

Outline

The Devil That is Me

“I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience? I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.

“But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

“It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope.”

Romans 7:14-24 TM

Can you relate with that? I know I can. I have spent a good portion of my life battling the things within me that I know are wrong and that will hurt me and take me down very bad paths. I can honestly say, and I think you can relate with me, **I have really wanted to do the right thing in my life.** I always want to choose wisely and well. **But I so often end up choosing poorly and acting in ways that are very self-destructive.** I don't want to give in to anger, and come up with strategies to combat it, but when put in a conflict situation and an attack, I still go defensive and jump into the attack with teeth bared and a razor wit ready to slice up my opponent and cut them down to size. I know that coveting someone's good life and fortune are wrong, but when confronted with the face of what they have and I do not, I react with jealousy and envy and lust for more money, more things, their life, and let it drive me toward resentment of them and wrong decisions where I try to manipulate life and circumstances and position myself to get more. I know the Bible tells me to love everyone and to respect my fellow man, but I deliciously slide into gossip and talking about another person at a moment's notice - especially someone I am struggling with - even though I have taught time and again about the sin. I respect women and desire to have the purest thoughts and avoid any entertainment that would cause me to lust only to find myself seeking after that which feeds the very dark recesses of insatiable and demeaning desires within.

And I do not think I am alone this morning. I think you fall prey to repetitive and be-

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setting weakness and sin, even though you crave to be good, to do good, to live a pure life. And we are not alone, for the first few moments of this message today have come right out of the Bible and the writer, Paul's, description of his own struggle with sin and weakness as recorded in Romans 7.

In this series, we have taken a good long hard look at *Angels and Demons*, the spiritual world where a great battle is going on for our very souls. Last week we examined the idea that **we have a very real spiritual opponent that, while defeated by God at the Cross and the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, is still very much alive and desiring to defeat us.** I think I proved conclusively that Satan and his demons are not to be feared, for they cannot physically harm us. However, they do influence our spirits by consistently suggesting that we harm ourselves and others. I think you can see from the passage in Romans that we started this message with that God agrees:

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me...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: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. Romans 7

Satan and his demons have declared an all-out attack on you and me. However, it is not a physical battle; it is a spiritual one and the battlefield is within my mind and spirit. **He is that fleeting thought in my mind that suggests that I hate, lust, abuse, envy** to the extent that I create a lifestyle of selfishness that destroys my peace and joy and causes me to destroy the peace and joy and lives of others as well. And this battle is a strong one. I once thought that the older I got the better handle I would have on these temptations of self-destruction. That is just not the case. **It seems the older we get, the more tools we have to pamper ourselves and to allow for self-indulgence**, which provides fertile ground for Satan to influence us toward mistakes and addictive behavior that threaten to destroy us and those within our sphere of influence. So the more that I indulge self-centeredness, the weaker I seem to get in winning the battle of evil in my life. Even though I have an enemy, **the real devil that I find is the devil that is me** as I contribute to the slide toward self destruction and others-destruction. I come to the same conclusion that the writer of Romans 7 found himself in:

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Romans 7:24 TM

Can you relate? I know I can. I guess the question then is: Is it hopeless? Am I just destined to a life of addiction, self destruction, no peace, no joy? Well the very next verse says "No Way!" Jesus Christ is our power over our powerlessness to live right, do right, and avoid evil's whispers of self destruction!

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The Good Life Begins with Surrendering to God's Control of our Lives!

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. Romans 7:25 TM

The Good Life Destroys the Lie of Condemnation from the Enemy!

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1 NIV

The Good Life Distinguishes between the Voice of God and the Voice of the Enemy in the Fleeting Thoughts!

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Romans 8:5 NIV

The Good Life Obeys the Voice of God in the Fleeting Thoughts

The MIND of sinful man is death, but the MIND controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. Romans 8:6 NIV

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. Romans 8:12-15 NIV

Know This: Ignore the voice of God and you will self-destruct and others-destruct!

Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's way. **The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us.** We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer. James 1:13-15 TM

So what do I do?

1. **Admit you are powerless to live the Good Life.**
2. **Submit to God's control of your life.**

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3. **Identify the voice of evil that tempts you to self-destruct.** – negative fear, hate, envy, condemnation of self and others, worship of self and others
4. **Identify the voice of God that leads you to positive relationship.** – positive encouragement, servant hood, conviction of sin, hope, and joy
5. **Rebuke the negative voices and Obey the Positive Voice in your Fleeting Thoughts.** - practice, practice, practice!
6. **Avoid Empty Religion** – talking the good talk, but not walking it.

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