

THE GROWTH OF FAITH

Romans 7:1-25

Key Verse: 7:25a

"Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

In lesson 4 we learned about the fruits of faith. They are primarily peace, joy, hope and rejoicing in our sufferings. We are freely justified by God's grace. Still, we are but spiritual babies in God's family. We must grow day by day, just as our physical bodies should grow. In lecture 5, we want to learn how our faith can grow. Let's study Romans chapter 7 to learn how our faith can grow.

I. A new life in Jesus (1-6)

First, a new life in Jesus requires a new commitment. (1-3) Look at verse 1. "Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?" Paul is speaking to those who were once observers of the law but who are now Christians. By the law they were pronounced "guilty," but because they believe in Jesus they are freely justified and are pronounced "not guilty." They are precious children of God only by God's grace. Still, they are nothing but spiritual babies who need to be taken care of, and grow day by day. At present, their spiritual condition is vulnerable. They are like the Israelites, who, after being enslaved in Egypt for 430 long years, were suddenly liberated and didn't know what to enjoy first. Most new Christians are also like modern-day Russians, who, after living under an oppressive system of communism for 70 years, are now relieved from that system to some [degree](#), and their human freedom is condoned. These Russians must find new direction for their country. But they say that most Russian people only want American Big Macs and gym shoes. In short, they do not know how to maintain their freedom. Likewise, most new Christians do not know what to do with the amazing grace of our [Lord Jesus Christ](#) given to them freely when they believed in him. They must grow spiritually.

Read verses 2,3. Here Paul gives an illustration from marriage to the believers to help them have a fruit-bearing new Christian life. Undoubtedly, Paul drew this illustration from his own experience, which came from his life of faith. Paul once married the law because he thought the law was the best way for his salvation. Paul pledged commitment to the law. Virtually, he married the law. Thus Paul became "Mrs. Law." Mrs. Law did her best to please Mr. Law. She cooked 3 meals a day. She washed his [laundry](#), ironed his neckties and white shirts. But Mr. Law was never happy with her. Instead Mr. Law only pointed out Mrs. Law's weaknesses. Mr. Law also made ever-increasing demands on her every day. Mr. Law condemned her so much until Mrs. Law became helpless and full of self-condemnation. Paul says the law is holy and good. (7:12) But man can never meet all the demands of the law. (3:20)

Look at verse 4. "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God." In this verse Paul explains that we are freed from the demands of the law through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Paul doesn't

nullify the law; instead, he explains the relationship between the law and grace. When Paul said, "died to the law," he meant that when Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins and guilt, we also died with him. By the same token, we died to the demands of the law. Thus we are set free from bondage to the law. And when Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised also. In this way, we have an inseparable relationship with Jesus Christ. (Ro 8:38,39) What kind of new relationship do we have with Jesus? We are his virgin brides, and he is our bridegroom. (2 Co 11:2) On the basis of this relationship, we are absolutely free from bondage to the law. At the same time, we must have the assurance of a new relationship with Christ. Now it is required that we who have a new relationship with Jesus Christ must commit ourselves to him.

But many people are not sure about their new life in Jesus. Also, they do not make a commitment to Jesus. For example, one young man made a love confession to a girl and married her. But he said, "You know, for the last 10 years of marriage I have dreamt so many times that I was taking finals and looking for a marriage partner." This happened because his sinful bachelor mentality was lingering in his inner person. He is a man with a slave mentality. Also, he is a man of no commitment. We must have a blessed assurance that we divorced Mr. Law and married Mr. Grace. We must make a new life commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul had this assurance and commitment in Jesus, he was ransomed from the bondage of Mr. Law, and he could bear fruit to God (4) and serve in the new way of the Spirit. (6) Through the parable of marriage, we learn that we must make a life-commitment to Jesus when we want to grow spiritually. We feel sorry to see so many people who do not commit themselves to God. Thus they don't commit themselves to anyone or anything. Psalm 1:4 says that they are like chaff blown by the wind. Let's make a deep commitment to Jesus so that we can bear the fruits of faith.

Second, a new life in Jesus is a fruit-bearing life. Read verses 4,5. We must know that God saved us through his Son's blood so that we might bear fruit to God. Verse 4b says that God saved us in order that we might bear fruit to God. Again, verse 6 says, "...so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit." Here we learn why God saved us. It is so that we might bear the fruits of faith.

II. Faith grows through spiritual struggles (7-24)

First, Paul's struggling with sin. Many people expect no more struggling after conversion. Contrary to their expectation, there is more struggling than before. This was Paul's problem also. Scholars still haven't decided whether this struggle occurred before or after Paul's conversion. Nevertheless, it is interesting to know what made Paul struggle most. Look at verse 7. "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" Here Paul says that the law is good, but the demand of the law makes man rebellious, and it makes sin seize the opportunity to enslave man. We know this reaction very well. One girl said, "I was ready to dance for the Christmas worship service. But because you ask me, I won't." People become like this because of the power of sin. Genesis 4:7b says, "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door." Romans 7:8a says, "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of

covetous desire." In verse 9 the same idea is repeated. This is true. One young man attended an overnight revival meeting. There he repented of his sin of anger. Then he went to his fellow Christians' meeting and began to pour out his anger for no obvious reason. After the meeting he said regretfully, "I really wanted to show myself to be a gentle and spiritual man since I attended a meeting that emphasized the Holy Spirit. But I don't know why I was angry in that way." He did so because he was seized by the deception of sin. In the movie "The Dirty Dozen," the prison chaplain asked, "What is your last word?" Then the murderer, sentenced to death by hanging, repeated, crying, "I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! It just happened!" He didn't mean to do it, but he murdered someone because he was seized by the power of sin. It's hard for anyone to struggle with sin. But the Bible encourages us to struggle with sin to the end. Hebrews 12:4 says, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

