

Romans: Our Civil War...

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[0 : 00] If you're here for the first time or for the 200th time, I don't know if we've been meeting that long. We've been around for about three years. We've talked about going on a journey.

We've talked about the Christian life is a journey. We've talked about all of life is a journey. And sometimes we put an illustration up that's in your bulletin, hopefully, and it's this diagram right here. And we think this diagram best represents what the Christian life looks like as we, as children of God, walk with him. We're on this journey and we're walking through life.

And all of a sudden, at some point in our life, God's spirit comes into our life and opens our eyes.

And we see A and B. We see our sinfulness and we see God's holiness.

And at that point, we invite Christ into our life. Christ comes into our life. He changes us. We enter out of the, Scripture says, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. But we continue on this journey after that conversion point.

[1 : 04] And what Scripture says and what Romans has been teaching us is that as we grow, as we continue to journey, that A and B continue to increase.

If we're walking the normal Christian life, we're going to continually grow in our awareness of God's holiness. If we're walking the normal Christian life, we're going to continually grow in our awareness of our sinfulness and our indwelling sin and our fleshiness.

And if A and B are growing and getting wider, then the cross fills that space and the cross becomes more beautiful and wonderful and purposeful to us.

As Christians, the cross is everything because it's where we are redeemed and brought back to the Father. But the passage today and the things we've been talking about is that it doesn't work like that.

That there's this struggle, this indwelling sin in us. And this indwelling sin in us tends to shrink our vision of the cross. It shrinks our vision of what Christ has done for us.

[2 : 06] It shrinks our idea of our need for redemption and to be saved. Either we say things like, well, you know, God really isn't that good. Because if he was good, he would be doing these things for me.

My life would be different than he is right now. And so A shrinks. Or we say things like, you know, I'm really not that bad. I'm really not that bad of a person. When I look at the people in my office, I'm surely not as bad as my boss.

My boss is terrible, but I'm not that bad. And so we develop our own righteousness. And so the cross gets smaller and smaller. If A decreases, if we see God as less holy, then what we do is we start to perform.

We don't think of God as holy and totally other. We think of him as just Tobin plus 10. And so we think we can do things and we perform and we come to church and we enter the worship team and we preach and we tithe and we serve and we do all these things.

But all these things are is our performance in trying to make up for how small God has gotten in our eyes. If B decreases, if B decreases, what we do is we tend to minimize our sin.

[3 : 13] We pretend. We say, well, we're not as bad as we really think we are. Well, when we go to church, sometimes I get depressed because they talk about how we're totally deprived and we're sinful and things are really bad, but that's not really true.

And so we pretend. We compensate by pretending. The Romans says we wear a mask. And so when you come in here, people ask, how are you doing? You go, great, thanks, fine, everything's good.

Because we don't want people to see our brokenness. We don't want people to see our need for the gospel. We don't want people to see what we struggle with. We don't want people to see our

shadows and our dark places. And so we pretend.

And as we pretend or as we perform, what we do is we shrink God. And most of us are on this journey that we want to shrink God down into this little box because we get God into this little box and we can control him or we can rub him and we need to do something and he pops up like a genie.

And the passage that we've been talking about throughout Romans and what we're going to talk about today is why this happens in our life as followers of God. And it's this idea of indwelling sin.

[4 : 18] That sin stays within us and it indwells in us and it changes us. You know, guys, today is this massively difficult and important passage. I think no other parts of scripture besides Romans 6, 7, and 8 have changed my life in the 30 years plus that I've tried to walk with God.

What you heard, read today is this idea that there's this indwelling sin in us and it stops our journey. It prevents us from doing what we want to do.

You know, my greatest fear is I'm going to do a bad job of covering it today. My greatest fear is it's such a massive and huge thing that I'm going to just slice off a little bit of it.

And so I've been praying and praying that we would all see that this struggle is true of all of us. You know, I think about it. When I talk to non-Christians, people who aren't in church, people who are pre-Christians, some of the things they say sometimes is, well, I don't like to be around Christians because it seems like they're always talking about struggle and things are difficult and things are hard.

But what I've realized in my journey is that all of us struggle. Even people who aren't in the family of Christ. We all struggle on this journey of life.

[5 : 35] We all struggle. And we've been reading about it in Romans, Romans 1, 2, and 3. It talks about that we all struggle and that before we come to Christ, we all struggle with God. We all struggle with this idea of God, that he's holy and he's righteous, and so we don't like it, and so we try to make our own righteousness.

