

Romans 07 - Powerless Sanctification; The Believer's Relationship to the Law; The Believer's Struggle Between the Old and New Natures

IV. Sanctification (Rom 6:1—8:39)

(2) The believer's relationship to the Law (7:1-25)

(A) The believer's freedom from the law (7:1-6)

- (a) Legal illustration (7:1)
- (b) Marriage illustration (7:2-3)
- (c) Application to our union with Christ (7:4a)
- (d) Possibility of fruit bearing (7:4b)
- (e) Past fruit bearing (7:5)
- (f) Present fruit bearing (7:6)

(B) Although the Law is holy, sin used it to usher in death (7:7-12)

- (a) Is the Law sin? (7:7a)
- (b) Emphatic denial (7:7b)
- (c) Purposes of the Law (7:7c-11)
 - (i) The Law defines sin (7:7c)
 - (ii) The Law provokes sin (7:8)
 - (iii) The Law is an instrument of sin/death, not life (7:9-11)
- (d) Conclusion: the Law is good (7:12)

(C) Although the Law is holy, it is powerless to deliver someone from sin (7:13-25)

- (a) Interpretive challenges
- (b) Contrast between the Law and man's nature (7:13-14)
 - (i) The Law is not the cause of our sinful tendencies (7:13)
 - (ii) Our nature and the Law are going in opposite directions (7:14)
- (c) Man's inability to gain victory through the Law (7:15-20)
 - (i) The Law cannot prevent me from doing wrong (7:15-16)
 - (ii) Problem of the sin nature (7:17)
 - (iii) The Law cannot cause me to do right (7:18-20)
- (d) Description of the conflict within the believer (7:21-23)
 - (i) Principle of evil yet the desire to do good (7:21)
 - (ii) Good explained (7:22)

- (iii) Evil explained (7:23)
- (e) Solution to the problem (7:24-25)
 - (i) Problem stated (7:24a)
 - (ii) Cry for a solution (7:24b)
 - (iii) Answer to the problem (7:25a)
 - (iv) Ensuing conflict (7:25b)

Romans 7

(2) The believer's relationship to the Law (Rom 7:1-25)

Earlier in this epistle, Paul was clear that no one was ever justified by means of the Law. Justification only comes by grace through faith. But what about the present aspect of the believer's salvation, sanctification? Is sanctification gained through the works of the Law?

Throughout church history, many times this question was answered positively and that believers thought following the Mosaic Law would sanctify them. In Rom 7, however, Paul explained that the works of the Law do not avail to sanctification. The believer is neither justified nor sanctified by the Law.

(A) The believer's freedom from the law (7:1-6)

This passage develops the doctrine of the believer's emancipation from the Law by discussing the law of the husband. The verses build on Paul's teaching in 6:14: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace." Believers are not under law, and now Paul will explain why this is so. He will keep referring back to several concepts and terms that were explained in previous sections.

The term "man" means "mankind." The term "law" without the definite article often refers to the principle of law, while "the law" refers to the Mosaic Law. The wife mentioned in this passage represents the believer. The first husband can be taken either as a representative of the Law or the sin nature. The second husband mentioned refers to Christ.

(a) Legal illustration (7:1)

1 Or do you not know, brothers *and sisters* (for I am speaking to those who know the Law), that the Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

1 Don't you realize, brothers—for I am speaking to people who know the Law—that the Law can press its claims over a person only as long as he is alive?

1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know [the] law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

- Verses 1-6 relate to what Paul said in 6:14—the intervening verses (6:15-23) were a digression raised by the question in 6:15.

Rom 6:14: For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace.

— The statement that a believer identified with Jesus Christ in His death is no longer “under the Law” (6:14) would not have surprised Paul’s readers because they were men who knew the Law. Paul even says so in this verse.

— However, this statement should not be restricted to Jewish believers in Rome because Gentiles also knew the principle of law had authority (*kyrieuei*, “rules as lord”; Cf. 6:9; 14) over a man only as long as he lives.

- “...do you not know” - again, before giving them commands, Paul is going to teach them (us) correct doctrine.

- “...brothers *and sisters*” - fellow believers; first time Paul used this description since 1:13. Of the 7x Paul uses this address to his readers, it can easily be seen that it always marks some special concern on Paul's part.

- “...those who know” - Paul’s Roman readers; they lived in the capital of the empire where officials debated, enacted and enforced laws.

- “...the Law” - there is no definite article (“the”) in the Greek, so this means that Paul is speaking of a principle broader than the Mosaic Law. The law that has dominion (“authority”) over man includes the Mosaic Law, but there is a broader principle of law communicated by creation and by conscience, and these also have dominion over man.

— The most important thing that Paul will say about the law is that it will not save (justify) a single person. You can try your entire life to obey the law, but that won't gain you entrance to heaven.

— The next most important thing Paul will say about the law is that once you become a Christian, it cannot help you live a godly life. In fact, Paul will explain that simply obeying the law without the cross and without the Holy Spirit, is lethal (dangerous).

— So if obeying the law cannot save us, and it cannot (without the Holy Spirit) help us live a life that is pleasing to God, then what good is it? It is good at condemning us (Cf. John 5:45).

— Before a person comes to Christ, their relationship with the law was that the law told them to do something and they failed; the law told them not to do something and they did it anyway. So the law is always condemning an unbeliever.

— But Paul's point in v1-6 is that the believer has been set free from the condemnation of the law through faith in Christ.

- "...the Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives" - the Greek wording here also has no definite article ("the") before Law, just as the previous reference to "the Law" in this verse also has no definite article), thus Paul is not specifically referring to the Mosaic Law here, but to any law (the laws of the USA, the State of Arizona, etc.).
- The law (in general) has jurisdiction over a person for their entire life, until death. Once a person dies, the law has no jurisdiction over them any longer. The law can no longer hold someone accountable for a crime once they are dead. Death emancipates us from the law.
- Paul will make the point that our death with Christ emancipates us from the condemnation of the law. Because a believer has been unified into Christ's death, they have been liberated from the condemnation of the law.

(b) Marriage illustration (7:2-3)

- 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he is alive; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.
- 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.
- 2 For a married woman is bound by the Law to her husband while he is living, but if her husband dies, she is released from the Law concerning her husband.
- 2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.
- In the Mosaic Law and Israeli law today, a woman is bound to her husband for his (or her) entire life. There was no option for divorce by the wife; divorce could only be initiated by the husband.
- Note that Paul is not giving us instructions on divorce and remarriage here; he will do that elsewhere. This is an illustration to hammer home his point in v1.
- "...if" - third class condition, uncertain of fulfillment but still likely. If at any point in the future this condition is met (the husband's death), then this (the wife is released from the law) will follow.
- In the illustration, the wife represents the believer and the husband represents the law.
- A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. If her husband dies, the wife is released from the law of marriage. She is bound to him by marriage while he lives, and obviously his death frees her from being bound any longer
- "...released" - *katargeō*, perfect tense, meaning she "has been and stands discharged").
- As a woman whose husband has died, she is now free to marry another. So also are believers, since they have died to the law, we are now free to belong to Christ.

3 So then, if while her husband is alive she gives herself to another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress if she gives herself to another man.

3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

3 So while her husband is living, she will be called an adulterer if she lives with another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from this Law, so that she is not an adulterer if she marries another man.

