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Romans 7: The Believer's Accountability to the Law

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Chapter 7 The believer's accountability to the Law (esp. the Ten Commandments)

If the Law justly condemns us, how are we to deal with our continuing sinful nature?

Since salvation is promised by faith without works, what becomes of the law? Does the new life of a believer mean he must be perfect and eradicate his sinful nature? Why do I still want to sin after becoming a believer? These are some of the topics covered in Romans 7 which deal with the practical struggles between the new godly desires and our continued sinful drives.

The audience is a mixture of believing Jews and Gentiles struggling to understand each other and the harmony of God's revelation in the OT with the NT as revealed through the apostles, especially Paul, and prophets (Eph 2:20). Paul addresses much of this chapter to the Jewish or proselyte believers (7:1) to lead them to a transparent honesty with the universal struggle against the sinful nature common in all men. There is no superiority or distinction in this struggle. Since both Jews and Gentiles are equally condemned by the law and both need the power of the Spirit to overcome their sinful nature (Rom 8), there can be unity in the common struggle. This chapter describes that struggle within every believer.

I. Freed from the Law, but not free of the Law (7:1-6)

^{NET} **Rom 7:1** Or do you not know, brothers and sisters (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law is **lord** over a person as long as he lives?

² For a married woman is **bound** by law to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is **released** from the law of the marriage.

³ So then, if she is **joined** to another man while her husband is alive, she will be called an **adulteress**. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she is joined to another man, she is not an adulteress.

⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also **died** to the law **through the body of Christ**, so that you could be joined to another, to the **one who was raised** from the dead, **to bear fruit** to God.

⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful desires, **aroused** by the law, were active in the members of our body to **bear fruit for death**.

⁶ But now we have been **released** from the law, because we have **died to what controlled us**, so that we may **serve in the new life** of the Spirit and not under the old written code.

7:1 Paul addresses part of the Roman believers who were knowledgeable of the law, former Jews or proselytes, to demonstrate how the freedom from the law is to be bound to Jesus in a new life. But the Jews were taught to love the law and exalt the law. Isaiah wrote, "The Lord was pleased for His righteousness' sake to make the law great and glorious" (Isa 42:21). It was a cause of rejoicing, enlightening the understanding, demonstrating purity and holiness, and greatly to be desired (Ps 19:7-10). However, the Jews had come to believe that obedience to the law was the means of salvation (i.e., legalism and Phariseeism). Yet Paul had declared that "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:19-20). This is why the law is essential to understand salvation: "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Rom 3:31). How is the Law useful for salvation in these verses?

1 Tim 1:8

Rom 3:19-20

Rom 5:20

- The general principle is that any law only has jurisdiction over a person who is living. Once dead, no one can be brought before a court and condemned.

7:2-3 The analogy of the husband and wife who are bound by law until one of them dies illustrates how no law has jurisdiction over a person when he is dead. If this explanation is the purpose of this passage, then this is not contextually a divorce text (see Matt 5:31-31; 19:3-12 and 1 Cor 7:10-15 for the NT teaching on divorce). As a woman is “**bound**” (*deo*, “fasten with chains,” or metaphorically, “to put under obligation”) to her husband, so every human being is bound to the law until he has a God-approved death to his credit. These verses are almost identical to 1 Cor 7:39. What is the purpose of the law and who are under its indictment?

Rom 3:19

James 2:10

1 John 3:4

7:4-5 The application: The only way out from being bound to the Law and its condemnation is through a personal death. Once you have died, the law no longer has a case against you. The phrase, “**you also died**” (*thanatoo*, aorist passive, “at one time were made to die”). This aorist tense expresses completeness and finality of death. The passive voice means that Someone has acted upon the believer putting him into a death or bonding him to a death, not his own, but that is equally as authoritative as though it were his own death. The secret is the phrase “by the body of Christ.” If we could just be so bonded to Christ that His death becomes our death before God, then we could be judicially free from the just condemnation of the law and be freed to be “bound” to Christ instead. The remarriage of the surviving spouse to another husband results in a completely new and permanent marriage. No longer is the sinner married to the law, but now is married to Jesus Christ in a salvation that cannot be broken unless the new Spouse, Christ, dies again. Since He has already died once, and He will never die again, so our new marriage bonding (salvation) to Jesus is eternal. Why was Paul so protective of the Church as seen in 2 Cor 11:2?

