**Romans 7 – Overcoming The Struggle Within Us**

Have you ever said or done something that either immediately or later regretted doing or saying. Even for Christians, though we are made a new creation by God, given a new nature (a new inward person, conscience, etc.), we still have lingering in our bodies the residue of sin. **Gal. 5** refers to it as the Spirit-flesh conflict. Though we have victory over sin because of Christ, we still wrestle with the problem.

Today we are going to be in **Rom. 7**. This passage has several different interpretations so instead of spending time explaining all of them, we will zero in on what I think Paul is saying in this chapter.

We have spent time dissecting **Rom. 6** on more than one occasion. In that chapter Paul talks about the victory over sin’s power and guilt that we have because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Sin has no power over us unless we allow it to.

Now, let me begin by saying that **Rom. 7**, like what we have seen so far in Romans, is not age specific. It is speaking to anyone who is a Christian, though obviously as we grow older and know more about our faith, we will understand what this passage says in more depth. Christian growth does come with age, hopefully, and spending time with God though I must admit, I have met some young people who had a deep knowledge of the Word of God and applied it.

I think he really picks up at **vs. 7** to make his point in this chapter. The main thought is that it is impossible to live the Christian life by trying to keep laws, rules, and manmade regulations. Not that we are to ignore what the Bible says regarding how we are to live, but Paul shows us his struggle to try to handle things on his own, by obedience to the law or by doing what he could to win the fight against sin or gain salvation.

Now, some think that Paul is speaking about when he was not a Christian. That is not my view but a legitimate one held by many. Some believe he is speaking as a Christ follower. These two thoughts come from **Rom. 7:14** and **Rom. 7:22**, two contrasting passages.

Still others believe Paul is speaking to Jews who are seeking to be made right with God by their works. That is a legitimate interpretation that is held. The conclusions at the end of **Rom. 7** are what matter.

Yet another way to look at this is that both could be true. Paul speaks of when he was not saved and then of when he had come to faith in Christ. There are times that we can try to overcome sin even as believers in our own power.

This passage is connected to **Rom. 6**. We cannot overlook that, where Paul is clear that we who are in Christ have a new relationship to God, to sin, and to the law. Remember, also, that there was a mixture of people at the Roman church - Jew and non-Jew.

**1) The law shows us our need for God.** Most of our morning will be in **vss. 14-25**.Quickly let me summarize **vss. 1-13**. The OT law could not save anyone. No one can keep any rules, manmade or otherwise, and earn a right standing with God.

The word **“binding”** means **“to rule over us, exercise influence, have power over, to be lord over”** and we have died to the law, thus Paul’s point is to stop trying to live under it. Now we might say we are not trying to keep the OT law and all that it teaches but, many people try to “do” things to be accepted or loved by God, and at times those are based on manmade legalistic rules.

We cannot bear fruit, or show our true relationship with God, if we try to do it in our own strength and by trying to keep rules and such. We belong to Christ **(vs.4)**, and fruit is seen in how we live, how we treat others, and in the fruit of the Spirit **(Gal. 5:22-23)**. It is the evidence of the Holy Spirit in us.

The focus of **Rom. 7** is on our attempts to grow in our Christian life and for God to accept us and for us to prove our worth, we might say, to God, by doing it on our own. We see “I” quite often in this chapter.

As **Rom. 6** tells us, we have been changed because of Christ. We could not fix the sin problem we had. But God could and **vs. 6** tells us that we have been **“released” (terminated, discharged, separated, free)** from the law, from manmade attempts to please God, so that we could serve with the Holy Spirit living in us and not by trying to keep a list.

**God’s Law can show us our desperate need for Him.** That really is the thinking behind **vss. 7-13**. The law is not evil, it is God’s Word. But it was written to show us how sinful we were, how we could not please God by complete obedience to it, which no one could do anyway. Even in the OT, people became believers by accepting what God said, by faith in Him, not by anything they did.

The law magnifies how sinful we are **(vss. 7-8)**. Sin is always with us, and the flesh wants to do opposite to what God’s Word says. Paul did not see how sinful he was until he read the law and saw how he could not overcome sin on his own. It showed him, and anyone, the mess we are without God.

