

A STUDY OF ROMANS
ROMANS 7 – PART 3
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Turn in your Bibles, please, to Romans 7. This will be our third session on this particular chapter. We'll begin at verse 14 of Romans 7, "¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks 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." Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

We need to read Romans 8:1 as the conclusion of chapter 7 because it's a summary statement of all of chapter 7. We'll begin in two weeks and pick up chapter 8. You have to read the context of 8:1, which really is a summary of all that we just have been learning, trying to figure out in Romans 7. With that in mind, would you pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we come to this most difficult passage. We trust that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher. We pray, Lord, that you would give us insight, that you would give us wisdom; that our learning would lead to living, just not stop at knowledge. Whole we just pray that you would be our teacher, we ask that only those things that are consistent with your glory would be the things that we will speak and the things that we will remember tonight, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

You have your handout on Romans 7. Two weeks ago, we looked at verses 1-6 and saw the believer and the law. We saw our relationship to the law. It is changed. That is because we now have a new relationship to the Savior. One's relationship to law has changed. We've been set free from the law. We're now in Christ, no longer in Adam. Then we saw last week the functions and the limits of the law. We saw where there was an illustration usage where God used the law to reveal the sinfulness of our flesh. In other words, its design was to expose us—not condemn us, as we will see next week, but to expose us. That's its purpose.

Then there was a condemnation usage of the law that Paul taught us last week in verses 8-13, in that sin was used to rekindle the desires of the flesh. You see, it's our understanding of the true nature and power of sin that helps us overcome it through the spirit. We saw that it had certain functions, but we also saw it has certain limitations.

Tonight we want to talk about what those limitations are. We've seen what its function is, and now we need to understand what the limitations of the law are. First of all, in verses 14-16, we see Paul's confusion. He basically says he doesn't do the things he wants to do, and he does the things that he doesn't want to do. That's the confusion that he has.

In verses 14-25, which follows logically upon verses 7-13 that we studied last week, Paul is reflecting upon his own situation and the situation of other people, just like himself. He discusses in these verses the activity of the struggle and the victory of life. He's talking about the struggle and the victory of life.

He doesn't find fault with God's holy law. That's not his point. The law exposes him because he said that's the purpose of the law is to expose me. He doesn't find fault with it. All it does is it says it reveals to me that I'm really polluted with sin. What he does here, is he doesn't attack the law. He basically offers a clear and open confession, and this is what he says, "we know that the law is spiritual, but I am not. I'm a slave sold to sin." Now that's a confession that he's making. He's taking a realistic look at himself. He admits, therefore, that although there's absolute goodness and beauty in the law of God, it cannot be perfected in his own strength. He said, "I see that the law is perfect. I see that it is spiritual. I see that it's good. But I cannot perform it. I cannot perfect it." That's what he's saying. And he knows this—as long as he's in this earthly life, he's still going to be in that struggle. He's just going to be in that struggle, and he goes into some detail of describing.

Now this is a very, very victorious passage; it's not a depressing passage, if you understand its right context. The Apostle generally deplores this fact he's been sold into sin as a slave, as he says, and this is basically what he confesses. He takes a realistic evaluation and estimation of himself. He says this, in sort of a paraphrase, "Indeed that which I'm accomplishing, I do not approve of. For not what I want to do, that is what I practice, but what I loathe, that's what I do. For what I do is not good, that I really want to do. It is the evil I do not want to do, that's what I practice."

Is not that the very same thing that he said in Galatians 5 when he's describing the struggle of life? In Galatians 5:17, Paul writes this to the church at Galatia, "The flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other." Those very things you may wish to be doing, those you are not doing." He's saying the same thing in Galatians that he's saying here in Romans 7.

What about Philippians 3:12-13? Is not this an understanding of he underrecognizing that he cannot perfect the law in himself? It exposes him, but he can't live it out perfectly. He's not talking about sinless perfection in his sanctification. Here's what he says to the church Philippi, "Not that I have already attained this," meaning perfection, "or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Jesus Christ has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own," in other words his sinless perfection, "but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to do what lies ahead." That's a very positive statement about what he's saying in Romans 7. He says, "I do some of the things that I don't want to do, and the things I really want to do, I don't do."

He's not being depressed by that; he's being realistic. He has a sane evaluation of himself. He's not hiding behind the fact that he is says I'm not perfect. You know, that's what we always say. Whenever we do something erroneous or will violate the Scripture, our defense and justification is, "Well, I'm not perfect." Well no kidding. {LAUGHTER} Now that's not what Paul is doing here. He's not saying that. He's taking a very positive approach to this when he's saying this, "I forget all of the failures of my past. But the one thing I do is forgetting what lies behind; I strive toward that which lies ahead."