- The ultimate objective: the new bonding to Christ not only identifies us with His death, but also with his transforming power, especially “that we might bear fruit for God” (v. 5). How would you describe the fruit that we should bear in this relationship?

Gal 5:22-23

Heb 13:15

Phil 1:11

7:5 refers to four characteristics when the readers were “in the flesh” (in contrast to being “in the Spirit,” Rom 8:9), that is, before they became believing Christians.

1. Unregenerate unbelievers are “in the flesh” and can only respond to their life through the natural, sensual sphere of the unsaved world.
2. The flesh-life was characterized by “sinful **passions**” (*pathema*, “that which one suffers, misfortune, calamity, evil, affliction”). These are destructive impulses of the mind that are generated by the flesh.
3. The flesh-life responds to the conviction of the Law by being “aroused by [on account of] the Law.” Ironically, when the flesh learns the difference between good and evil (by knowing the Law, see 7:7) the natural flesh rebels and lusts for what is forbidden.

4. The unregenerate flesh-life unceasingly **works** (*energeo*, imperfect tense, “kept on...”—“to be operative, put forth power”) in our bodies. This word is the source of the word “energy.” This energy of the flesh is displayed “in the members of” the “body to bear fruit for death” (both the death of the “flesh” and eternal death in divine judgment).

If this were a description of a former marriage (to the flesh), who would not want to be married to another?

7:6 Freedom from the law is the power to be righteous. “But now” introduces a contrast from the flesh-life (7:5) of the unregenerate man. “We” (present believers including Paul) “have been **released**” (*katargeo*, aorist tense: past completed action, “to render inactive, inoperative, deprive of force, influence, power”) from the law. This “release” is only possible if one has died (7:1), which is declared as a past completed action, “having died” to that which “we were **bound**” (*katecho*, imperfect tense, “were being continually...”-“to hold back, restrain, hinder, hold fast”). When a person dies, all legal liabilities or penalties cease to have any threat. In our union with Christ by faith, His death becomes our death as full payment for our sin debt as revealed by the Law, releasing us from any penalties under the Law. What is meant by the “curse” in Gal 3:13?

- This new freedom does not mean the liberty to do what the law forbids. This reiteration is necessary because the human mind is devious (Jer 17:9) and wants any excuse to sin. How did Paul deal with this false notion of a freedom to sin in Rom 6:1 and 6:15?
- “**So that**” (*hoste*) introduces a dependent clause that indicates the actual result of the former action, thus “for this reason.” Paul then states that “we may **serve**” (*douleuo*, present active, “continually or habitually...” – “be a slave, subjection to another”), which is not used to describe a voluntary service or a hired worker who could refuse an order or find a better employer; rather, it refers to a slave whose only purpose is to obey the will of his master. The purpose is to serve “in **newness** of the Spirit,” a reference to a recently new state as well as “a different and extraordinary newness” (FRIBERG, see 6:4 for only other use). If under the “oldness of the letter” or “the old written code” the psalmist could write, “O how I love Thy law!” (Ps 119:97), how much more the freed believer empowered by the Spirit will love any expression of the will of his new Master in His Word to demonstrate how much he loves his Savior. This is the sure sign of the new life. How is it expressed in these verses?
Deut 30:20
John 14:15
John 14:23

II. If the Law kills, it is good or bad?

Paul is writing this epistle to a church of Jewish and Gentile believers who needed to understand the role of the law in teaching the reasons for why Christ is the only answer to man’s sin problem (which the law magnifies). He earlier called the law a “schoolmaster,” which *tutored* us to come to Christ (Gal 3:24), but once we put our faith in Christ, “we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (the law) (Gal 3:25). This is the legitimate use of the law (1 Tim 1:8): to reveal how sinful we are.