The Bible shows us how sinful we are and can be, especially without Christ in our life. The law, and the entirety of Scripture, drives us to God, or at least that is one of its intents. **Vs. 9** does not show that Paul was a believer. He just lived thinking he was doing okay until He read the Word of God and saw just how sinful he was, and his flesh reacted to the Word.

The problem is not with God, it is with us. **Vs. 13** tells us that sin is the issue, not the Word of God. The law magnifies our sin problem.

**2) How to overcome the struggle within.** We all battle stuff in our lives. Sinful habits, issues, things we wish we did not have to deal with. Beginning in **vs. 14**, and this section going to **vs. 25**, as I have noted, is interpreted differently, so we will do our best to explain what I think it means. So, hang with me.

**A) There is a conflict in every believer (vss. 14-16).** What does Paul mean in **vs. 14**? Note he says that he realizes that the law is spiritual, showing us our sinful condition, but Paul makes the statement that he is **“of the flesh, sold under sin.”** Is he unsaved? Is he a Christian struggling to live **Romans 6** which by the end of the chapter he comes to understand? What can we get out of this verse. Well, let’s try to figure it out and see how it applies to us.

The word **“flesh”** is descriptive of the part of us where sin still dwells, even if we are believers. It is not dealing with our nature. It is the residue of sin, we could say, that never leaves us though it has no power over us according to God’s Word.

Paul has come to recognize that the flesh is always with us, though we are new in Christ **(2 Cor. 5:17)**. Sin does not leave us when we become saved. It is not who we are as a person because our old self (who we were before coming to Christ) died with Jesus **(Rom. 6:6)** and were given a new life.

But sin still remains though we have been fundamentally changed on the inside. We are a new creation in Christ, and we do not have two natures. This teaching about having a sinful nature as well as a new nature is foreign to the NT. The word **“flesh”** in some translations is translated as “sinful nature” or “sin nature.” This is a poor definition of the word.

Nature describes who we are in our deepest personhood. Our thoughts, conscience, the decisions we make. Our nature was made new when we became a follower of Christ, but sin resides in our body. This is the whole point in **Gal. 5:16-25** regarding the Spirit-flesh conflict, as we call it. Sin is still with us, but its power and guilt died with Christ, and we were made new. Paul knows that but is honest in his struggle in **Rom. 7** with sin and the need for Christ to help him overcome it.

To be **“sold under sin”** is to be devoted to sin, under the control of sin. Before we jump to the conclusion that Paul must be talking about his unsaved condition before coming to Christ, note that he is discussing the opposite response to the goodness of God’s Word, which is holy and just, righteous, and good **(vs. 12)**. The Bible tells us what is wrong, and yet, we sin.

Note that the word **“sold”** is in the passive voice. That means something else has acted upon him to lead him to sin. It is the flesh, and he hates it as we are about to see. He is doing things he does not want to, and he is looking for help in overcoming his problem.

A person who **“sells themselves to sin”**, by their choice, is not a believer because if we truly know the Lord, sin bothers us, and we cannot live a life of sin with no conviction. See **1 Jn. 3**.

Paul says that he has a problem. It is the flesh. Paul could be referring to his body, where sin dwells in **vs. 14**, and he knows that without Christ he is in trouble, as we shall see. And if he tries to overcome sin by the law, that does not work either.

**Vs. 15** says, and we can relate to this when we are struggling and not living **Rom. 6** and the victory we have over sin, that Paul wrestles with doing the right thing, what he wants to do. The fact that Paul hates what is happening shows God’s Spirit at work.

Paul has regrets for his actions, and those regrets are brought on by the Holy Spirit. He is bothered by things he is doing. You and I have the completed Word of God, the Spirit living in us and can read Paul’s letter and understand that sin is defeated, while also acknowledging that there are times when we sin, when we allow the flesh to have the upper hand.

A non-Christian cannot state what Paul does in **vs. 15**. They can say they hate something that they are doing, but to fully understand why requires a relationship with God. That is why Paul **“hates” (detest, abhor)** the things he knows are fleshly and wrong.

