

**Romans Study**  
**Session 11 - Romans 7:7-25**

Our last session completed Paul's three pronged truth concerning the believer and his relationship to sin and the law. In the beginning of chapter 6 we saw that believers are dead to sin but alive to Christ. At the end of chapter 6 we saw that believers are no longer slaves to sin but rather slaves to God and righteousness. Then at the beginning of chapter 7 we saw that believers used to be united with the law but once in Christ, they have died to the law so that they are now joined to Christ and free from the law.

Now in this session, the remainder of chapter 7, Paul is going to make two points. First, the law of God is good and not the root cause of man's problems. Second, how it is a contradiction to think that one can live a victorious Christian life while continuing to submit to the law, their former spiritual "spouse".

One of the logical questions the Roman Christians may have had after discussing our freedom from the law is whether or not the law itself was the problem.

**[Romans 7:7-12]**

Q: Is the Law sin? (*v.7 - no*)

Q: What did the Law allow us to accurately identify? (*v.7 - sin*)

In v.8 the word "opportunity" is a military term meaning a base of operations - the starting point for an invasion or military action. Later, the word came into common use to mean the starting point for something or the opportunity for something to happen or take root.

Q: What is depicted as setting up a base of operations against humans? (*v.8 - sin*)

Sin used the law as a starting point to rush in and entice man into acts of sin. Mankind just didn't come to understand what sin was through the law but it also led to greater sinning through the law. It's like we've mentioned before, a prohibition creates a desire within us that urges us to act against the prohibition. (It's part of the independent, self-centered way of living we picked up when we had a sinful nature.) Here it is important to note what we are talking about tonight when we say "sin". In this chapter, sin is not used as a verb but rather as a noun - something.

In Genesis 4:7, after Cain's sacrifice is rejected by God but his brother, Abel's sacrifice was accepted, God confronted Cain about his bitter attitude. He told Cain, "*If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, but you must master it.*" Sin was personified as a force as it is elsewhere in Scripture. So, it's important to understand that Paul is not discussing sinning or committing an act of sin (though he uses coveting as an example) but rather he is discussing a force or power that hijacked the law and perverted it's use. The power of sin used the law in order to bring death to mankind but it's important to note that the law only provided the opportunity thus the law is not sin. Also, a point to mention is that Paul begins using the first person singular pronoun (me and I). Don't take this so much as a personal testimony but rather a generalization valid for all people. Though what is

true of all people is certainly true for Paul.

Q: What is dead apart from the law? (v.8 - *sin. The word “dead” here has the force of “goes dormant” it goes back to the crouching stance mentioned in the Genesis 4 passage we read. Without the law, sin lost it’s easy entrance into our lives - the tool sin used so that we actually worked against our own desires to live holy lives. There is still temptation in the world and the power of sin is still active in the world in which we live so the capacity for sin is present.*)

Q: From our last study in Romans 7:1-6, what did believers die to? (7:4 - *we died to the law*)

The implication is that if we were made to die to the law and were made to be united with Christ, then as we are dead to the law, then we are also dead to sin (reinforcing chapter 6). While the power of sin is still in operation, the believer, through his permanent union with Christ is now free from the power of sin. There is no sin which the believer MUST commit.

V.9 is a recap of a person’s life. It basically states that there was a point in our lives when we didn’t know the law, we were ignorant of the law and it’s demands. However, we were still engaging in sin as we were living independent of God, apart from the law and thus subject to sin’s power and penalty. We did not know it’s holy standards. Yet at some point man became aware of the law and from there sin used that as a beachhead to invade our lives and at that point, we died spiritually. The law awoke in us the knowledge of good and evil. At the same time it also showed us that we were evil in that we had sinned against holy God. Thus we found ourselves separated from God and spiritually dead.

Q: What was the commandment/law intended to do for mankind? (v.10 - *it was supposed to result in life*)

Q: According to Paul’s train of thought, what did the law become for us after we were made aware of the law? (v.10 - *it became death to us. In other words, sin used the law to bring death to God’s Old Testament people, Israel, just as sin is still using the Law to bring death to people in Paul’s day - and today. In fact, it’s only when a person gets to the of the law and allows the law to “put them to death” that they realize that there is something beyond the law that they need to deliver them from sin. While the death that sin brings was disastrous, it is also necessary for a lost person to every come to salvation in Christ.*)

Q: What is the final verdict concerning the law that is stated in v.12? (*the law is holy, righteous, good. Here’s the takeaway here. Only when a person recognizes the law as good and holy and then dies to themselves - comes to the end of themselves realizing that they cannot keep the law, that they finally die to the law - quit trying to keep it and seek for true deliverance from sin.*)

The question then has to be answered, how did something God created to be holy, righteous and good end up being a source of death for mankind?

