

Theme: **Reforming our lives in God's Word means acknowledging our wretchedness**

Tet: Romans 7: 14 – 25

Season: 11th the Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 20, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let God work in your lives, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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. (Rom. 7:15 – 18a)

I think I can . . . I think I can . . . I think I can. But learn No, I can't. The good that I would do, I do not do. We all have heard motivational speeches. You can do anything you want if you just put your mind to it . . . if you just put your mind to it . . . if you just put your mind to it. But the reality is that I can't keep my mind on it.

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. (Rom. 7:18b – 20)

The Apostle Paul in the 7th chapter of Romans is not giving us a motivational speech, but God's Word and it explains a lot about the problems that we keep finding ourselves in this world. Even as a Christian I can't fix myself. Even though I have been freed from the sin that lives in me by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I find the law of sin in my members condemning me to failure in every case, even when it seems that I am succeeding failure right around the corner. This is the problem that the Apostle Paul finds himself in and this is the problem that we all find ourselves in as we realistically look at our own lives in this world, even though we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit into faith in Jesus Christ and given the forgiveness He has purchased for us by His life, death and resurrection.

Now the sinful, unbelieving man, he doesn't even have the desire to do what God commandments are calling him to do, no matter how 'spiritual' or 'godly' he may appear on the outside, even to himself, because without faith he is still a slave to sin and the law that is in his conscience condemns him. Still the Christian loves God's law, for he knows that he has been set

free from his sins and the law so that he can live in God's love and through the Law he learns how to love God and his neighbor, selflessly.

That's the problem, isn't it? We want to be good Christians at all times but then we find ourselves looking after ourselves, making ourselves more important than God and our neighbor. Oh, the wretchedness we find in our lives, but if we truly look at the Ten Commandments that God gave to us to show us how to be His people and not a slave to the sins of the world we would see the direction that God wants us to go and ask for God's help to get us going in the right direction and keep us going in the right direction.

I want all of you to take your hymnal and open to page 321. Here you will find Luther's Small Catechism section 1, which not only gives us the Ten Commandments but it also gives us an explanation of what each of the commandments means to our lives. How I'm sure that many of you memorized each of the commandments and their meanings when you were through your catechism classes as a youth, but do you still have them memorized. Though we might not have them memorized word for word any more, we often know what each of the Ten Commandments are and what the explanations say so that we can apply them to our lives daily. So, let's look at the Eighth Commandment just for a moment and its explanation and see how well we have let God reform our lives to His Word. (You can read along with me.)

The Eighth Commandment; You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way. (LSB pg. 321)

This is one of those commandments that we might think that we can keep if only we put our mind to it. I think I can . . . I think I can . . . I think I can. But then we realize that No, I can't. Oh, we try hard not to tell lies about our neighbor, not even little white lies. We work hard at not betraying, slandering or hurting him or her also, which we think is easy, but then in the middle of a conversation with some friends or just talking with a group of people we find that they are saying something that they heard about a person or what they did and you want to join in on the conversation and express your opinion, but before you know it you are not defending him or her, speaking well of him or her or even trying to explain his or her actions in the kindest ways. Why? Because that would mean that you would sound like you like that person and that's not the

worldly way of talking or thinking about people that do bad things. Yet that is exactly what Jesus came down into this sin filled world to do for you and me. Oh, what a wretched person I am!

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. ²⁴ Oh, Wretched man that I am! (Rom. 7:21-24a)

Oh, there are times when we like the sin filled habits that we have become comfortable with. Why we might even like trying to use our Christianity to soften the Law, so that we can live as though what we are doing isn't sinful and yet the Apostle Paul and God's Words tells us that by doing so, we are destroying our own Christianity and our faith, for we are becoming slaves to sin again and letting go of the freedom that God has given to us through Jesus Christ. **"Oh, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Rom. 7:24-25a)

Who will deliver you and me from all your wretchedness? There is only one who says to us, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Mat. 11:28) Jesus knows our wretchedness and He also knows our desire to do God's will and live in God's love, peace and joy all our lives. The fact that we all struggle with the sins of this world doesn't mean that we are not Christian, that we have turned our back of God or that God has turn His back on us, but that we need help. We need to let God reform our lives to His Word so that we can receive His love, peace and joy now and for all eternity.

As I look back on my life and especially my first 20 years of my life I can see the influence that three book had on my life. The first is the Bible as my parents, pastors, teachers and so many others used the Bible to show me God and His love for me as the Holy Spirit worked in my life. The second was Luther's Small Catechism as my parents, pastor and teachers used the Luther's Small Catechism to train me in the ways that God wants me to live my life. The third was a book called "I am Third," written by Gales Sayer, the famous running back for the Chicago Bears. Now 'I am Third' is about Gale Sayer's life and his relationship with God, his wife and his friends especially Brian Piccolo. Now I like sports and especially football and wrestling. "I am Third" is all about how Gale Sayers let God work in his life to reform his life so that he could live in this world with God first in his life, to make the Second most important thing in his life his wife, family and

friends and put his own self Third. This is what the Bible teaches us, but what “I am third” taught me is what the Apostle Paul is telling us about through this 7th chapter of Romans and what we all will have to deal with as we struggle with in this sin filled world, yet God will be there in the good times and the bad. For in the good times God will give you people and His Word to share the good times with and allow you to give thanks to God for those good times. In the bad times, which will be difficult at times, God will also give you people and His Word to help you through those times so you can grow in the love of God given to you now and for all eternity. Making my old sin filled nature the third most important thing in my life is not easy, but God is there to help us do it through His Word and Sacraments as He reforms our lives to His Word because going the other way only leads to hell.

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. (Rom. 7:25)

Our own sins and wretchedness remind us that God’s law is true and good and therefore it strips any illusion we might have that we can do even the least thing to save our self and bring us to put all our trust and assurance in God and His Word working in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Our wretchedness is a blessing, because it drives us to the presence of God and His Word and Sacraments. It is Jesus who gives us the forgiveness, deliverance and the rest that we need through His life, death and resurrection. As we let God reform our lives through His Word and Sacraments the Holy Spirit will enable us to make God’s Love be the number one thing in our lives and not our love for ourselves. God’s love will allow us to give the self-giving love of God to our neighbor, our friends and our family as the second most important thing in our lives and our selfish selves third. Yes, the life of a Christian in this world is wretched, but deliverance from our misery both now and at the end, comes always and only through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. When we struggle with the wretchedness of our lives, we have the certainty that we have been delivered now and on that Last Day, once and for all. We will be delivered from this body of misery and death and live with God in perfect love, peace and joy as we let Him reform our lives. This is the love that we have be given to share with others so that they also can let God reform their lives in the love, peace and joy that only He can give to us all. Amen.