3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

- However, if the wife pursues another man before his death, she has broken the law and become an adulteress.

— But if she marries someone else after her husband died, she is not considered an adulteress.

— Paul's point is: death brings freedom from the law.

(c) Application to our union with Christ (7:4a)

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in regard to **the Law** through the body of Christ, **so that you might belong to another, to Him** who was raised from the dead, in order that we might **bear fruit for God**.

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

4 In the same way, my brothers, through the Messiah's body you also died as far as the Law is concerned, so that you may belong to another person, the one who was raised from the dead, and may bear fruit for God.

4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that [for the purpose that] ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

- "Therefore" - introduces the application of the illustration (v2-3) for the readers.

- "...you also were put to death" - *ethanatōthēte*, aorist tense, passive voice, indicative mood of the verb *thanatōō*, which means "to put to death." The aorist tense emphasizes that the death described is a once-and-for-all event. The passive voice indicates that the death is brought upon the person.

— The believer was not "made to die to the law" (freed from its binding authority) because the law died, but because we died with Christ. Since we died with Christ, we

no longer have to live according to the commands of the law.

— Believers have died to the law (the Mosaic Law), not to the OT in general. The OT is still authoritative revelation for Christians. It's just that the relationship that once existed between the OT believer and the Mosaic Law no longer exists for the Christian.

- "...the Law" - *nomos*, again, there is no definite article ("the") present in Greek, thus the "law" could refer to either the law or our sin nature.

- "...so that you might belong...to Him" - because believers were put to death with Christ, buried with Christ, and raised with Christ, the law (the first wife) no longer has any authority over him (just like the husband who died no longer has authority over his living wife).

— As a result, the wife (representing believers) is now legally free to marry another. Paul says, marry Christ, the One who was raised from the dead, so that we might bear fruit to God.

- At the point of one's faith in Christ, their whole identity shifts...

— We may not feel like our identity is shifted, but theologically from God's perspective there was a dramatic shift in our relationship. We are no longer under the condemnation of the First Adam, but we are now under the forgiveness and righteousness of the Last Adam.

— Just as in the two illustrations above, our union into the death of Christ brings forth liberation from the law and from its condemnation. This liberation is from seeking to keep the law and failing, seeking to keep it again and failing, and doing this over and over again throughout our lives while the law stands in condemnation of us. As believers, we are freed from this scenario.

- "...another" - *heteros*, two words for "another" in Greek: *allos*, another of the same kind, and *heteros*, another of a different kind. Here, "another" refers to Christ; every believer not only died with Christ, but also arose with Him (6:14). Thus, God joined ("married") us to Christ, in both His death and resurrection. His death ended the old relationship with the law.

- "...bear fruit for God" - this is the purpose of God freeing us from the condemnation of the Law...so I can "bear fruit for God." Fruit bearing is the purpose of a believer's relationship to Jesus Christ. Only this new relationship can produce the fruit of righteousness; people married to the law cannot produce good fruit.

— God has something much better in store for our lives than perpetual failure and perpetual condemnation, which is what we had under the First Adam.

— We can only do this with the righteousness that the Holy Spirit produces as we cooperate with Him through faithful obedience to God's Word. It is this pursuit, not the law, that sanctifies us.

- The point of faith is really the point of death, when I was unified into Christ's death, and consequently this condemnation that the law had over me was erased. All of my infractions of the law, past, present and future, have been unconditionally forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- All of my failed attempts to keep the Law can now be remedied through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer.
- In Rom 8 Paul will talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification process. But before he gets there, he will discuss his own failures to keep the law. As a believer, he tried to keep the law, but failed. He was trying to live the Christian life without the power of the Spirit, and he failed miserably. Finally, he learned about the power of the Holy Spirit and will describe it beginning in 8:1.

So believers are freed from the condemnation of the Law and now there is the prospect of actual fruit bearing for God, not from my own strength or power, but as I learn to tap into the divine resources God has given us.

The divine resources are:

- Our identification/unification into Jesus Christ and how that broke the power of the sin nature (Rom 6).
- The Holy Spirit and the role He plays in the believer's life (Rom 8).

(e) Past fruit bearing (7:5)

5 For while we were **in the flesh**, the sinful passions, **which were brought to light by the Law**, were at work in the parts of our body to **bear fruit for death**.

5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

5 For while we were living according to our human nature, sinful passions were at work in our bodies by means of the Law, to bear fruit resulting in death.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

- "...in the flesh" - *sarx*, a broader biblical concept that just our sin nature. It describes our fallen human nature operating independently from the control of the Holy Spirit. This describes an unbeliever (Cf. 6:19). See notes on 6:7 for detailed definitions and usages of sin nature and flesh.

- "...which were *brought to light* by the Law" - the purpose of the Mosaic Law was never to justify or sanctify anyone.

— In 5:20, Paul explained that its purpose was to cause sin to increase and to become very clear. Now he adds that the Mosaic Law produced "sinful passions." This will be

explained further in v7-13.

- "...bear fruit for death" - before Christ, when the Law of God told me to do something, I didn't do it; conversely, if it told me not to do something, I usually did it. Because of my sin nature inherited from Adam, I had a desire to do the very thing that the Law told me not to do.

— There was a discovery process...I learned that my default nature is to yearn for rebellion against God. This is the bad fruit. The works of the flesh eventually produce ("bear fruit") for death.

— "death" - temporal death; the believer is exempted from the penalty of sin: spiritual death and eternal death, but not from physical death or temporal death

— There are all kinds of things that "die" when we walk in sin. For example, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, look at the things that died: his son, Uriah, his family unity and love. Death follows sin like night follows day.

— But as a believer begins to walk more and more with the Lord, we become more and more exempt from temporal death, more and more things that otherwise would be dead if I continued in sin, will live and in fact flourish when I walk with the Lord.

— Paul understood his spiritual deadness from his pre-Christ experience. Before he met Christ, Paul's righteousness based on the Law was perfect...or so he thought. He served faultlessly in the "way of the written code." Yet Paul's actions were evil, and exercise in self-righteousness that led him to persecute Christians (Cf. Acts 9:1-6; Phil 3:6). He produced fruit, but it was quite literally "fruit for death."

- Sin, Paul repeatedly affirmed, leads to death (Cf. 5:15,17,21; 6:16,21,23; 7:10-11,13; 8:2,6,10,13).

— The law energized our rebellion... The law cannot bring us into a righteous life. It can only demonstrate our sinful nature.

— If you understand this passage you will understand what most of the people that have ever lived have not been able to grasp: What is the purpose of the law of God?

(f) Present fruit bearing (7:6)

6 But now we have been **released** from the Law, **having died to that by which we were bound**, so **that we serve** in **newness** of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

6 But now we have been released from the Law by dying to what enslaved us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit, not under the old writings.

6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

- This verse is a summary of v1-5...because we died with Christ, we are now dead to the law and delivered from its dominion over us as a means for both justification and sanctification.

- "But now" - *nyni de*, literally means "now however" shows a contrast: in contrast to believer's past position of bringing forth nothing but dead fruit, to their new position: "released from the Law."

— These words (*nyni de*, also used in 6:22) point to what happens when we receive Christ as Savior. Paul goes on to describe this great change through a series of contrasts:

- Our condition before Adam, before God saved us—but now—our new life in Christ.
- Our former slavery to sin—but now—our new and willing slavery to God.
- Our bondage to the "old husband"—but now—we died to the old and belong to the new.