### **[Romans 7:13]**

The point Paul is making is that sin is completely sinful. It gives us a glimpse into not

only the nature of sin but the sheer power that sin can wield over those whose eyes are not open to the spiritual truth concerning sin and the default lost condition of the human soul.

Q: What are some of the things we learn about sin from this passage? (*many answers - one of them being that sin corrupts everything it touches, sin can corrupt even the good things God has created and the blessings He has for us. Sin has no "good" outcomes. It ruins and leads to death anything it touches. Only in the excesses of sin do people truly have their eyes opened to the dangers and evil power of sin.*)

So, the fault of mankind's moral failures are not in the law but rather in sin's use of the commandment. This answers the question "why?" after last week's session. Why did believers by necessity need to be made to die to the law in order to be united with Christ? It is because as long as a person is united with the law, even as good and holy as it was, it will lead people to sin - greater and greater amounts of sin. Now, in this last section of chapter 7, Paul is going to deal with the responsible party for sin and to do so he's going to use a sort of drama. This drama is the struggle between the law of God and the "law of sin".

Before we get started in this area, I need for some of you to do something. If there is a heading above v.14/15 in your Bible that says, "*The conflict of the two natures*", you need to mark that out. It is not divinely inspired but just a note that the editors of the Bible include to help readers understand what's coming up. They don't always get it right and in this case, it is especially wrong - because we do not have two natures. A lost person has a sin nature but a saved person shares in the divine nature. For the one who was saved, his sin nature was crucified with Christ and is now dead (Romans 6:6). Along that same line, many of the modern translations mistranslate a Greek word. If you see the phrase "sinful nature" or "sin nature" in your Bibles, you should replace it with the word "flesh". The actual word in the original Greek is flesh and the flesh is not the same as the old man or sinful nature. Your nature is who you are at the core of your being. A person with a sinful nature is a sinner because that is who they are at the core of their being. All they are capable of doing is sin. However, the flesh is a set of habits we learned before we came to Christ to get our needs met and these habits seek to keep us living independent of God. We'll look at flesh a bit more later.

### **[I John 4:17]**

Q: According to this verse, who are we right now? (*we are as Christ is - we share in His nature and are beloved by God*)

Also, it is important to realize that this section we are about to cover, while controversial, does make sense when it is properly sorted out. This section deals with a person who is saved and it becomes evident as we read that this is the case. Remember, in chapter 7, Paul is dealing with the Law. We are delving into our relationship to the Law and exactly why a believer's life is incompatible with the law any longer.

### **OPENING ACT - The Confused Soul**

**[Romans 7:14-16]**

Q: How many “actors” do you see mentioned in vv.14-15? (*Two - the Law and I*)

Q: What word is used to describe the Law in v.14? (*spiritual - in other words, the Law came from God and speaks to our spirits or inner man*)

Q: What word is used to describe “I” in v.14? (*composed of flesh - literally unspiritual. In I Corinthians 10:3-4 it is used to describe “carnal” Christians - those born again but living in the flesh. In this case, the word is just referring to our being human and possessing a body of flesh.*)

This is a major contrast. There could not be a larger divide than between the spiritual world and the material world. Notice this verse describes “I” as having been sold into bondage to sin. This bondage describes something so pervasive that it numbs and blinds him to what is right. It describes the actions of “I” as that of a slave - acting but not sure why he’s acting this way or what he’s really doing. In other words, this person is forced to carry out what he does not want to do. He hates what he’s doing but the good things he wants to do, don’t materialize. One might ask, “How can a believer be sold into bondage to sin, especially after what we learned in Romans 6?” The problem is that we still have a physical body which is used to relate to the physical world. The world is run by Satan and the systems of the world are designed to pull us from God and into sin. Thus, all Paul is saying is that while spiritually free from the need to sin, his body is still vitally connected to this world and as he tries to use the law to free himself from the bondage to this world, it isn’t working.

