



Daily Faith Practices

Sunday, July 3-9 (A) – Romans 7:15-25a

Focus: *Internal strife*

word of life

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”
(Romans 7:15 NRSV)

Read Romans 7:15-25a

A significant amount of Paul’s letter to the Romans addresses the issue of sin. In particular, this passage contains classic verses describing the inner conflict waging inside each person. And yet, not everyone can acknowledge this reality.

The apostle Paul understands his own struggle with sin is not unique to himself. But rather, all are enslaved to sin because sin dwells inside of us. That is just the way it is.

This internal strife has been described as a civil war raging inside. Paul writes from his own personal experience of wrestling with the power of sin over his life. The verse preceding this lectionary text includes a heartfelt confession by Paul. He writes, “. . . but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.” (Romans 8:14 NRSV) Ouch! Sold into slavery! Those strong words from the apostle Paul sound irreversible and final. One might ask if there is any hope to live a righteous life.

1. *What does Paul mean when he describes being sold into slavery under sin?*
2. *Who sold Paul into slavery under sin?*

Paul writes in very personal terms: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:15 NRSV) No wonder Paul describes this as slavery. Despite being born with freedom of choice, he cannot control his own actions—despite his best attempts to do so. His human will is limited because of sin dwelling inside of him.

3. *Can you relate to Paul’s words? How so?*
4. *Give an example of not wanting to do something, but doing so anyway.*

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” (Romans 7:18-20 NRSV) These words can be quite discouraging. Paul’s words ring out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24 NRSV) Again, the question has to be asked: Is there any hope to live a righteous life?

5. *Who rescues humanity from this body of death and sin?*
6. *Why does Paul spend so much time writing about sin?*

Paul’s answer is clear: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25 NRSV) We cannot and do not defeat the power of sin on our own. Thanks be to God who defeats sin yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

It can be helpful for all Christians to hear Paul name the power of sin and identify his internal civil war, knowing all along that sin does not have the final say in his life. Jesus Christ has set him (and us) free from the slavery of sin. As much as Christians desire to do God’s will, the internal battle never ends. That is an important self-awareness to obtain in this life. We are left to turn to God with each breath.

Word among us

Diets are begun on January 1 or shortly thereafter. Gyms and fitness centers overflow as people vigorously try to shed extra pounds gained over the holidays. But as the days and weeks wear on, those same gyms and fitness centers become less busy.

Our New Year's resolutions are often full of good intentions which may or may not be followed. One person always resolves never to make resolutions. He knows he can't keep a resolution, so why try?

1. *What are your thoughts about New Year's resolutions?*
2. *Why can't we do what we intend to do in our New Year's resolutions?*
3. *What is the key to staying on a diet?*

Paul writes, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Romans 7:15 NRSV) This verse has been used by some to justify not trying to make changes. They might say something like, "Look at the apostle Paul. He can't do what he sets out to do. It is simply impossible. Why even bother to attempt to live a godly life? The power of sin is too great."

4. *How do you respond when people quote this verse to justify their actions?*
5. *Was Paul encouraging people to give up? Explain your answer.*

Imagine a young person approaches you after hearing this passage read during worship. This person has a confused facial expression and begins to ask you about this passage.

6. *How might you respond to this young person?*
7. *What do you find confusing about this passage?*
8. *How do you describe the internal strife inside each one of us?*

Martin Luther was one who wrestled with the power of sin over his life. He struggled with how he could ever stand before God. He fully and totally related to Paul's words, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24 NRSV) For that is how Luther understood himself. For both the apostle Paul and Luther, this self-awareness about sin raging inside did not lead to despair; rather, it led them to the love of God found in Jesus Christ.

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

In baptism we have been claimed by Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit forever. But that does not mean that we skip over the internal civil war and tensions within us. Sin is still a reality. But thanks be to God who frees us from the power of sin in our lives and empowers us to live as a new creation in Christ. Each day we remember God's claim on us in baptism and God's invitation to live in Christ.

9. *What is important to remember from this passage?*

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for not giving up on us. Continue to rescue us from the power of sin within us. Amen

last word

For one day, make a list of those things you intend not to do, but that you do. Pray over that list.

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