- "...released" - *katargeō*, delivered from, unshackled; rendered inoperative. We died to the law, just as we died to sin (Cf. 6:5); the same Greek word (*katargeō*) occurs in both verses. Christ's death as our Substitute changed our relationship with both entities (sin and the Law).

— Just as the wife was discharged (released) from the law of the husband upon his death, believers have been released from the law by their death and identification with Christ. The law no longer has any authority over them; they have died to what had previously enslaved them.

— This is one of several passages that reveal that, as Christians, we have no obligation to keep the Mosaic Law: Cf. 10:4; 14:17; Mark 7:18-19; John 1:17; Acts 10: 10-15; 1 Cor 8:8; 2 Cor 3:7-11; Gal 3:19,24; 4:9-11; 5:1; Heb 7:11-12; 9:10.

- "...having died to that by which we were bound" - I was released/liberated from the condemnation of the Law at the point of death (our union into Christ's death at the point of faith). My union in that death frees me from the power of the sin nature.

— Consequently, I have a new life now...I can say Yes to God in the newness of the Holy Spirit that indwells me, and I can say no to my past life of sin (2 Cor 3:6). Before I came to Christ, the Law was killing me. The Law pointed out my failure, then it pointed out the consequence that I deserved (death).

- "...that we serve" - *douleuō*, present tense, meaning we constantly serve.

— The purpose of this release from the Law is so that we may serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the Law ("written code").

- "...newness" - *kainoteti*, suggests something "fresh" rather than something new or recent. Paul uses this word to express the superiority, freshness, and vitality of the believers relationship to God, after having experienced union with Christ.

The Law of Christ

Paul did not say we have only been released from the ceremonial part of the Law, as opposed to the whole Law. The Mosaic Law was a unified code that contained moral, religious and civil regulations (Cf. Ex 20—Num 10). God has terminated the *whole* code as a regulator of Christians' lives (Cf. 10:4). Christians have received new code that Paul called the "Law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

The "Law of Christ" contains some of the same commandments as the old Mosaic Code, including 9 of the 10 Commandments. The one that Jesus did not carry over was the fourth commandment about Sabbath observance. Nevertheless, the Law of Christ is a new code. Thus, Paul could say that God has released us from "the Law" of Moses. The Law of Christ consists of the teachings of Jesus that He communicated during His earthly ministry. It also consists of teachings that He gave through His apostles and prophets following His ascension to heaven.

Letter vs. Spirit

Letter

Depends on the flesh (Rom 8:3)
1:8)

Produces rebellion (Rom 7:8)
Results in more sin (Rom 5:20)
Brings wrath (Rom 4:15)
Not of faith (Gal 3:12)
Kills (2 Cor 3:4-6; Gal 3:21)

Spirit

Depends upon God's power (Luke 23:49; Acts

Produces God's desires (Phil 2:13)
Righteousness (Rom 8:4)
Brings joy, peace, production (Gal 5:22-23)
By faith (Gal 5:5; 2 Cor 5:7)
Gives life (Phil 2:12-13)

Why the Law was Given (Cf. Rom 5:20)

1. The Law was given to expose our sin nature (7:7)
2. To incite the sin nature to sin more (7:8-23); sin nature cannot be reformed.
3. To drive us to despair of self-effort (7:24-25).
4. To drive us to dependence upon the Holy Spirit alone (8:1-4).

These are not all of the purposes of the Mosaic Law, but only these four pertain to the context of 7:7—8:4. These four points must be experienced before you can continue in the Spirit.

The involvement of the Mosaic Law in the discussion of a believer's identification with Christ and death to sin raises a question about the Law's relationship to sin:

(B) Although the Law is holy, sin used it to usher in death (7:7-12)

(a) Is the Law sin? (7:7a)

(b) Emphatic denial (7:7b)

(c) Purposes of the Law (7:7c-11)

(i) The Law defines sin (7:7c)

7 What shall we say then? **Is the Law sin? Far from it!** On the contrary, I would not have come to know **sin** except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, **"YOU SHALL NOT COVET."**

7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."

7 What should we say, then? Is the Law sinful? Of course not! In fact, I wouldn't have become aware of sin if it had not been for the Law. I wouldn't have known what it means to covet if the Law had not said, "You must not covet."

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

- "...Is the Law sin?" - if believers are dead to the sin nature (Rom 6), and dead to the law (7:1-6), then is it correct to conclude that there was something wrong with the law? In other words, if the Law points out my failures, if it's a ministry of condemnation over me, is there something wrong with the Law?

— Paul refutes this conclusion and explains that the problem was not with the Law, but with people. The moment we understand that the Law is perfect and holy, and we are not, that we are the problem, is the moment we understand the purpose of the Law.

- "...Far from it!" - *Me genoita*, the strongest negation in the Greek language; also translated "God forbid!" (Cf. 6:1,15). Paul emphatically says No, there's nothing wrong with the Law, but there is something wrong with us.

— There is a divine purpose in the Law, which Paul will describe in v7-12: the Law's purpose is to tell us that there is something wrong with us. The problem is not the Law because the Law came from God; the problem is us, and the Law is very good at pointing this out.

— The point is that the Law is not sinful simply because it makes us aware of what is sinful. It is similar to an MRI machine that reveals a tumor...the machine itself is not bad because it reveals something bad.

— The Law arouses sin (7:5) but that does not mean the Law itself *is* sin. In fact, Paul said later, the Law is holy (v12) and spiritual (v14). Paul went on to explain that the Law made sin *known* (Cf. 3:19-20).

- We have to understand that the Law of God is the perfect revelation of God's moral character. As you study the Law, we learn what pleases God and what displeases God. If God had not revealed His character through the Law, we would have no idea what things are pleasing to Him and what things are displeasing to Him.

— The Law is a very good reminder of when we do something externally (behavior, actions) outside the will of God. But the Law is also much deeper than pointing out just our external sins.

- "...sin" - *hamartia*, "falling short"; Paul is thinking of sin in this passage as our sin nature, not an act of sin. It is that force or sin principle that the Law's prohibitions and requirements arouse. We see that we fall short of what God requires when we become aware of His laws.

- "...YOU SHALL NOT COVET" - a quote from Ex 20:17, the 10th commandment. Paul chose the 10th commandment because it is different than the other nine commandments in that if you violate one of the other nine, it's obvious to outside observers. People can observe when you break one of those commandments.

— But the 10th commandment, a prohibition on coveting, is not something that is observable because it's committed in the heart and mind.

— This shows that the Law of God does not only stand in judgment of what I physically do wrong, but also stands in judgment on what I think. The Law also stands in judgment of my inward motives and desires of my heart.

— Often, our hearts and minds commit sin before our hands get around to it. When we take into account the 10th commandment, it shows that the Law of God does not only rule over our actions and behaviors, but it also has jurisdiction over our hearts and minds. Jesus made this point clear with numerous examples in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Law functions a lot like pain does for us...we put our hand on a hot stove, feel pain, and immediately remove our hand. The pain we feel is actually a good thing. The pain causes us to remove our hand from the stove and prevents further, maybe permanent, damage.