Look at verse 8 again. Paul's specific spiritual problem was covetousness. The tenth commandment, "Do not covet," is somewhat different from the others because it concerns the motives of the heart. When Paul heard, "Do not covet," he really wanted to be a sacrificial servant of God, overcoming his covetousness. Contrary to his wishes, he became all the more self-ambitious. Paul could not bear himself because of his malevolent personality. He felt that his personality was split. Nevertheless, he did not give up his struggling with sin. He kept on struggling with his sin of covetousness. We call this the spiritual battle, or the good fight. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight" (2 Ti 4:7). Here we learn we should not give up our struggling with sin. If we give up our struggling with sin, we become like dead fish floating downstream. Paul struggled with sin to the end. Thus he became the everlasting champion in the spiritual battle.

The Bible teaches that there are two kinds of struggling. First is the struggling between men and men. Second is man's struggling with God. Jean Jacques Rousseau was a good example of a person caught up in vicious human struggling. He struggled with many aristocratic women. He finally married an idiot over whom he could have complete control. He said many good things, but his inner man was so weak that he abandoned his four cute children to orphanages and cried. A different example is found in St. Augustine. He struggled with God until an intellectual hedonist was transformed into a devout man of God. This once wretched man was known later as Saint Augustine. While he was indulging his sinful nature, he was at war with God. So he went to see Ambrose for counseling. Finally he was converted by the words of Romans 13:13,14. "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." After his conversion, Augustine did not struggle anymore with women or men. He struggled with God. St. Augustine studied the Bible with the premise, "That I may know God's grace, and that I am a sinner." In his struggling with God, he grew up to be the pre-eminent figure in the Christian thought world. God used him as the defender of the church of God at a time when people thought that Christianity would be destroyed with the fall of the Roman Empire.

Martin Luther is another example. In an effort to find peace with God, he climbed the steps of Pilate's staircase in Rome on his knees,

until his knees were badly injured and bloody. While struggling with God, the words of Romans 1:17 came to his mind, "The righteous will live by faith." Then God used him to reform the church, from politics and ritualism to a Bible-centered church. St. Paul's struggle with God has been the most influential. Paul only struggled with God to know Christ. He said in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ." Thank God who saved us from struggling with sin only. Thank God who saved us from the struggle between husband and wife. Thank God who helps us struggle with him until we can grow in Jesus.

Second, Paul's view of man. Paul saw that man has a two-fold nature. Mencius, a Chinese philosopher, advocated the doctrine of the "inborn goodness" of man. Soon Ja, on the other hand, insisted on the doctrine of the innate evilness of man. Both of them lacked universality, and neither of them could explain the antithesis: If man is good, why is the world full of evil, and vice versa? It is important to keep this truth in our hearts, that men are both good and evil. One lady married a man because of his gentleness while dating. Later she found out that he was devious, wolfy and a drug trafficker. She divorced him after 3 months of marriage. We must believe that only God is good, and that men are both good and evil.

Third, two spiritual principles at work in us. (14-24) Look at verse 15. "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Paul really did not understand what he was doing. He discovered that when he did something, it was not he, but sin living in him that did it. Look at verse 17. "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." In the course of struggling with sin, Paul grasped a spiritual secret--that the power of sin is working in all men. Read verse 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 can not carry it out." Paul wanted to do good. But he found that he had actually done what he really did not want to do. He acknowledged that sin was reigning in him, and that he was utterly helpless. Man is man because man has the most splendid dreams that he wants to fulfill; man has the highest desire to do good. But the total depravity of man does not allow him to do so.

Look at verse 17. "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." He confesses that there is nothing good in him. He has the desire to do what is good, but he cannot carry out that desire, for he is under the control of sin. At the moment he wanted to do what was good, the law of sin in him was like a crouching lion ready to pounce upon him. (Ge 4:6,7) He confessed in verse 21a, "I find this law at work." Here the word "law" means "principle" or "power of sin." He said in verse 21b, "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." And in verses 22,23 he repeats the same idea, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body..." In the end, he realized that there were two powers or two principles within him. Verse 21a reads, "So I find this law at work." In verse 22, "the law of God" refers to God's power. In verse 23, "another law" refers to the power of sin which lived in him secretly. Read verse 23. Paul was caught between the Law of God and the law of sin that waged constant war within him. What Paul needed was God's help.

III. Jesus Christ, the only Savior (25)

Look at verse 25. "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." Paul was a fine-looking Pharisee, but he felt that he was the most wretched man in his inner person. He felt that he was carrying the body of death. So he cried out in verse 24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul was totally helpless. But there was a way when he looked at Jesus. He could find rescue in Jesus. Paul simply believed in Jesus and was freely justified to be a righteous child of God. Then he could become a servant of Jesus Christ. This was the secret that had enabled him to really grow in Jesus.

In today's passage we learn that we must have an assurance that we are justified freely by our Lord Jesus Christ. So we must commit our lives to Jesus only. We also learn that we must never give up the struggle with sin. If we give up struggling, we are no more normal human beings. Most importantly, we learn that we should not struggle with men only, but with God. May God bless you to struggle hard with God so that you may grow in faith.