We try to develop our own purpose. We try to develop our own meaning. We try to avoid this idea of judgment that we talked about in Romans 1, 2, and 3 because God would never judge us. We try to think of God in different ways.

We try to think of God in our image because it would be easier if God was like Tobin or like you because then you would never have to worry about displeasing him or not being holy because he's just like you and everything's going to be great.

And so before we come to Christ, we struggle with this, and we try to avoid God. We try to create God in an image that we can handle, or we try to be God, and we try to serve ourselves.

And so even before we come to Christ, we struggle. But the passage that we've been reading says that once we enter into the family, we continue to struggle. I mean, life is this struggle.

[6 : 41] But now once we come into the family because of the gospel, because of what Jesus has done, now we have this different struggle in us. And this struggle is these conflicts of these beings inside of us.

We struggle with our old person, our old flesh, the sinfulness, and our total depravity. Remember we talked about total depravity before? I mean, I don't know if I did a very good job of describing it because people kind of came up and asked questions.

But I said, you know, total depravity means that everything about us is tainted, right? We all are tainted with sin and brokenness and selfishness, and we all have this in every part of our life.

And if sin were the color blue, that if you looked at you, if you looked at your heart, that every part of you would have this kind of shade of blue. Now, we wouldn't be all blue, but total depravity doesn't mean you're totally sinful.

It means that there's not a part of you that isn't touched by sin. And so everything we do, our thoughts, our actions, our deeds, they all are blue.

[7 : 41] Now that we come to Christ, we struggle with this because we have this blueness in us, but that we have this new spirit that came in us, and it's this righteousness that God put in us, and God saves us, and he gives us this new nature.

But when he does it, when he gives us this new nature, the thing that bothers me is he doesn't take away our old nature. The Bible doesn't say that God takes away our old nature. The Bible doesn't say that God takes away our sinfulness.

He doesn't take away our corruptedness. We still feel its power. We still feel its pull. We still feel its influence. We still feel its longings on both of us.

And so we have this struggle between our old nature and our new nature, between our sinfulness and our total depravity and our righteousness. And the passage says that as long as we're on earth, please listen to me, as long as you're alive, as long as, I call this our earth suit, as long as we're wearing this earth suit, we're going to struggle.

And as Christians, we're going to struggle with this conflict between these two natures. Does that make sense? Because I didn't understand that for a long time in my life. For a long time in my life, people said, when you come to Christ, everything's going to be great.

[8 : 49] When you come to Christ, you get a Rolex, and you get a great job, and you get a great wife, and you get a great house, and you get a great family, and no problems, nothing ever happens wrong. And if something happens wrong, it means that you don't understand it totally. You go back and reboot, and you reboot, and everything's going to be perfect.

But the Bible says no. And if you hang around people who say they're perfect and they're not broken, you need to run away from those people. Because those are the people that grab a lot of people around them and go off to some Africa or some country, and they start their little commune, and bad things happen.

When you're around perfect people, right? It does. Bad things happen when you're around perfect people because you start to feel how imperfect you are. But the passage doesn't say that. The passage says we have this struggle, and the struggle's always going to be with us.

And to me, it's incredibly comforting. Because I grew up thinking I was going to be perfect, but I still felt imperfect, and I still felt this struggle, and I wondered, why am I feeling this struggle? What's wrong with me?

How come I can't do these things? And I started reading Romans, and I realized that's normal. That there's a battle within me, and this battle is struggling, and this battle wants control.

[9 : 58] And so I want to start a dialogue today. I want to begin this foundation of this talk, and we're going to come back to it over and over and over because I'm sure we're going to have to. And what I want to look at in this passage is three things.

I want to look at our struggle. So what does the battle look like? Why are we battling in this struggle? What is this conflict? I want to look at what does it look like in our lives? How does it live out here?

Because Paul gives three really powerful examples of what his struggle looks like. And then the third thing is I want to see how we can deal with this struggle. Okay, so why do we have this struggle?

What does it look like? And how we can deal with it? That's pretty easy. That's the only way I can think simplistically like that. So you guys ready? Because you guys are really quiet, and you're kind of looking at me like, okay, this is a really weird person.

I don't know what's going on here. Why do we have this struggle? For thousands of years as Christians, we have been trying to deal with the problem of sin in our life. You know that? For thousands of years, Christians have been trying to deal with the issue of indwelling sin in our life, and people have done amazing things to try to escape the struggle and the conflict within them.

