

# Sermon: The Human Condition

Text: [Romans 7:14-25 ESV](#)

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**Introduction:** The passage of Scripture before us has been discussed down through the ages. It speaks of the human condition and describes the “war within,” and a kind of interior “tug of war.” It is my understanding that the Apostle Paul is speaking in our text this morning from the perspective of his being a Christian - not his pre-Christian life, as some might teach. [Romans 7:14-25 ESV](#) <sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Do you think of yourself as a good person, or an evil one? People down through the ages have struggled with human goodness or depravity. Theologies are based on their view of man as well as God. The Apostle Paul struggled with this seemingly dual nature.

Many of our Baptist, Presbyterian, Assembly of God and Reformed brethren believe in a doctrine of “total depravity.” “What *total depravity* means is the total person is corrupted by sin: every aspect of human nature is depraved, including the intellect and the will.” - Christian Standard article by Jack Cottrell, March 2007

When taken to its ultimate conclusion it means that no one can understand the truth, let alone do it. This also means that infants are baptized in churches without their having personal faith. I do not believe it is necessary or even biblically correct to baptize babies. I do not believe babies are born sinful and thus consigned to hell if they were to die without baptism. That only happens as they come to an “age of accountability” and knowingly reject God’s call on their lives.

**Richard Holloway, (Bishop of Edinburgh, at the Catholic Renewal Conference at Loughborough in April 1978) wrote:**

**“This is my dilemma..., I am dust and ashes, frail and wayward, a set of predetermined behavioral responses,...riddled with fears, beset with needs..., the quintessence of dust and unto dust I shall return...But there is something else in me...Dust I may be, but troubled dust, dust that dreams, dust that has strange premonitions of transfiguration, of a glory in store, a destiny prepared, an inheritance that will one day be my own...So my life is stretched out in a painful dialectic between ashes and glory, between weakness and transfiguration. I am a riddle to myself, an exasperating enigma...this strange duality of dust and glory.”**

**You might remember the story by Robert Louis Stevenson called: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Henry Jekyll was a wealthy and respectable doctor, inclined to religion and philanthropy. But he was conscious that his personality had another side, a dark side, so that he was committed to a profound duplicity of life. He discovered that man is not truly one, but truly two. He then began to dream that he could solve the problem of his duality if only both sides of him could be housed in separate identities, the unjust going one way, and the just the other. So he developed a drug by which he could assume the deformed body and evil personality of Mr. Hyde, his alter ego, through whom he gave vent to his passions-hatred, violence, blasphemy and even murder.**

**At first Dr. Jekyll was in control of his transformation, and boasted that the moment he chose he could be rid of Mr. Hyde forever. But gradually Hyde gained ascendancy over Jekyll until he began to become Hyde involuntarily, and only by great effort could resume his existence as Jekyll. “I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse.’ Finally, a few moments before this exposure and arrest, he committed suicide. The truth is that every Jekyll has his Hyde, whom he cannot control and who threatens to take him over. John R.W. Scott, (*Contemporary Christian*, p. 44)**

## **I. Mankind Is Capable of Many Things.**

**A. Mankind is capable of understanding the law.  
(but may choose - make a conscious choice, to disobey)**

**We have been given a mind with which to think, process information, and make choices. We are a higher creation than the animal kingdom. But if to know the right thing was the same as doing right, life would be easy. But knowledge by itself does not transform a person. Even the Word of God must be put into practice.**

James tells us: **James 2:18-19 ESV** 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Then James tells us: **James 4:17 ESV** 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

John R. W. Stott, on our text in Romans writes: “Indeed, an honest and humble acknowledgement of the hopeless evil in our flesh, even after the new birth, is the first step to holiness. 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.” John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), p. 1974

Who is Lord? Who is on the throne of our lives? We have been given free will. We are not at the mercy of hormones and instincts. We can do the difficult thing. We can take the narrow way. We can love instead of manipulate and hate. We are made in the image of God – maybe a little marred, but nonetheless capable of being good.

#### **B. Mankind is capable of great deeds.**

I have known many people in my life who were not Christians, who did many good things for other people. It is that spark of the Divine, that inoculation of God, that causes all creation to do things that honor the Creator.

**Illus.** Funeral for a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient & also the town drunk (Dr. Lynn Hieronymus story) The Medal of Honor recipient had lost his way. Why? It’s hard to tell! Maybe like so many, he quit the discipline of Church, study, and prayer. I hear it all the time: “We used to go all the time, but we have just gotten out of the habit.”

That was the good news – now for the bad news:

## **II. Mankind Is Incapable of Many Things.**

#### **A. Mankind is incapable of perfection in the area of obedience.**

Ovid, the Roman poet, said basically the same thing. “I see the better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse.”

