

## **THE DIVIDED SELF**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Romans chapter 7

The Civil War was the costlier war in American history in terms of casualties. More Americans died in the Civil War than in WWI or WWII. Civil wars, however, don't just take place within nations. They can also take place within an individual as Paul reveals in today's reading. He describes the battle in himself in the strongest of terms: *"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."*

Some Christians have trouble believing that Paul could be talking about himself as a Christian. They reason that he must be referring to what life was like before he came to Christ. Paul's own testimony about his life prior to Christ, however, seems to negate this view (see Phil 3:4-6). Also, Paul's portrayal of the divided self shows up in the section where Paul is writing about how God develops righteousness in us. In other words, it's not in the pre-conversion section of Rom 1-3 but in the post-conversion section of Rom 6-8.

Yet, if this is true, it makes one wonder how being a Christian is worth it if we are just going to walk around crying out as Paul does, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* After this cry for a rescuer, though, Paul bursts into praise in the last verse of Romans 7: *"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* This implies that deliverance is possible from the divided self. However, immediately afterwards, he concludes, *"So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."* What's up? Is he delivered or isn't he? The answer comes into focus when we get the bigger picture.

Prior to coming to Christ, we only have a sin nature. Spiritually, we're dead. The sin nature is bent on producing more and more sin in us. After we come to Christ, we are made spiritually alive. We have a new nature within that is bent on righteousness. In effect, we have a divided self: two sides battling for dominance. This is what Paul describes in Romans 7. The solution to the battle, however, is not for us to try to beat the sin nature into submission or to try to overpower or conquer it. It can't be done in our own strength. This is what Paul learned and shares with us in Romans 7. The solution lies outside of us. It lies with Christ. Only when we count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (as we saw in the devotional from Rom 6), trusting in what Christ did on the cross to pay the price for our sin and free us from the power of sin, can we walk free from sin's tyranny. By relying on the victory Christ won, instead of attempting to defeat the sin nature on our own, we enjoy the benefits of being more than a conqueror (Rom 8:37). The old man is rendered powerless (Rom 6:6) and the new man, *"created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Eph 4:24) is able to win the war of the divided self through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-13).

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Have you struggled with the civil war within as Paul did? Reread Rom 6-7 in light of the chapter devotionals and pray for grace & wisdom to walk in Christ's victory by faith rather than in your own strength.

**Take-a-way:** *The Civil War within is won not with force of arms but by faith in Christ.*