[11 : 03] I mean, early Christians would go to the desert. Some of my favorite writings and authors were these guys called the Desert Fathers. And these Desert Fathers went to the desert, and they tried to just escape everything around them that caused sin.

They tried to just separate themselves, and they did some weird things. I mean, they wrote some great books and articles, but they did some crazy things, and they just tried to separate themselves from the world, tried to separate themselves from evil, tried to create their own little commune, and tried to get rid of all this indwelling sin within them.

And they figured, if I can get rid of this stuff, I can get rid of this stuff. Some of us do that today, don't we? I mean, it seems to me that some of us struggle with creating this perfect world.

Some of us try to separate things that cause discomfort and pain and tension and sinfulness. It happens all the time. I read about it in America. They're trying to separate these different things from this and this different things, and if we can create this great utopia.

They try to do it in Switzerland with Calvin and Zurich and Zwingli, and they try to separate all these things, and so we do these weird things, and we do it today.

[12:10] But the passage says that, and history tells us, no matter how much we try to separate ourselves from the bad influences and the sinfulness and the stuff outside of us, we can't separate ourselves from our heart.

We can't separate ourselves from the indwelling sin in our life. No matter how much we try to change our schedule or our regiment, that our heart is still there, and we struggle with this flesh. We struggle with this fallenness. There's a really interesting story in the Desert Fathers. The most holy guy, he'd been in the deserts for like 30 years, and everybody came to listen to wisdom and all the things that he did, and he was just amazing.

And so the story says that one day the devil went to tempt him, and the devil went to tempt this Desert Father who'd been in the desert for 30 years, separating himself from all things that would cause sin, and he tried to tempt him with lust, and the guy said, no.

Tried to tempt him with power, and the guy didn't take it. Tried to tempt him with money, he didn't do it. And the devil goes, wow, you're really holy. And as the devil was walking out of the guy's hut, the devil turned around and said, hey, I just want to congratulate you on your brother for being nominated the new pope of Rome.

[13:22] What an amazing thing he did. And the story says that all of a sudden this anger rose up within this monk, and he realized that as much as he wants to separate himself from the things that cause discomfort and sin and pain and badness in his world, that he couldn't separate himself from his heart, and the brokenness in his heart.

And that's what Paul says here in verse 14. Look at it. He says, I know that the law is spiritual, but I am flesh. I am sold into the bodies of sin. When he says I am flesh, he says the law is spiritual. It's been given by God. The word actually means it's been imported by the Holy Spirit, that it's good. It's from the Lord. The law isn't bad. But in me, there's this flesh.

There's this sinful nature, this thing that dwells within me. And this battle fights on. We talked about in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 that people said that the law is bad.

The law causes us to stumble. The law causes me to get in trouble. And what Paul is saying is the law is just like this x-ray. This law takes this x-ray of our life, and it shows us what's in our heart.

[14:35] The law doesn't produce the bad things in our heart, but the law shows us our fleshiness. And Paul says it right here that he struggles with this. In chapter 6, he says, even though I have a new nature, I'm not completely changed.

He says, I'm not totally like Christ, and I struggle with this sinfulness in me. And this sinfulness in our lives put us under its will, put us under its dominion.

And Paul says, I struggle with the darkness within me. He says we all struggle. And the verbs from verse 14 to 25 are all present. They're all active. They're all right now.

And what it means is that from here on out, from onward, for the rest of our lives, we are going to struggle with the darkness in our life. He's talking as a Christian. So here's a question for you. What is the darkness that you struggle with? As a follower of God, what is the darkness in your heart that you struggle with?

[15:38] Is it pride? Is it selfishness? Is it comfort? Is it security?

I mean, all these things are great, but once they become our idol. One of my favorite authors and pastors in America, he says that we all have a shadow mission.

That in our lives, we all have this shadowy side. We all have this shadow mission. And even though we're acting great on the outside, inwardly, we have this shadow mission. And this is the thing that we want to see carried out.

And if it's not carried out, we become upset and we become angry. What is the darkness in your heart? Because Paul says that we all struggle with it.

We all have it there. C.S. Lewis once said this amazing thing. He says, if we don't realize we struggle, we don't realize what it means to be a Christian.

[16:39] He says that the struggle is the mark of a Christian. And if there's no struggle, there's no true faith. Those are pretty strong words, aren't they?

If you're not struggling as a Christian with the darkness in your heart, if you're not struggling with your shadow mission, if you're not struggling with the things you should do, but you want to do, but you don't do, but you do other things, if you're not doing that, Lewis says that you need to ask yourself, do you have faith?