There are 613 commandments in the OT (248 commands and 365 prohibitions). The commands focus on such things as worship, inter-relations, war, social actions, family requirements, judicial issues, personal rights, slavery, etc. The prohibitions include idolatry, blasphemy, aspects of Temple worship, what not to sacrifice, dietary limitations, vows, agriculture, loans and surety,

business, slaves, business and personal relationships. In an attempt to make sure these commands are obeyed, Rabbis and the Pharisees added numerous laws that ordered every part of one's daily life. This legalistic lifestyle became "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10) according to Peter at the Jerusalem Council.

The issue is extremely serious because God had declared, "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (Deut 27:26, quoted in Gal 3:10). To make matters worse, James stated, "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). This is called "Mission Impossible." Paul added in Gal 3:11a, "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident." Then Paul quoted Hab 2:4, "the righteous man shall live by faith" (3:11b). Man can never trust in his own goodness, but must put his faith in God's mercy. The law only reveals our sinfulness and shortcomings.

Paul will reveal four elements of the convicting work of the Spirit through God's Law: (1) it reveals sin (7:7b); (2) it arouses sin (7:8); (3) it ruins the sinner (7:9-11); and (4) it reflects the absolute sinfulness of all men (7:12-13).

Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! Certainly, I would not have **known** sin except through the law. For indeed I would not have known what it means to **desire something belonging to someone else** if the law had not said, "Do not **covet**."

⁸ But sin, **seizing** the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of **wrong desires**. For apart from the law, sin is **dead**.

⁹ And I was **once alive** apart from the law, but with the coming of the commandment **sin became alive**

¹⁰ and **I died**. So I found that the very commandment that was **intended to bring life** brought death!

¹¹ For sin, **seizing** the opportunity through the commandment, **deceived me** and through it I died.

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

¹³ Did that which is good, then, become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin, so that it would **be shown to be sin**, produced death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin would become **utterly** sinful.

7:7 Twisted minds always want to discredit whatever makes them look bad, thus some wanted to do away with the Law, especially the Gentile believers who may have wanted to live as they pleased. Paul used the strongest denial, "May it never be" or "Of course not!"

- **Paul shifts to the first person**, "I" and "me," indicating from this chapter on describes Paul's personal testimony (also a universal truth). As Saul (later Paul) persecuted the believers, the Spirit was already at work in his heart convicting him of sin. What does Acts 26:14 say about this?
- **If Paul was "kicking against the goad"** of the Spirit's conviction then God was working in his heart before his regeneration conversion. We cannot understand spiritual truth except that the Spirit is present and illuminating (1 Cor 2:10), even our sinfulness. Paul would not have known he was a coveter except the Law prohibits coveting. This awareness of personal inward guilt may have driven his fanatic external zeal, but to no avail (a common reaction to conviction¹). It would not go away. When Paul met Jesus, he knew immediately the solution to what the Spirit had been teaching him and he surrendered instantly (Acts 9:6). What are other indications of inward sins that cannot be ignored for how God understands two of the Ten Commandments?

¹ It is not uncommon when a sinner comes under conviction of sin that he doubles his zeal to his former religion.

Matt 5:21-22

Matt 5:27-28

7:8 Paul clarifies that the Law is not the cause of personal sin, but it seizes the “**opportunity**” (*aphorme*, “starting point or base of operations for an expedition”). Man has a rebellious tendency that resents any imposed command or restriction, instinctively wanting to commit whatever is prohibited. This universal tendency should reveal that man can never be righteous on his own before a holy God.

- **Covetousness produced other evils** in Paul. One sin always leads to others. What is covetousness called in Col 3:5?

How is covetousness related to other sins in 1 Tim 6:10?

Who is especially motivated by covetousness and what are they motivated to do in 2 Pet 2:3?