Now here's a real definition of Christian maturity. We often think maturity is more knowledge, more Scripture. That would be true, it's going to be very helpful. No question about that. But we think that a person who is mature in Christ knows more than somebody else. There are two educational systems in the history of mankind. One is known as the Greek, and one is known as the Hebrew, or the Middle Eastern. The Greek system basically says that wisdom is the accumulation of knowledge. In other words, the more you know, the wiser you are. That's why you have Socrates and Aristotle and Plato.

You see, they know so much, and so therefore, we look at them as wise. Now they are wise, but the Greek educational system says the more you accumulate, the wiser you are.

The Hebrew system, the biblical system, basically says this—it's not the accumulation of knowledge that makes you wise; it's the application of knowledge. In other words, if I apply what I know, I'm wiser than the person who knows a lot and doesn't apply it. Our educational system in America is based upon the Greek philosophy. The more you know, the higher degree you get. You see, realistically, we need to understand what Paul is saying is this, "I forget those things of my failure. I press on toward the future." You see, he's taking a very, very positive approach to the realistic understanding and sane view he has of himself, "There's a struggle that I have. One side of me wants to do this; and one side of me wants to do that. But because I'm now in Christ and I'm not in Adam, I forget what lies behind me, all my failures, and I press on toward my future." You see there's the definition of maturity.

Maturity is not this—maturity is not whether or not you fail; it's how quickly you get up when you rebound. That's the definition of maturity. It's not that you're going to fail, because you're going to do that. You and I are failures. The definition of maturity is not do I correct my failure; it's how quickly do I rebound when I've hit bottom. That's why in business, in my consulting group, I teach people, "Don't pursue success. The only thing success leads to is failure. Once you get to the top, the only way you can go is down." The real test of your success is how quickly you rebound when you've hit bottom.

You see, if you were to ask the CEO of my corporation the definition of success, you'd get one answer. If you asked the president of the market here in Pittsburgh the definition of success, you're going to get another answer. If you ask me what the definition of success is, you're going to get another answer. You see, for an employee to pursue success is like chasing a cat up a tree. You don't know which limb it's going to go on. Everybody has a different definition of success. Paul is saying pursue excellence.

One of the ways you pursue excellence is this—you know your position, you know yourself. You have a sane estimate of who you are. You know there's a struggle going on within you. When you fail, you get right back up because you know this—I'm not going to give myself to the failures of the past; I'm going to pursue that which is forward. Scripture teaches how to do that. You see, we feel guilty for two reasons. One, you are. {LAUGHTER} Two, you choose to feel guilty.

I would say more often than not, we choose to feel guilty. I was talking with a young friend who's having difficulty with her child. She says, "I feel guilty that I'm not doing better." I said, "Don't do that. Don't choose to feel guilty. You're doing the best you can, correct? Then you have no reason to feel guilty." You can't go...the response of your child does not determine your success. You're basing your success upon what you see in your child. You have to realize your child right now is a sinful little viper. {LAUGHTER} You can't evaluate your success based upon her response to you. Something has to change in her heart before you can start evaluating your success. Be excellent. Pursue excellence. You're doing all the right things. You have to trust Christ with the rest."

***Audience Member:** Does that also apply to your spouse?*

In what way?

***Audience Member:** Maybe not a sinful little viper, but all we can do is do the best...*

Do the best you can and trust Christ with the rest. That's not a copout, as we'll see in a moment. Where in the world did you get that question? {LAUGHTER} Anyway, here's my point, Sig. My point is this. The test of our maturity as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, is not whether or not you're successful; it's how quickly you rebound when you know you've failed.

That's what Paul is saying. That's why that critical verse in 7:25 is, "But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." You see, he takes a realistic, sane evaluation of himself. It's a very positive way he's looking at himself by saying this, as he told us in Philippians, "But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind." That doesn't mean you don't learn from your failures. You certainly do. Failure can be a wonderful teacher, but you don't get bogged down into it. You don't become depressed over your failures because you know right away that you are what? You're a failure. You are a one. Be realistic. In the eyes of God you are a failure. That's why Christ died for you. We already learned that in chapter 6. He says, "What lies behind, I forget that, and straining forward to press on to what lies ahead."

What do you do when you are guilty? Well, 1 John 1:9 tells us what we do. We forget that and we do this. For God is, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to cleanse us of our sins and cleanse of all unrighteousness, forgives us our sins and cleanses." The word "confess" is the Greek word *homologeō*. It means to say the same thing as what somebody else says. Who defines what sin is? God does. It's not our culture. It's not our society. It's not the constitution. It doesn't define sin; God does.