The Law functions the same way...we go through our lives virtually clueless to our fallen condition. One of the greatest deceptions of Satan is that we are mostly good. We're made in God's image, but we have all inherited a nature from Adam that hates God, that wants to do its own thing. I have a nature that wants to do what I want to do. And I don't realize I have this nature until I become exposed to the Law of God. The Law then functions like pain in that it alerts me to an action that is necessary to prevent further, maybe permanent, damage. If I don't follow what the pain tells me to do, which is remove my hand from the hot stove, I will do permanent damage to my body.

In the same way, if I do not recognize the spiritual reality (pain) brought to me through the Law, I have no understanding of my fallen nature. And if I don't understand my fallen nature, the whole gospel presentation seems irrelevant. This is why many people hear the Gospel, but say No Thanks, because they don't feel like they *need* the Gospel. The Gospel is for the bad people, not the good people, and they think that they are one of the good people. They feel like they have everything they need, they are content, so they don't view the Gospel as something relevant to them...because they have not encountered the Law of God.

We can't understand that we even need Christ without the Law (Gal 3:24). The purpose of the Law is to alert man to the presence of his sin nature. Once a person understands their sin nature, the Gospel all of a sudden becomes more appealing because he sees his need for it. Spiritually speaking what is happening is that pain is introduced, alerting the person for the need for corrective action.

The Law is a mirror that helps us see our dirty faces (James 1:22-25), but you do not wash your face with a mirror! It is grace that provides the cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ. [Wiersbe]

The Law can lay down what people ought to do, but it cannot give them the power to overcome the temptations to do evil.

(ii) The Law provokes sin (7:8)

8 But sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, **produced in me** coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

8 But sin seized the opportunity provided by this commandment and produced in me all kinds of sinful desires, since apart from the Law, sin is dead.

8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

- Paul says that everything was perfectly fine in his life until the Law showed up and wrecked everything...he began to learn that things he was doing in his life, externally, were displeasing to God.

— Then the Law of God took another surgical step and started looking into the deep dark crevices of his heart...and Paul essentially says that sin came to life within him.

- "...produced in me" - it wasn't sin that came to life in Paul, it was his *awareness* of his sin...the sin was always there, but it was not called sin because there was no law against it. Once the Law came, it pointed out that what he was doing all along was sin.

— If the Law produced sin, it would be bad. But Paul said that the Law isn't bad, it's good (v7). The Law didn't produce sin out of thin air, the sin was already there, it just wasn't called sin since we weren't aware that it was displeasing to God (Cf. 3:20).

— The problem is not the Law, the problem is not God, the problem is us because we inherited a sin nature from Adam. If we didn't have the Law, we wouldn't know what sin was, and we wouldn't be aware of our natural appetite for sin (Cf. 4:15).

— In v7, the Law defines sin; in v8, the Law provokes sin.

— "in me" - it is significant that, beginning with v7 and continuing through this chapter, Paul begins writing in the first person singular, presenting his own personal experience.

— Up to this point he used the third person, the second person, and even the first person plural. But now he describes his own experience, allowing the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to his readers.

Whenever someone establishes a law prohibiting something, the natural tendency of people is to resist it. Suppose you want to drive your car as fast as it can go. If there was no speed limit on a road, you would go as fast as you wanted to. But if you came upon a long stretch where the speed limit was 30mph, your will would rebel. Then you come upon a sign that says, "Speed Limit Strictly Enforced." You would drive on frustrated, conscious of both your desire to speed and your rebellion against the imposed speed limit. The speed limit signs did not create the desire to go fast: you already had that desire. But the 30mph speed limit and strict enforcement signs brought you into conscious conflict with authority.

(iii) The Law is an instrument of sin/death, not life (7:9-11)

9 I was **once alive** apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I **died**;

9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

9 At one time I was alive without any connection to the Law. But when the rule was revealed, sin sprang to life,

9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

- Paul says, I was having a great day until the Law arrived...then I became aware of my sin and experienced the consequences of it—death.

- "...once alive" - Paul lived unaware of the Law's true demands and was therefore self-righteous (Cf. Phil 3:6).

- "...apart from the Law" - Paul was born a Jew, so when was he ever apart from the Law? Especially as an unsaved Jew, Paul was under the Mosaic Law.

— There was a time when Paul was freed from the law, which was the moment of his salvation. According to Acts 9:9,15-16,20-22, he knew what it was like to live a Spirit-filled life apart from the law within three days after his salvation.

— But for whatever reason, Paul developed the misconception that he would be sanctified by means of the works of the law. This faulty initial conclusion led to the spiritual struggle described in this passage.

— He thought that through God's Spirit, who was living in him since the moment of salvation, he would be able to keep the commands of the law. But that was a mistake, and it was not long before he noticed that he was failing. He stood accused and found himself dying again, for sin had been revived.

— His sin nature used the law as a base of operation and regained control over him. Sin existed before the law, but apart from the law, the sin nature is dead. With the law, the sin nature has a base of operation and will use it.

- "...when the commandment came" - when Paul became aware of the Law's true demands; when the law of God entered his consciousness. He had reached the age where he became accountable under the Law.

- "...I died" - *egō apothnēsko*, he became aware of his spiritual deadness, his separation from God. Death in the Bible doesn't mean "a corpse" or someone unable to respond. See notes on Eph 2:1 for more details on the biblical definition of death.

— This verse is the basis for the belief that children who die prior to the age of accountability are saved and in heaven (Cf. 2 Sam 12:15-23).

God doesn't hold children accountable for their sins until they become old enough to understand the sin/salvation issue. Before that time it's as if they haven't sinned. This is

part of what Jesus meant when He said we have to become like little children to enter God's Kingdom (Matt 18:3), in other words not accountable for our sins. In Rom 7:15-20 Paul says that's the case for all born again believers.

10 and **this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;**

10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

10 and I died. I found that the very rule that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

- "...this commandment" - the Mosaic Law. - The original intent of the Law (for OT believers) was to bring people blessing ("life") as they obeyed (Cf. Lev 18:5). Because Paul did not obey it, he found that it condemned him.

- "...which was to result in life" - if Paul would've perfectly obeyed, the law would have given ("resulted in") life.

- "...proved to result in death for me" - however, Paul found himself dying because he could not keep the law perfectly.

11 for sin, **taking an opportunity through the commandment**, deceived me, and through it, killed *me*.

11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

11 For sin, seizing the opportunity provided by the rule, deceived me and used it to kill me.

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

- The Law aroused Paul's sin nature, because he now had the requirements of God in his life; his sin nature was always aroused, he was just unaware of it. Consequently, Paul was condemned to a perpetual life of sin. He struggled with all kinds of sins, such as coveting.

- "...taking an opportunity through the commandment" - sin uses the law as a base of operation (Cf. 1 Cor 15:56). Without the law, sin has no power. The internal struggle of the believer comes because the sin nature responds to the law in rebellion. If the law says, "Thou shall not...", the sin nature responds with, "Oh yes I will!" This is why sanctification must be lived out on the basis of the Spirit, not the law.

— So this sin "deceived" him ["led him astray"; Cf. 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14)] and put him to death (lit., "killed" him), not physically but spiritually. Paul's sin nature urged him to do the very things "the commandment" (the law) forbade. This is what sin does to all people.

— How did it deceive him? By luring him to attempt to live for God *by his own effort*. Without the cross to forgive me and the Holy Spirit to empower me, the Law is the most lethal truth a person can ever be exposed to.

