

(i) *The Struggle, 7:14-23*

- Paul wants us to know that the problem is ‘Paul’ and not the law. The law is “spiritual” – the commandment is holy, just, and good. Paul contrasts himself with the law: *“but I am carnal”* – ‘I am made of flesh,’ which suggests that he is dominated by sinful tendencies. The flesh is by nature weak, unable to keep the law. Paul adds that he is *“sold under sin.”* There is a part of him that is still under bondage to sin! Paul acknowledges that he is still living under sin, meaning he is under the influence of sin. But he is not living in sin.
- This is a portrait of a believer! It is a description of the believer who struggles with his sinful depraved nature. Every born-again child of God hates sin. However, the old sinful nature is still there. Sin has been deposed but not expelled. It remains in him, though it is no longer in the place of predominance that it once held over him.
- There is a fierce war going on inside every Christian. It involves us in a relentless battle between our new man in Christ and our old sinful flesh. If you do feel the intensity of this internal strife, it is because you are converted to Christ. This is how life was for Paul – an inner war between his flesh and the Holy Spirit who dwells within (Gal 5:16-17). This is why Paul instructs believers to *“walk in the Spirit.”* The Spirit enables believers to resist temptations and to keep their eyes on the Lord. It is also clear that believers still have *“the lust of the flesh”* within them. This results in a war between the flesh and the Holy Spirit within each believer: *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.”* Within the one born of God, the flesh is lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit is setting its desires against the flesh. They are in fierce opposition to one another. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:22, *“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.”* To “put off” or “lay aside” is the idea of taking off dirty clothes. We have to take off the old self and disrobe the sin by confessing it, repenting of it, and resisting its temptation.
- V15 explains what it means to be sold under sin: *“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 being honest. Paul knew he ought to do good things, but he did not do them. On the other hand, he could not keep himself from doing evil things he knew he should not and did not want to do them. It was as if two men were inside him, pulling in different directions. He knew what was right and wanted to do it; and yet, somehow, he never could. He knew what was wrong and the last thing he wanted was to do it; and yet, somehow, he did. He felt dreadful about it. Then why does he do it? He simply does not understand. His problem isn’t desire - he wants to do what is right. His problem isn’t knowledge - he knows what the right thing is. His problem is lack of power. As a believer, Paul is still entrenched in this war against the sinful flesh within him. As believers, we will always be fighting sin. The battlefield is within us, and the spiritual conflict is not going away.

**The Struggle with Sin (7:1-25)**

- In Romans 7, we see the struggles of a believer who longs to experience victory over sin but does not understand that total victory cannot be obtained in the flesh because of the old “I” within us. Paul shows that we are no longer bound by the law because we are dead to the law. Nevertheless, the law is holy, just, and good. It is we who are the problem! Paul is relating his own experience as a believer in his struggle with sin to show the frustrations of trying to live under the law, and how the law is powerless to deliver us from the power of sin.

**1. Dead to the Law (7:1-6)**

- In the broad sense of the term, the law of God includes all the commandments, regulations, prohibitions, etc, which He has prescribed for mankind. Using a truth universally understood, Paul begins by noting that the law exercises control over a person only for as long as he is alive (v1). When the person dies, he is free from the power of the law. It is like a marriage relationship that is binding as long as both husband and wife live (vv2-3). If the husband dies, the woman’s obligation as a wife to her husband is discharged; she is “loosed” or freed from *“the law of her husband.”* Otherwise, she becomes an adulteress if she re-marries (1 Cor 7:39). As death dissolves the union between a wife and her husband, and the obligations resulting from that union, so the death of the Christian to the law dissolves that union, and the obligations from the union. Death ends the believer’s moral responsibility to the law.
- We died to the law through or *“by the body (death) of Christ”* (v4). We are identified with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (6:3-5). Just as Jesus died, He died for all who believe in Him. Dying to the law means that we are free from the curse or condemnation of the law, which is death (Gal 3:10,13). We died to the law in the sense that we no longer have to meet its requirements in order to gain acceptance with God. Since the believer has died with Christ, the law can no longer prosecute or punish him. We are dead to the power of the law. Note that the law has not died. Rather, believers have died to the law.
- 2 ramifications of the believer’s death to the law:
  - It prepares the way for another union (v4a). Every believer is now joined to Christ and has become His bride. We did not die to the law so that we could live lawlessly but that we might be joined to Christ, to be under His authority (1 Cor 9:21). The law of Christ contains a clearer revelation of God’s law and a higher standard than the law of Moses. The believer will engage in godly living as the result but not the cause of his salvation.
  - We are to be fruit bearers for God (v4b). We have become joined to Christ *“that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”* As long as the sinner is under the law (subject to its demands and curse) he brings forth fruit for death but when he is discharged from the law and joined to Christ, he brings forth fruit for God. Believers are empowered to live a holy life (6:22) for God’s glory.

