

Jesus makes a profound statement in His garden-of-Gethsemane prayer: **The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Mk. 14:38)**. We fully agree!! We're learning how to properly deal with the law, flesh, and Spirit, the subjects in **Romans 7-8**. We're learning how to WALK as the Christians we ARE. Because we're no longer IN Adam but are now IN Christ, we possess the desire to walk worthy of who God has made us. Yet there's a struggle against sin in the flesh.

In **7:1-6** we learned that we as Christians have died to the Law. Reasons why: so we could (1) be joined to Jesus, (2) bear fruit for God, and (3) serve in newness of the Spirit. **7:7-25** are like a parenthesis between **7:6** and **8:1**.

In **7:7-13** we learned sin in our flesh uses even God's holy, perfect Law as its base of operations, its starting point, to deceive us and destroy our walk. We also saw the power, deceitfulness, and exceeding sinfulness of sin, which still dwells in every person's (Christian's or non-Christian's) body (flesh). **7:20,23**.

In **7:14-25** Paul takes up exactly the same theme: how the law exposes sin and kills us; but this time "it is not explained, it is experienced." In the present tense, Paul tells of his own experience in trying to live up to the demands of the Law in his own strength. "I end up doing what I had sworn I would not do. Why? Because there is the new 'I' who wants to do what God wants but there is sin which dwells in my flesh. My flesh is not my identity, who I am. (We'll learn in **8:9-11** that the new "me" is not IN the flesh but IN the Spirit.) This is a Christian yet seeing the inability of his/her flesh to do what he/she desires to do. Also explained in **Gal. 5:17**. Whether a Christian trying to walk by the flesh or a legalistic Christian, he can't keep the Law in his own strength.

Read 7:1-8:4. 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. We fully know that the Law is spiritual, Spirit-inspired, holy; it reflects God's holy character. So, why shouldn't I try to make God's Law my way of life now that I'm a Christian? Because we are still of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. The problem is with sin which resides in our flesh." Even as Christians, if not walking by the Spirit, this is how we behave/think, by the flesh, like a slave to sin! Law used 28X in Romans 7-8. The Law can't help a person—as a means of justification or the way to walk. "The Christian can't be happy with his sin, because it is contrary to his new nature and because he knows that it grieves his Lord as well as his own conscience."

:15-17 :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. "I can't understand my own behavior. I'm not doing what I'd like to do; I'm doing the very thing I hate! I find myself unable to live up to God's standards and my own new heart's desire (**:22**). I detest what I end up doing! My will power is never enough; sin in the flesh wins, every time if I don't know how to walk." The flesh wants life to continue as it was; as Swindoll says, "The flesh seems to have a mind of its own." **: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.** Yet if I do things I really don't want to do, I'm admitting that I agree that the Law is good, excellent. The Law is NOT responsible for my failure. **:17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me."** So, no longer am 'I' the one doing it (the new 'I' in Christ is a complete and permanent change), but

'sin' which makes its home in my flesh (**:18**)." The new 'I' no longer approves of that approach to walking. Even if I try to walk by God's Law, I fail.

When Jesus comes into a life, that individual is made God's new creation. The old you (who you were IN Adam, a sinner by nature/identity) died on the cross with Jesus. Then you were raised a new person IN Christ. You're now IN Christ; you've become a partaker of God's nature. Jesus lives in your spirit (**8:10**). However, the new person IN Christ is still housed in a body of flesh (**8:23**) that won't be perfect or match your nature until you die physically or the Lord returns. And, sin still dwells in these bodies of flesh. The new 'I' wants to obey our Lord and hates sin. Yet "sin in my fleshly body causes problems with the new me IN Christ. Someone called it 'The Law of Frustration'! Then what is to blame for the good I don't do and the evil I do? It's not the law (**:12,14,16**). It's not the new 'I'. It's rather sin living in my flesh."

:18-20 sound like a repeat! **: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.** "For I fully know that nothing good dwells in my flesh. I want to do what is good, but I don't. The wishing is present but the doing is not." Notice that nothing good dwells in my FLESH. It's not your old sinful nature/identity/spirit because who you were IN Adam has died and been buried with Christ. It's your flesh that is the problem. **:19-20 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. :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.** "I know the good thing to do but I don't do it; I know what's evil and I don't want to do it, but I find myself without the ability to stop it! But, when I find myself doing the very things I don't want to do, the new 'I' is no longer the one doing it, but 'sin' which makes its home in my body." He is not disclaiming responsibility or finding an excuse. He's just pointing out that "there's this terrible, deceitful power of sin still living in my flesh. So, even when I see the Law in all its holiness and want to obey it, I just can't walk in victory. As I'm growing in my walk with the Lord, I have both an increased hatred of sin and an increased love for righteous living." What a dilemma!!

:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. "Let me conclude my thought. This seems to be the rule: Evil, sin, is present in me, the one who wishes to do good." **:22-23** explain **:21. :22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man...** "In the inner man (the spirit/heart/nature), I heartily agree; I delight in God's Law. The new person I am IN Christ dearly loves God's Law." (See **Ps. 1:2a**) **: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.** "BUT! I see a different law in my bodily members, in my flesh. Two laws—the law of the mind and the law of sin—and they wage war (strategy) with one another, and the law of sin always wins! I end up a prisoner of the law of sin which dwells within my body. Wages war and also takes me prisoner!" I'm determined to walk in a way pleasing to God, "only to find that under certain circumstances all that determination melts away and I do exactly what I did not want to do. What's the matter with me? Why can't I do what is right?"

If we think our wills are strong enough (our desire motivated enough), we can control evil in our lives by simply determining to do so, then we have not come to the end of ourselves yet. And we fail miserably, until, at last, out of our failures, we cry out ‘O wretched man that I am’!

:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free (rescue me) from the body of this death? “Wretched man, I! Miserable creature, distressed, afflicted, troubled person that I am; exhausted from hard labor.” MacArthur: “An ancient writer tells us there lived a tribe which punished murderers by fastening their dead victims to the killers until the murderers died from rot.” If we stopped here, if there wasn’t more, what a bleak, ugly, miserable life. Many Christians (including me in the past) say: “These verses describe me in a nutshell.” But if they do, it just means you’re not using God’s solution but your own. “Sin has deceived us, and the Law, as our friend, has come in and exposed sin for what it is. The Law can’t deliver us from sin. Law will only drive us, again and again, to the mighty Deliverer.” When we see how wretched it makes us, then we are ready for God’s answer, which comes immediately in :25. “Who will deliver me from this mortal body still subject to sin and death?” Notice it’s Who, not what. This gives us a clue that there is a solution. **:25a Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** And in **8:1-11** we’ll see God’s deliverance program, which He’s already provided! Our feelings must be answered by facts given to us by God. Who will deliver us? God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord and by the indwelling Holy Spirit! He has provided for walking in victory (**8:1-11**). We’ve died to the Law (**7:4**). We are married to the resurrected Jesus to bear fruit for God and to serve in newness of the Spirit. We must begin to think, “I am a free child of God. I have died to sin. I have died to the Law. Jesus’ power, His life, everything He is, is mine, right at this moment, through the Spirit.”

Then it’s like Paul says, “Oh, excuse me for my outburst; let’s summarize! **:25b 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.** “With my mind I know what to do (I’m serving the Law of God), but with my flesh I’m in bondage to the law of sin.” At 1st these words sound admirable, but the Christian will end up defeated even if he’s given his will and mind over to God’s perfect Law.

Paul says, “I can’t do the good. I can’t stop doing the wrong. The power of sin within my flesh is too strong. I just can’t keep God’s Law with my own strength. I ‘feel’ so condemned. If I try to please God by the flesh, with my own resources apart from the Holy Spirit, then immediately I foolishly place myself under the Law, the Law to which God said I died (**7:4**)!” We do need the Law. We need it every time sin deceives us. But the Law will not deliver us from sin; the ‘Law will only bring us, over & over, to the mighty Deliverer’.

Paul’s problem is not of knowledge or desire or will. He was trying as hard as he could. “Yet I find myself a prisoner of the law of sin which inhabits these body members. There’s a war going on and I’m losing. I’m not doing the things I want to do.” (see **Gal. 5:17-18**). We’ve all been at this point! The tendency is turn to the Law or try harder or give up. How miserable is the condition of those WHOSE CHRISTIANITY IS LAW AND THE FLESH. The good news

is that **7:14-25** is not the end of the story! God’s solution is given in **8:1-11**.

Reflecting on Romans 7:14-25: As you read the passage and the message again, in what ways can you identify with Paul’s description? In what specific areas do you need to accept God’s provision instead of trying so hard on your own? What are some practical steps you’ll take to incorporate these truths into your mind and your choices? However, don’t stop with **7:14-25**!

Let’s take a quick look at God’s solution to **7:1-25**’s frustration. The answer is in **8:1-13**, especially in **8:1-4** (**read**). Since sin still dwells in every person’s body/flesh (**7:17-18,20,21**), even the Christian’s, we need to learn how to walk, not by the flesh, but by the Spirit. God’s solution for our dilemma was to place the Holy Spirit to live in our bodies of flesh. God’s ‘solution’ for the Christian’s walk is the indwelling Holy Spirit, who came to indwell your body when you became a Christian, an element of the New Covenant.

Paul knew there were only 2 methods for walking: The Spirit or the flesh. The real issue in our walk is the Holy Spirit versus the flesh. There’s victory when we walk by the Spirit, even over sin which indwells our bodies. There’s defeat, even as a Christian, when we try to walk according to the Law (good as it is) by the flesh, by our own strength. Blessed is the person who comes to the end of his/her own human resources!! Then we’re ready to rest upon the work of Another, both for justification and for living the Christian life. How do you see yourself, as still under the Law, trying as hard as you can to do your best for Jesus; OR, as IN Christ Jesus and walking according to the Spirit? The place to start in your walk is with God’s truth. Victory in the Christian life must be preceded by an awareness of your spiritual identity (the flesh is NOT who you are!) and God’s provisions for walking in triumph. Realize, it is impossible to ‘live’ the Christian life without Jesus’ presence and work and the Spirit’s indwelling presence and power.

Before we became Christians, we had no choice but to walk by the flesh. This fleshly walk revealed itself in idolatry, sexual immorality, sexually perverse practices, depraved thinking, or thinking oneself superior because of your morality or religious practices. After we became Christians with new natures/hearts, we thought if we just knew God’s ‘laws’, we could walk in a way pleasing to Him. We wanted to obey God’s laws. But we’ve discovered there is still sin in our bodies, our flesh. The flesh is how you respond when you don’t rely on God! Sin in our flesh urges us to try to handle things in our strength, with our own distorted thinking, apart from relying on God.

It’s true, as Christians our natures have been changed (no longer IN Adam but are now IN Christ; no longer sinners by nature but saints by nature), yet we still live in these bodies of flesh, where indwelling sin tempts us to try to experience life, even God’s life, without relying on or trusting Him. This results in continual frustration, trying to obey but never succeeding, “For the good that I want, I don’t do, but I practice the very evil I hate!” Paul calls it the law of sin and death. If we aren’t freed from that law, all we will see is ourselves falling short of God’s standards, never pleasing Him. But the good news is that God has freed us from both sin and the law! God’s solution to our walk is in **Romans 8**. Let’s learn how to walk—God’s way!

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