Q: From v.15, how do we know Paul is speaking about a saved person? (*They don’t want to do the evil, even a little bit. Instead, his heart desire is to do right and good but he is not actually doing it. If he were lost, he’d not care if he was doing wrong or not. It wouldn’t bother him. This person confesses that the Law is good - thus useful for God’s purposes.*)

So now let’s follow the line Paul has been drawing since the beginning of the chapter so that what follows makes sense. We were once united to the Law. However, sin used the Law in manner which was corrupt from it’s original purpose so that it led us to even more sin and this led to death. We were made to die to sin so that we could be united to Christ. Once in Christ, we know freedom from sin. However, this freedom isn’t natural to us. The life of faith doesn’t feel comfortable at first. It takes time and discipleship in order to grow accustomed to this life of faith being our “normal” or “real” life.

We are used to living under the Law so this is describing a hypothetical person who is a believer who is trying to continue living under the law. (While it could also be describing Paul, we have no Biblical passages that give us information that Paul tried to live under the Law after his conversion.) Last session we saw that a believer who tries to live under the law is a spiritual adulterer. This is what Paul is discussing here at the end of this chapter - the danger of attempting to live in Christ and under the law at the same time. In our drama set in vv. 14-25, so far there are two actors - I and the Law. And so far, the action is that while “I” has not done what is right, “I” confesses that the Law is good and desires to do right. “I” is blinded as to the reason why he is still acting in a way contrary to his desires (godly desires).

## ACT II - A New Character Emerges From the Shadows

### **[Romans 7: 17-20]**

Q: Who is the new or third actor mentioned in this drama? (*v.17 - sin. Paul is not disclaiming responsibility for his sinful actions, he is trying to explain his actions by revealing the force that is leading him to act the way he is acting. The power of sin is not only leading him to sin, it's blinding him to sin being the source of his problems. Instead of seeing sin as the problem, this person is seeing the law or his inability to keep the law as the problem.*)

What this means for us in this drama is that what is taking place is a dialogue rather than a monologue. Satan wants you to think that the voices in your head are all yours. He wants you to think that when the power of sin is enticing you to act apart from your new nature, that it is you and your old sinful nature speaking to you - that your sin nature is still alive and that's the true you. The truth of v.17 & 20 is that there is a dialogue happening in your mind between you (I) and the power of sin. Sin, like the devil, lies.

Q: Where does no good dwell? (*v.18 - in his flesh. The flesh is not the sinful nature. The flesh is the set of anti-god programs we collected in our minds before we were saved and helped us to get our needs met using the methods of this world - completely independent of God.*)

*SEE FIGURE 1* - This figure comes from Bill Gillham's book, Lifetime Guarantee. In the book there are Scripture references to everything he mentions which I have omitted for the sake of clarity. The flesh in this diagram are the vertical lines (some thin and some thick) in the brain (the area between the flesh and the soul). Every person has a different version of the flesh with different tendencies and characteristics but what is identical about every person's flesh is that these habits are in our brains - they are things we used to get our legitimate needs met in illegitimate ways before we came to know Christ. They represent things we learned while living on our own, independent of God. What is important to know is that they are not who we are. We now partake of the divine nature (II Peter 1:3-4). That's who believers are at their core. Yet, like old programs slowing down a computer and causing it to crash, the flesh seeks to continue to get us to meet our needs through means independent of the Lord. Notice that the person who is saved, the thus has direct input from God and an alive spirit, that person's flesh is "less active" or "unattended" than that of a lost person who still uses the flesh freely and without any reservations. Due to disuse, some "pathways" of the flesh disappear while others are greatly shrunk in influence in the life of a believer due to the activity of the Holy Spirit's leadership and the believer's willingness to surrender to the Spirit's direction.

### **[Galatians 5:17-18]**

Q: What are the two things opposed to one another in these verses (*the Spirit and the flesh*)

Q: If you are led by the Spirit, what are you no longer under? (*the law*)

Here's a key for living the victorious Christian life. The law and the flesh are linked.

The flesh likes to try to live by the law because it leads to pride. The flesh dilutes the law so that it believes it can accomplish it and thus find favor in God's sight. It can be a pride trip and a form of self-righteousness. The law is actually "easier" to attempt to live by. It isn't "messy" like a real relationship. Humans prefer legalism because it sets up a few rules, attempts to live by them and ignores the relationship hassles (it also usually rationalizes or justifies its own mistakes and violations of the laws it claims to hold onto). Living by the law takes less time and allows for sloth and pride. This entire section of Romans 7 is describing the negative side of that flesh-trip. Thinking you can live up to the law is a fantasy and it will end poorly. The issue is that a believer attempting to revert to living under the law will never find peace or joy or unity with believers who live by grace (freedom in Christ). The legalistic soul must judge others seeking to get them to conform to the standard of the law to which they hold. But in the process, not only do they wreck the human relationships around them but they also lose any peace which could be theirs only by forsaking the external religion they are following and instead live by the freedom of Christ and allow others to do likewise. As long as one seeks to live by the law, the flesh will be active and strengthening.

