He picked it up and read the following:

'Tomorrow at twelve o'clock I shall be free...but before leaving this room...I find it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience, and before God, who sees me, I declare to you that I despise freedom and life and health and all that your books call the joys of this world. For fifteen years I have studied attentively the life of this world. It is true that I neither saw the earth nor its peoples, but in your books I lived...I sang songs, I hunted the deer and the wild boar in the forests...In your books I climbed to the summit of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and I saw from those heights the sun rise in the morning, and at night it shed its purple glow over the sky and the ocean and the mountain-tops. I saw beneath me the flashing lightning cut through the clouds. I saw green fields, forests, rivers, lakes and towns. I heard the song of the sirens and the music of the shepherd's reed pipes. I felt the touch of the wings of beautiful [angels] who had flown to me to talk about God...Your books gave me wisdom. All that had been achieved by the untiring brain of man during long centuries is stored in my brain in a small compressed mass...I know I am wiser than you all...And I despise all your books, I despise all earthly blessings and wisdom. All is worthless and false, hollow and deceiving like the mirage. You may be proud, wise and beautiful, but death will wipe you away from the face of the earth, as it does the mice that live beneath your floor; and your heirs, your history, your immortal geniuses will freeze or burn with the destruction of the earth. You have gone mad and are not following the right path. You take falsehood for truth, and deformity for beauty. To prove to you how I despise all that you value I renounce the two millions on which I looked, at one time, as the opening of paradise for me, of which I now scorn. To deprive myself of the right to receive them, I will leave my prison five hours before the appointed time, and by so doing break the terms of our compact.'

The banker read these lines, replaced the paper on the table, kissed the strange, sleeping man and with tears in his eyes quietly left the house. Chekhov

writes, 'Never before, not even after sustaining serious losses on change, had he despised himself as he did that moment.' His tears kept him awake the rest of the night. And at seven the next morning he was informed by the watchman that they had seen the man crawl through a window, go to the gate, and then disappear.¹³

I don't recommend all the conclusions to which the lawyer came, but Chekhov's story is a masterpiece at forcing us to look through the window into our own hearts. Friends, all of us are experiencing the struggle within. Some of us are being honest about it. Some of us aren't. Some of us are feeling it and responding, by God's grace, the way He intends. Some of us aren't.

You say, "What is the proper response to this struggle?"

I'd to answer that question by sharing a song with you that's been helping me greatly in my own struggle within. Remember, redeemed people sing the word. This old hymn models for us the answer to the struggle within. Annie Hawks wrote it in April 1872. I've adapted the refrain, and have chosen to freshen it up with a different melody.

*I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like Thine can peace afford.*

*I need Thee every hour, stay Thou nearby;
temptations lose their power when Thou art nigh.*

*Refrain [revised]:
I need Thee, every hour I need Thee;
Bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.*

*I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain;
come quickly and abide, or life is vain.*

*I need Thee ev'ry hour, teach me Thy will;
and Thy rich promises in me fulfill.*

*Refrain [revised]:
I need Thee, every hour I need Thee;
Bless me now, my Savior, I come to Thee.*

Make It Personal: Let's be honest about the struggle within.

1. *The problem is in us.* More money isn't the answer, nor is more education, or a better family, or job. When it comes to our struggle, the problem is *in us*.

2. *The solution is not in us.* It's not. Believing in ourselves isn't the answer. Trying harder isn't the answer. But there is hope.

3. *Only Christ can deliver us.* That's the point of Romans 7. Only Christ can give us victory. How? By putting our total trust in Him, for salvation, for sanctification, for service, for everything. We'll find out what that looks like in the weeks ahead as we finish our journey through Romans 7, and then, the Lord willing, move into Romans 8.

Closing Song: #428 "I Need Thee Every Hour" (new tune; revised refrain; four verses)

This evening: OARBC churches from Scioto County at WBC; Chuck Pausley preaching

¹³ *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, pp. 174-5.