

Romans 7:15-20  
Message #1 (10:15) in the series "Whose Verse Is It Anyway?"

Pastor David Wolverton

Well, good morning. Grace and peace to you. In the name of God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. It's good for us to be together on this great, warm day, it's a gracious day and as we prepare ourselves for the Word of God today, would you join with me in prayer?

Holy God, open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, I pray in Jesus mighty name that God's people said Amen. Amen.

Well, we are launching a brand-new summer season series called Whose Verse Is It Anyway? And literally, we're pulling verses of scripture that you all sent in, and we're discovering what God has in mind for us for that day. Now, this is what we're calling improv, preaching improv. And when Jen made that little error, she was actually spot on. We take that title from the old TV series Whose Line Is It Anyway? Where improv is demonstrated for us each and every time, we watch that show. Improv preaching is similar in style, but it's grounded in something a little bit different. Certainly, you cannot get onto a stage and do improv without having a lifetime, or at least a lot of extra training and doing improv. And one of the principles that you're taught in Improvisation is what's called the 'yes; and' principle. So, I have taken that principle and applied it to this preaching, and we have shared that together as a preaching team. Improv asks us to look in preaching for the 'Yes' of God. What do I mean by that? So first and foremost, what I mean is I really believe that from the beginning of the Book of Genesis, all the way through the last verses of the Book of Revelation so, our entire Bible, we have a picture of a God who is wanting us to know him. God wants to reveal himself to us. And so, when you open up the Scriptures, wherever you land, you're getting an opportunity, an invitation to learn about the character and heart of God. God wants to reveal himself to his people. That's us. And so, we need to tune in to the divine 'yes.' What is it that God wants to say and what does that mean for us today? So, the basic principle that we're operating on in doing this series is we have a God who wants us to know him. So, while we're looking at the verses, we're going to do the second principle that I'd like to re-share with you. Those of you who've been around with me for any length of time, you've heard this teaching, and those of you who are watching online, you've seen this or heard me do this in messages before, but three words. Any time you open the scriptures, this helps with our Bible study. It's observation, interpretation and application. Observation is all about what's going on in the Scriptures, what what's happening here. And observation also is looking at the context. So, if I have a verse, where's that verse in the paragraph? What's the paragraph saying within the context of the section? What's the section saying in the context of the chapter? What's the chapter saying in the context of the whole book? And what's the whole book saying in context with the whole canon of the Old and New Testaments, how is God revealing himself not just in those couple of verses, but those verses within the larger context? That's all observation. Interpretation is. All right. What could these words have meant back in the day when they were first written or uttered? And what could they mean for us today? That's the why. The why? What's God trying to say to us? And then the application is, what am I going to do with what God has taught me? So, observation, interpretation and application throughout this summer series, that's what we're going to be doing live in the moment. Hopefully we have more than 10 minutes or 15 minutes to do a little bit of prep work. But that's what it's doing. Improv is also not winging it. What you will see me do. What you will see Dominic do. And Matt and Pastor John. And an Aliyah. We're all doing this together this summer. What you will see us do is pull from the resources of

daily walking with the Lord. So, each of us has a daily encounter with the Lord. Our own daily devotions, our own Bible studies, our own years and Aliya has got less years than we do. But, but years of struggling with Scripture, engaging God. We're going to pull from all of those resources. And here's the thing- you can do the same thing. So, what you see model up here, I invite you to try it on your own. If you don't right now have a personal devotional life, if you're not engaging God on a daily basis, use this as a model observation, interpretation, application. Open up the Bible, open it up wherever it is, start wherever it opens. Don't resist doing Bible bingo unless you're willing to do the exchange- the work of observation, interpretation and application. So, when you do that, you're going to ask God for the- yes. What is it, Lord, that you want to say to us? What is it that you are revealing of your heart, your character, your life, for the life and character and spiritual growth of your people? And then what do you want me to do with what you're teaching me? Asking those questions is a great way to engage in spiritual growth. Why do I say all of that as prep? Certainly, for the series. But now I have a baiting question. Do you trust me? Some of you are going, oh I don't know. And you're wise, but I want to ask you to do something right off the cuff. Ready? For those of you who are physically able I want to invite you to count of three seats in front of you. Get up and move there. If you can't count because you're in the second row or the first row, count three starting in the back. So, take just a brief moment. And for those of you who are watching online, I want you to do that, too. Maybe you don't have the luxury of having three seats in front of you but move to a different spot in the room and readjust your viewing advantage, whether your screen needs to be turned or you need to move a chair, move your spot. Starting now.