Throughout the ages, sin makes a double promise to its victims: first, that no evil consequences will ensue, and second, that their view of life will be enlarged and that on this increased knowledge will follow increased happiness.

(d) Conclusion: the Law is good (7:12)

12 So then, the Law is **holy**, and the commandment is holy and **righteous** and **good**.

12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

12 So then, the Law itself is holy, and the rule is holy, just, and good.

12 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

- Paul began this passage (v7) with a question of whether or not the Law was bad. He answered with the strongest negation possible that the Law is not bad, it is not sin, but rather the Law is holy. He concludes here repeating the same thing.

- "...holy" - far from being sinful, the Law comes from a holy God and searches out sin.

- "...righteous" - because it lays just requirements on people, and because it forbids and condemns sin.

- "...good" - because its purpose is to produce blessing and life (v10).

— The Law is not the problem, I'm the problem; the Law is just very good at pointing out that I'm the problem. What was wrong with the law is what the law had to work with...me.

- Paul was a man who at one point in his life, before Christ, thought he kept the Law perfectly (Cf. Phil 3:5-6). Now this same man, in Christ, as his mind is being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, compares his life to the Law and sees himself as an abject failure.

— This was a revolution in Paul's thinking about the Law of God and his own righteousness. We need that same revolution to go on in the world today, including in the church. We need to get away from this futile and foolish mindset that everyone is inherently good because if you believe you are inherently good, you haven't studied the Law of God.

(C) Although the Law is holy, it is powerless to deliver someone from sin (7:13-25)

(a) Interpretive challenges

Verses 13-25 provide a description of a man (Paul) who is extremely frustrated in the Christian life. Paul reveals in this passage that not only can the Law not save us, it doesn't have the power to sanctify us.

This passage is one of the most debated in all of the Bible. In it, Paul details his personal struggle with sin. ***The question is whether Paul is a believer or an unbeliever when he describes his struggle with sin?***

Many commentators will say that because Paul describes his deep struggle with sin in this chapter, he is somehow recalling his "pre-Christ" days when he was an unbeliever. Many people believe that a Christian cannot struggle with sin at the level Paul describes here, and thus conclude that he is describing something that happened to him while he was an unbeliever.

Three Questions to Properly Interpret this Passage

1. Is Paul a Christian when he wrote this?
2. If Paul is a Christian, how does it shape our view of who we are in Christ?
3. So what?

There are two views on this passage, by those who equally love Jesus Christ and His Word: the "pre-conversion view" and the "post-conversion view." Did Paul have the struggle with sin described in this passage before he was saved (pre-conversion view) or after he was saved (post-conversion view). For the detailed arguments of both the pre-conversion view and the post-conversion view, see [Romans 17_The Believer's Relationship to the Law - Part 2 \(Rom 7:13-25\)](#).

Post-Conversion View Arguments

1. Change of tenses

Argument: The dramatic change of verb tenses from the past tense (7:7-13) to the present tense (7:14-25) indicates that Paul is speaking of a present experience in 7:14-25, possibly even an experience he was having when he wrote Romans.

- Paul uses the pronoun "I" or the first-person singular verb form 24x in these verses; he uses "me" 8x, "my" 4x, and "myself" 1x. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is not mentioned at all.

2. Desire of Paul to keep God's Law

Argument: The desire of the "I" (Paul) to keep God's Law (7:22) cannot be describing an unbeliever (Cf. 3:11).

Response #1: It is possible for unregenerate Jews to delight in God's Law (Rom 9:31-32; 10:1-2).

- The Pharisees delighted in tradition rather than the Law (Mark 7:13); 1st century Pharisees did not delight in God's Law...they were interested in their own man-made traditions (outlined in the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*) that revolved around the Law.
- Paul was steeped in these Pharisaical traditions (Gal 1:14).
- Paul's desire in Romans is not for tradition, but for God's heart.

3. Desire of "I" (Paul) to keep/delight in God's Law.

Argument: The desire of the Paul for God's Law cannot be describing an unbeliever (Cf. 3:11); Paul is struggling and failing to keep the Law, but the desire to keep the Law is there.

Response #2: God has placed His Law in the hearts of all men, including unbelievers (Rom 2:14-15).

- Rom 2:14-15 only says God's Law in the hearts of unbelievers convicts them...it doesn't give them a desire to keep it.
- The Law in the heart of unbelievers isn't a joy...it annoys them, convicts them, harasses them. It is not something delighting to them, yet Paul here is delighting in God's Law.

4. Desire of "I" (Paul) to be rescued.

Argument: The desire of Paul for deliverance from the present body (7:24) is consistent with the believer's call for the redemption of the body (8:23).

- Paul says that he is such a failure as a Christian that he wants out of his body (7:24).
- Paul has the same cry in 8:23 for deliverance.

Response: Future tense of *ruomai* indicates a call for salvation (justification).

- *ruomai* is a call for glorification, not justification.

5. Similarities between Rom 7 and Gal 5

Argument: Because of the similarities between Rom 7:14-25 and Gal 5:16-18, and because believers are in view in Gal 5, a believer must also be in view in Rom 7:14-25

- Both passages speak of a struggle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, between the mind that wants to please God and the mind that does not want to please God.

- There is no debate that Paul is talking to believers in the Gal 5 passage, so if the topics are identical, how in the world can Paul be describing himself as a non-believer in Rom 7?
- Another consideration is how in the world would an unbeliever have access to the Spirit?

6. Duality of the two "I's" - I want to do the right thing, but I don't do it.

Argument: Because Rom 7 is a description of a divided man (7:18,22,25) and because unbelievers are unilaterally under sin's control (Eph 4:17), a believer must be in view in Rom 7.

- There is a capacity in Paul to go in either direction (he is divided)...this cannot describe an unbeliever because they only have once choice: sin. They are unilaterally under the control of sin, which is a concept Paul develops throughout Rom 1-3.

7. Overall flow of Romans

Argument: Because Paul has left behind his discussion of sin and unbelievers (1:18—3:20) and moved onto salvation (3:21—5:21) and the sanctification section of the book (Rom 6-8), a believer must be in view in Rom 7.

- It would be strange for Paul to disrupt the argument flow of the book by spending a whole chapter going back to the topic of sin and the unbeliever, because he covered that in 1:18—3:20.

Response: Occasional Pauline flashbacks to his unsaved life (Rom 8:7-8).

- Yeah, but an entire chapter? That would drastically disrupt the flow of Paul's argument.

8. Personal experience of the believer

Argument: Because believers identify with Paul's struggle in Rom 7:14-25, a believer must be in view in these verses.

- The believer strives to attain the holiness of God, because God put that desire in our hearts, but we are frustrated and fall short.