7:9-11 The law first reveals sin, then ironically stimulates sin to rebel, and ultimately destroy the sinner. Paul is recounting his experience before his conversion, describing his zeal for obedience to the law as “blameless” in Phil 3:6. As a Pharisee he thought he was pleasing to God. However, at some point “**the commandment came**” to Paul’s conscience and he realized how far he was from God’s standard of perfection – and he “**died**” (Rom 6:23a). His pride, self-esteem, perfect self-image, and self-satisfaction all were destroyed. He recognized that God could not accept him as a sinful being. For the first time, Paul recognized that he was spiritually dead, a condemned sinner, in need of a Savior from his own sin. He now saw himself as one of the “ungodly” for whom Christ died (Rom 5:6). What was the conviction of sin that brought you to Christ? How did you come to see yourself as a guilty sinner?

- The commandment “was intended to bring life,” means ideally if it could be perfectly obeyed. Paul wrote, “For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified” (2:13). However, it only takes one infraction of the Law to become guilty: “For the one who obeys the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). Paul did not realize the truth of how repugnant sin is to God, nor how even a “little” sin makes a sinner guilty, not a little guilty, just guilty. Paul thought his good works would outweigh his “minor” sins, but sin “**deceived**” him (*exepatesen*, “led astray, entice, delude”). The Law’s perfect standard did not make him sin, it only showed Paul that he had sinned and was thus guilty. What did Rom 3:19 say would be the reaction of anyone coming to this truth?
- **Illustration:** if a 15 year-old took a 38-caliber pistol and killed someone, what commandment did he disobey? What did that make him? If 50 years were to pass and he does not murder another person, is he still a murderer? It really doesn’t matter how good he was during the 50 years, he will remain a murderer forever! The same principle applies to a liar (9th commandment), a thief (8th commandment) or a lustful adulterer (7th commandment) or a coveter (10th commandment), like Paul. Violating any one of the commandments makes a person a guilty sinner, whether he violated one or all of them, it makes no difference: he is guilty and nothing he can do can undo that guilt forever. He must find help outside of himself or he is hopeless.

7:12 Once again Paul answers the question, “Is the law sin?” (7:7), which he will reaffirm throughout the chapter. He will call the Law “spiritual” (v. 14), “good” (v. 16) and thoroughly agree with it in his “inner man” (v. 22). When the court upholds the law and

condemns the violator, assigns a just punishment, then neither the court nor the law is evil. The law-breaker is the evil one; the court only recognized and exposed his evil doing. When the court condemns the murderer to death, the court did not cause the evil, but exposed it and declared the just sentence. What was the psalmist's attitude toward the law in Ps 19:7-11?

7:13 If the Law (especially the Ten Commandments) is perfect, and makes wise the simple, enlightens one's understanding, and more desirable than gold, how could one love what brings spiritual death to the seeker? How would you define "spiritual death" from Isa 59:2?

- If a person, through ignorance of the Ten Commandments, never realized how separated he actually was from God (spiritual death), but presumed that his good works, and his partial or sporadic obedience were "good enough," then his sinful nature would have deceived him (7:11). He would be in for a rude awakening when he stood before the Lord. What provokes a reaction of love from a wise man? (Prov 9:8)
- Illustration: In Colombia in 1970 a band of Guajibo Indians came into a camp of Colombian "gauchos" (cowboys), who murdered all 17 of the Indians. When arrested their defense was that they had no idea that killing Indians was against the law and were shocked to find that it was wrong!
- The issue with man is to convince him that he is totally unacceptable to a holy God. Proud man must be "shown" that his sin is "**utterly**" sinful (*hyperbolan*, "excess, extraordinary degree, beyond measure"). This helplessness forces a sinner to find a solution to his sin problem outside of himself. He needs a Savior.

III. What good is the Law then?

Until now, Paul had been using the past tense (7:7—13), which presumably referred to his pre-conversion experience. However, now the verb tenses change to the present tense in reference to himself. This consistent change suggests that Paul is now referring to his present Christian struggle with sin.

Also there is a change in v. 14 of the person's conscious relation to sin. Previously (7:7-13) Paul was deceived by sin, unaware of its deadly reality, virtually helpless against its grip of death. Now Paul speaks of his full awareness of sin and a conscious and determined battle against sin, which is still a destructive power within him, but it is no longer his unconscious master. The awareness of sin as revealed by the law is seen as a good thing (7:21-23) in the life of a believer, not as a means of salvation, but as a tool that the Spirit uses to convict us of sin to keep us growing in obedience. What is the definition of sin for the unsaved and saved alike in 1 John 3:4?

