

**Sermon Series:** Do Over: Experience New Life in Christ  
**To be used with:** Session Five: A Fight You Can't Win By Yourself  
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**  
 This Means War  
 Strong Enough is Never Strong Enough  
**Scripture:** Romans 7:14-8:2

**Connection to Unit Theme:** *Do Over: Experience New Life in Christ* is a six session study from the book of Romans. These text-based sermon outlines will cover the same Scripture passages and topics as are being studied in the small groups, but with a different perspective. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about, without “stealing their thunder.” Session 5 is “A Fight You Can’t Win By Yourself.” The Point of the session is “We are not alone in facing our ongoing struggle with sin.”

## Introduction

### *Illustration*

Tommy Lasorda, the former Los Angeles Dodgers manager, once described his battle with bad habits: “I took a pack of cigarettes from my pocket, stared at it and said, “Who’s stronger, you or me?” The answer was me. I stopped smoking. Then I took a vodka martini and said to it, “Who’s stronger, you or me?” Again the answer was me. I quit drinking. Then I went on a diet. I looked at a big plate of linguine with clam sauce and said, “Who’s stronger, you or me?” And a little clam looked up at me and answered, “I am.” I can’t beat linguine.”

While Tommy Lasorda was strong enough to quit smoking, and strong enough to quit drinking, eventually he faced a fight he wasn’t strong enough to win. And the fact is, if it’s only our own voice saying, “I’m stronger than this temptation,” or “I can overcome that temptation,” we are going to lose. We may not every battle, but certainly we will lose the war. Because as small groups are learning this week, the ongoing fight against sin is not one we can win by ourselves. But thankfully, we don’t have to. We are not alone in facing the ongoing struggle against sin.

*(Read Romans 7:14-8:2)*

## I. The Dilemma (v. 14-20)

One of the most hotly contested issues in biblical interpretation is whether Paul was describing his pre-Christian state in these verses, or if he was describing a battle he faced *as* a Christian. Those who argue that he is describing his pre-salvation reality point to verse 14: “But I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (NIV). This would be consistent with the images he uses throughout his letters of being a slave to the law. And if Paul was describing his life as a Christian, 7:14 would be at odds with Romans 6:18, 22; which describes our being set free from sin, as well as the last verse of our focal passage, Romans 8:2.

On the other hand, the person Paul is describing seems to be a believer. For one thing, everything he says in this passage is in the present tense. He “hates” the bad that he does (v. 15) and “desires to do what is good” (v. 18) He “joyfully agrees with God’s law” (v. 22).

Understand that you can come to either conclusion and still be a Christian.<sup>1</sup> But it's also true that all of us can read this passage, and it "feels" like Paul is describing the struggle we have with sin. Many of us have a "besetting" sin in our lives, one that we can't seem to say no to, no matter how much we try to follow God or how long we've walked with Him. Verse 21 describes evil as a constant companion, always with us. Every good word, every good deed, every good thought, every good motive and every good thing is challenged by evil. If we are able to any good thing, it is always the result of a battle!

Isn't it true that when we would do good, there is always the temptation to do evil? Isn't it hard to keep your motives pure? Isn't it difficult to control the thought processes so that good wins out? Of course it is. And the result is despair.

## II. The Despair (v. 22-24)

In verse 24, Paul cries out "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dying body?" We get the cry, don't we? We can imagine every time we do that thing we swore we would never do again. We clench our teeth. We beat our fist against the wall and curse ourselves for being so weak.

Paul is not begging for physical death as the only way to escape the battle against sin. So what does he mean by "who will rescue me from this dying body?" (NIV: "from this body of death?")

The *Holman Bible Commentary* relates this to a section of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*. After the fall of Troy, the cruel king Mezentius tortured his living prisoners of war by tying them face-to-face with the dead ones. They would be bound together until the living one died. In Virgil's poem, the fact that it rhymes doesn't make it any less gruesome:

The living and the dead at his command  
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand  
Till, choked with stench, in loathed embraces tied  
The lingering wretches pined away and died.<sup>2</sup>

Can you imagine how much those prisoners longed to be set free from the corpse they were bound to? It's the face-to-face part that gives me the willies. Nevertheless, it's a powerful image of how we need to see our sin. Temptation would never be as powerful if sin were as ugly to us as it is to God. But when we are brought face-to-face with our sin, we come to hate it as much as God does. And when we hate our sin as only God does, then we long to be set free from it as only God can. Thanks be to God, there is an answer.

## III. The Deliverance (v. 25-8:2)

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<sup>1</sup> For what it's worth, three of the most popular conservative commentaries are split on this point. The *NIV Application Commentary* on Romans argues the "unregenerate" interpretation. The *Holman Bible Commentary* and <sup>2</sup> *Holman Bible Commentary, Vol. 6 (Romans), p. 232*

There really is only one hope for deliverance from sin—through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:25 mentions this so briefly that we’re tempted to miss it. So let’s camp for a minute on how we are rescued “from this dying body” through Jesus.

Jesus Christ took that body of death you were tied to and took it on Himself instead. He allowed himself to be condemned and crucified instead of you. Jesus is the opposite of us. Jesus always did the good things he wanted to do. Jesus never did the evil things he hated. He was perfect. And yet, he let himself be treated as a sinner, so that God could call you a saint. He let himself be taken as a prisoner, so that you could live in freedom. He allowed himself to become wretched in the eyes of God, so that you could become pleasing in the eyes of God. He let his body become a body of death, so that someday, you would have a body of eternal life. Instead of the wrecking ball crashing into you, the wrecking ball crashed into Christ. This was Jesus’ way of rescuing you – he became your sin, and you became his righteousness.

Because of Jesus, you have hope. This is the cure to the problem you have in your soul. And that cure is called: the forgiveness of sins.

That doesn’t mean that the war is over inside of you. There still is something wrong with your soul, and there will always will be something wrong with your soul until the day you die. You will always have that sinful nature – it won’t go away. That’s why we need the Gospel. Every day, the war inside of us causes us to run to the cross of Jesus Christ. That war inside of us causes us to lool to the Gospel, and to rejoice that we have been forgiven for all of our failures. We have been forgiven for the sins we have committed, and that makes our future bright, and hopeful.<sup>3</sup>

## **Conclusion**

### *Illustration*

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus is sailing with his crew on a series of dangerous adventures. One adventure takes them past the island inhabited by the sirens. The sirens were creatures with the bodies of birds, the heads of women, and very beautiful voices, and their sole purpose was to lure sailors to destroy themselves against the jagged rocks around their island. When the sirens begin to sing, passing sailors were so entranced that they rushed toward the island in order to encounter these lovely creatures, only to be smashed to pieces and.

Now Odysseus didn’t know how he was going to get by. There were two ways it could be done. First, by equipment. Odysseus plugged up all of the sailors’ ears so they couldn’t hear the siren song. Then, he had them lash him to a mast so he couldn’t move.

But somebody came up with a better idea. There was on board the ship a man who was the greatest harp player of them all, Orpheus. Orpheus made the most beautiful music on his harp—far more beautiful than the singing of the sirens. Thus as the men listened to the music of Orpheus they were not tempted by the songs of the sirens.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from “There’s Something Wrong With My Soul!” sermon by Don Schultz, available at SermonCentral.com

Here is the lesson for us: the best way to overcome the desires of the flesh is to allow our desire for God drown out all other passions. Then we will hear the voice of God and be unmoved by the siren voices of unregulated passion which would lead us to destruction. Then we can satisfy many of those legitimate appetites in their proper order. We need to create a relationship with God that is so strong that it can dominate any other passion of life. This is the road to mastery.

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