He said this. He said, ask Hitler if he's a spiritually bad man. And he would say no. But he said if you ask Abraham Lincoln, if he was, he would say yes, and to a very great degree. Lewis went on to say this. He says, common sense tells us that the worse we are, the better we feel about ourselves. Did you hear that? The worse spiritually we are, the better we feel about ourselves.

And the better off that we are, the worse we feel about ourselves. Did you hear that? He says, common sense will tell us that the worse off you are, the worse off you are spiritually, the worse off that you are within your heart, the better off you're going to feel about yourselves, the better off you're going to see yourselves.

[17 : 55] And the better off you are, the worse you're going to see yourself, the worse you're going to feel about yourself. So the question is, how do we feel about ourselves today? We talk about our life with God.

We talk about our growth. We talk about that chart as we walk. Do we see ourselves performing? Do we see ourselves pretending? How do we see ourselves today? Paul's going to tell us that in all of our lives, we have this darkness that's hiding, and we often wear masks, and we try to hide it from other people, and we say, you know, that's not me, it's not me, I don't have any of these problems.

You know, I wonder sometimes why non-Christians look at us in the church and say, you guys are crazy. Because I see you struggling with those things.

I see you anxious and angry and nervous and worried. But when I talk to you about faith, you say, well, everything's perfect, everything's great, come to church, and you'll be good like me.

No wonder the non-Christian world around us has a hard time looking at the church and finding attractive things within our lives.

[19 : 12] Am I going with things this way? I remember the first time I shared with my friend who was not a believer, and we were talking about life, and he was worried about things going on, and I said to him, you know, I worry a lot.

I struggle with worry a lot. I struggle with control a lot. I struggle with those things. And he looked at me and goes, you're a pastor. You're not perfect.

And he said, you know what? I'm not. And it was like I'd hit him over the head with his sledgehammer, because in his mind, Christians, and especially pastors, were supposed to be perfect, and we never had troubles.

We never had struggles. We never talked about those things openly, at least in his world. Let me ask you a question.

what would it be like if we were a church where everybody knew they were broken?

[20 : 27] Everyone desperately needed grace. Everyone knew they didn't have to hide it. and they could encourage other broken people to come in here and go on the journey with him. What would that look like?

Would that be a good thing? I wonder sometimes. Because it seems like sometimes in the church we just want perfect people.

And when a non-perfect person walks in our doors or a broken person comes into our community group, we don't know how to handle them. We distance ourselves from them. We say, oh, that's bad.

That's terrible. Get away from them. But Paul says that's not real life. That's not the Christian journey. What would it be like if we were a church where people knew they were broken, they didn't hide it, they didn't have to hide it, and they encourage other broken people to come in and to be changed by God's grace?

The next thing the passage shows us, and it shows us this very small glimpse, a very intentional, personal glimpse of Paul's life and his struggle.

[21 : 41] It shows us Paul's hopelessness. It shows us that Paul, even after he had been a Christian for all these times, still struggled with his Christian walk. Can you think of this for a second?

Someone comes walking into your community group, and they've been a Christian for 30 years. They're Paul. And they say, no, I'm really struggling.

I'm really struggling with these areas of my life. I'm really struggling. I feel like I'm getting beat up by the devil all the time. I'm really, really struggling. What would you do? What would you do? Well, in

my life, I might have said, well, you need to read the Bible, dude.

You need to read the Bible. If you read the Bible, everything's going to go away. You need to memorize the Bible. What would Paul have said? Yeah, I wrote about a third of the Bible. Oh, okay, okay, okay.

Sometimes people come in like that, and some churches say, well, you know, you need to get more spiritual gifts. Your problem is you're not speaking in tongues. You're not having enough spiritual gifts. If you had all those spiritual gifts, then all the darkness would walk away, and you wouldn't struggle with that anymore.

[22 : 53] Paul would say, yeah, you know, I speak in every tongue. In Corinthians, it says, I have all the gifts. I still struggle with it.

Maybe we would say something like this. Well, you don't have a big view of heaven. If you had a bigger view of heaven, if you thought heaven was amazing, if you saw heaven as it really is, if you really saw heaven, then you wouldn't struggle with all this darkness.

You wouldn't struggle with the pain. You wouldn't struggle with the evil in your life. You wouldn't struggle with those things if you could just see heaven. Paul would say, you know, I've been in heaven.

