

Week #4 – Wrestling with Sin<sup>1</sup>  
*Romans 7:13-8:4*

**Key Concepts:**

The Sinfulness of "Sin"  
Our Internal Struggle Against Sin  
Deliverance by the Power of the Holy Spirit

**Background (*Romans 6:1-7:12*)**

Now that we have a new position in Jesus Christ (*Romans 6:1-23*) through our belief in Him for salvation. We also have a new relationship to the Mosaic Law (*Romans 7:1-12*). We have **died** to the Law – that is we are no longer required to keep it in order to further our spiritual growth. Still, the Law is "holy, righteous, and good" (*7:12*). Because of this, the Law reveals God's clear distinction between **sin** and **righteousness** for us. The result is that since we know what sin is, we are tempted to give into it.

**The Sinfulness of "Sin" (*Romans 7:13*)**

*v. 13* – Paul continues to unroll his discussion through the use of rhetorical questions (cf. *Romans 6:2* and *15*).

Some people might have thought removing **the Law** would solve the problem of death and sin. Paul argues that the Law did not bring death. Rather, sin used the Law to bring about death. This highlights the **evil** nature of sin (*Genesis 4:7*).

"While the Law has its limitations and weaknesses, it is not evil, and it is not synonymous with sin. There is a close relationship between the Law, sin, and death, but the Law and sin are very different. The Law is "**holy, righteous, and good,**" while sin is sinister."<sup>2</sup>

In the end, don't confuse the Law with sin, as they are **distinct** according to Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> This material was covered in an excellent message entitled "Wild Dog or Child of God?" preached on April 6, 2008 as part of the NextStep series at Topeka Bible Church (<http://topekabiblechurch.org/services/sunday/sermons/180-your-next-spiritual-step-wild-dog-or-child-of-god>).

<sup>2</sup> See Bob Deffinbaugh, "The Loveliness of the Law and the Ugliness of Sin," [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

### Questions:

1. Even though we are no longer required to keep the Mosaic Law for our spiritual growth, is there value in studying it? Why or why not? How frequently do you study the Mosaic Law?
2. If the Law is good, and sin is evil, why does our culture so frequently believe the opposite? Can you cite some examples?

### Our Internal Struggle Against Sin (*Romans 7:14-25*)

*v. 14* – Because the Law was given by **God**, it is spiritual. Unlike the Law, however, Paul is not composed of spiritual matter, but **fleshly** matter (“unspiritual,” NIV). This does not mean that we do not have the Holy Spirit. Rather, our human nature is **sinful** (i.e. – sold into bondage to sin) with a built-in tendency towards rebellion.

“In chapter 6 he spoke of the relationship of the new man in Christ (the **whole** person, the Christian) to sin. In chapter 7 he spoke of the relationship of the old nature (**a part** of every person, including the new man in Christ) to sin.”<sup>3</sup>

The Law is not the problem in Paul's struggle with sin. He is the problem because of his sinful nature. His nature prohibits him from fully **understanding** God's law as well as fully **obeying** it.

#### *vv. 15-17 – Doing the things we do not want to do ...*

We can all relate to Paul's experience in verse 15. We so often do the thing that we do not want to do. Paul notes, however, that the Law was not **responsible** for his wrong doing (*vv. 16-17*). *He* was to blame for it because of the **sin** that dwelt/lived within him. Mentally, Paul agreed with the Law, but the weakness of his flesh kept him from obeying it. The same is true for us today.

#### *vv. 18-21 – Not doing the things that we want to do ...*

Paul recognized that, because of his wretched sinfulness (flesh, or “total depravity”), he was not able to live his life in constant **obedience** to God.

He reiterates his point from verses 15 through 17 here to express his frustration with the reality and consequences of his sinfulness. Ultimately, Paul concludes in verse 21 that evil is present **within** him.

\*\*Note that while the flesh is **weak**, sin is **evil**.\*\*

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Tom Constable's *Notes on Romans*, p. 79  
(<http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/romans.pdf>).

## ***vv. 22-25 – The Wretched Man with a Glorious Hope!***

Paul again articulates his struggle with sin in terms of **internal** agreement with the Law, but **external** rejection of it. Paul has been taken “prisoner” by sin and he’s being held hostage within his own body, being forced to do that which he does not want to do!

His desperate plea in verse 24 reveals that he wants to be set free from this bondage. Paul knows that he will **never** be set free from the struggle until his death (and future glorification, *Romans 8:23*). He knows that he is **helpless** to overcome his struggle on his own power. Thus, the ability to experience victory in the struggle with sin must come from elsewhere – through **Jesus Christ** (*7:25*)!

Just as the cross of Jesus Christ provided for our initial **salvation** (or justification), so also the redemptive power of the cross of Jesus Christ provides for our continuing **spiritual growth** (or sanctification).

### ***Questions:***

1. Do you believe that sin lives within your “sinful nature/flesh” (*Romans 7:18*)? How can we, as Christians, still have evil present within us (*Romans 7:21*)? Are we saints? Sinners? Both?
2. Do you ever relate to Paul’s words in *Romans 7:15*? Why do we often struggle to avoid sin and live obediently to God? How do the “mind/inner man” and “flesh/body” relate to this “war” that Paul mentions (*Romans 7:22-23*)?