What we're saying is when I confess my failure, I'm saying, "Lord, you're right. I'm wrong. I failed. Will you forgive me?" He forgives us because we are now in Christ, not in Adam. He cleanses us of the desire to want to do that again. You see, righteousness is right-wisdom. It means making the right decision. He cleanses of all those things that hinder us from making the right decision. It doesn't mean that you're going to be perfect the next time. But it does mean this—you don't worry about the past. You press on toward the future because you know this—I have been forgiven in Christ, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those of us in Christ. That's what we're going to see in two weeks. That's a result of what Paul is taking a sane estimate about himself.

[UNCLEAR] the fact that in his inner being, Paul says this—that he really doesn't do what he wants to do, and what he wants to do is sometimes contrary to God's will, and he detests that situation in which he finds himself. It fills him with courage so that he is able to explain "According to my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see in my bodily members a different law, waging war against the law of my mind and making a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?" Here's the wonderful, positive side of how he's looking...you see, if you really want to understand the joy of Christ, you've got to see your own position before Christ. This is who I am. And then he says this, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This summary statement that he makes, "So then I myself with my mind serve the law of God that my flesh, the law of sin," that doesn't cancel out the assurance of the assurance of his victory expressed in these memorable words in 7:25, "But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, everything that he's talking about the realistic, sane evaluation of himself and the struggle of life takes him to that one sentence, "But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, he's talking about the solution. The solution is not more knowledge. It's not more activity. It's not more effort. The solution he's saying is "Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ." He points us to whom? The person and work of Christ. When you recognize your sin, what does it do? It points you to Christ. It shouldn't point you to your failures; it points you to Christ. That's what Paul is saying.

You see, this is a very, very hopeful passage. It's not one of despair. He first of all says, "You've got to take a sane evaluation of yourself." The degree to which you understand yourself will be the degree to which you understand the grace of God.

He talks about the corruption in verses 17-20. He realizes the total corruption of his old, sinful nature, that it's corrupt. It's in the flesh. There's nothing good about that. Then he comes to a conclusion in verses 21-23. He understands this daily struggle that's within him, and he manages it. He doesn't try to

escape it, justify it, rationalize it away. He deals with it. He said the old nature is always tempting me to do wrong. That's verses 21 and 23. But he says the new nature is always tempting me to do right. That's the struggle. When he fails, he doesn't worry about the failures. He points to the person and work of Christ, confesses his sin and moves on. That's the sign of our maturity. Maturity is not what we know; it's what we show.

One of the things we show is this—when you fail, how quickly do you get back up. You see, that's the greatest panacea for depression. You see that? The greatest panacea for depression is realizing that Christ, you're no longer in Adam; you're in Christ, and you have hope. You have hope. That's what Paul is leading us to.

After he deals with the law and it's defeating purpose in his life, Paul concludes that there are two natures existing within him, that operate in his life. Two principles, or two laws, as he says. The first one is the law of sin and death, and the second one is the law of the spirit of life in Christ. Look at chapter 8:2—you'll see that contrast. The law of sin and death and the law of the spirit of life in Christ.

He's dealing, then, when the two, the presence of these two natures in the child of God in himself and in us means this—that salvation does not mean that God changes the old nature, that he cleanses it or that he removes it. The believer's old nature is just as wicked and is opposed to the law of God as it was the day he was saved. Salvation means that God gives you, a believer, a new nature. Doesn't remove the old one; he gives you a new nature. He crucifies the old one. You're dead to sin. That's what we learned about in Romans 6.

The believer still has the ability to sin, but notice, now he has the desire and the appetite for holiness. You see, that's the struggle. We still have the ability to sin because of our sinful nature. But we've got a new nature. Doesn't remove the other one. You see, the dynamic of sin is there, but the desire isn't. That's because you've got a new nature, because you're no longer in Adam, you're in Christ.

Paul is saying there's a conflict there. The law of sin and death is simply the operation of the old nature, so that when the believer wants to do good, Paul says, that evil is always present. That evil is present in our motives. You see, we want to do the right thing, but secretly the motive says, "Maybe I'll get more money," "Maybe it's about me," "Maybe I'll be able to write a book," "Maybe they'll put me on the radio," "Maybe they'll put me on TV."

You see, I don't know what preachers go through. My church in Chicago, a gentleman sold his business and he gave a huge donation to church and said, "I want to put you on radio," and I said, "No way. I can't be on the radio and pastor this church and do both well, so you pick one or the other. I'm not going to be on the radio. It's the last thing I wanted. No, I'm not going to write a book. I don't have time to do that. If I'm going to do my job well as your pastor/teacher, then forget the radio and forget the book."

