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Unshakeable: Romans / Ro 7:14–25

A couple of weeks ago, I decided it was safe to take my winter tires and put back on my all-season tires. And I wanted to save a bit of money, so I decided to do it myself.

The problem is, I didn't have the right tools.

So I did what I do, whenever I don't know what to do... I called Pastor John, because Pastor John always knows what to do.

But I was so grateful because Pastor John has all the tools you need to do the job. He has an hydraulic floor jack, the impact gun, he even has a torque wrench that measures the exact torque pressure your bolts need, looked it up online and everything.

And between the two of us, it took us about 30 minutes to change out those tires. And while I was working, first of all I was reminded of how I'm not built for manual labour, but second I couldn't imagine if I tried to do this on my own with my own tools.

I mean all I've got is the little roadside kit in the back of the van. The hand crank jack that you pump up one click at a time. The wrench that runs entirely on whatever you had for breakfast. And honestly, I'm not even sure my wheels would have been torqued properly when I was done.

We're talking a couple of hours. Maybe more. And I probably would have gotten it wrong anyway.

How important is it, to not just be equipped for the job, but have the tools needed to do the job. I had all the desire and even knew what had to be done, but I was not equipped for the job myself.

There's a powerful spiritual principle there that I haven't been able to shake all week. It's what Paul wants us to get as we open up to Romans chapter 7 again. Paul wants us to know that there is a war raging inside of each of us that you and I are not equipped to fight on our own.

I don't think that's a surprise to anyone this morning, I think as we read through these verses that what Paul is describing is what each of us experience on a daily basis, we know there is a war that is being waged inside of us.

But here's the important principle that Paul wants us to get. That we can't fight this battle on our own, in fact, when we try to fight it in our own strength, in our own flesh we fail every time.

We have the desire to what is right, but not the ability. So what's the answer?

We need someone to rescue us; we need someone with the right tools to equip us and empower us to overcome.

So, here's what the message for us is this morning.

You can't win this fight on your own — but lean on the One who already has.

Let's look at our passage this morning.

Just as we get ready to dig into our passage I think it's helpful for you to know that there are a couple of different views on how to interpret these verses.

For the most part people have agreed that what Paul is talking about here is the everyday experience of the believer that is growing in holiness and righteousness.

This reality that there is this internal struggle that we experience, that often — more often than we would like — we know the right thing to do. We want to do the right thing, we love God's Words and His commands, but more often than we

would like, we find ourselves doing the very thing we don't want to do, the very thing we hate.

How many of us can relate to that struggle? Oh how we want to obey God, but so often, we fail and we're not happy that we do, we hate that we do, but it is a reality that we struggle with sin.

But then there are others who would say, Paul can't be talking about the believer's experience. Because the way he describes himself, is not things that describe a believer.

So they would say what Paul is talking about is his experience before he was a Christian. How sin controls you before you are a believer. See, they would point to things that Paul says, like the fact that he is sold under sin in verse 14, or he talks about the sin that dwells in him, that nothing good dwells in him, he's crying out for deliverance.

These are things that don't describe a believer, in fact they would say they are the complete opposite of everything that Paul has just said in previous passages that we are free from sin, that sin is no longer our master, how can these two things co-exist?

I can understand that argument, but here's why I disagree, here's why I think Paul is talking about the experience of a believer battling against sin. The first is simply that Paul is talking in the present tense, he's saying this is what goes on right now, this is my current experience, in fact just a natural reading of the text, the implication is that he is speaking as though this is what he goes through currently.

In fact, I didn't even know there was another view until I went to seminary, the years prior to that I would read this passage and I just understood that's what Paul is talking about it wasn't until someone said there was another view that I was like, okay.

But Paul says somethings here that cannot be true of the unbeliever, for instance he says that even though he falls, that he loves God's Law, that he agrees with it, that he has a desire to fulfill it. No unbeliever talks like that, when you don't know Jesus you give no regard to God's Law, no thought, no desire that you want to fulfill it.

In fact, I didn't think like that until I became a Christian. When I was saved then I started realizing how short I fall, then I became aware of sin in my life and then I grieved every time I fell. That's not how an unbeliever thinks.

No, Paul is drawing out this tension that we all feel, this war going on inside of us. This battle with sin that, so often we all face. Oh, how I want to obey God's Law, I want to walk in obedience, I desire it with everything in me, but more than I would like to admit, I fail.

Why? Why do I struggle with sin?

But before we go there, maybe there are some here who are saying, well that's not my experience, maybe there are some here who think, yeah I don't struggle with sin.

Or maybe you've just gotten comfortable with your sin, that this struggle isn't a reality to you.

And if that's you, then I would just simply say that you're lying to yourself. In fact I don't say that, but God's Word says that.