It's amazing. I mean, I struggle with wanting to go there right now. I wonder, should I stay or should I go? Because I've been there. I've seen God's throne. I've seen it all. But I still struggle.

I still hurt. I still conflict. I still battle. Verse 15, he says, for what I'm doing, I do not understand, for I'm not practicing what I would like to do, but I'm doing the very thing that I hate.

[24 : 06] You gotta listen to these passages, because Paul's not, he's complaining about his actions, but he's not putting responsibility on somebody else. He's saying, all my actions don't line up with who I know I am.

I have this new identity. I have this new heart. I have this new mind. I have this new spirit. God has given me all these things, but for some reason, all these things in my actions are out of sync. They don't sync up.

They don't work. I mean, I understand that I'm this new man, but within this new man, I have these desires that are, they're bad, and this sinfulness, this indwelling sin, prevents me from doing the things that I wanna do.

I wanna do those things, but I don't do those things. I have this conflict, and I can't fight it. I can't do it. What do I do in my life? And when you read verse 17, he says, there's no longer I and the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me, he's not using it as an excuse.

He's not saying I'm not responsible. He's not blaming other people. He's not putting our blame on other people like we do or like I do, but what he's saying is that there's a sinful nature in there, and the sinful nature indwells in my heart.

[25 : 15] It's always gonna be there, and just because I'm a Christian doesn't mean that I don't struggle with indwelling sin. It's never gonna disappear, and the sinful nature is there, and it's struggling with me, but I know that this sinful nature isn't who I am.

It's not me anymore as a child of God. As a child of God, I'm different, but this sinful nature hasn't struggled, hasn't disappeared, and I continue to struggle with it over and over and over.

Does that make sense? So he's struggling with this, and he's thinking through these things, and he's saying, how do I fight this struggle? What do I do in my life to get rid of sin? How do I deal with this brokenness in me that is there, and I don't want to show people?

How do I do with these things? What do I do? You know, in my life, I've tried to walk with the Lord for over 30 years, studied the Bible for years and years, memorized huge passages of it.

I've taught most of it. In my heart, I want to do the spiritual thing. You know, after all these years, reading God's word, being in community, leading worship, understanding God's will, communion with the Holy Spirit, praying, after all these years, I understand a very clear path.

[26 : 45] I understand this very clear path that God wants me to walk, but it still does not take away the control of the indwelling sin in my life.

I still hear those voices. I still feel those temptations. You know, chances are very good today that before this day is over, I'm going to hurt everyone I love in my family very dearly.

I'm going to hurt them. I'm going to say something mean to them. I'm going to be sharp. I'm going to be focused on myself instead of them. I'm going to say something that's going to really hurt them deeply.

And I'm going to have to struggle with sin the moment I leave and even now as I preach. I'm going to have to confess my sin to my family, my friends. I'm going to have to repent of those sins and walk away.

I'm going to have to realize every moment of every moment of my life, I need God's grace. in my life. And there's not a time that we will not struggle on this earth as God's people.

[28 : 14] Does that make sense? No, growing up, I hated struggle. I tried everything in my life to stop struggle, especially as a Christian.

I mean, and I'm just being very honest and I'll share things and please don't feel like there's fingers pointing at you because his fingers are pointing at me. But in my life, I've tried formulas. I said, okay, I'm going to do all the right things.

I'm going to study all the right books. I'm going to do all the right programs. I'm going to do four steps. I'm going to do 12 steps. I'm going to do stop this. I'm going to do that. I'm going to let go, let God. I'm going to think life is supposed to be easy.

If life is hard, then I'm not doing the right formula. If things are difficult, I'm going to get a different formula. It's all about having the right formula. If you have the right formula, then life's going to be easy. In my life, I've tried new experiences.

I mean, if I get new experiences, if I get gifts and get tongues and I get the second work of the Spirit, I get lordship. I got non-lordship. I get cleansed. I get past defeat to victorious. I become victorious to defeated. I get more emotional experiences. I get different worship.

[29 : 17] I get different church. I get different pastor. I get different spouse. I get my best life now. I've tried all these different experiences in my life and I know that some of you have also. Hoping that with these different experiences, you will deal with indwelling sin in your life and you won't have to struggle with it anymore.

Sometimes in my life, I've just tried to avoid this struggle. I've tried to turn away from the struggle. I've tried to remind myself and think, well, it's not really a struggle. It's not there. It's just in my mind. It's not a part of who I am. I'll get, again, get involved in Bible studies.