**There are some who teach what is called “perfectionism” (this is a heresy, of course) as being the expected experience of Christians, but that certainly was not Paul’s experience after twenty plus years with the very best mentoring. (Bill, an evangelist with our churches, and a group in NY state)**

**Paul tells of his plight. Even though Paul is a Christian – a committed Christian, he struggles with evil. To know what is right is one thing – to do it, yet another.**

**Illus.** This is much like when we spend money and go to the doctor; and he/she tells us we need to eat less and exercise more. And if we don’t follow this advice, we should anticipate certain results. We know better, but we somehow fool ourselves into believing the doctor is either wrong, or maybe just in our case.

**From our text this morning in [Romans 7](#), there are commentators who insist that this is not Paul speaking from current experience, but from history. It is, however, the person who understands the cost of grace who also understands the wide gap between God and us. The more we comprehend that fact, the broader the gulf.**

**Illus.** Some have said that Paul must have been a golfer. He could picture a shot in his mind. He had had a hole-in-one before, BUT conditions change, focus is interrupted and even the best in the game sometimes shank a shot or hit a shot where I might remark: “I could have done better than that!” The pressure in the game comes when everyone is watching. In the Christian life, trouble may even come when no one is watching...

**[1 Timothy 1:15 ESV](#) <sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.**

**There have been great spiritual leaders down through the ages. In the O.T. we see Abraham, Moses, David, and others with all their admirable traits who still lacked perfection.**

**Abraham was a man of faith. He was willing to sacrifice his own son at God’s command. He and Sara trusted God for a child even though it was humanly impossible for them to conceive. Yet this same man of faith was willing to allow someone to be intimate with his wife to save his own skin. Abraham lied to protect his own life. ([Gen. 12:10ff.](#))**

**Moses was a great leader who brought millions of his people out of Egyptian slavery. He was given the Law from God on Mount Sinai, yet he did not enter the promised land because he disobeyed God.**

**David was a man after God's own heart, and still he became a liar, murderer and an adulterer just to name a few of his flaws.**

**We have had modern day heroes from Billy Graham, Mother Teresa or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and yet with all their good and admirable traits, they missed the mark. They were not perfect either. We have living examples of spiritual failures. Some we see in the mirror everyday. That is why grace is so important, but grace (as Paul has already told us) is no excuse for sloppy and reckless following.**

**The Law that was given to Moses tells of things we should do, as well as not do. God says:**

- 1. no other gods before me**
- 2. no graven images**
- 3. do not take my name in vain**
- 4. keep the Sabbath holy, do no work on the Sabbath**
- 5. honor your parents**
- 6. do not murder**
- 7. do not commit adultery**
- 8. do not steal**
- 9. do not bear false witness (lie)**
- 10. do not covet**

**The Bible says if you disobey one of these commandments you have broken them all ([James 2:10](#)). Jesus made it even more difficult. He said anger and murder were the same. He went to the heart of sinning and looked at even our motives. Lust and adultery are the same with Jesus because they come from the same heart (mind). Jesus sees what others may not notice. Just because you don't get caught does not mean you have gotten away with it.**

**Today, even our culture holds to at least the idea that adultery is somehow wrong on some level. God says it is wrong no matter who you are. Certainly leaders ought to represent our best, but we see failure all around in those ranks -- even in the church.**

**There is within all of us (Schleiermacher) a "feeling and taste for eternity" Nearly everyone wants to go to heaven, and believes he or she will. YET...**

**B. Mankind is incapable of saving himself.**

(Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.260) “only a new man, only a victory over my humanity, only eternal life, can release me from the enigma (contradiction) of my being.”

“Religion spells disruption, discord, and the absence of peace.” (p.266) Jesus said He did not come to bring peace. In fact, all the words used in **verses 23-24** indicate we are at war with the enemy. If we are not careful we can become a P.O.W. of Satan. But our commander is on the battlefield with us; and with a word from us, He will come and rescue us from the very hands of the enemy. Life is a spiritual war. Armageddon is NOW!

Barth continues by saying: “Religion is the KRISIS of culture and of barbarism. Apart from God, it is the most dangerous enemy a man has on this side of the grave. For religion is the human possibility of remembering that we must die (p.268)”...If we are slaves to sin, we are guilty of death.

That was the bad news, but there is a remedy.

**Conclusion:** “The mark of a Christian is not perfection, but the fight of faith showing itself in imperfect love by the power of the Spirit and in the joyful confidence that God justifies the ungodly. So take Christ as your righteousness and fight to treasure him and his ways above all things.” - John Piper

Jesus Christ provides salvation for all who will accept His plan for redemption. God is able to do more than we can imagine. And all there is for us to do is to give thanks for the grace we have received.

This thankfulness is not for the struggle, but for the sure victory which Paul states in verse 1 of the next chapter.

**Romans 8:1 ESV**

**Life in the Spirit**

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.[a]

**Footnotes:**

[a] Romans 8:1 Some manuscripts add *who walk not according to the flesh (but according to the Spirit)*

It is only in and through Jesus Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit that we can have any chance of victory here and also for the life to come that is called: HEAVEN!