1 John 1:8-10 ESV

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I mean we have this beautiful promise. That if we sin, if we are repentant and confess that sin – that Jesus is faithful and He is just to forgive us and cleanse us – but it's sandwiched between two powerful statements, that if we say we have

no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us and in fact if we say we have not sinned we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

See, while you and I are on this side of eternity, still in this flesh and blood we will struggle with sin. The hope is that we would see progressive growth, but we will struggle. So, if you are here and you think this isn't an issue for you, you are either deceived or you're not saved.

Why? Why do I struggle with sin, and is there a way to see victory over it?

Here's what Paul says, here's what we need to realize this morning. Here's where it starts.

Recognizing the battle is beyond our strength.

THE BATTLE IS BEYOND OUR STRENGTH

The whole point of this section is to show us, that in our own strength, we fail every time. When we try to fight sin, or when we try to obey God's Law in our own strength, that's when we fail.

Paul gives us this reality, these two spiritual truths. Here's the problem.

Romans 7:14 ESV

¹⁴ ***For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.***

Two realities, there is the spiritual, and the flesh. And the Law is a spiritual reality.

The key to understanding what Paul is talking about here is to keep in mind that the Law is still the subject of focus. We talk about sin, because sin happens when we violate God's Law, but the Law is still the focus of chapter 7.

There are 25 verses in chapter 7 and in those 25 verses the Law or commandment is used 29 times. 29 times the Law is either directly or indirectly mentioned and when we come to the second half where we are in verses 14-25, the Law is mentioned 8 times, 8 times in 12 verses.

The Law is still the focus and the question is why can't we keep God's Law, why do we fail to obey? Paul is saying because the Law is spiritual, and you and I are in the flesh.

When he says flesh, he's talking about this flesh and blood, this fallen nature that is corrupted by sin. The flesh is contrary to the spirit. And the Spirit is contrary to the flesh, they are opposite of each other.

You cannot live and fulfill the spiritual while we're still in the flesh. The flesh is weak, it's mortal, it's wasting away, it's temporary.

But the Law is spiritual, it's eternal, and divine and immortal and stands forever. Do you see the problem?

It tells us what Paul is getting at here, he's talking about why the struggle happens, why I can't keep the Law in my own strength, because me by myself, I'm in the flesh, and the Law is Spirit, and if I'm going to live out the Law and walk in obedience, I need to walk in the Spirit.

You cannot walk in the flesh and fulfill the Spirit, it just doesn't work.

It's what he said back in verse 6 of chapter 7 do you remember? [Romans 7:6](#)

Romans 7:6 ESV

6...that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

This is the fundamental piece to understand, this is where we start, if we are going to understand why you and I struggle with sin, we struggle because often times we are trying to walk in obedience in our own strength, in our own flesh and we can't, we're trying to serve God in our flesh, we're trying to walk in obedience without relying on the Holy Spirit and when that begins to happen we're headed into a danger zone.

I mean here's the thing, there is such a thing as muscle memory isn't there? Like if you do the same thing enough times, your body just gets used to it, you just

go through the motions without even thinking about it. It's why we say you never forget how to ride a bike. Why? Because your muscles just do it without thinking about it.

How many times have you driven to work and allowed your mind to wander and think, and suddenly you realize you've ended up at work without even remembering your drive?

See, I think the same thing can happen in life, in our spiritual walk. We can run on auto pilot. We can just get in the habit of doing actions, of going through the motions of serving the Lord and without even realizing it, we're doing it in our own strength.

The dangerous thing is we can get by, but it will eventually show up in this very struggle, this very battle.

See, the first thing we need to realize is this, that when it comes to battling against sin, when it comes to seeking to walk in obedience, we can't do it in our own strength, this battle is beyond our strength.

Remember what Jesus said? He said, without me you can do somethings, no, without me you can do nothing, but how often do we try and fail to do it on our own?

The first thing to admit, is that we are powerless to fight against sin in our own strength.

Interesting isn't it that even secular movements get this, I mean isn't this the first step to AA or NA?

The first step is recognizing isn't it? That you are powerless over your addiction. That when you try and fight it on your own is when you are setting yourself up for failure, the first step is recognizing your powerlessness. You need a greater power, and if that works for secular organizations, how much more for those of us who have access to and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit – the power of the one true God?

Paul doesn't just name the problem and leave us there. He starts to show us what it looks like from the inside. He describes the experience of living in this tension — and I think when you hear it, you're going to recognize it immediately because you've lived it. Here's what it looks like when we do try to fight this battle on our own.

DESIRE IS REAL, BUT THE POWER ISN'T

Romans 7:15–20 ESV

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

See, here's what it looks like when we try to do in our own strength.

Our desire is real, but the power isn't.

Does that sound familiar to you?