**Vital:** Paul coveted, he maybe got angry, he said some things he should not, and it bothered him. He is talking about, in my opinion, his progressive growth in the Christian life, which is seen, I believe, throughout **vss. 14-25**. As he learned his identity in Christ, it changed everything in his life.

In **vs. 16** Paul says when I do the things I do not want to do, I agree with the law, that it, the law, is good. It shows us how sinful we are and how we need the Lord in our life. Paul is not trying to get out of his part in allowing sin to have control. He is simply stating that it is a struggle for him, as it is for us.

But as we shall see, he does not leave us with no hope. The end of **Romans 7** will flow into **Rom. 8** where the Holy Spirit comes into play in a big way to help us in our relationship with God.

**B) We must understand the root problem and face it head on.** We are responsible when we sin. It can be discouraging. It is who we choose to either allow sin that still dwells within or the Holy Spirit, to have control over our life.

When Paul, in **vs. 17**, refers to himself as “I” and claims that he is not the one who is leading him to do what he should not, but that it is sin, he is not excusing the problem. What he says in **vs. 17** is tied to **vs. 22** as we shall see. He is a new person as we are, and delights in God’s Word as that “inner new person.”

But he recognizes that there is a battle, but this does not make us be two different people. As a believer, the deepest part of us desires to know God. The flesh, where sin dwells, would rather we not know the Lord and make decisions that are sinful. This is why we struggle with sin.

Paul, in **vs. 17**, is explaining the conflict that he has, and that we have, between the new person we are and the sin that still hangs on in our body. But we are not sinful by nature, we are a new creation, but the “residue” of sin will be with us the rest of our lives. Thus, the importance of living **Romans 6-8**.

Let’s look, then, a little closer at **Rom. 7:17**. Sin, Paul says, is our problem. He was miserable. He saw the conflict within and experienced it. As a new creation, he longed after God. But, as he notes here, sin was still around and it, when he allowed it to, made **vs. 15** real in his life.

We could see when looking at **Romans 7**, that Paul is telling us his story and that when the light of Rom. 6 really came on, he knew then that the conflict was real, yes, but sin did not have to win as **Rom. 7** says.

**Vs. 18** is a true statement. Again, the word “flesh” in this verse does not refer to the physical body, per se, but to sin that dwells in our body, the “flesh”, or sin.

In **vs. 18** Paul also says that he has the desire to do what is right, but in himself he does not have the ability to do so. That is where **Rom. 6 and Rom. 8** come into play. The Holy Spirit takes the truths that we do experience, and we can live in victory over sin when we realize that we cannot overcome sin.

Paul cannot achieve what he wants to, and he knows it and it frustrates him. The **“desire” (resolve, determination, will)** to do what is right that is noted in **vs. 18** is because he is a child of God, and he is pulled in a direction of doing what honors the Lord.

Is this not our battle sometimes? Frustration over sin. The discouragement of not experiencing what God wants for us. That happened with Paul, like it does with us. But he does not give up. He knows that this new life he has in Christ carries with it so much, being a “new creation.

Again, in **vss. 19-20** Paul talks about the realization that sin is the battle, but it is not the victor in his life as we are about to see.

**C) We must accept, believe, and act on what we have in Christ. Vss. 21-25** are like a breath of fresh air for Paul, and for us who wonder if we can win the war on sin. We already have according to **Rom. 6**, but we need to claim and live it by faith. We also must do our part. We must watch what we see, read, listen to. But we need to live out our identity in Christ. Now note what Paul tells us here.

**Vs. 21** tells us that Paul, like the rest of us, knows that when we want to do right, evil, sin, is right there wanting to raise its ugly head. The idea of law is not the OT law. It is descriptive of something we have come to know as a fact because we have seen or experienced it. Let me also say that the believer who has grown in their faith, will be one who is more sensitive to sin and the need for the help of Christ in overcoming it, of living out **Rom. 6**.