Conclusion

- Paul is describing his personal experiences
- Paul had these struggles during his Christian life

- Christians are dual-natured

Dual Nature View of the Believer

1. Paul's use of *sarx* in Rom 7:14-25
 - *Sarx* is used in Rom 7:5,18,25
 - *Sarx* is not always a negative term but Paul's use of *sarx* is typically negative
 - Residue of the old self remains even after conversion
 - Rom 13:14; Gal 5:13 both tell believers to make no provision for the flesh/sin nature.
2. Numerous theologians have advocated the dual-nature view
 - Augustine
 - Reformers - Calvin, Luther, Melancthon
 - 19-20th century Calvinists - Hodge, Hokema
 - Dispensationalists: Scofield, Chafer, Ryrie
3. The dual nature view does not advocate spiritual schizophrenia
 - Jesus had two natures (human and divine)
 - Jesus was not schizophrenic
 - Christ was one Person with two natures
 - Believers are one person with two natures

Implications & Conclusion

- A saved person has both an old and new nature.
- Old nature - a complex set of attributes with a disposition toward sin.
- New nature - a complex set of attributes that incline and dispose the believer toward holiness.

Application

1. Believers with two natures can only achieve sanctification by availing themselves of the divine resources.
 - *The law is useless as a means of deliverance from sin, thus this passage shows that it is impossible to live the spiritual life under the power of the flesh.*

- Paul's struggle shows that the new nature cannot in and of itself produce a righteous life that God desires.
 - If the new nature was enough (2 Cor 5:17), there would be no struggle in Rom 7; if the new nature was enough, God would not need to provide us with divine resources.
 - Divine resources
 - Believer's baptism/identification with Christ (Rom 6); position informs condition.
 - Provision of the Holy Spirit; the believer's walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16; Rom 8).
2. Human responsibility plays a role in the sanctification process
- ***Christians do not automatically experience practical sanctification because they are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).***
 - ***Any view of practical sanctification based solely on the sovereignty of God, independent of human participation, is not biblical.***
 - A volitional response must be made toward the appropriation of the divine resources.
 - The resources are there and available, and powerful, but whether I avail myself to them is my decision.
 - Otherwise the biblical exhortations are meaningless
 - If the new nature was automatic, the commands throughout the NT to walk in the Spirit, do not make provision for the flesh, reckon the old man dead, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, put on the full armor of God, etc. are non-sensical and irrelevant.
 - Why would God give us so many commands if the sanctification process was automatic?
 - We permit God to work out His plan of sanctification in our lives when we avail ourselves to the resources He has given us.
3. Ultimate perfection will occur in heaven rather than in the present.
- ***Ultimate perfection will only occur at death or the Rapture (Eph 5:27; 1 John 3:2; Rev 21:8).***
 - Perpetual conflict between the old and new nature as long as the believer remains in the body.
 - Some degree of sin will always be present (Rom 7:24; Phil 3:12; 1 John 1:9).

Review

- Paul is speaking of his personal experience in Rom 7:14-25
- Paul's struggle here represents a post-conversion experience
- The believer is dual natured
- This dual nature view of the believer shapes our understanding of sanctification

The Law was not designed, nor is it capable of helping the believer live the righteous life that God wants for us. The Law gives us standards for right and wrong, but as far as empowerment to live the Christian life, it provides nothing.

Some reading this may say Why do we need to study Rom 7...I'm not under the Law and I don't struggle with the Law. But what Paul addresses here is not Christians struggling with the Law, but Christians struggling with legalism. Legalism can be defined simply as "rules without resources."

Many Christians today struggle with the set of rules/commands given in Scripture. They attempt to "white knuckle" the Christian life, all out of their desire and volition, without tapping into the resources that God has provided. They hear sermons on the need for holiness, but have no idea how to attain it? How do I get that holiness in my daily life, because I'm constantly trying and failing? That's what Rom 6-8 is all about.

(b) Contrast between the Law and man's nature (7:13-14)

(i) The Law is not the cause of our sinful tendencies (7:13)

13 Therefore **did that which is good become a cause of death for me? Far from it!**

Rather *it was* sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by bringing about my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

13 Now, did something good bring me death? Of course not! But in order that sin might be recognized as being sin, it used something good to cause my death, so that through the rule, sin might become more exposed as being sinful than ever before.

13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

- "...did that which is good become a cause of death for me?" - Paul's question is: Is the Law the reason for my sinful tendencies?

- "...Far from it!" - *Me genoita*, the strongest negation in the Greek language; also translated "God forbid!" (Cf. v2; 7:7). The sin nature that I inherited from Adam, at the point of conception, is the problem, not the Law. The only thing the Law did was make me aware of my sin nature.

— The law only makes sin more sinful because the sin nature is able to use that which is good (the Law) to cause condemnation and an increase in sin. Sin's use of something good (the Law) to bring about something bad (death) shows the utter sinfulness of sin (Cf. Gen 3:1).

(ii) Our nature and the Law are going in opposite directions (7:14)

14 For we know that the Law is **spiritual**, but **I am fleshly, sold into bondage to sin**.

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am merely human, sold as a slave to sin.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

- My nature wants to go the opposite direction from the Law...if the Law is going right, my sin nature wants to go left; if the Law goes up, my sin nature wants to go down.

- "...spiritual" - *pneumatikos*, Spirit-given; the Law came from God (Cf. 1 Cor 3:1). The Law is spiritual because he came from God who is Spirit (John 4:24). It expresses God's will for human living.

— Paul didn't want his readers to think that what he was about to say about the Law was a criticism of the God who gave it.

- "...I am" - present tense, 1st person; autobiographical. Paul uses himself as an example.

- "...fleshly" - *sarkinos*, carnal; it means "characterized by the flesh." It speaks of a person who can and should do differently, but doesn't. Paul sees this contrast, this competition between his two natures, in himself (v15), and he realizes that the Law, though it is spiritual, has no answer for his carnal (sin) nature.

— In contrast to the Law, which was good, Paul was "fleshly." Understanding the conflict in personal sanctification involves seeing the relationship between a believer and his sin nature.

— Paul is describing himself, a redeemed believer in Christ, as "carnal." However, he makes it abundantly clear in Rom 8 that he does not regard the Christian as being carnal in the same way that an unredeemed non-believer is carnal.

- "...sold into bondage to sin" - after saying the Law was spiritual, Paul contrasts it with himself. The Law was spiritual, he was fleshly. He was trying to live the spiritual life in the strength of his flesh. But his flesh sold him and his sin nature bought him, so he was once again a slave to sin.

— But Paul saying that he is a slave to sin seems to contradict what he said earlier about a believer no longer being a slave to sin (Cf. 6:6-7,17,20).

— What Paul was saying, and which resolves the apparent contradiction, is that in Rom 6 Paul is instructing believers to "reckon" or "consider" themselves dead to sin due to their participation in Jesus' death. Considering oneself dead to sin means that we no longer *must* follow sin's dictates...we have another option.

— What Paul is saying here is that although the Christian should consider themselves dead to sin, it doesn't mean that sin has lost its appeal for the Christian. Sin still and always will have a strong appeal to every believer because our sin nature is still sinful (Cf. 6:15-23).

(c) Man's inability to gain victory through the Law (7:15-20)

(i) The Law cannot prevent me from doing wrong (7:15-16)

15 For I do not understand what I am doing; for I am not practicing what I want *to do*, but I do the very thing I hate.

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

15 I don't understand what I am doing. For I don't practice what I want to do, but instead do what I hate.

15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

- Paul is realizing that he is dual-natured. Before he became a believer, he was single natured. He received his sin nature through Adam, and that's all he ever knew.

— But the moment Paul was saved, he received a new nature. Now that new nature is in competition with his old sin nature, and he struggled (and marveled) at the competition raging inside of him.

