

The rise of the internet and information sharing has brought good and bad. One of the things people go to the internet for is help in diagnosing whether it be car trouble or health trouble. We recognize someone somewhere must have a similar model type car or body and has experienced what I am experiencing. There are good videos and information and there are bad. You might look up information on a lingering cough and come away thinking you have the bubonic plague. It's important to get an expert opinion by going to a medical professional or a professional auto mechanic.

Today the inspired expert, the apostle Paul exposes and diagnoses something in himself and in every Christian. He shows us so that we know where to go and how and who will fix us and help us.

Jesus is our Rescue and Rest in our Sanctified Struggle.

1) Understand the desires of your heart.

2) Look to your champion.

In his letter to the Romans Paul beautifully lays out each believer's salvation story: Man's utter sinfulness and complete inability to reconcile himself to God, Christ's perfect righteousness for us and sacrificial death for us meaning our forgiveness and heaven's open door, assured by his resurrection from the dead, communicated to us through the means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. But difficulty remains. Why?

You get your car tuned up. It should run perfectly and never have trouble, correct? No. That's not reality. We are made children of God, born again by water and the word. Faith is worked in our hearts. But why do I still struggle with sin and sinful desires? Paul helps us understand.

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do- this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

You know what this is (car diagnosing tool)? It helps you diagnose in basic codes what is going wrong with your vehicle if a light comes on the dashboard. It can be kind of scary with all the possibilities, but you need to know the problem and the solution. For the Christian you need to **Understand the desires of your heart**. Plug it in, and sure enough: codes.

A struggle awaits every Christian as they seek to live a new life in Christ. Luther echoed Paul when he commented that a Christian should not think that he lays his burdens down at the cross only to pick up a life of ease. No, he lays his burdens down at the cross and rises as a soldier facing a fight. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus also said, "I will give you rest" (Mt.11:28). This struggle seems to be so unexpected. We want to live according to God's good commands now, but why when we look at our lives and into our hearts do we feel the desire to do what is against God's good commands for us? Why do we see awful sins being committed in the lives of other Christians and why do we fail as well? How can this be? I just don't understand? Paul knew this struggle.

¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* ¹⁶ *And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.* ¹⁷ *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.* ¹⁸ *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.* ²¹ *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*

Paul is not having a schizophrenic episode, or disassociative identity disorder. Paul is not speaking about the years before his conversion. Paul makes it very clear that he is speaking of the struggle right now.

Plug in and see that there is this ugly sinful nature in us that fights against God and his love and his good commands, and us living according to those good commands. You don't have to teach a child to be selfish. They have a sinful nature that shows itself so quickly with a bite, a swipe, or a pout. And the older we get the more crafty the sinful nature gets.

The devil tries to overwhelm us with temptations, or in our good works attach a little bit of greed, lust, or pride – self-serving/glorifying. Paul is angry at this sinful nature inside of him that wars within him and battles him when he wants to do good. Paul admits that all too often this sinful nature wins out and Paul does what is wrong and sinful instead of what is good and right. Christians, you and me, like Paul, who are honest must admit that these are some of the most real words a believer can speak.

How many times haven't we left church or the Lord's Supper, or started our day with prayer with the best intentions to do good, but we don't or do evil instead. You want to set aside a generous amount for the Lord or some noble cause, yet failed to write the check because other wants caught your eye long before Sunday came and the money was gone. You want to take better care of your body by eating healthier, exercising more, not drinking so much alcohol, and then you make enough exceptions to your great plans until you are right back where you started or worse off. You have the best intentions to live for Jesus, stand up for what's right when conversations will come, yet find yourselves too scared or tired to engage others or even yourself in that conversation or in simply picking up God's Word to read it. You sit down at a computer or tablet or on your smart phone to get some work done, yet get distracted, waste your time and others', or do even worse things and visit places a child of God should not. You ignore the ones you should show love and attention to, but give most of your time to self or some selfish pursuit. You want to love others and see others as Jesus does, yet find yourself being proud and selfish, judging others, judging books by their cover, stereotyping, being unforgiving and angry. *"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing."* God help us. Is this who we are? Paul?

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." Paul wants you to **understand the desires of your heart**. But understand that your sinful desires are not you. Just like cancer does not define a person, so who you really are is what Paul says in Ephesians. You are a *"new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:24), yet this side of eternity you also have a sinful nature that battles against you and wants to rule over you. You are Saint and Sinner here. (Simul iustus et Peccator).

But there is hope for us. **Look to your Champion, Jesus Christ, the one who won the victory, and makes you someone new.** Paul goes on in v. 22 – *"For in my inner being I delight in God's law."* Whenever Paul speaks of his inner self or his mind he identifies with the new person that God has created him to be – the living soul that has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know Christ's sacrifice for us and to love God and to live for him. He speaks of the sinful nature as something warring against him in the members of his body. He speaks of this sinful nature as one that is not him, but that is always near him. The word (parakeimai) means that it's always at hand, right there, but he doesn't say, "That's me." We are forgiven children of God who live and fight for him.

We don't ignore our opponent or the battle. One of my friends was driving back to college and threw his wallet up on the dash. Six hours into the long trip the engine was fried. He didn't see the check engine lights go on – blocked by his wallet, and so he missed the warnings. Paul wants you to **hold onto your champion** and recognize the battle each day. Our sinful nature knows it's time is limited. So he'll rage until the day he's evicted – judgment day. Then we'll be just perfect with no more struggle.

Paul says, *"but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."* Paul describes his sinful nature's actions with two words for war. One means "to lead an army against" and the other to "hold captive at spear point." How many Christians, Paul and us included, haven't been comforted by their free forgiveness in Christ only to plunge into some sin and then be held captive by guilt and shame and by temptations that you can't seem to outrun or beat? Some Christians come to church to hear the good news of forgiveness in Jesus and yet have constant terrors of conscience because sin has held them captive at the spear point of evil desire, guilt and shame thinking they can't be forgiven or rescued. Paul cried out, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"*

Paul responds immediately in joy at our deliverance – *"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Jesus' work for us and in us speaks louder than guilt's hold or the sinful nature's accusations. Jesus is not only the key to our Justification – that God declares us not guilty in Christ. Jesus is the key to our Sanctification, the struggle, that God sets us apart to live for him in true righteousness, innocence and blessedness. You are forgiven in Jesus Christ by his merit and love. You are set free to live and fight because Jesus died for you and his righteousness covers you. Believe it. Fight. It's hard. But **Look to your Champion**, the one who won the victory for us will help us fight our battles too. He's forgiven you and freed you to fight another day.

Paul diagnosed the problem perfectly and the only solution. **Look to your champion, Jesus Christ. He is your Rescue and Rest in your Sanctified Struggle.** Amen.