I get involved in programs. I get involved in other things instead of dealing with my sin. You know, sometimes I think in the Christian church, hear my heart here. We have more programs and more Bible studies and more study cues and more things we can do than any other time in the history of the church to help us.

And most church historians would say that we are worse off as the people of God than we were before we had all these things. Our influence is worse.

Our testimony is worse. Our lives are worse. I mean, it's almost like we feel like we get all these, and I, in my life, and not pointing at anybody else, but in my life, sometimes I had Bible study after Bible study after Bible study and other things that I did throughout the week at my church because I didn't want to have to deal with things going on in my life.

[30 : 47] Because it was easier to go to a Bible study and pretend that I wasn't struggling, that I didn't have these issues. It was easier to read another book and write out a study than to deal with people in my life and to deal with the brokenness of my life.

And I say that because I know that's true of me, and I know that it's true of many of us because many of us get involved in doing, doing, doing things because we don't want to deal with what's going on in our heart. We don't want to deal with the darkness of our heart.

We don't want to deal with everything going on in the shadows of our lives. And because we don't want to do that because it's uncomfortable, we try to escape the conflict and the tension. But God says, and Paul says, that you will never, ever do that here on this earth because we all will have tension and we will all struggle with those things and we will all have to deal with those things.

The passage says at the end in verse 24 and 25, Paul comes to this realization after saying, I, me, mine. He says it 40 times. And finally in verse 24, he says this.

After trying to do, there's three examples of this trying to do it by himself, trying to do it by himself, trying to do it by himself, over and over and over. And he does it all by himself over and over and over. And finally when he comes to the end in verse 24, he says this.

[32 : 01] He says, Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from this body of death? Wretched man that I am, I'm pathetic, I'm helpless, I'm calloused, I'm miserable.

That's what it all means in Greek. I'm terrible. Remember, this is Paul. This is the church father. He's 60 plus years old. He's written one third of the Bible. He's walked into the Lord for over 30

years and he's still struggling with a sin inside of his life that people don't want to talk about, people want to hide, people don't want to be real with.

And he says to himself after he's tried to hide it and do all those things, Wretched man that I am, I'm pathetic, I'm helpless, I'm calloused, I'm broken. Who will set me free?

I can't fix myself. I can't make myself holy. I can't get rid of my shadow mission. I can't do the things I know I should be doing. I'm helpless, I'm hopeless, I can't rescue myself.

Who will set me free? Because I can't do it from this body of sin. It's a very interesting word, body of death. You know, in Rome, if you did a really heinous, heinous crime, I mean, if you did a really, really bad crime and it was really heinous, one of the punishments they would do is they would actually strap the person that you murdered onto your back.

[33 : 15] And so they would strap this dead body onto your back. And you would walk around life with this dead body on your back. And as this dead body decayed, it decayed into your flesh and it eventually destroyed you and killed you.

And this is the imagery that Paul's using there. And he says that dead bodies are indwelling sin. And he says, we're carrying around this indwelling sin on top of us and we're trying to get rid of it. We're trying to hide it. We're trying to get rid of all these things.

We don't want people to see it. And he says, wretched man that I am, who's going to set me free from this? I have this body of death, this indwelling sin. I can't do it. What am I going to do?

In verse 25, he says, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other with my flesh, the law of sin.

He says, thanks be to God that God loves us, that God saves us. It's not me, but it's God. It's God who comes into my life. I'm struggling, but it's God who comes into those moments when I struggle and he changes them.

[34 : 19] He makes them less. He makes me able to go through them. How? Through the cross. Through Jesus Christ. Basically, verse 25 is the gospel. What Paul is saying there is that there's no way, even after, remember, he's not coming to Christ.

He's been a Christian and even as he walks as a Christian in his life, just like before, he had to deal with sin and the wrath and judgment. The cross came in.

It dealt with that. Paul is now walking, but he's still dealing with his indwelling sin and he says, the same way we deal with our lives now is the same way we deal with our lives in the beginning. And as we go to the cross and we trust Jesus to come into our life and we realize all that he's done and when we realize that all that he's done, we give our lives to him and we trust him and we walk with him.

Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from this body of sin, this indwelling sin, this body of death? Praise be to God. Thanks be to God because he does it through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What he's saying that you and I in Christ as we walk every day, we can be secure.

You and I as we walk with Christ every day, we can trust him, we can surrender our lives to him, we can walk in his spirit, we can realize that he's with us. We can realize it's okay to be broken.