- Paul's sinful nature influenced him to such an extent that he found himself doing (approving) the very things that he despised intellectually. This fact caused Paul to marvel at himself.

— His problem wasn't a lack of desire...he *wants* to do the right thing. His problem isn't lack of knowledge...he *knows* what the right thing is. His problem is a lack of power. He is not "practicing what he wants to do" because the law gives him no power to do the right thing.

16 However, if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, that *the Law is good*.

16 But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good.

16 Now if I practice what I don't want to do, I am admitting that the Law is good.

16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

- When Paul did something he did not want to do, he was following his sin nature. In that case, the Law is good in that it points out to him that he's doing wrong.

— His attitude toward the Law was not the reason for his dilemma since he has admitted that the Law is good.

(ii) Problem of the sin nature (7:17)

17 But now, no longer am I *the one* doing it, but **sin that dwells in me**.

17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

17 As it is, I am no longer the one who is doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me.

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin [nature] that dwelleth in me.

- Our problem is not that we commit acts of sin, but that we have a disposition toward sin (our sin nature) that produces acts of sin. This means that I'm not a sinner because I sin, but rather I sin because I am a sinner. The fact that we commit sin is just a logical outworking of who we are in the First Adam.

— This does not mean Paul was avoiding personal responsibility for his actions; he was speaking of the conflict between his desires and the sin within him. He was identifying the source of his sin, which was his sin nature.

— Viewed as a whole person, he was dead to sin. Nevertheless, the source of sin (his sin nature) was very much alive.

— We have to understand that our sin nature/flesh is so corrupted that God does not even attempt to rehabilitate it. He deems our old nature unfixable, and thus gives us a new nature.

- "...I" - refers to the new nature Paul received at the point of faith; his true self.

— As a person, Paul was dead to sin (as are we). Nevertheless, the source of sin within him (sin nature) was still very much alive.

- "...sin that dwells in me" - Paul's sin nature that was still indwelling him.

— This indwelling sin nature was like a tyrant compelling Paul to act against his better self, which was his new nature.

— What we learn from this is that if believers try to live their lives by the works of the flesh and the works of the law, they will once again become slaves to the sin nature inside of them.

It comes as a surprising discovery to new believers, or immature believers, to realize that their problem with sin is complex. We are sinners, not because we commit acts of sin, but because, as descendants of Adam, we are born in sin. We are also sinners because we possess a nature that is thoroughly sinful. Luckily, Christ paid the penalty

for acts of sin, He removed the punishment of original sin, and He enables us to overcome the power of innate sin.

Verses 14-17 describe practicing what is hated—our inability to overcome evil in the flesh. Verses 18-21 describe our failure to do the desired good—our inability, because of our sin nature, to do what is right. So man is a double-failure—unable to overcome evil and unable to accomplish good. Because of this, help must come from outside of man, beyond himself.

(iii) The Law cannot cause me to do right (7:18-20)

18 For I know that **good does not dwell in me**, that is, **in my flesh**; for **the willing is present in me**, but **the doing of the good *is* not**.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.

18 For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but I cannot carry it out.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

- "...good does not dwell in me" - sin thoroughly corrupted Paul's nature. Even though he was a Christian, he was still a totally depraved sinner. He knew what he should do, but he did not always do it.

- "...in my flesh" - no good is found in our indwelling sin nature. This is proven by what Paul says next: I'm *willing* to do good, by I'm not *able* to do good.

— This verse, among many others in Romans, perfectly describes the idea of "total depravity" (the biblical definition, not the Calvinist definition). To a non-Calvinist, total depravity refers to the fact that sin has affected every aspect of a person, but it does not necessarily mean that people are as bad as they could be, or that they are so bad that there is nothing good in them. Even an atheist stops for children crossing in a crosswalk.

- "...the willing is present in me" - the desire to do good is present in Paul, which proves that he is speaking of himself after becoming a believer, but before he understood how to allocate divine resources toward the problem of his sin nature.

- "...the doing of the good *is* not" - Paul desired to be totally devoted to God. He desperately wanted to do the right thing, yet he found that he was incapable of doing it, even though he wanted to.

— Paul is not saying that a believer cannot do anything good; he saying that our sin nature, our flesh, cannot do anything good. He had the desire to do the right thing, but he was impotent and incapable of doing it.

19 For **the good that I want**, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

19 For I don't do the good I want to do, but instead do the evil that I don't want to do.

19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

- "...the good that I want" - the desire to do good is present (Cf. v18) in Paul, but the *power* to do good is not.

— We have to understand the dual nature of the Christian...we have the old sin nature, and we have the new nature (2 Cor 5:17), and both are in competition with each other.

— At the point in his life that he is describing, after Acts 9, Paul had not yet learned how to allocate divine resources to say No to his old nature and Yes to his new nature.

- One example of our dual nature is Peter in Matt 16...one minute he confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus then gives marvelous promises to Peter...that Christ will use him to build His church, and He gives Peter the keys of the kingdom.

— Just a couple verses later, Jesus begins to tell the disciples that He will go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, and eventually be killed. Peter took Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, aside and rebuked Him. Jesus tells Peter Get behind me Satan.

— In the span of a single conversation, Peter goes from proclaiming one of the greatest truths in Scripture, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, to being used as a tool of Satan, trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross to provide atonement for the sins of all mankind and fulfill His mission in coming to earth.

— One minute Peter is in the Spirit, the next minute he is in the flesh.

- This is exactly what Paul is describing...the desire to please God is there because of the new nature, yet we keep falling backwards.

— Next time you're bothered by your sin, be thankful because that proves the new nature is there, the Holy Spirit is working. If the new nature wasn't present in you, if the Holy Spirit wasn't indwelling you, you would sin and it wouldn't bother you at all.

— The fact that a struggle is happening is cause to praise God because it shows us that there is a higher source of power within us called the new nature. If the new nature wasn't there, I would not be bothered by my sin.

- The new nature is good, but it's not enough. It will give you the desire, the sincerity, but it's not designed to add the power and the fortitude by which we can live for God in this fallen world.

20 But if I do the very thing I do not want, I am no longer *the one* doing it, but sin that dwells in me.

20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am no longer the one who is doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me.

20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin [nature] that dwelleth in me.

- A restatement of v17, but with a further insight. The source of sin is the old (sin) nature. Paul now, as we often have as a small child, in candor and honesty, admits he doesn't understand his own behavior.

— Paul recognized that even as a believer he had an indwelling principle of sin that once owned him as a slave and that still expressed itself through him to do things he did not want to do and not to do things he desired to do.

— He is acknowledging that he was master of neither himself nor sin. This demonstrates what he said in v14...that he was in bondage to sin. This is a problem common to all believers.

— If Freud could only have known this, we could empty the psychiatric clinics.

Psychology can only deal with symptoms (guilt) rather than its cause (sin).

(d) Description of the conflict within the believer (7:21-23)

(i) Principle of evil yet the desire to do good (7:21)

21 I find then the principle that **evil is present in me**, the one **who wants to do good**.

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

21 So I find this to be a principle: when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me.

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

- "...evil is present in me...who wants to do good" - a picture of the dual nature of the believer. It perfectly describes the believer who is trapped between justification and glorification...I've been justified but not yet glorified.

— The new nature, which will dominate at glorification is in me, but that sin nature that dominated before my justification is still there.