Salvation brings regeneration and new life to the spiritual part of man, but his physical body remains carnal, selfish, self-centered, proud and sensual. Only the Holy Spirit empowers the mind, heart, soul and spirit of man can sin be overcome. The first step is the awareness and consciousness of personal sin in violation of God's law, then the struggle to be victorious through the application of the Word and the power of the indwelling Spirit (Rom 8).

In 7:14-25 MacArthur showed how Paul gives three sad conditions (vv. 14-17; 18-20; 21-23) of his newfound inner conflict with his own sinfulness, ending with a marvelous exaltation of thanksgiving to a Savior who both gives victory and will never condemn us (8:1) in this struggle. Each description of Paul's new relation to sin will describe a condition, a proof and a source.

A. First Frustration (7:14-17)

¹⁴ For we know that the law is **spiritual**– but I am **unspiritual**, sold into **slavery** to sin.

¹⁵ For I **don't understand** what I am doing. For I do not do what I want– instead, I do what I hate.

¹⁶ But if I do what I don't want, I agree that the law is good.

¹⁷ But now it is no longer me doing it, but sin that lives in me.

7:14 The condition: Paul affirms that the Law is not his problem, because it is “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*, “belonging to the Divine Spirit”). Salvation by grace does not eradicate or do away with the Law, especially the moral law or the Ten Commandments, since they were never meant as a means of salvation, but as a standard of holiness and conduct for how to live. The humbling experience of failure only motivates the believer to thankfulness for His grace to forgive and to empower obedience. How does Paul make a distinction between “me” and “flesh” in Rom 7:18?

- **Paul describes himself as “unspiritual”** (*sarkikos*, “carnal, having the nature of the flesh, mortal”). This is the same word used in 1 Cor 3:1, “I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the **flesh, as infants** in Christ.” The continual state of Paul is “**sold**” into slavery to sin (*piprasko*, perfect tense: “had been sold and remain in that state,” metaphorically, “sold under the control of the love of sinning, of one bribed to give himself up wholly to another’s will”). This phrase describes both the unsaved and the saved in the ever present conflict with indwelling sin that seeks continually to control his life. How did God advise Cain to deal with sin’s influence in Gen 4:7?
- **In verse 23** Paul makes it clear that it is only his fleshy body that is “a prisoner of the law of sin.” The difference now is that no longer is the believer’s spirit a slave to sin as well, but now becomes an enemy. The fact that a person recognizes this conflict within him indicates that a new life has begun within him. How did David continue to thank God and to pray in Ps 51:1-3?
- The characteristic of a true believer is their honest confession of their sinfulness. How is 1 John 1:8-10 a test of who is a true believer?

7:15 The Proof: Paul’s confusion is the lack of understanding or explanation of what is going on within him. Paul had never realized how covetous and lustful he was until he understood the Law (7:7). Now that he is aware of God’s law and he loves it, but he discovers that he is not doing it. He can’t measure up to it. What before was never given a second thought, now Paul “hates” (*miseo*, “detested”), yet he continues to “do” it (present tense, “continually or habitually”). The fact that he knows the Law and he “wants” (*thelo*, present tense, “to intend, to love, to like to do a thing”) to do it, both indicate that the Holy Spirit is working in his life or has regenerated him already, thus his new nature is in conflict with his old nature or his flesh. Instead of thinking he was a “good” person, now Paul’s humble contrition of confession of his sinfulness marks him as a true believer. He is totally dependent on the mercy of God for his acceptance.

7:16-17 The Reason: Paul has declared that God’s standard is superb, but his inability to measure up was his own fault, not his circumstances or the commands of the Law. The greater a person’s maturity in Christ, the more he appreciates the goodness and holiness of God. The more one is committed to being obedient to the commands of the Word, allowing the Spirit to convict and correct him to conform to His Word, the deeper his love for Christ

becomes and the greater his appreciation and worship for God's holiness, the more profound his desire to fulfill His law. What is the ongoing process described in 2 Cor 7:1?