I was dealing with myself because what was it, the old nature was saying, "Maybe you can write a book. Maybe you'll get a bigger church. Maybe you'll have greater numbers," as I looked out and saw 75 people in my flock. The first question is, "What did you do wrong? How come you don't have 400?" You see, that's that nature that just rears its ugly head. Even though you desire to do good, Paul says that in the midst of my desire to do good, I've got to realize that evil is always present. It's always there, and that's why you have to fight it. The answer to that is, "But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ," as we'll see in a moment.

You see, sin is evil, is present even in our desire to do good works. Why is that people give gifts to philanthropy? I don't know. Only they can answer that. I was in a situation in Philadelphia with a potential new business client who has a foundation. I later learned that this man made a significant gift

to a college. He said, “I’ll double the gift every year if you name the college after me. If you change the name of the college, I’ll give you as much money as you want.” A good deed. A good/bad work. Good in the eyes of man, but bad in the eyes of God. You see, in the midst of that desire to do something philanthropically that was good, and that was to fund this institution, behind it was this desire, “Maybe they’ll name it after me and change the name of the college, which has been there for 150 years, and name it after me. It’ll be my college.”

Paul is saying that, in the midst of our desire to do the good things, you’ve got to be aware that evil is right there beside you. It exists. Look at verse 21. You see, it’s here that you and I see the difference between the victory of chapter 6 and that which we read in chapter 7. In chapter 6, the believer gains victory over the evil things of the flesh, that is, he ceases to do evil deliberately. That’s chapter 6. You’re free from now choosing to do it deliberately. You may do it accidentally, you might do it because of the struggle, but that is not your deliberate choice. You’ve been set free from choosing that, we’re told in chapter 6.

In chapter 7, he triumphs over this—over the good things that the flesh would have you do in obedience. What do I mean by that? Chapter 6 deals with our freedom from the sin, and chapter 7 deals with our freedom from the law, even the good things that we think we need to do, in obedience, that are going to gain merit for God. Do you see, we are called to do good works. No question. But do you get merit, credit for your good works? No. You get credit for the sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ. That’s why the subtlety is this, “I want to do the good stuff, but I’ve got to realize at the same time that evil is right around the corner lurking its head saying, ‘Eh, Bruce, why don’t you just twist it and do it this way.’” You see, that’s the difficulty Paul is saying. But his answer is this, “But thanks be to God who rescues me from all of that.”

Chapter 6 frees us from sinning deliberately, and chapter 7 frees us from using the law as a means of achieving our salvation, using the law as a means of accomplishing our justification or our sanctification. You see, you’ve been set free from that. That’s chapter 7. God will not accept the things done in the flesh.

***Audience Member:** What do you think was Paul’s biggest sins? He doesn’t pin anything down, but...*

What do I think his biggest sin was? I have no idea. I’ll ask him when I see him and let you know. {LAUGHTER} Really don’t know.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, you said it frees from choosing sin.*

Correct. What do I...hang on; we’re going to discuss that again, because you’re still going to choose to do it. This is all introduction. Bear with me. Notice, when we say that we’re free from the law, of doing the good things in the flesh, that means with a secret motive that I want to build me up. That’s what I mean in the flesh. You’ve been set free from doing those good things in the flesh. That’s what Paul is talking about in Romans 7. That’s what I mean when I say you’re free from the law, of doing the good things in the flesh, to earn your salvation, justification or sanctification.

John 6:33 says this, “The flesh profits nothing.” It means when you do good deeds in the flesh, they’re no value. That means you’ve got to check your motive. We are not in the motive checking business, as believers. The only person you can check the motive of is yourself. You’ve not been given, nor have I been given, the ministry motivation checking by the Holy Spirit. The only motive you can check is your own. That’s what Paul is saying. You’ve got to do that and take a sane estimation of yourself.

Yet how many of us set up laws, little Christian laws, that we set up for our lives and seek to discipline the flesh, “I’m going to discipline my flesh by doing this and not doing that and doing this and not doing that. I’m going to discipline my flesh into obedience,” when God says this. The old nature is not subject to the law of God, indeed neither can it be. In other words, there’s no value in trying to discipline yourself in the flesh. Yes, we need to do that, but not for the point of achieving merit. That’s what Paul is saying. You’re freed from that, doing the good things in the flesh as a means of earning your salvation, earning your justification or improving your sanctification. I’ll show you in a moment how that works itself out.

Paul says that the law of sin and death is counteracted by what he says the other law that’s in us, and that is the law of life in Christ. It is not by submitting to the outward laws that we grow in holiness and serve God acceptably, but by surrendering to the indwelling Holy Spirit. This law or principle that Paul is talking about is elaborated in chapter 8, and we’ll get to that in two weeks, especially the first 17 verses. I’d encourage you to read that.