The Six "Laws" of Romans

1. The Law of Moses, which condemns (3:19)
2. Law as a principle (3:21)
3. The law of faith, which excludes self-righteousness (3:27)
4. The law of sin in the members, which is victorious over the last of the mind (7:21,23,25)

5. The law of the mind, which consents to the law of Moses but cannot do it because of the law of sin in the members (7:16,23)
6. The law of the Spirit, having power to deliver the believer from the law of sin which is in its members, and his conscience from condemnation by the Mosaic Law. The Spirit works in the yielded Christian the very righteousness which Moses' law requires (8:2,4).

THE CHRISTIAN'S THREE-FOLD ENEMY	
<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution</i>
The World	Flee
1 John 2:15-17	1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22
Lust of the Flesh	
Lust of the Eyes	
Pride of Life	
The Flesh	Deny
Romans 7:18-24	Romans 6:12-13; 8:13
The Devil	Resist
1 Peter 5:8	1 Peter 5:9

(ii) Good explained (7:22)

22 For I **joyfully agree** with the law of God in the inner person,

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

22 For I delight in the Law of God in my inner being,

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

- "...I joyfully agree" - *synēdomai*, only usage in the NT; means "to rejoice together" and has a variety of extended meanings such as "to congratulate" and "to sympathize with." It refers to sympathetic joy that one person can have with another.

— Paul says that inwardly, he loves God and His Law. He found great delight in obeying the law of God in his new nature. He had a real desire to do what was right and good.

— In light of both this statement and 8:7-8, this *clearly* could not be said of an unbeliever (Cf. 3:11).

(iii) Evil explained (7:23)

23 but I see a **different law** in the parts of my **body** waging **war** against the **law** of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the **law** of sin, *the law* which is in my body's parts.

23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

23 but I see in my body a different principle waging war with the Law in my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin that exists in my body.

23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

- But as soon as Paul saw himself making a commitment to live according to the law of the mind (v22), meaning obeying God's will, there entered a desire not to do it. There was a "different" or another law working in his members (mind).

- "...different" - *heteros*, also translated as "another", here meaning "another of a different kind"; there is a different/another principle in Paul than just the "law of God" described in v22.

— Two words for "another" in Greek: *allos*, another of the *same* kind, and *heteros*, another of a *different* kind. The word "different" here is the latter.

— Paul has an inner yearning for the law of God (v22), but there is also something "different," another law of a different kind in Paul, pulling him in a different direction. The old man was not the real Paul; the old man is dead. The flesh was not the real Paul; the flesh is destined to pass away. The new man is the real Paul, but now Paul's challenge is to live like God has made him.

— The point of this passage is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin.

- "...law" [3x] - *nomos*, can be used as a principle of life, which is how it's used here.

— Paul says that there was within him, in his saved state, a principle of sin that had not been eliminated. Based on his own personal experience, Paul said he saw another law or principle at work within him. This is the principle of sin. Paul called it "sin living in me" (v17,20), "evil is present with me" (v21), and "the sinful nature" (v5,18,25).

— The indwelling principle of sin was constantly mounting a military campaign against the new nature, trying to gain victory and control of a believer and his actions (Cf. "slave" in v14,25 and "slaves" in 6:17,19-20).

- "...body" - our body, when used for sin, is called the "body of sin" (6:6); conversely, as we grow in Christ, we are to present our body as a living sacrifice (12:1). Our body is not evil, it is neutral; it can be used for both good and evil.

- "...war" - sin is able to war within Paul and win because there is no power in himself, other than himself, to stop sinning. He is caught in the desperate powerlessness of trying to battle sin in the power of self.

— Paul describes this war in Gal 5:17; this war inside the believer is a *present reality* for everyone trapped between justification and glorification.

Gal 5:17: For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want.

— Despite a believer's identification with Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and his efforts to have Christ-honoring attitudes and actions, he cannot *in his own power* resist his indwelling sin nature. In and of himself he repeatedly experiences defeat and frustration.

— This natural rebelliousness was something that Paul could not rid himself of. Thankfully, Paul explained in Rom 8 that Someone with infinite power can enable us to control and overcome our rebelliousness.

(e) Solution to the problem (7:24-25)

(i) Problem stated (7:24a)

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is infected by death?

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

- "Wretched man that I am!" - the agony of this tension between his old nature and new nature, and his inability to rid himself of his sin nature that urges him to do things that lead to death, come out strongly here in Paul.

— Paul was frustrated with himself because he felt like he was losing this "war" between his old nature and his new nature...and he was! He feels this way because he was not yet aware of, and thus did not access, the divine resources provided to him by God to overcome this struggle.

— The word "Wretched" (*talaipōros*) carries with it the idea of "helpless exhaustion from hard labor" because of the struggle. "Who is going to deliver me?"

- "...Who will set me free from the body of this death?" - Paul cries out to God for an answer. What Christian has not felt the guilt and pain of doing things that they know are wrong.

— This is not a cry for salvation (justification) because Paul was already saved; this is a cry for glorification. It's also a cry and a plea for additional divine resources beyond the new nature. Paul didn't want the *desire* to do right without the *empowerment* to do right.

— This cry for help doesn't sound like it's coming from a man who is long since removed from the situation in question. The one who cries for help so pitifully and

mournfully cries from within a contradiction: he longs for deliverance from an endless war and frequent defeat.

— The Message translation: "I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me?"

(iii) Answer to the problem (7:25a)

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! **So then**, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving **the law of God**, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

25 Thank God through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, because with my mind I myself can serve the Law of God, even while with my human nature I serve the law of sin.

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

- The answer: Jesus Christ

— The answer is not more rules and regulations, it's not trying harder to live the Christian life, it's not white-knuckling it...it's tapping into the additional resources that Christ has graciously given us while we're trapped between our justification and our glorification.

— These additional resources include our baptism into Christ (Rom 6) and our walk with the Holy Spirit (Rom 8). Until these resources are realized and appropriated (they're there, it just has to be discovered), the struggle will continue.

— The struggle between the old nature and the new nature, the law of sin and the law of God, will continue until these new resource beyond the new nature are accessed.

— Until the time comes in my growth, my maturity, my sanctification and my discipleship whereby I have taken the time to realize what Christ has done for me, realize the new resources that I have, and begin to walk in those resources in a moment-by-moment fashion, the struggle will not end.

- "...So then" - *ara oun*, means "then so" and introduces the conclusion as a summary recapitulation of what Paul says in this passage.

— With the flesh, the believer can only serve the law of sin because the sin nature is incapable of serving God under any circumstances. So when believers try to live the spiritual life by means of the flesh, they are guaranteed to fail. As soon as they set up a law upon which to live their spiritual lives and try to live it out by means of the works of that law, they will end up sinning more.

- "...the law of God" - does not refer to the Law of Moses, which was intended for Jews only. Rather, the expression refers to the Law of Christ, which is applicable to both Jewish and Gentile believers.

- The next chapter will show that the means by which believers fulfill the commandments of the Law of Christ is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The question...[is] in the future tense. Paul here proclaims his present involuntary imperfection, summed up in the latter part of v25, will one day be made a thing of the past through the redemption of the body. For that future redemption we must long and wait, maintaining always the two-world, homeward-traveling, hoping-for-glory perspective that pervades the whole New Testament. [J.I. Packer]