**Vs. 22** is a key verse. A person without Christ cannot say this. This is just one of the reasons that Paul is speaking, I believe, in **vss. 14-25**, about Christians. Literally, in **vs. 22**, Paul is saying he is **“delighting”** in the law of God. It is present tense. And why? His inner being, his renewed self, the new creation that he is, desires to know God. He is delighting in God and His Word.

**“Delight”** is a great word. You could say **“rejoice, approve.”** We can joyfully agree with God’s Word and what it says and desire to know it because the **inner man (soul, conscience)**, who we are in our deepest personhood, has been made new. See **2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16; Col. 3:9-10**.

In **vs. 23** Paul also recognizes the spiritual conflict that he has. The members refer to his body where sin dwells **(see Rom. 6:13)** or simply the idea of our body as **Rom. 6** noted. We have a choice. Do I allow sin to rule or do I live my identity as a believer and choose to follow the Lord.

There is a spiritual war within us. Our mind, which is being renewed **(Rom. 12:1-2)** comes under the attack of sin and if we are not careful, we become captive to something that we do not have to. Sin has no control or power over us unless we allow it to.

**Key:** The mind, in **vs. 23**, has to do with the new creation, and Paul’s changed personhood. It is a reference to the inner man. We need Christ to overcome sin. We need to take **Rom. 6** and apply it.

In **vs. 24** Paul says, who will deliver me from this death, this mess of sin, this body of death. The word **“wretched” means “miserable, afflicted, enduring toils and troubles.”** Paul knew that as long as we are in this body, we will battle sin, even though we have victory over it, no one experiences that victory all day long. But we can live more on the side of sin staying dormant than acting on it.

He asks in this verse, who will **“deliver” (rescue, draw to one’s self)** us from this body of death **(Rom. 6:6)**. That leads to the last verse of the chapter.

**Vs. 25** is Paul’s “victory cry” of this chapter. He knows that he cannot win the war on sin. It is Jesus, and Him alone that enables us to do so. It is only through Christ our Lord. Let’s talk about this for a moment. The Lordship of Christ, in my thinking, is crucial to victory over sin.

**Point:** This verse is the passage every believer needs to hold on to and apply. Connect this text with **Rom. 6** and **Rom. 8:1-17**. God has given us the victory over sin by the Holy Spirit.

We know that we already have the victory, but it is only as we allow Christ to have control of our life do we experience what is factual. If anything else is on the throne of our hearts, any sin, anything, and Jesus is not, we will struggle with sin.

We choose, to either be an obedient servant or a rebellious one, but it does not change the fact that Jesus is Lord. Some would argue that Jesus as Lord means that He is God, and that this word speaks to His Deity. That is true also. The fact is, if He is God, the One Who made everything and saved us, He is the Lord over us, because He is God.

Paul knew that the Lord was the One Who could bring victory over sin, and he spoke to that fact in **Rom. 6**. We have a new life in Jesus and sin’s power is broken. Obviously, when we get to heaven, we will experience no more battles with sin, but even while still here on earth, we have victory in Christ over it.

Note also in **vs. 25** that Paul is clear. With his mind, his new life in Christ (I, myself), he serves (is serving) the law of God, the Word, the commands of the Lord. This is important to remember. This is why if we are believers we are convicted of sin, of why we learn from the Scriptures, why we have that Spirit-flesh conflict. The new “us” desires to know and follow God, but the flesh tries to get us to serve sin.

**Point:** What Paul tells us in **Rom. 7:14-25** is not the “normal Christian life.” That is found in **Rom. 6**, where we see that sin’s power has been broken, our before Christ life died with Jesus and when He rose from the dead, we were given new life.

**Rom. 7** describes Paul’s challenge, I believe, before he came to the full realization of the victory, he described in **Rom. 6**. It is true of all of us that we at times do things we wish we had not, and that we wish we followed God as we know to do and have the power to do. Any of us can relate to **Rom. 7** but we must also keep in mind that Paul is clear in **vs. 25** that the life we need to live is found in Christ our Lord.

**Point:** Paul is talking about, not his current spiritual maturity, but of the fact that he struggled with sin as an immature Christian until he came to the realization of what he wrote about in Rom. 6.