- In v5 Paul shows why such fruitfulness is impossible under the law. *“In the flesh”* is descriptive of our standing before we were saved. *“The motions of sins”* or “sinful passions” refers to the corrupt inclinations of the unconverted heart - the lust, greed, pride, envy, etc., - which were aroused by the law to bear fruit unto death. The law does not create sinful passions, but it arouses and provokes the sinful passions within us (vv7-11); it generates sinful impulses which lead to breaking the law. Our rebellious nature is awakened when restrictions are placed on us and makes us want to do the very things the law forbids. The problem is not with the law, but with the sinful flesh.
- The law can only command – it cannot give strength to perform; it can only point out sin – it cannot enable one to conquer sin. V6: *“But now”* or under the gospel and being saved, we are delivered from the law. In Christ, we have been released from bondage to the law so that we can serve God in newness of the Spirit. We serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law (Phil 3:3-4), but in the new way, by submitting to the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. We do not serve to be saved but because of the gratitude that we are saved.

## 2. The Law & Sin (7:7-13)

- Paul defends the righteousness of God’s law against critics who argued that Paul’s teaching in v5 – that the law arouses our sinful passions - implies that the law is sinful. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin?* Does this mean that the Law is sinful or evil? Again, Paul answered with an emphatic, “God forbid!” and proceeds to show the true function of the law. Paul is speaking about his own experience from v7 onwards. He uses personal pronouns - “I,” “me,” “my,” and “myself” - more than 40X! 3 functions of the law with regard to sin:
  - (1) The Law Reveals Sin (v7). The law produces conviction of sin by teaching us what sin is. Paul would not have known sin if it had not been for the law (3:20). He uses as a personal example the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment against coveting. Had the Law not said, *“Thou shalt not covet,”* he would have never known what lust is (Phil 3:5-6). Coveting concerns our heart’s desires, whether we ever act on those desires or not (Matt 5:28). When the Holy Spirit brought the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment about coveting home to his conscience, Paul realized that he had violated God’s holy law. Paul is not blaming his sin on the law; he is merely pointing out the truth that the law made plain exactly what sin really is. The law shows us God’s standards and reveals how far short we fall from these standards.
  - (2) The Law Incites or Arouses Sin (vv7-12). Paul personifies sin as an active force that uses the law to provoke him to commit sin (v8). The command not to lust made Paul lust even more! Sin takes advantage of the law and arouses all kinds of forbidden desires within us. If there were no law, sin would not have that power (1 Cor 15:56). Why is the law the power of sin? Because the law stirs up sin. The law is not at fault. The fault lies in every man’s fallen nature inherited from Adam. We have a deeply ingrained rebellious spirit (Rom 8:7).

- Paul was sinful, but the sin was “dead” or lying dormant (v8b). It was dead as far as his awareness was concerned. With the law “dead,” Paul was “alive,” for he felt no guilt (v9a). He saw himself as blameless with regard to the law (Luke 18:11-12). But when he began to understand the true requirements of God’s moral laws, when it was applied to the heart and conscience, he saw he was sinful, and he came under the sentence of death (v9b). The law, through making sin known to Paul, made him realize that he was spiritually dead. It hit Paul in the heart and killed him.
- God has said that the commandments have the potential of giving life if kept faithfully (Lev 18:5; Rom 10:5). It directs people in the way of righteousness and peace and thus is meant to promote life. But it was not Paul’s experience (v10). He did not keep it faithfully any more than anybody else did, and sin revived, and thus, the commandments are “death” to him. The commandment was the instrument by which sin deceived him. One of Satan’s greatest deceptions is to get us to think of sin as something good that an unpleasant God wants to deprive us of (Eg. Eve - Gen 3:13; 1 Tim 2:14). The law does not cause death. It was sin that killed the apostle. The law only reveals it.
- The conclusion then is (v12), *“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good”* (Deut 32:4). The law is not in any way sinful. It comes from God and is an expression of God’s character (Ps 19:7-11). Although all of God’s people have been freed from the law in relation to salvation, they have never been free from God’s law as a rule of duty.
- (3) The Law Magnifies or Amplifies Sin (v13). It is sin that causes Paul’s spiritual death. Sin did the harm but did it through the law; it made use of what is good to bring about something evil. The law is given in order that sin might be seen for what it is - that sin *“might become exceedingly (utterly) sinful.”* Without the law we would not recognize sin in its deepest evil. Next to God’s holy magnifying mirror, we all appear as abominably filthy, utterly unholy! It shows us that we are utterly and completely sinful. It is not the law that brings death but sin which uses the law which itself is good. The law brings us to the end of ourselves so that we will be open to God’s mercy and grace. The law shows us our need for a Saviour.

## 3. The Christian’s Struggle with Sin (7:14-25)

- Romans 7:14-25 describes a believer (personal view). Reasons:
  - In 7:7-13, Paul uses the past tense, but in 7:14-25, he shifts to the present tense. It points more naturally to Paul’s present experience than to his reflection of the past.
  - The intensely personal character of the verses indicates that this was Paul’s own experience & frustrations as a believer.
 While Paul clearly holds that the Christian life is a victorious life, he does not see victory as without conflicts or struggles.