Verse 15, I do not do what I want, but I end up doing the very thing I hate. Verse 18, I have the desire to do good, but not the ability to carry it out. I don't understand it because even though I desire to do good, in verse 19 it says, so often I do not do the good I want, but the evil I want is what I keep doing.

Sound familiar? Understand, Paul isn't talking about confusion, he's speaking in frustration, the frustration we all experience.

I don't understand what's going on... and that word *understand*, it carries with it this idea of approving or owning. It's kind of like he's saying I don't even recognize the person who is doing these things. It seems like there is always this gap between who I long to be, who I want to be, and what my current reality is.

Like understand, Paul is describing our struggle against sin. This internal battle of someone who is growing in holiness, and at times it doesn't seem like growth at all, it just seems like frustration doesn't it? Because we read the word of God and we hear His voice and who He is calling us to be, but we're so aware of our sin.

Sometimes we think it get's easier, but often the closer we draw to Jesus, the more aware we are of this struggle.

I think back to all those things I gave up when I became a follower of Jesus and a lot of it was the external actions. The music I listened to, the words I used, what I did with my time.

But, then you realize, like sin is not an issue that is fixed in 3 months time, it runs deeper, so much deeper than actions. That I could be sitting alone in a cave in the middle of nowhere and still struggle with sin, because it's what's going on inside of me.

What's going on?

Well, understand the desire is there... that's how we know that the Spirit is at work here, because there is a genuine desire to do God's will. Paul says that I do not do the things I want. I want to walk in obedience. He says I agree that the Law is good, I love God's Law that's not the issue. I agree with His Law, but he puts his finger on it, I have the desire to what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

That's the issue, me – in this flesh and blood, without the power of the Holy Spirit, when I'm relying on my self and my own capabilities – I don't have the ability to carry it out.

It's like me sitting in my drive way with my tires saying I want to do this job, I know the job needs to be done, but I don't have what it takes.

So, what happens when I try to fight in my own strength? Sin wins.

That's what Paul realizes, he says in verse 17.

Romans 7:17 ESV

17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

And you say, well I thought that sin was a defeated foe, that sin was no longer our master, and you'd be right, but as long as we're in this fallen state, sin may no longer be in control, but we can choose to give in.

Sin is no longer the honoured guest, it's kind of like a squatter. You know what a squatter is? It's someone who has taken up residence in someone else's home and refuses to leave. And if someone chooses to squat in your home, it's very difficult to evict and remove them. And while they're there, unwelcome, they can still do a lot of damage.

That's what sin is, it's no longer the honoured guest, no longer the paying tenant - it's a squatter taking up residence in your home and causing all kinds of chaos and destruction.

And understand that Paul is not letting himself off the hook, he's just naming the problem, he isn't saying he isn't responsible for his actions, he is, and we are. But we need to know what is going on in us.

So often we want to blame sin on outside sources don't we? We want to blame our circumstances, other people, the devil made me do it.

No, it was sin that dwells in you, wreaking havoc on your thoughts, your mind, your heart, your desires.

Paul is just naming the problem isn't he? He's pointing out what happens when we try to walk in obedience, when we try to live up to the Law in our own strength, when we are walking not in the Spirit, but in the flesh.

Romans 7:18 ESV

¹⁸ 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.

Like, maybe you're here and what Paul is describing in these verses sounds so much like your Christian walk and it's just so exhausting, so exhausting.

You fall and then you pick yourself back up and you say okay, I'm going to try again, I'm going to walk in obedience, I'm going to get right this time, only to find yourself defeated again. It's this vicious cycle of sin, repent, guilt, and shame, sin, repent, guilt, then shame, repeat.

Sometimes you just feel like giving up.

The desire is real, but the power isn't there.

What's the answer?

Well, here's the final thing we need to accept if we're going to win this war within.

We need to accept and understand the fact that the answer isn't found inside of us, the answer is found in Christ.

THE ANSWER IS FOUND IN CHRIST

I mean, look what Paul's been doing this whole time. Something stands out about these verses, it's a subtle, subtle clue.

Let me read some verses and see if you can catch it.

Read back over verses 15-20 and emphasize the I's and me's

Did you notice something? How many times he refers to himself in this battle, in this struggle. Every sentence is about what I can do, what I want to do, what I keep failing to do. And when "I" is the subject of every sentence, "I" is also the problem.

It emphasizes a very simple point, this is the reality of relying on ourselves, in our own strength, in thinking we can fight sin all by ourselves.

It doesn't work.

The answer isn't in trying harder, the answer isn't in locking in.

The answer is in Christ!

Paul comes to the end of this and he finally names the struggle inside.

Romans 7:21–23 ESV

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ 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.

Paul is moving from telling us what the battle feels like to diagnosing what's going on.