Wow! Some of you have never been this close to the preacher before. Right? This is awesome. And I feel the energy now. I feel it. This is good. So, I noticed a few things, maybe you did, too, when I asked you to do that. I heard laughter. I heard laughter. What I didn't hear, but probably just statistically was present, there were a few people who went, 'augh', right? Let's be honest. You can admit it here. There are few, at least a few, maybe all of you who were somewhat reluctant. Because some of you, dare I say it? Some of you, at least in the room here, you came early to get your seat, right? Because you have your seat. And me asking you to do something really touched a nerve. Because sometimes that change is a little awkward. Sometimes it's hard. And some of you feel like you're sweating now because you're closer to the pastor than you've ever been. I don't spit much. I can't promise about using people for illustrations. All right. Why did I do that? So, any time we are asked to change what our normal is, we have a reaction if the change is dramatic, our reaction is dramatic. If it is traumatic, our reaction and response to it is traumatic. If it's benign. Well, maybe we could go either way, depending on what kind of mood we're in. Hold on to that. When I read you what Paul wrote in Romans 7, again, listen to these words and see as I kind of read it, but also interplay with it a little bit. Ask yourself, have I ever felt this? Paul writes:

For I do not understand my own actions. (Anybody been there? Yeah? Yeah. I've been saying that ever since I got married, because the reality is, when I was living on my own and on my own terms, I didn't have to think that anybody else. Now there's a clash. All good by the way.) He says,

I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good.

Let me pause there just to explain what Paul is doing here Did you ever hear the phrase cognitive dissonance? Cognitive dissonance is when what's going on in our mind are usually our mind, our thoughts, there's a contrast, a conflict between two competing values. And when those are in in conflict with each other, we literally we could become paralyzed if it's a significant conflict and the values are both important to us, we literally could be paralyzed, and we can't make a decision we can't choose.

So, the cognitive dissonance is that literally a conflict. In the olden days on TV, you know, we used to see the little angel, the little devil on our, you know, graphically put on shoulders for people. And the devil was trying to convince us to do one thing, and the angel was trying to convince us to do the other thing. That's the good thing. And the devil would then say to the angel, you shut up, and there's no you be quiet. And then they would fight with.... That's what we're talking about. That's what Paul is talking about. There's a clash that's going on and the value systems that are important to me are battling it out. And the things that I know I should want I end up not doing because what's winning is the old. The old me. The old way of doing life. I forget that there are ramifications to what I what my behavior is or what my actions are. And I forget who I am, and I forget who I'm called to be. That clash is very important for Paul. Now, if we were to do the observation interpretation application, pull up a little bit this passage of Scripture comes within a very important segment of the book of Romans. Paul's writing a treatise. It's a very powerful and impactful letter that he's writing to the Christian church in Rome. He's anticipating that he's going to get there. He's going to see them personally. And because he's anticipating arriving there, he wants to let them know in advance what he's going to be teaching them, what the good news is, what the gospel message that he's been proclaiming has been all about. He wants them to know. And for Paul, what he's doing here in these verses is he's giving a personal illustration about that cognitive dissonance that that clash of values and what he does in very, very unique ways. You know, he's using language that for us in modern times can sound confusing. But I think Paul is doing that on purpose, because what he's saying, in effect, is, you all know what I go through because you go through it too. It's the clash between what life was like for us before Jesus. And what life can be for us with Jesus. And the whole set up of Chapter 7 is illustration after illustration of that point. When you pull up a little bit further, the entire letter of Romans is built around that contrast. The cognitive dissonance about what life was like, not just for him, not just for the people of Israel, but all of humanity. That's what he's describing in Romans. This is what life was like before Jesus. And this is life with Jesus. Before Jesus we just lived life and didn't care about anything else. And some of us lived a life thinking we were religious. Thinking that we got it. Thinking that we were saved just because we were obeying every law written in the Torah. And yet we missed the mark. That's what Paul was getting at. First, second and third chapters of Romans is setting up the stage of that cognitive dissonance, that dialectical tension, that that contrast of values and contrast of lifestyles, leading him to say, in effect. So, what Paul says, every one of us stands in need of God's grace. Because apart from God's grace we have nothing. We are nothing. So, he uses himself as illustration. He says, so if I do what I do not want I agree with the law. The law of the old life was designed to expose sin and our need for a savior. Verse 17:

"So now it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me." [Romans 7:17]

The word in the original language for 'dwells here' has the root word that we get the word house from in Greek. So, it's taking up residence. When sin takes up residence, our identity is connected to it. Get a load of this. Verse 18:

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I know that nothing good dwells in me." [Romans 7:18].