What Paul is saying is this, in summary, “We cannot fulfill the righteousness of the law by our own strength.” That’s the bottom line. You just can’t do it in your own strength. He says the spirit fulfills it in us by his power, and that’s chapter 8:3-4, which we’ll pick up in the couple of weeks.

What’s the practical application of what we’ve learned so far? Remember our whole emphasis is what am I going to do about what I learned. Let me see if we can talk about some things. First of all, in our new position before God, of being in Christ and no longer in Adam, as dead to the law, using our good works to achieve righteousness, God does not expect us to obey God in our own strength. He does not expect that of us. God has not enslaved us under a set of Christian laws, if you would, that we must obey in order to be holy. Rather, he’s given us his Holy Spirit as the means by which that changes our desire to do the things. Remember this—the dynamic of sin is there but the desire to isn’t. The dynamic is there, but the desire isn’t there in our new nature because we have the Holy Spirit, which fights that for us. That’s our battle.

Let me just show you something. One of the great principles of Scripture is this—that God never expects something of us, doesn’t require of us, something he doesn’t equip us to do beforehand. God never requires of you and me something that he doesn’t equip us to do beforehand, because he knows this—and that’s what Paul is saying—he know this; that you will never be able to accomplish it in your own strength; therefore, he gives us the Holy Spirit as the power source by which we are empowered to do that. That’s what Paul is saying. He says, simply put, God doesn’t expect you to obey him and become righteous in your own strength.

Let me show you some verses that will help you understand that. Go to Ezekiel 36:22. Here’s the principle we need to understand in Scripture. God never requires of us something he doesn’t equip us to do beforehand. Ezekiel 36:22-23, “²²Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”

The expectation is this—your purpose and my purpose in life are identically the same. Every person in the body of Christ has the same identical purpose, and that is this—to be the means by which God is going to vindicate the holiness of his name. That’s your purpose in life. If you’re a doctor, a lawyer, an Indian chief, a stay-at-home mom, a banker, a teacher, an athlete, retired—whatever it is—your purpose is never changing. Now that you’re in Christ and not in Adam, you have the same purpose as everybody

else sitting in this room, and that is this—you are the means by which God is going to vindicate the holiness of his name. Paul is teaching us this—you can't do that in your own strength. The principle of Scripture is this—God never requires of us to do that unless he does something for us first. Notice what he says, “And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.” (Ezekiel 36:-23)

Here's what he does, “I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.” (Ezekiel 36:24) The first thing he does is he calls us to have a relationship with him. We don't call him. He chooses us, “I'm going to call you from the nations.” Secondly, “²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” The second thing he does is this—calls us to himself, he cleanses us from ourselves. If you and I are going to be the vehicles and the vessels, the clay pots by which we demonstrate the holiness of his great name, the first thing he's going to have to do is clean us up, because right now, we are filthy vessels. We are sinful little vipers at birth. Something has to happen. We've got to be cleansed. We can't do that. That's what the person and work of Christ does. You see, we don't do this in our own strength. He calls us to himself. He cleanses us from ourselves.

Notice next, “²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” That's regeneration. The second thing he does is he gives us a new life. He creates a new life within us. Calls us to himself, cleanses us from ourselves, creates a new life within us. That's regeneration. He takes that heart which is insensitive to spiritual things and he replaces it with a heart that is sensitive to spiritual things. That is called regeneration. It's called being born again. It's called being born from heaven. It's called salvation. It's called conversion. What it is, it's something that God does. What's he doing? He's equipping you to fulfill what he's called you to do for the purpose in your life. Calls you to himself, cleanses you from yourself, creates a new life within you.

But that's not all. Notice the next one, “²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” The next thing he does is he completes us with the Holy Spirit. Here's what he does to equip us to fulfill our purpose in life. Calls you to himself, cleanses you from yourself, creates a new life within you, completes you with the Holy Spirit. Notice the end result—cause you to walk in my statutes. What is that?

Audience Members: His Word.

That's obedience. It's obedience. Who takes responsibility for your obedience? God does. That doesn't mean you copout and say, “Oh the devil made me do it.” I'm not saying that. But I am saying this. I know that I cannot be obedient in my own flesh, because anything I do in my own flesh, the Scripture says is no value. That's what Paul is saying. He's summary, saying all of chapter 7 he says, “Look, you've been set free from doing the good things in your flesh that have no merit. Don't you understand that anything that you do in the flesh is of no value, because only those things that are done by the spirit are of value?” He's basically saying this, “You can't be obedient in your own strength.” You can't be obedient in your own strength.

