

# One More Round!

April 15, 2007

Scripture Reading: Romans 7:14-25

A couple of weeks ago I met a friend of mine for breakfast. And as I was getting into his car to head out for the restaurant, I noticed a black box on the top of the dash. He told me this was one of the new GPS systems. Said he got it so he could find his way around up in the Twin Cities. So I asked him how it works. He said all you have to do is enter the address of where you want to go and it'll give you directions. So he entered in his home address, which we had no intentions of going to. The restaurant was in the opposite direction.

As we're going to the restaurant, the box displayed on its screen the roads and street names we were on and kept trying to tell us the turns to make. Opps, missed that one. Then it said, in half a mile take a right. We went by it, and the box said try again. Take the next right in an eight of a mile. Missed that one too. Then it said, in one mile make a u-turn and go back.

Well, a mile came up, we saw the turn but did not take it. The box said "recalibrating." There was silence for about 30 seconds and then the box said in a female voice, "You are totally lost ---- better stop and ask for directions."

Many of us are acquainted with Robert Frost's use of the idea of choices in his poem "*The Road Not Taken*."

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

As we go through our life, we are challenged to walk according to God's Word by the power of God's Spirit. When we do, we'll never look back, and it will make all the difference in the world.

The great American theologian, philosopher, and baseball Hall of Famer, Yogi Berra put it another way

*When you come to a fork in the road, take it.*

The fork in the road Yogi was talking about is near his home in Montclair, N. J., and both roads lead to his home. When he first said it, it was a simple set of directions to get to his house. If only it were so simple. Many of us live as if that were true. We want it all, to do it all, have it all. At other times [that is how we often feel when faced with alternatives. We are frozen, fearful we will make the wrong choice only to regret it later.](#)

Within each one of us there is a constant battle being waged. Within each one of us there are two parts of us engaged in this battle. Something like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

There is the natural, flesh or “not real me” side. This is the side of us before we came to Christ when only the flesh ruled, living after it’s desires for self gratification only and incapable of having a relationship with God.

And there is the spiritual side, the “real me”. When we came to Christ, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." This is the part of us that is spirit – a part that has a permanent relationship with God.

The “real me” knows that God wants me to love other people. I’m supposed to forgive, be patient, be generous, make sacrifices and be a servant to other people. I’m supposed to be the nicest guy on the block, all the time.

But the “not real me” is not that way. I’d prefer to be selfish, to hold grudges, to not make sacrifices. I don’t do what God wants me to do.

So what is my problem?

We are led by the “not real me” and not by the desire of doing good. We turn from the will of God and surrender to the will of ourselves. And in the background Satan is sitting and waiting for each one of us to use that free will for self. He is probing us and trying to find a way into our lives. He is watching our every move. He is learning our weaknesses and our strengths. Then, when the time is ripe, he is right there ready to use our weaknesses against us.

The scripture we heard this morning applies to anyone who thinks they can practice their religion on their own power. I used to think "as long as I’m a good person. As long as I keep the 10 commandments. As long as I don’t covet my neighbor’s car. Or my neighbor’s wife. Or my neighbor’s \$5000 home entertainment system, I’ll be alright. I’ll have a place in the world to come. I’ll earn myself a first class ticket into heaven."

And Paul’s message to us is "forget about it! Because even if you have the desire to do what is good, you won’t be able to carry it out." No matter how hard you try to do the right thing, evil is right there with you!"

You may be wondering, "wait a second! If Jesus has washed away all of our sins, then why do we still struggle? Why is life so hard? Why do we do what we don’t want to do?"

For many of us, this passage is the story of our lives.

- A struggle with addictions like alcohol, gambling or pornography
- A struggle with the credit card, maxed out and no way to pay it off
- Wishing I could take back the harsh things I've said
- A marriage that is on the rocks

And with each wrong choice we make, we dig ourselves deeper and deeper into the hole of despair. We start thinking that we will never experience victory in this life.

We struggle with sin because our salvation is a three stage process. When you accepted Christ, you were saved from the PENALTY of sin. Right now, you are being saved from the POWER of sin. Later, when you go to heaven, you will be saved from the PRESENCE of sin. And the reason why there's still some tension in your life is because the second stage is going on right now! There's a conflict inside you between the old sinful nature you were born with (The "not real me") and the new nature you were given when you accepted Christ ("the real me"). How do I know that? Because Galatians 5:17 says that

*"The Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh. And the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit. The two are in conflict with each other so that you cannot do what you want."*

It's like the war in Iraq. Technically, the war is over. We declared victory when we drove Saddam Hussein out of power. We declared victory when the new Iraqi government was installed. But even though Hussein has been defeated and the victory has been won, we're finding out that the enemy has a lot more fight than we thought. There are still pockets of conflict in places like Fallujah. Little skirmishes that can make life difficult for our soldiers

The same thing is true with the war on sin. When you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, victory was declared. Satan was removed from power. And the new government of Jesus Christ was installed into your life. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says

*"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

But we're finding out that the enemy has more fight than we thought. There are still pockets of resistance in our lives. Little skirmishes going on that can make our lives difficult. And it's not because you're a loser. It's not because you're a failure at the Christian life. It's because the battle is long. And the fight is hard!