Here's what it is – there are always two principles at play. There is what is going on in our minds, we want to delight in the Law of God, we want to walk in obedience, but whenever I try that, in my own strength, I'm pulled towards the law of sin in my members.

It's kind of like the law of gravity, there is a law that every time I want to jump up off the ground and fly, I can only get so far because there is a law, a force that is pulling me back to the ground.

It's the same kind of principle, this is what's going, we want to live for Christ, we want to walk in obedience, but we cannot do it on our own, any more than we can fly, we just don't have the ability in and of our own strength.

When we try, we get into this vicious cycle of failing, confessing, guilt and shame, we end up frustrated, defeated, angry and sometimes confused.

We cry out with Paul...”Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death!”

Notice Paul’s wording there, who. Who will deliver me, not what, not how, not where... who?

We seem to think that what we need is a better strategy and better plan, a better support system, we seem to think that what we need is more accountability, or caution. That what we need to do is just lock in, like really take it seriously, focus and discipline.

And it isn’t that any of those things aren’t good in themselves, it’s just that alone, they’re just more of me, trying harder with me.

I need someone greater than myself to deliver me from this bondage, I need Christ.

I need more of Christ, growing, and moving and working in me and through me. I don’t need to try harder, i don’t need to just lock in, I need to rely on Jesus, I need the power of his Holy Spirit living and working and growing me in holiness.

Paul builds this tension, I cannot do it on my own, when I try I just keep failing... who can deliver me?

Romans 7:25 ESV

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus Christ working in me, through His Holy Spirit which leads us cleanly into chapter 8, which is all about life in the Spirit.

But for right now, like maybe you’re asking, okay, what does this look like then?

What does it look like practically, how can I walk and lean and rely on Jesus, like can I ensure that I am relying on the Spirit and not my flesh?

Well let me share an illustration I’ve heard a few pastors give that was helpful.

Imagine you have two dogs, a black dog and a white dog and every day the black dog attacks the white dog and even though the white dog tries to defend itself, every day the black dog almost kills the white dog until you step in.

One day you ask someone — how do you get the white dog strong enough to hold its own? Simple. Which dog are you feeding?"

Whichever dog you feed the most, is the dog that will have the strength to win the fight, you start starving that black dog, he won't even have the strength to attack any more.

Imagine you've got two dogs living in you, you've got the Spirit of Christ and the principle of sin squatting, which one do you feed the most?

How much time, energy and effort goes into your relationship with Jesus? How much time do you spend feeding your flesh?

How much time are you feeding the Spirit... How much time do you spend in prayer, in the Word, worshipping? How much time do you spend being apart of Christian community, serving in ministry?

How much time do you spend feeding the flesh? Doom scrolling mindlessly, binge watching endlessly, what are you watching, what are you reading, what and who are you listening to?

The dog you feed is the dog that will win the fight.

Here's what it all comes down to this morning.

There is a war going on inside of you. And you cannot win it on your own. We've seen that this morning — when we rely on ourselves, when we try to fight this battle in our own strength, we fail every time. We enter into that exhausting, frustrating cycle of sin, confession, guilt and shame, and then we do it all over again.

The answer is not to try harder.

The answer is to lean on the One who has already won.

See here's what I need you to understand this morning. Jesus Christ did not just come to forgive your sin — He came to defeat it. And when He walked out of that tomb on the third day, sin and death were defeated. The war has already been won. And if you are in Christ this morning, you are not fighting for victory — you are fighting from victory. The resurrection is your proof that sin does not get the final word.

And the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead — that power, the Holy Spirit, lives inside of you.

So the question this morning is not can you win this war. The question is whose strength are you fighting in?

Walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Not because you tried harder. Not because you finally got your act together. But because you stopped relying on yourself and started leaning on the One who already has what it takes.

Maybe you're here this morning and you are exhausted. You're tired of the cycle. You're tired of failing. You're tired of the guilt and the shame. You've tried to change and it hasn't worked and you don't know how much longer you can keep going.

I want you to hear this — you were never meant to fight this battle alone. Stop trying to change your tires with a hand crank.

You have access to a power that is greater than your sin, greater than your flesh, greater than your weakness. His name is Jesus Christ and He is not just your Saviour He is your strength.

Lean on Him.

But maybe you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus. And what Paul has been describing this morning — that war within, that cycle of failure — you know it all too well. You've been trying to fight it on your own and you keep losing.

Paul cried out — *who will deliver me from this body of death?*

And the answer is Jesus Christ.

Not a programme. Not a resolution. Not trying harder. A person. The only person who has ever defeated sin and death and walked out of the grave to prove it.

You need Him this morning. Not just as a helper. As Lord and Saviour.

And if you give your life to Him this morning — that war within doesn't just get harder to fight. You get a Rescuer.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.