Christians have the victory of chapter 6 over sin, deliberate sin, and we're no longer enslaved by the body of flesh. That's what we learned in chapter 6. But there's more to the Christian life, Paul says. Shouldn't we produce fruit for God? Isn't that we're called to do? Absolutely. But the minute we start doing works in our own strength, Paul says this, “We discover that we're failures.” The moment you start doing it in your own strength is when we realize that we're failures. And sad to say, many well-meaning believers stop right there and become spiritual casualties because they think that they can do

good things in their own strength. Rather, we should accept the truths of Romans 7, of what Paul is saying. He's saying that when I do have a desire to do the good things, evil is right there beside it. I've got to recognize that. We've got to accept Romans 7, that we are indeed failures in ourselves when we try to do things by the flesh, in our own sinful nature is what I mean. We need to understand that the law is good, but we are carnal in the sense of we have evil lurking right beside us. And then we've got to allow the Holy Spirit to work out God's will in our life.

That's essentially what Jesus is teaching in his first staff meeting at the Beatitudes in chapter 5 when he says this. He gives a picture of how you enter the kingdom of God in the Beatitudes, those eight character qualities. He also describes the character of a person who's in the kingdom of God. He also describes the quality of life of the witness of the person that's in the kingdom of God. But the first verse that he says in the Beatitudes is the critical one, and that is this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God." In other words, poor in spirit means this—I'm a spiritual beggar. Do you realize that spiritually you're a beggar? It means literally this—I'm bankrupt. I have no spiritual resources to live a life that God wants me to live. That's what Paul is saying in Romans 7. "I don't have what it takes," he's saying.

He's not saying that depressively, discouragingly; he's saying, I realize that, but the answer is thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is hope. It's not in me; it's in him. Blessed are the poor in spirit is exactly a summary of all of Romans 7, because Paul is saying this. You've got to realize, first of all, to live a life of victory, you've got to realize you don't have the resources. It's not within you to do it. But God has equipped you to do that because he's called you to himself, he's cleansed you from your sin, he creates a new life within you, he completes you with the Holy Spirit and the end result is that you have a desire, you have an appetite for holiness that you didn't have before. You see, that's the sign of your true conversion. Do you have an appetite for holiness?

One of the backhanded confidences that you can have of your salvation is this. Do I struggle? That may be one of the greatest indications of your salvation, because you see, the non-believer doesn't strong about this. He could give a rip about what I'm saying. He doesn't care about that. He can only do one thing—that's think one way and act one way. He can't do anything else. All he can do is act one way because he only thinks one way.

You see, the proof of our salvation, our regeneration, is I don't want today, but I find myself wanting to do it. I want to do this, but I don't want to do that. You see, that may be one of the indications of your true salvation. It's because you recognize that. Paul is saying this—you've got to come to grips with it, folks, that you can't be obedient in your own strength. But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The law of sin really is alive all the time. We need to understand the agony of Paul's problem is this. What a miserable person I am. Who will free me from this life dominated by sin? The answer is...thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, that's why it's such a hopeful passage. It's not a discouraging passage. He's not describing a depressed believer; he's talking about a realistic person who sees himself the way he ought to see himself. He sees himself in reality. He's poor in spirit and he realizes this—thanks be to God.

There are certain truths that we can gain from this passage that are extremely critical for our understanding of our Christian walk. I don't have time to go through all of these verses. Just let me highlight three insights that Paul gives us in verses 24 and 25, and that's this. He teaches us a truth about the unregenerate, about the unbeliever. He gives us some wonderful truths about the unregenerate, which means I ought to examine myself in light of these truths. Secondly he teaches us about the truth

about the power of sin. Thirdly, he teaches us about the limits of the law. The truths about the unregenerate, the truths about the power of sin, and the truths about the limits of the law.

Let's take a look at those quickly. First of all, he gives us some truths in verses 13-25 about the unregenerate. The reason I'm going to go over this, folks, is because...have this be a mirror that you look at yourself and say am I that or am I in Christ. It can only be one of the two. You're either in Christ or you're in Adam. Here are the truths that he teaches us. The unregenerate is wrong about his view of the law, and he's wrong about his view of himself. The reason he has an incorrect view of the law is because he has an incorrect view of himself. The reason he has an incorrect view of himself is because he has an incorrect view of the law. You see, that's the position he's in. The unbeliever is pleased with himself and he thinks that he can justify himself by his works. You see, he pleased with himself, "I can do that. I've got the Ph.D. I've got the degrees. I've got the experience. I've got all the support. I can do that." You see, the non-believer is pleased with himself because he says, "I can do it." Paul says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That's the person who enters the Kingdom.