It's this fight that Paul focuses on in the scripture we read today.

Paul is saying he is just like me, and many of us, in his struggles. That Paul himself had been frustrated as well, just as I've been. He's frustrated and disappointed in himself.

Before Paul's conversion he was a zealous persecutor of Christians. He was part of a radical and sometimes violent faction of first-century Judaism known as the Shammaite Pharisees. And it was in that spirit of "holy war" that Saul of Tarsus pursued the Christian heretics—men, women, and children—who were caught and often beaten, imprisoned, and even executed. Whatever he did was done with fervor. After his conversion he kept that character. For him, everything he did had to be done to his fullest capability.

Paul's concept of sin comes from the Hebrew word Chata' and the Greek word "Hamartano". Both have the basic concept of "to miss the mark." The basic meaning illustrated by Judges 20:16 is

*"<sup>16</sup>Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss."*

Let me illustrate with this target. The bulls-eye represents complete obedience to God's will. Only one person ever hit this target; Jesus. Even though He was tempted, He never missed the mark. That is, He was sinless. He was always obedience to God's will.

Paul's personal goal was to become as Christ-like as he possibly could. And although he tried as much as he could, he could never hit the bulls-eye. He "missed the mark." This is the cause of his frustration.

In a tongue-twisting flood of words, worthy of any Pepper that Peter Piper may have picked, Paul lays out his disappointment of his life as a Christian. He acknowledges that he daily has the opportunity to do good in the eyes of God – in fact he wants to do good in the eyes of God. Because he is thankful that God brought him to believe in Jesus as his Savior. However, he is ashamed of where his spiritual life is and confesses...

*"<sup>14</sup>We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup>I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup>And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good." (Romans 7:14-16)*

Does that sound to you like the words from a spiritual giant? Not hardly! He's frustrated and disappointed in himself – he's missing the mark.

Paul is confessing that many times he is confronted with circumstances where he knows exactly what the right, God-pleasing thing to say or do would be – but then he's startled when he does something different than what he wanted to do or says something other than what he wanted to say.

Paul doesn't understand the things he did. He acknowledges that there are no problems with God's Word - it's him. It's the person that's weak. Like a prisoner who struggles to be free, there is an inner struggle that is constantly going on. Paul felt trapped and desperately wished to escape this death-trap that he was in.

At times we all feel the same even with our good intentions! We can all relate to that. How many times a day do you say something or do something that you know you shouldn't?

So why do I do the things I know I shouldn't? Because if you look in verse 17;

*<sup>17</sup>As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*

I want to do right, but I have a natural born tendency to wander off the correct path – to miss the mark. There is a part in all of us that are captive in sin, destined to moral failure.

What's worse is that this scenario plays itself over and over again in our lives as it did in Paul's.

In fact Paul says he's even more confused when the situations arise where he can see the harmful effects that wrong actions would bring on his life but he does them anyway. It's like a addict who knows that another hit or another drink will only further destroy him – but he gets high anyway.

But Paul recognizes that these sinful actions will be harmful. He realizes that God's law is good and right because it is put in place to keep him from hurt and pain. Since these sinful actions run contrary to his true desire he pinpoints the cause of the problem when he says,

*<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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.” ( Romans 7:18-20)*

Paul openly and even publicly admitted that - HE HAD FAILED! You can see that frustration and disappointment that Paul is dealing with here. He's missed the mark.

Just because you become a Christian doesn't mean you won't sin. Far from it. In fact you will be tempted to sin probably more than you ever were in your pre-Christian days. If you have not made that step of faith....Satan doesn't have to worry about you. You're already his. But when you cross the line to God's team...Satan's going to do some poking around to see how he can get you back. How he can beat you. Don't ever think that Satan doesn't know his stuff when it comes to Gods word. Quite the contrary, he knows this stuff better than any Bible scholar ever will.

While our desire is to do God's will, at times - sin seems stronger. The "not real me" is weak and Satan is a powerful enemy, but we understand that we take responsibility for our own sin. We make the ultimate decision to give in and let sin dominate us. We miss the mark!

Paul realizes it is his sin that is causing him all these problems; he is in need of forgiveness. Since sin is first and foremost a crime against God, Paul is in desperate need of the forgiveness that only God can offer.

Are we any different? We too have to admit that we are daily guilty of sin – even when we know better, even when we want to do better. That's an important reminder for us, especially as Christians, because it keeps us from becoming self-righteous, filled with arrogant pride about our goodness. Since as Christians we are also sinners, we are still in need of the forgiveness that only God can offer us.