[35 : 34] We can realize that it's okay to have this struggle with indwelling sin. In fact, the more we bring it out into the light, the more we deal with it. I think our biggest problem as Christians is we think everybody thinks we should be perfect and so we never talk about our brokenness and we never bring it out into the light and so the light, God, the Holy Spirit, doesn't have a chance to come in and heal it and fix it and change it because we're afraid of that because we're afraid that if someone sees me broken as a pastor, they're not going to want to come to church because they're perfect people but there are no perfect people.

There are no perfect people. What would it be like if we all realized this? What would it be like if we walked through our day and we continually said things like, thanks be to God who saved me through Jesus Christ?

You're struggling with the brokenness, the darkness, the shadows in your life. You shared it with your friends. You're about to do the thing that you don't want to do. What if in the middle of that time you said, thanks be to God who saved me through Jesus Christ?

You're about to walk into this incredibly hard board meeting and you know things are going to be tough. You know you're going to have to compromise. You know you're going to be trusted. People are going to want you to compromise and your values and all these things and you don't know what you're going to do. What if you said before you walked into that meeting, thanks be to God.

God's in control here. I can trust Him because He saved me through Jesus Christ.

[37 : 17] Does that make sense? I just want to share four closing thoughts.

We're done. But I don't think we're done because I want to be a church where broken people come and share their brokenness.

and realize it's okay to be broken because we're all broken. And Jesus is doing an amazing thing by healing us and changing us.

And we need to talk about that. My first thought. you and I will always be in this very intense struggle.

There will always be this intense struggle going on in our lives as we're Christians. The struggle is with our indwelling sin. If we're not struggling right now, the passage says there's something wrong with us.

[38 : 28] either we've renamed it, we've hidden it, we've closed it away in a closet, we don't want to talk about it.

But Paul says as His people, as His redeemed people, as His chosen people, as His people who are a holy priesthood, that we're always going to struggle with this indwelling sin in our lives. And if we're not struggling, He says there's something wrong with us.

Number two, we are never going to, and this is going to bother people, especially, I think, Americans, because we want victory, we want success. But we're never going to get to a point in this world where we don't need grace.

We are never going to get to a point in this world where we don't need grace. We don't need God's empowerment. We don't need God's strength. Even our victories, the Bible says, even our victories, even the good things you do, even when you succeed as a husband, a wife, a worker, you do the great thing and it's an amazing thing, even our victories, the Bible says, even our victories are because of Jesus.

Did you hear that? In Revelations 4, it's one of these interesting passages. In Revelations 4, what it says is that as God's people, we will come to heaven and we will see Jesus, the Lamb of God and we will have crowns on our head, crowns of gold and jewels and all these things that we did well for his kingdom and we served him.

[40 : 00] In the passage, it says something very interesting in Revelations 4, 11. What it says is that you and I, we all take off our crowns and what do we do with them? We all take off our crowns, what do we do with them?

We lay them at Jesus' feet. Why do we do that? Why do we do that? Because everything we've done, everything good, everything great, everything righteous, everything perfect, everything the way God calls us to do it, everything the Bible says, you do it this way, everything you've beat this indwelling sin in this case and you've really been nice to your wife or your husband or your worker or you've done all these things to your friends, you've been great.

All those righteous things, he says at the end, we just lay them at Jesus' feet. Why? Because everything we've done is because of his grace.

Everything we've done is because of his power. Everything we've done is because of his strength. But Jesus is the hero of our story.

We're not the hero of our story. Number three, no matter where you are, no matter where you are, if you're God's child, he is pursuing you.

[41 : 29] No matter where you are in your journey, if you're pretending or you're performing or you've shrunk the cross so small that you can just keep it in your pocket and pull it out when you need it, no matter where you are, God's word says that he's pursuing you.

He never gives up. He's the God of second chances. You're never by yourself.

You're never blown it so badly that he's not looking at you. You never mess up so badly that he's turned his back and he's ignoring you. The passage says he's always, always, always pursuing his children because he loves you so much.

One last thought. I love I love Lord of the Rings and Tolkien and a couple of those.

I really don't like science fiction that much. I really don't like fantasy that much. But I love the Lord of the Rings. I love Tolkien. I love the story that he tells. I love C.S. Lewis. I think it's amazing how they weave myth into this grand story and they capture our story in life.

[42 : 58] and I've been thinking about this a lot, you know. When Peter Jackson in New Line Cinema was reading Tolkien and they said, you know, hey, we need to make a movie out of this.

