

As many family take road trips this summer, we are continuing our three part sermon series on Romans 7–8 as we consider the Law in the life of the Christian. Last week, we talked about how the Law shows us the will of God, and even though it condemns us, it is doing its job as it points us to our perfect savior. If we ignore the Law, it doesn't go away and we don't avoid sin.

Today, we're continuing our road trip theme as we go into the second part of Romans 7. But this time we see how we get tripped up. Paul struggles to keep the law, and we see inner battle to live out the Christian life. He writes, **“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”** What we can learn from Paul today is this: FEAR NOT SAINT-SINNER, IN CHRIST YOU WIN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE FLESH.

First, I. The Lord calls Christians to be perfect saints. The Holy Spirit works through the Word and Sacrament to create Christians. Whether the Holy Spirit converts someone at an older age through the Word working in their hearts and then he or she is baptized, or an infant is baptized and then remains in the Church continuing to receive the gifts of Word and Sacrament, that person is fully a holy saint in the eyes of God. There are no half-Christians.

Paul later writes in Romans 8 **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Elsewhere we read in Galatians **“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”** You are all perfect in the eyes of the Heavenly Father. How can this be?

“For our sake [The Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” A great exchange has taken place and your sins were placed upon Jesus on the cross. He has taken on all your sins, even those sins against which you struggle and seem to have no relief. The Father no longer counts them against you. In their place, Jesus gives you His perfection, His righteousness, His holiness. He never struggled against sin or gave into temptation. All this is yours.

In fact, you have the Holy Spirit within you who is very God. He is the Spirit of Jesus Himself who works in you to believe in Jesus, and to do good works, even if imperfectly. This is how Paul can say, **“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,”** It is the Spirit working within Him.

To keep with our road trip analogy, it is as if NASCAR driver Jeff Gordon took your place behind the steering wheel on your way to your vacation destination of Sioux City. All the stress of traffic, all the detours and road construction on I-90 not your problem, but placed into the hands of a professional driver.

As a saint in the Lord, the Holy Spirit gives us new desires, and steers our lives in new directions. There's no denying the countless lives changed for the better because of the renewal and regeneration of the Triune God working in the hearts of men. Christians are 100% saints.

However, II. Christians remain sinners who struggle against their sinful flesh. You knew it wouldn't be so easy. Yes, you have Jeff Gordon driving you to your destination, but he is driving you in an old Honda Civic from the 90s. It doesn't quite have enough horsepower to carry you and your luggage, and it's held together with string and duct tape. Even the world's best driver is going to have a difficult time making it across Minnesota on I-90 in that old beater.

Paul writes, **“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.”** If Jeff Gordon needs to pass a semi on the freeway, even when he floors it in an old car, it might only top out at 75. The professional driver is limited by the car that he drives.

We are born with sinful flesh. King David writes, **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”** Isaiah writes, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”** David likewise writes, **“They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”**

Even though when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith we have been given new desires and wishes, we have a limited ability to carry them out. We are born with original sin, and a sinful flesh that has desires that war against the Spirit within us.

Death is the ultimate result of this sinful flesh which clings so closely to us. Paul concludes our text screaming, **“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** Sin kills us, the wages of sin is death. There's a reason there aren't many Civics from the 90s still on the roads, they are in scrap heaps or have been recycled. Every funeral shows us that that person was a sinner in need of a Savior.

Don't be surprised when an old car has some rattles, when it gets horrible gas mileage, when it tops off at 80 miles an hour, or if the power steering is out.

Likewise, don't be surprised, then when Christians don't always act so Christian. Don't be surprised when those sin habits in your own life are so hard to kick. Don't be surprised when years of sin decays our body and draws it closer to the grave.

With such a sorry state, what hope do Christians have? III. Christ wins the victory over our sinful flesh as the Holy Spirit continues the road trip. The tip is this, just keep driving. Near the end of Paul's life he reports, **“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”** Paul can say with confidence that he has

fought the good fight and finished the race. Even though he still sinned after his conversion, he has a clean conscience because he knows that his mistakes are forgiven in Christ.

Paul concludes, “**Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.**” In all of this, as we reflect on our lives, we say that God’s law is still good to point out our sins and call us to repentance, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we aim to make a course correction.

Our hope as Christians is that despite the struggle against the sinful flesh, the victory has been won in Christ. We are still fully and wholly saints. The Father counts no sins against you, and despite your struggles, they no longer count against you. In Christ, you are not the sum of your failures, you are the sum of the victories the Holy Spirit has worked in you.

To add a nuance to our analogy, say that instead of Jeff Gordon driving the car, it’s still you with the driving ability of Jeff Gordon. You are still you and you remain yourself throughout eternity. God is using this life to make you into the kind of person He wants you to be forever.

To keep with our road trip analogy, it’s not your job to arrive at your vacation destination in Sioux Falls, but it is your job to drive west on I-90. In other words, we aren’t called to earn our place in heaven, but we are called, to follow Jesus in small daily ways.

We risk losing salvation when we say, “It doesn’t matter how I live, God’ll forgive me and my ticket is punched to eternity.” We risk losing salvation when we fool ourselves saying, “I can keep sinning this way and there will be no negative consequences.” We risk losing salvation when we say, “I did the things: I got baptized, I got confirmed, now I don’t need to attend church or live as a Christian, heaven is mine no matter what.”

But the Lord calls us to take sin seriously because it cost Him the life of His Son, and He calls us to frequently seek the places where He promises refreshment: weekly gatherings where we receive Word and Sacrament, the consolation of fellow Christians, and the gift of prayer and devotion. This will be a struggle, but **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Yes, despite your many hours on the side of the road, despite the detours to refill leaking fluids, despite the harrowing encounters with semis that try to merge on your lane, one day, you’ll arrive with the family in South Dakota, and in the process, you’ll have grown from you trip gaining new and important skills.

Dear Saint-Sinner, know that in Christ you are forgiven, made whole, and given eternal life, but never give up against the struggle against the flesh. The Holy Spirit equips you for the work, and you are called to fight sin, even if it’s one step forward and two steps back. The Lord equip us as He prepares us all for eternal life with Him!