Kay Arthur, a Christian author, put it this way

*"If you tolerate sin in your life, that sin will not only take you farther than you wanted to go, it will keep you longer than you wanted to stay and it will cost you more than you thought you'd pay."*

If we tolerate sin...let it become a habit, it will destroy us. Rest assured, I'm not just talking about drugs or alcohol here. It's whatever controls your life. It might be work, food, gossip, jealousy, sexual immorality or any other negative thing in your life that controls you.

But bad habits can be broken. Just remember in God's race, it's a marathon not a sprint. In a marathon, runners have good stretches and some bad. It's all part of the game. However, the runners don't just quit when they hit that bad stretch. They just keep running.

And this is what Paul did. He was having a bad period in his life and he did what most of us fail to do. He confessed it and turned to the one person who could help

*"<sup>21</sup>So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup>For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup>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." (Romans 7:21-23)*

He says there's a war going on inside of his mind and heart and at times he feels like he's losing this fight. Paul was disgusted with himself. He was at the bottom of the barrel. This fight was tearing him apart. It's almost as if Paul were on the brink of despair and breakdown.

Years ago there was a great prize fighter by the name of John L. Sullivan; that thought he was the best heavyweight champion in the world. And he went up against a fella who was a pimp squeak; they gave him a thousand to one chance to beat John L. Sullivan. That man went into the ring with John L. Sullivan. Sullivan hit him the first time so hard his whole body shock. Went over to his corner. His trainer asked him "How you doing?" He said "I'm doing all right but the first shot he hit me with I could feel it from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. But I said to myself "if I could just go - for one more round."

Then he came out the next round, and when he came out the next round Johnny L. Sullivan hit him so hard that he lifted him up off the turf and he came down, fell on his back. Saved by the bell, they dragged him over to his corner again and the trainer said "You want me to throw in the towel?" He said "No, let me see if I can do it for one more round."

He came back out the next round. When he came out that time John L. Sullivan hit him so hard he cut his eyes. His eyes were so filled with puff that he could not see. Went to the corner, they took razor blades and slit his eyes so he could see and the trainer said "Do you want me to throw in the towel?" He said "No no no, just one more round."

It was the longest prize fight in history at that time. He went back out again the next round and got knocked down three times. And guess what he said.

He came out the twentieth time. Twenty first time. Twenty second time. Twenty five rounds of fighting. Over and over again he said to himself "*One more round.*" Bloody and bludgeoned but "*One more round.*" Eyes puffed, but "*One more round.*" Too tired to stand but "*One more round.*" That last round he came out. John L. Sullivan figured he had him, and let down his guard for just an instant. The challenger hit John L. Sullivan - and knocked John L. Sullivan out.

Paul came to the place in his life, just like the boxing challenger, where he just couldn't take it anymore. And he cried out,

*"<sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24)*

All of us are stuck in a cycle of discouragement at times. You may be saying, "I'm so tired of trying. I'm so tired of failing. I'm so tired of putting out all this effort to improve my life with no results. I'm so tired of fighting the sin in my heart."

Friends, we have a John L. Sullivan in our midst and his name is the devil. And whether you like to admit it or not, he's there. Believe me, I know, I've been there. He is a liar and the truth is not in him. And I say to you, when he hits you, I want you to say "*Just one more round.*" Just one more round, that's all I want. Just one more round, just let me stand one more time, just give me the strength to make it one more time, one more round, that's what I want - one more round.

And what's the solution? Paul knew:

*"Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25a)*

Paul knew the only solution was Jesus. He alone can rescue us from sin and death, because He defeated them both on the cross.

Frustration and disappointments are going to happen. But we can't quit. We have to keep fighting. I'm not saying that the desire to sin will go away over night. I'm not saying that you'll never be tempted ever again. I'm not saying that you won't have to keep going back to God for forgiveness and help. You have the option of either depending on Him or depending on yourself. The result is either freedom or frustration. Why not give it all to Christ? He will help us through it.

The boxer who defeated John L. Sullivan – his name was James J. Corbett and he is quoted as saying,

*"When your feet are so tired that you have to shuffle back to the center of the ring, fight one more round. When your arms are so tired that you can hardly lift your hands to come on guard, fight one more round. When your nose is bleeding and your eyes are black and you're so tired that you wish your opponent would crack you one on the jaw and put you to sleep, fight one more round - remembering that the man who always fights one more round is never whipped."*

It all boils down to this: Are you willing to be like Paul and cry out to Jesus Christ out of the desperation of your own heart? Are you willing to stop trying to fix everything yourself? Are you willing to let go and let God call the shots in your life? Are you willing to go *One More Round* – with God's help?

Let's pray.