This would be a great movie. We don't know how successful it's going to be but this is going to be great. We need to make a movie out of this book. What's the first thing they had to do? They're reading The Lord of the Rings, they're reading Tolkien, they go, wow, this is incredible.

I really like this story. This is going to make a great, great, great book, a movie. Let's make it into a movie. What's the first thing they had to do? Come on.

What did they have to do first thing? Do what? Wow, Elaine. You know, the first time I heard this I was like, okay, you got to get the right character for Legolas, you got to get the right character for so and so.

Maybe I'll do that. You know, you're thinking all these characters or you're thinking, well, where are we going to get the money to produce this and where are we going to shoot this and all these things but no. The first thing they had to do was they had to buy the rights to the book.

[44 : 20] They had to buy the rights to the story because until they bought the rights to the story, they couldn't keep the story going. They couldn't fix the story. They couldn't change it. They couldn't do anything about it. I mean, even though most movies are different than the books and so there's these changes going on but they wanted to make the movie.

The very first thing they had to do was they had to buy the rights to the story. You and I are on a journey and God comes in and he buys the rights to our story.

He sees your life and he goes, wow, that's amazing. I don't even worry about who's playing it because you're playing it but what I got to do, I got to buy the rights to that story. How do I buy the rights to that story? I send my son.

My son buys the rights to that story. now I have that story. I love that story. I want to make sure that story has an amazing ending.

I'm going to make sure that story is filled with grace and mercy and struggle and love. I'm going to make this story amazing. Do you know that?

[45 : 46] God has bottomed the rights to your story and he wants to do something incredible in your life. He's going to do it through your struggles, through your failures, through your successes, through your hard times, through your good times because he wants to do something amazing in your life.

Do you believe that? That's the message of Romans. That's the message of God's word.

Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you as we think about the struggle that we face, that we have heroes of the faith like Paul who shows us that the struggle doesn't just stop at one end, but it continues and continues and continues.

But in the midst of that struggle, we have a hero. This hero is your son. And this hero comes in and he buys the rights to our story.

movie. And it is an expensive movie because the rights cost him his life. But now he has our manuscript in our life.

[47 : 14] And he's doing an incredible story in our life. And we don't know what the ending is going to be like because sometimes he rewrites things different than we want them to be. And so we face pain and struggle and tension and conflict and we want to avoid.

We want to say you're not in it. You don't love me. If you love me, you would have done these things. You wouldn't let these things happen. Why are you there? You're not good. But your word says that you are and you bought our story and you want to do something amazing with it.

And the question is, will we let you? Will we let you? Father, I know there's some people here who are on a journey by themselves and they're still trying to be God and still trying to create God and find God.

And I pray today that somehow, Lord, you would open their eyes and their ears to your son, Jesus, that they'd realize that all of life is a struggle. The question is, where is their efforts going to go within that struggle?

I pray they would come to know your son and enter into the family. And I pray that when they walk into the doors of this family, they would see a family of people who are broken, people who are being changed and redeemed and honest and real and struggling with indwelling sin and talking about it and praying about it with each other and confessing it and helping each other along the journey.

[48 : 44] and all along, crying out, praise be to God who changes us through Jesus Christ.

I know there's some of us in this room who've been on that journey for a while and we've been on it for so long we've even forgotten where we're heading. We're kind of like the hobbits in the woods and we lose track of the trail and all of a sudden we're in the middle of the mirkwood and we don't know how to get out and we're captured and we're in these webs of sin and indwelling sin and we're waiting for a hero to come and to release us.

Lord, I pray for our hearts. Help us to confess our shadows. Help us to be honest and real with you and to repent of our brokenness and to realize that the only way we can make it is through your mercy and grace and that you're doing an amazing thing in our story.

I pray for us, Lord, that we would be different people because of your word. I pray that we would be different people because we gather together to worship you and to sing of amazing songs of how good you are. I pray that we would be different people because we're in a community that loves you and reaches out to those who don't know you yet.

I pray for this part of Hong Kong, Lord. I know there are a lot of people who are rewriting and writing their own stories and those stories are ultimately going to end up in pain and badness and hurt.

[50 : 10] help us to be a church that introduces them to the author that can rewrite all things, the one who's willing to buy them whatever it costs so they might have life and hope and mercy and grace.

Father, we love you. We desperately, desperately need you. I pray these things in your son Jesus' name.

Amen.