

Apostle Paul talks about the experience of true human nature in Romans. He uses observations of human experience to support his writing, and that experience of human nature is the starting point of his message in today's passage. This is how we understand our human nature.

He says in Romans 7:15–25, “I can decide what I want to do, but I am powerless to do it. I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”

According to Paul, comprehending human nature can be challenging. We can understand our desires, but then we question whether those desires truly define our actions.

I would like to ask you a couple of questions: Has anyone lived the life you wanted to live? Has anyone done what you wanted to do in life?

There's a man who shares his experiences of human nature in his everyday life.

He calls himself a person who enjoys ice cream late at night. Not only does he enjoy the ice cream, but he also loves it with chocolate and nuts on top. He finds solace in this treat when his wife is not around at night.

This habit has become so ingrained in him that he has become addicted to ice cream. As a result, he is putting on weight.

He tried to control his habit whenever he attempted to open the fridge for ice cream.

So, he decided to lock the fridge with a chain and give the key to his wife. One night, his wife heard the sound of the chain unlocking—it was her husband trying to open the fridge. The next day, the wife found marks on the fridge door, and the man was desperate.

His confession was this: “I know what I need to do in my head, but when I actually do it, it is not what I want to do.”

We laugh at this man and this situation because it is fundamentally true to our own experience. And we understand what the Apostle Paul is talking about.

What he is trying to say is that when he is deciding what he wants to do with his life, he knows what needs to be done in his head, but when he actually does it, it is not what he wants to do.

He is not doing what he decided to do in his mind. So he says, “What I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do.” He identified himself as a slave to this dilemma.

We can distinguish between the things we want to do and the things we do, regardless of whether they are good, bad, or somewhere in between.

We sometimes struggle with this conflict, whether we like it or not. According to Paul, there are two different forces that we are wrestling with. In my own experience, I would say that we are not truly free to do everything we want to do.

According to Paul, we don’t know why we fail to do what we want to do, yet we do the very things we hate. And we feel a sense of shame for our own actions.

Paul says, “I want to do some good, I want to do the right thing, but then I end up doing something else—I do the evil thing. And I keep on doing it.”

Is what Paul is saying our confession as well, or is there simply a similarity between our experience and Paul’s words?

Our freedom seems to be limited by what we want to do. When we consider freedom, (changed from Because with freedom) we often do what we do not want to do. We do what we hate. That is how we misuse our freedom. According to Paul, our freedom is restricted by the sin that lives in us.

Paul says, “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.” We are limited by sin.

Our limitation is connected to self-indulgence and to chasing false desires.

Paul regards this so-called freedom as a form of slavery that he longs to escape. He wants to do good, but evil is right there with him. His inner being delights in God’s law, yet he sees another law at work within him.

He is waging war against evil, and he has become a slave to this war. How can we be freed from a war we do not want to engage in? Is there a way we can be released from the slavery of sin we are in?

These questions posed by Paul can be found in today's gospel, Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30. Jesus invites people to follow Him and take on His burden and yoke.

He assures them that His burden is light and His yoke is easy. Jesus encourages us to take His yoke upon ourselves and learn from Him, promising that we will find rest in this form of servitude.

Jesus is telling us that we are free from the bondage of sin when our lives are connected with Him and when we begin to live according to His will. By learning His way of life and choosing to follow His ways, we can experience the freedom that comes from His yoke.

In this passage, Jesus is not suggesting that we can be completely freed from all burdens and yokes. Instead, He offers us the opportunity to learn from His way of life and find rest in His presence.

We are not alone in this human experience—in our struggles and in the human nature of which we are a part.

There is St. Augustine, a theologian and philosopher, who laid the foundation of medieval and modern Christian thought and shares a similar experience to ours.

In his best-known book, *Confessions*, he admitted that he had lived his youth as a carefree, wayward child, causing all kinds of trouble. Then he met Christ, and he converted. He became a great Christian Church Father.

After his conversion, Augustine described freedom as not the ability to do whatever we want, but rather the ability to become who God intends us to be.

We are constantly surrounded and constrained by external forces. Any intentions other than Christ's hinder us from being right with God and keep us from doing what we are meant to do.

We have both good and evil within us. We are pulled by these opposing forces, worn out by the war inside, and can even become slaves to this inner battle.

Jesus invites us to come and learn from Him. He promises us freedom and the opportunity to find our lives in the love of God.

Jesus calls us to seek rest for our souls in the spiritual battles we face, between good and evil and right and wrong.

We can find freedom by placing the yoke of Christ on our shoulders and embracing the burdens of Jesus. And true freedom is ours when we find ourselves in Christ. It is ours when we are equipped with His words and truth within us.

When we are connected with Him in prayer and in a relationship with Him, we become truly free, and we are free to do anything in Him. Christ came to free us from sin and death.

Knowing Him and following His Word will set us free because the truth will set us free (John 8:32).

In Him, we find freedom, and within that freedom, we are free to do what He wants us to do: to love Him and to love others. Only then do we truly become free.

Amen.