The unbeliever is totally unaware of the sinful nature that is within him. Paul says that, "Evil exists within me. Sin is within me," and that he has sold unto sin. You see, the non-believer doesn't recognize that. He's not aware of that. He doesn't understand the true nature of sin. He never talks about sin as Paul is talking about sin in this passage. You never hear a non-believer say, "I do this. I don't want to do that." You never hear them say that. You never hear an unbeliever say the he hates sin. He may be annoyed with himself when he suffers the consequences of his choices, but that doesn't mean that he hates his sin.

You see, the unbeliever would very much dislike the consequences of sin, but would have the sin without the consequences if it were possible. You see, that's the unbeliever. In other words, he does not having understanding of the true nature of sin. That's where we come across the greatest problems of this world. You see, the world does not have a true understanding of the nature of sin. He does not know anything about the true meaning of the law, so he does not have a desire to keep it or desire to live according to it.

Conversely, in these verses, you see the picture of a regenerate person. The regenerate person understands the spiritual nature of the law. Desires to keep it, but who finds in practice that he can't do it in his own flesh. You have a desire, but you just can't do it in your own flesh. You see, the spiritual nature of the law, he admires it, he wants to keep it, but try as he will, he cannot keep it in his own strength. You see, that's a sign of your true regeneration. You desire to do it, but you know can't do it in your own strength. There's a duality, if you would, that exists—there's two principles existing within us—in a non-believer. That doesn't exist in a non-believer. It's only the regenerate has this struggle. The unregenerate can only think one way and act one way. They can only think one way. Within them, the dynamic of sin is there and the desire is there. That's why sometimes you say, "Why are they doing that?" We think that a non-believer should act the way that we think. They can't do that because they only have one nature. You can only act out the nature that you have. They can only think one way, and therefore, they can only act one way. And yet we have the expectation of, "Why aren't they doing those good things? Why do they act like a jerk?" That's because they are one. Why did I act like that? That's because I was a jerk, and still am in many senses. But I realize this, that there's that struggle that's within. It's a wonderful struggle because it points you to the person and work of Christ. But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What about the power of sin? The truth about the power of sin. Well the first thing we learn about sin is that it dwells within us. Paul says that three times—dwells within us. In other words, literally, in the Greek, it means it takes up a home in us. Sin makes a home in us. We should never think that sin is something outside us. We always think sin is out there. I'll tell you where sin is. It's in here. It's in my

members. It's in my eyes. It's in my mouth. It's in my tongue. It's in my hands. That's where it is, Paul tells us. There's another law that exists within me. You see, sin is within us, Paul tells us. We always think that it's something that's outside of us.

David said the same thing in Psalm 51 when he said this, "We are born in sin." You see, sin is in us from the very beginning. We don't acquire it. You don't learn it. It's something that we inherit. It's a vital part of our very makeup. It's within us. The regenerate person knows that and says, "That's why I can't fulfill it in my own strength. I must depend upon the person and work of Christ."

Secondly, we learn of the power of sin, not only it's presence. It's within us. It's in our members. It's why we've got to take care of what you look at. How does sin entice us? It's through the senses. It's through what we hear. What kind of music we listen to. What we see. The pictures we look at. The ads we look at. The movies we go to. All those things stimulate us. The desire is there, "I don't want to do that," but when you get fed those different stimuli through the senses of your body, you see, sin makes it appeal to our senses. Now there's nothing unholy about the body. All Paul is saying is this—you've got to manage that. You've got to take responsibility, he says, so I've got to realize that sin is in my members.

That's why glorification is freedom from the presence of sin. Justification is freedom from the penalty of sin. Sanctification is freedom from the power of sin. Glorification is freedom from the presence of sin. The only time you're ever going to be free of that is when God glorifies you by taking you home. Then you're free of it. That's why we have a celebration at the death of a loved one who's in Christ, because they're free from that. For the first time in their life, they're free of that. That's a great glorification. That's why I refer to the death of a believer is a glorification.

Now notice, a second thing we know is this, that the sin that dwells within us is more powerful than our own willpower. The sin that dwells within us is more powerful than our own willpower. It is more powerful than one who can say this, "I agree that the law is good. I agree with everything that it says. I agree it condemns and I condemn the same things that it does. I do not want to do anything that both I and the law condemn and hate, yet I do it. For the sin that dwells within me is more powerful than all my fleshly opposition to oppose it." You see, that's how powerful it is. It dwells within us and it's more powerful than our own fleshly willpower. You see, with all the enlightenment that we have in that last centuries, all the stuff that's available, all the Bibles that are on our bookshelves, all the CD's that we have, all the books that we can read, you see, often times, learning just stops at knowledge, when learning should lead to living.