Nothing good sets up house in me. That's what Paul is saying that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right. I have the desire, but not the ability to carry it out. So what Paul is saying is in this grand scheme, this grand tension that exists between life before Christ and life with Christ he says, I knew what the right thing was to do, I just couldn't do it. I didn't have that ability in me. In fact, I may have had the desire to live that way. I just don't have the capacity within me. I need a savior. Which is the point he's been making throughout all of Roman's. Verse 19:

"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do- this what I keep on doing." [Romans 7:19].

What he just said in that one statement. Describes the addictive personality of a culture of a people. I'm not going to pry too deeply. And you don't have to raise your hand. But have you ever been at a place where you could say, I know what he's talking about. I know what addiction looks like. I know that sometimes things have so much control over me that I know the right thing, I just can't do it. I just can't seem to stop doing the wrong thing. It seems to have control over me. Even when I know that it's the wrong thing. Ever been there? Here's the deal. We all have. That's what Paul's main point is throughout all of this letter. We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We're all equal. In our need for God's grace as we stand at the foot of the cross of Christ. And there's nothing, there's nothing that we ourselves can do to break that bondage. So Paul says in Verse 20:

Now, if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me." [Romans 7:20].

There's that word again. Sin that sets up house in me. So the interesting thing is that this passage of Scripture that whoever it was that submitted it, you stopped a verse 20. But there's more to the story. I want to share a little bit more of what Paul says right after that. Lest we see the reality of the cognitive dissonance, but end up leaving without any hope. This is what he says next. Verse 21.

"So I find this law at work, (he's about to say what that law is) when I want to do, good evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law. 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].

And basically in old language, what that saying is what I just told you about. There's a cognitive dissonance and it's at war with my within my mind, within my soul, within my life. And it's forcing me to have to make choices and I don't have the capacity to choose. I just can't do it on my own. Again, keep in mind he's using himself, this is a personal illustration of the larger message of what he's trying to communicate. And then he says this, this is so good. Verse 24:

"What a wretched man that I am! (Listen) Who will rescue me from this body of death? (You ever been there? Who will rescue me? And then he says) Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" [Romans 7:24-25]

Mike drop. Right then and there, the cognitive dissonance is resolved because for Paul, what Paul is saying is, I cannot fix myself. And anybody who thinks they can is wrong. Because the reality is everyone who has tried to fix themselves they end up getting caught. So in effect, what Paul is saying in these verses is who or what owns you? Who or what owns you? And as we move through interpretation to application, who or what will own you? Now that you are in Christ, get a load of this, He's not done. And you continue reading on. He says in chapter 8, Verse 1:

"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 8:1-2].

Repeat after me. In Christ, I am no longer condemned. In Christ. I have been set free. In Christ. I have a new identity. Do you believe that? (Yes.) Do you believe it? I heard a couple of yeses. (Yes.) So if you do, then Paul's dialectical tension, his cognitive dissonance that describes the condition of

everyone in this room and everybody watching on your screen right now. You have a new identity. You have been set free. You are a child of the living God, and your worth, your value is reflected in what God did in sending his Son to die on a cross. That's how much Paul says, God loves you. And that cross for Paul is central. It is central to everything that he writes that's behind the illustration of what these verses reflect and represent. His personal story does not stop with the cognitive dissonance. It continues to a cross and to an empty tomb. And to the freedom that Grace has been provided for him. To shift his identity to one of new life. (Amen. Indeed.) So within our addictive culture, where we're addicted to sin. I don't know about you. I know I am. Where will we place our identity? Who or what will enslave us? And what will be our challenge? I choose Christ. Like Paul in Galatians 5, I say, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God. Who loved me and who gave himself for me. That's what I choose. Because I no longer want to live within the paralysis of cognitive dissonance. I want to engage the yes of the God who has said yes to me.

I asked you all to move your chairs or move your seats. And some of us face into that with some cognitive dissonance. Some overt dissonance. Some of you did not move at all for various reasons. Maybe because physically you needed to stay where you were. I get that. But some of us, if you're really paying attention, your perspective has changed. What could God be asking you to see from the new angle of where you're sitting now. Let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for the great gift of your word. That word speaks and breathes life into each of us and invites us to know the God who loves us, the God who gave himself for us, the God who continues to give himself to us and invites us to give ourselves away for you. To pour out your Holy Spirit on us, Lord. Fall afresh on us. Start inside of our minds, in our hearts and our souls and whenever we are facing into that moment of dissonance where the old self is competing with the new self, Lord, shine a light in that moment on the cross of Jesus Christ. For in Him, there is now no condemnation. And we want to be in him. Thank you, Lord.