- In verse 17 Paul is not justifying his sin ("the devil made me do it" mentality), but describing the radical change that had come into his life. The connective "but now" is a negative adverb of time, indicating a complete and permanent change. The change that occurred was the "me doing it" means that Paul at one time was in agreement with his flesh, but now his new inner self, regenerated by the Spirit, disapproves what never bothered him before. How is this split person described in Gal 2:20?

See also Gal 5:17

What is the secret to victory in Gal 5:16?

B. Second Frustration (7:18-20)

¹⁸ For I know that **nothing** good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I **cannot** do it.

¹⁹ For I do not do the **good** I want, but I do the very **evil** I do not want!

²⁰ Now if I do what I do not **want**, it is no longer **me doing it** but sin that lives in me.

7:18a The Condition: Paul appears to reiterate the distinction between the "**in me**" in which "nothing good dwells" and the "**I**", which he had just mentioned as his new, redeemed, regenerated nature. The part of him in which the sin continues to dwell is in his "**flesh**" (vv. 5, 25), which remain unredeemed. "Flesh" is not always a reference to his literal physical flesh, but rather the sinful nature uses the physical body to sensually satisfy itself. What can you discern about the flesh from these verses?

Matt 26:41

Rom 7:5

Rom 8:5

7:18b-19 The Proof: Paul now says the "redeemed-me" (distinct from the "flesh-me") now has a "**want**" (*thelo*, present tense: "continually"- "to desire, intend, wish, delight in") to do what is good is "**present**" (*parakeimai*, "to lie beside, to be near"). Regrettably, the perfect ability to do good for Paul (or us) was not present in his life. Paul then rephrases the situation in vs. 19. Paul is not saying that he cannot do *any* good, but that he cannot always do what he knows to be right and acceptable to God. The sin nature once had Paul in slavery to its desires, and now Paul has been set free from its monopoly control of his mind and body, but it was still present in the body as an evil influence motivating him to do what his new nature did not "**want**" (*thelo*, present tense, as above). The nearer we walk with God the more offensive the smallest sin seems before a holy God and it hurts us that we continue to disappoint and offend our Savior. How do these verses respond to this universal inner battle?

Phil 3:12-14

Ps 32:1

Ps 51:1

7:20 The Source: Paul begins almost repeating vvs. 16-17 but then he clarifies a couple of things: (1) the phrase, "I am 'no longer' the one doing it," refers to a comparison with his life before his conversion to Christ. At that time his inner man, the "I," was, in fact, the one who sinned because he wanted to. (2) Now, not only does he know what pleases God, but now he wants to do it, but the "sin" influence or principle "which **dwells** in me" (*oikeo*, present tense: "continually..."- "live with" as a marriage). We will not be free of the

influence of sin until the ultimate redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). When does Paul teach that this transformation will take place in Phil 3:21?

C. Third Frustration (7:21-24)

²¹ So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me.

²² For I delight in the law of God in my inner being.

²³ But I see a different law in my members waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.

7:21 The Condition: This struggle with the “law” of sin is constantly present with the Apostle Paul. Anyone who says that he has eradicated sin in his life has lost touch with reality. The power of the Spirit (chapt 8) is victory over the ever present influence of and desire for sin within the believer. Before our conversion we were hardly aware of the influence of sin; we never knew any difference. With the implanting of the life of God within the believer, the sudden awareness of the evil of sinful desires within us that will not go away makes life in this body a frustration. The Lord told Cain that sin was at the door and desires to control him but Cain had to dominate it (Gen 4:7); a picture of every human since Adam. How does Paul describe the effect of this ever present sin principle in Rom 8:10?

7:22 The Proof: The first evidence that Paul was a new creature (2 Cor 5:7) and now had freedom from his former enslavement to sin is his newfound “**delight**” (*sunedomai*, present tense: “continually...”- “rejoice together”) in the “law of God.” In spite of the presence of sin in the believer, he discovers a stronger passion for the will and Word of God. In Psalms 119, all 176 verses refer to the Psalmist’s love for the Word of God, yet he concludes, “I have wandered off like a lost sheep. Come looking for your servant, for I do not forget your commands” (119:176). The “inner being” (or “inner man”) of every redeemed person has a naturally unexplainable desire for God’s holiness and spiritual truth thanks to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at regeneration. Every believer’s “inner being” is in a conflict. How does Paul describe our response to this “inner being?”