Let me give you my little exposition here on the status of the church today in America. We buy into this. We don't understand what Paul is talking about, the nature and the power of sin. We have gone, in the church, from theology to marketing. The church is now consumer driven. We're one of the largest consumers in the United States is the church, the Christian movement. Just some statistics about our society in general in the United States about marketing and consumerism. Twelve billion catalogs were sent out last year, to entice people. That means that you and I are exposed to 20,000 ads per year, or 1,600 advertisements per day. What is that? That's marketing. That's what it is. It's trying to get us to act one way by getting us to think a certain way.

So what happens to the church? We take surveys. What is it you want to do? What is it you would like to have? Now do you think Paul took a survey to the church at Rome when he wrote Romans 5, 6 and 7? I don't think he did. I don't think he said, "What are your felt needs?" You see, what happens today in America, preaching has become nothing more than well-being consultants. That's what a preacher is today. We're a well-being consultant, because we've been so focused on consumerism, and we've bought into this marketing mentality, that we're just like every other consumer. What is it the consumer

wants? That's what I'm going to give them. I have 75 people in my church. What do I need to do? I need to find out why I can get more people in. That's marketing. You see, we've replaced theology with marketing. We've become consumers. So preaching, unfortunately, rather than proclamation of biblical truth.

Preachers in the pulpit today in America are nothing more than well-being consultants. How can I teach you something that's going to make you feel better about yourself, because I'm concerned about your well-being? Now yes, we're concerned about your well-being. But the way you do that is you preach the person and work of Christ, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. That's the best message I can give for your well-being. It's not going to draw people to the church.

You know, people don't want to hear the message I have to say. That's why I'm not pastoring. Nobody wants to hear it. But there are certain people in churches who do. But most people don't want to have that because it's not a well-being consultant. You see, we've trained people in our seminaries to preach for felt needs. Christ is the only one who can meet those felt needs, and proclaiming truth is the way we do it.

Learning should not stop at knowledge; it should lead to living, and living should lead to loving, because God is love. In my mind, it's utterly ridiculous, really ridiculous, to suggest that a certain amount of moral teaching, more education in regard to sex education and crime consequences that follow certain actions, are going to solve the problems of the moral decay of our society. Do you realize that there have been more rapes and violent sexual activities in America since we've taught sex education in the schools? It's increased. Why is that? That's what the law does. It stimulates that.

Now you have to have the right balance. I'm not saying we don't do that. All I'm saying is this. When we talk about transformation of a society, it goes in three stages. You transform the person, you transform the organization, then you transform culture. It starts with the transformation of the person. That's where it all starts.

Life in the garden was quite simple, until sin entered in. Sin introduced complications. The first sin had to be covered up. The second sin led to lying. And so the process has continued ever since. So we cannot blame the truth. We cannot blame the law. We can't blame God. It's that foul sin that's within us that has produced the complications in us. Before sin came in the Garden of Eden, it was very, very uncomplicated. When sin came in, these four things happened—blame, shame, confusion and death. Blame—she did it. He was the first cad in history. He blamed it on her. Shame and blame. They tried to cover themselves up. That's what sin has done, and it continues to do that. Shame, blame, confusion and death. That's exactly what Paul is saying. You've got to realize that's where we're living.

What is the answer? The answer is Romans 7:25, "But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." What about the truth of the law? Let me close with this. What Paul is most concerned about in Romans 7, more than anything else, is to show us that the law cannot deliver us. That's the whole point of chapter 7. He wants to show us that the law cannot deliver you from this condition. Our only hope is Romans 7:4, when Paul wrote this, "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law," that means fulfilling it in your own flesh, "through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."

You see, he's saying the law can't do that. The only one who can do that is the person and work of Christ. Although the law is spiritual and good, he says, it can never deliver a man from sin. It just can't do that. It was never given to do that. It was given so that we would see two things—the exceeding sinfulness of sin and to be a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It was never meant to be the end and all. It

was just a means to an end. The means to the end is to expose us of our sinfulness and to point us to the person and work of Christ. That's why Romans 7:25 is such a wonderful, encouraging verse because he summarizes it this way, "But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore there is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1) You see, chapter 6 freed us from sin, chapter 7 freed us from the law, and chapter 8 freed us from condemnation. You're no more condemned because of your condition, because you're no longer in Adam; you're in Christ.

Let's pray. Father, once again we just pray that you would be pleased to have us only remember those things that are consistent with your revealed truth, those things that your Holy Spirit would want us to know. Father, forgive us for any inadequacy of teaching, the inadequacy of my study, my presentation. I just pray, Lord, that you would override that, and all those things that are consistent with your nature and your attributes would be the things that we would remember. Father, thank you for the clarity of this Word, and thank you for the hope that we see in chapter 7, and thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen and amen!