### ***Excursus: Three Views of Romans 7:14-25***

1. *Romans 7:14-25* describes Paul’s pre-conversion experience.
2. *Romans 7:14-25* describes Paul’s post-conversion experience.
3. *Romans 7:14-25* describes man’s inability to have victory over sin (both for the saved and unsaved individual).

## Deliverance by the Power of the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:1-4*)

"Spener is reported to have said that if holy Scripture was a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans its precious stone, chap. viii would be the sparkling point of the jewel."<sup>4</sup>

In *Romans 6*, Paul reminded his Christian readers that they were to live victoriously over sin because of their new **identity**. In *Romans 7*, Paul explained the arduous **struggle** that we go through in our efforts to live victoriously. In *Romans 8*, we turn the corner and see the **solution** to our struggle (i.e. the Holy Spirit, 18x in chapter 8, NASB), which opens the door for us to live the victorious Christian life.

### ***v. 1 – No Condemnation in Christ!***

With a "therefore," this verse draws a conclusion on all that Paul has written from *Romans* chapter 3 until now. Paul begins concluding his argument concerning not only the **sanctification** of the believer, but also their **justification**.

We are not condemned because we are in Christ (identity, *Romans 6*). This means we are free from condemnation for eternity apart from God's **presence**. This is because Jesus Christ has died in our place and paid the penalty for our infinite sinfulness. When we believe in Him, our salvation is **secure**!

### ***v. 2-4 – The Law of the Spirit v. the Law of Sin***

We should understand "law" in verse 2 to mean "principle," not the Mosaic Law. The end of the Spirit's work is abundant **life**. The end of the sin's work is **death**. Without the Spirit, we would receive nothing but condemnation. While we are still condemned to death for our sinfulness, we can experience abundant life through the Spirit!

The "Law" in verse 3 refers to the Mosaic Law once again. The Mosaic Law was ultimately **incapable** of dealing with our problem of sin. God, the Father, through the redeeming work of His Son, Jesus Christ, provided the **solution** that the Law could not do. We are not condemned, but God did condemn sin "in the flesh." The result is that we grow **spiritually** and live victoriously as we rely desperately upon God, the Holy Spirit, rather than on our own power (v. 4).

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<sup>4</sup> F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 295.

“Walking by the Spirit means walking in **submission** to and dependence on the Spirit (cf. *Gal. 5:16*). Walking according to the flesh means behaving as the flesh dictates and allowing our sinful nature to **govern** our lives.”<sup>5</sup>

### Questions:

1. How do you respond to the truths of *Romans 8:1-3*? Why are we no longer condemned through Christ? Are you able to experience the freedom and assurance that come through faith in Christ?
2. Paul indicates the importance of “walking/living according to the Spirit” in *Romans 8:4*? What exactly does this mean? How can you specifically walk by the Spirit this week?

### Conclusion/Thoughts Leading to Application

- 1) Only when the Christian gets to the point of **desperation**, when he or she learns to hate their sinful behavior will they begin to experience victory over it. This is because desperation leads us to look to the **cross** of Jesus Christ for this victory.
- 2) We must view our sin struggles very **seriously**. Failure to do so results in accepting behavior that is repulsive to God. We must also not simply “cope” with our sin, but rather turn to **God** whenever we recognize our struggle.
- 3) While sin is **complicated**, its solution is **simple**.<sup>6</sup> We must walk by the Spirit in order to experience victory in our struggle with sin. As we rely on the Spirit’s power, we will grow spiritually.

### Definition of the “Spiritual Life:”

**Part 1:** “Understanding your identity in Christ ...”

**Part 2:** “... as a slave to righteousness ...”

**Part 3:** “... who has been released from the Law ...”

**Part 4:** “...to experience victory over sin ...”

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<sup>5</sup> Constable, *Notes on Romans*, p. 87

<sup>6</sup> See Bob Deffinbaugh, “The War Withing,” [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

## Key Terms:

Sin dwells in me  
The weakness of the flesh  
No condemnation  
Walking according to the flesh  
Walking according to the Spirit

## Key Verses:

Romans 7:25  
Romans 8:1  
Galatians 5:16

## Scripture Memory:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."  
(*Romans 8:1, NIV*)

## Homework Assignment #4:

- 1) Memorize *Romans 8:1*.
- 2) **NextStep APPLICATION:** As you recognize your struggle with sin this week, turn immediately to God in prayer. Ask Him to forgive you and remember that you have been given the Holy Spirit to live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. What difference do you think walking by the Spirit will make in your spiritual life?
- 3) Review class notes.

## Next Week: Life by the Spirit (*Romans 8:5-17*)

"Teaser" Questions:

1. What is the difference between living according to the flesh (σάρξ) and living according to the Spirit (πνευμα)? Is it possible for a true Christian to live according to the flesh?
2. What difference does the promise of our resurrection make to how we approach daily living?