**[Read Philippians 3:2-11]**

Q: What is Paul describing in vv.4-6? (*His life in the flesh, before he came to Christ*)

Q: According to v.9, where did Paul attempt to find righteousness? (*through himself and the law. That's what's called self-righteousness - we come up with a standard and then when we live up to it, we declare ourselves righteous. The problem is that no one is righteous based upon their own performance before God's eyes.*)

Q: What did Paul do with his self-righteousness and impressive background? (*he considered it rubbish in order to gain Christ.*)

Notice, Paul had to get rid of one in order to gain the other. He had to write off his background as being a source of righteousness and his accomplishments living under the law in order to gain Christ. He couldn't have it both ways. That's exactly what Paul is describing in our section of Romans 7.

There is an important point that has to be made as to what is never mentioned in this passage of Romans 7:13-24. Christ and the Holy Spirit are not mentioned. What is mentioned is self-effort and the entire passage deals with the law. This is describing the misery of a Christian who is trying to live the victorious Christian life through the law. He's deceived by Satan who uses the power of sin to continue to live under the law, though the believer is actually united now with Christ.

**ACT III - The Inevitable Conclusion Followed by True Hope**

**[Romans 7:21-25]**

This is the climax of our drama. V.21 points out that this is just how the law works. The

word “principle” is actually the same word for “law”.

Q: Where in us is the evil present? (*in our flesh - and remember that the flesh is not our nature. The flesh is not the core of our being and does not represent us. We don't have sinful natures any longer.*)

Q: What does v.22 tell us about this person? (*that he is saved since in his inner self he concurs with the law of God*)

The battle is between the law of the members of my body (formerly completely governed by my flesh but now this is disputed territory and that's why there is a war raging) and the law of my mind (which has been enlightened by the Lord through the indwelling Spirit). The mind in this passage is referring to our inner man which delights to do God's will.

Q: What state is “I” in when it comes to v.24? (*wretched - literally this word is an very old compound word that means to “bear a callous”. It describes a heart-wrenching cry of despair born from enduring a trial that has left one miserable.*)

The death mentioned is the death of the body here as that is where the power of sin working through the flesh is located. This man is describing a life of “death” in that it no way resembles the life of Christ, what he wants to be lived out. It is the cause of the misery and wretchedness. Again, the source of Paul's wretchedness is not a divided self but the fact that the last hope of mankind - religion - has proved to be a broken reed - useless. Through sin, religion is no longer a comfort but an accusation. Man needs deliverance from sin and that will not come through another law. It comes through Christ alone. The law, though created good and holy, was twisted by the power of sin in order to spawn more sin. Thus, more law isn't the answer to our problem - Christ is our only deliverer. This will lead us to the life in the Spirit next week. But before we get there, knowing what we know from this week, how do we launch our offensive, as believers, against the power of sin working in our flesh? What are some of the ways the Holy Spirit can act or war against the flesh in our lives? Here are a few helps:

- 1) Know your identity in Christ and repeat it to yourself often.
- 2) Since the law of God is at work in our minds, we can use our minds to think ahead and spot potential problems that have tripped us up in the past and think through ways to counter or avoid sins pitfalls.
- 3) Don't allow yourself to give into the law or any form of the law for your righteous standing before God. Understand and fully embrace that it comes from Jesus and His perfect performance alone. Resist legalism.
- 4) Pay attention to the voices in your head and realize that you are not alone. The power of sin is inciting you to sin through the voice of your flesh and it's desires. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:3-5).
- 5) Spend time praying as praying is a spiritual activity based on the relationship between you and the Lord. It is an act of faith and thus brings you into the presence of God so that you will see things as He does. Not only will the person who prays not live by the law, they will not desire to do so as God changes their hearts and minds through time with Him.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?

Figure 1

Picture of the human life from Lifetime Guarantee by Bill Gillham

I Thessalonians 5:23