2 Cor 4:16

Eph 3:16

7:23a The second proof that sin was not his master any longer is that there is now a dichotomy within his being, a “different law” which does not affect his inner man. This is not the Mosaic Law, but a universal sin-principle that is “sin living in me” (7:17, 20), or “evil” that is “present with me” (see also 7:5, 18, 25). This law-principle of sin does not operate in the “inner man,” but finds its expression in the unredeemed sinful “flesh” or humanness that will continue until we receive our glorified bodies (8:23).

7:23b The Source: Paul’s frustration is that the inner man is not always perfect because, even for the believer, the “law of sin” can temporarily make him “**captive**” (*aichmalotizo*, a military technical term “take prisoner, lead captive”) to sin that is in his “members,” that is his “flesh.” Now the sin principle only works in the “members” of his body (sensual), which can temporarily win over the regenerated mind, which now knows truth and holiness. Despite what the mind now knows, man cannot of his own power resist the indwelling sin nature. It will take more than understanding and loving truth and holiness. The overwhelming pressure to violate what is known to be true for immediate gratification continues to frustrate man (7:21). This is not a partial or deficient salvation, but it is the reality of a redeemed person locked up in an unredeemed body until the day of Redemption, the Second coming when we will finally receive a new body. In the meantime, how are we to treat this sinful nature according to these verses?

Eph 4:22
Rom 8:10

IV. Is there any hope for the believer?

^{NET} **Rom 7:24 Wretched** man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my **mind**, but with my **flesh** I serve the law of sin.

7:24 Paul's frustration is a cry of anguish. The word used, "**wretched**," was given to the church of Laodicea (Rev 3:17, "you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"). The word is *talaiporos*, "enduring toils and troubles, afflicted" (THAYER), which describes the ongoing conflict of the normal Christian life. The person who pretends to be a Christian yet never perceives this conflict may never have been saved.

2 Cor 13:5

- The inner conflict will rage until we are "free" (*rhuomai*, "draw to one's self, rescue, bring someone out of severe and acute danger") from our "body of death." The word is used of a soldier carrying a wounded comrade out of the place of danger. Paul longed for the day when he would be rescued from the last aspect of his old, sinful unredeemed body. Paul had describe this as the "body of sin" (Rom 6:6), thus sin works through our natural bodies (6:12-13, 19; 7:5, 23) which results in death (6:16, 21, 23; 7:10-11, 13, 8:10). How does Paul want to be free of this body of death?
Phil 1:23

7:25 The response is immediate, as though he had been musing without this knowledge but now suddenly discovered it (written for dramatic effect). The frustration and pain that sin will cause in the human life is nothing to be compared to what awaits the faithful believer (Rom 8:18). What one word describes the existence of the believer in this body of sin in these verses?

Rom 8:23

2 Cor 5:4

- Paul's great transformation was future. When and how is this body transformed according to 1 Cor 15:52-53?
1 Cor 15:56-57
Phil 3:20-21
- However, Paul's focus here is on the victorious daily battle to be fought by every Spirit sensitive believer. His concluding remarks describe the on-going conflict between the real Paul and two internal dominating influences. He is a "slave" (*douleuo*, present active tense: "continually or habitually..." – metaphorically, "to obey or submit to something") to two pressures: (1) with the mind he is servant to the law of God, while (2) with the flesh, he is servant to the law of sin (or his sinful nature or sensual passions). There is no hint of the eradication of this conflict or our sinful nature until the Rapture, only a progressive victory through the power of the indwelling Spirit. Teaching to the contrary is misleading (i.e. believers who pretend

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to have reached sinless perfection in this life). This is the meaning of 1 John 1:8-10.

What does the true believer think of his goodness or sinlessness?

What does the believer constantly recognize within himself?

How can you know if a person has the truth in him according to these verses?