

## Bearing Fruit and Fighting Sin Romans 7:1-25

We've been considering the **gospel** in the book of Romans.

- The Gospel is not just that which tips you into the Kingdom, then you go on to something else. You do begin by embracing the gospel. But the rest of our lives we are growing in our understanding/appreciating/applying it.
  - The gospel is not the **diving board; it's the pool.**
  - It's not the just the **door; it's the house.**
  - **To redeem a line from Chance the Rapper: "This ain't no intro, this the entre!"**
  - **The gospel is not the intro; it's the entre.**

We need the gospel freshly applied to our lives everyday, just like we need food. We rely on the all-sufficient Christ everyday as a Christian.

We see that here in Romans 7.

- Romans 7 is about **sanctification** – how a Christian grows in Christ-likeness.
- Remember **chapters 6-8** are about sanctification.
- It's about **how we now live as Christians.**

And what does Paul say here?

**Verse 1-6:** The **What** of the gospel: **union with Christ** and **life in the Spirit.**

- We can bear fruit because of our union with Christ. (7:1-6)

**Verses 7-25:** **Why** we need the gospel: **we wrestle with indwelling sin.**

- This is why we must have the gospel freshly applied everyday.
- This is why we need to be reminded of things like our union with Christ, the indwelling Spirit, our hope of future deliverance – because we still wrestle with remaining sin.
- **We need to be reminded of God's daily distribution of amazing grace.**

**Bearing fruit and fighting sin is two important themes of sanctification.**

Throughout the chapter, there's a big **emphasis** on **the law.**

- Paul will speak about the **goodness** of the law, but also the **inability** of the law.
- The law shows us our sin. The law condemns. The law cannot acquit us.
- The law cannot change us.
- We **need the gospel to change us. We need the Spirit's work in our life.**
  - We must be changed through Christ by the Spirit.
  - **Romans 8:1-4** could be read with chapter 7.
  - In fact **7:6 parallels 8:1-4.**

## Two Truths about Living the Christian Life (2 Aspects of Sanctification)

### #1: Bearing Fruit through Our Union with Christ (1-6)

#### a. The Legal Principle (1)

- Paul is probably speaking about the **Mosaic Law** here, not Roman law. The Rabbis said, “If a person is dead, he is free from the Torah, and the fulfilling of the commandments” (in Moo). Many of the non-Jews in the Roman church were former god-fearers, familiar with the law.
- The law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.
- But **this authority is limited to this life**. Death annuls it.
- **Death delivers you from your common obligations.**

#### b. The Marriage Illustration (2–3)

- If the husband dies, the wife is released from the marriage vows.
- The contrast is clear: the law binds her, but **his death frees her**.
- And this release **is complete**.
- **V. 3**: Death makes her free to remarry.

#### c. The Application (4)

- Now there’s a shift in the metaphor.
- Now Paul has the wife **dying and remarrying!**
- Some commentators make fun of Paul – like people who can’t tell the punch line of joke
- Some say, “Paul wasn’t very good at very illustrations.”
- **Well they’re trippin**. Remember this is an illustration! He’s not developing an allegory in which every detail of the picture corresponds exactly to something in the reali
- The point is simple: **death ends the obligations to the law.**

The **point** of his illustration: **Christ’s death has secured our release from the law and our remarriage to Him.**

- At the cross, **we shared in *the death of Christ***.
  - We died with him (Rom. 6).
- We ***died to the law?***
  - The law’s condemnation has been taken away. (Rom 8)

**Marriage.** This is an apt illustration of the Christian life.

- **It’s not about rules** – though rules have their place.
- **It’s about being in love.**
  - **Becoming a Christian is like getting married.**
  - **You are united to Christ.**
  - **It’s the best of marriages.**

- It's about loving Christ.
- James Smith: "To be human is to be a lover and to love something ultimate."
- It's not about **religious formalism** (– not dancing, drinking, etc). This was the problem of fundamentalism; they passed along a legalistic culture but not the doctrines.
- It's not about **religious tokenism**. (just adding a bit of religion to your life when you have time).
- It's like the best of **marriages** – it changes everything.

The **purpose** of our dying with Christ: that we may be united to Him who was raised from the dead (4b).

- Think about this. You are united to the Resurrected Christ!

**Goal: That we might bear fruit to God (4c).**

- **Col 1:9-14**, Paul prayed that the Colossians would "bear fruit in every good work."
- The Christian life is about bearing fruit.
- What does this mean?
  - Fruitfulness involves manifesting **the character of Jesus**: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (**Gal 5:22–23**).
  - Fruitfulness involves certain **actions** as well -- the "the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (**Heb. 13:15**).
  - Jesus told the disciples that in bearing fruit they prove to be his disciples (**Jn 15:8**)
  - Paul prayed that Philippian believers would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (**Phil. 1:11**).
  - **Fruitfulness involves evangelism, church planting, missions, giving, & in Paul's case, supporting the mission to Spain.**

#### **d. A Further Contrast (5–6)**

**V5:** In our old life, our sinful passions aroused by the law (provoked to rebellion, as Paul will elaborate in verses 7:8–12) were at work in our bodies, **so that we bore fruit for death (5).**

**V6: But now** we are free to serve in **the new way of the Spirit**.

- The new age is essentially the age of the Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit writes God's law in our hearts.
- **Our old life** involved **a brutal bundle: law, sin and death (5).**
- **New Life: Servants God through the power of the Spirit (6).**

**Application: The New Way of the Spirit**

- As believers, we now we **want** to obey God, not to try to earn salvation, but because we have been changed.
- The Christian life involves serving the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit.

- **To be released from the law is to serve the goals of the law (righteousness) in a new way: by the Spirit.**
- Do you feel **defeated**? Look at this text! See the power that is yours!

Having reached this point, Paul could have gone straight to Romans 8.

- But before he gets there, he talks about **the reality of spiritual warfare** in verses 7-25.
- **He shows us that we can't live in victory over the flesh apart from the Spirit.**
- He does not mention the **Holy Spirit** again throughout the rest of chapter 8.

## #2: Fighting Sin Until We See Christ (7:7-25)

Paul digresses here to talk about the law. He picks up 7:6 in 8:1.

But it's an important digression, as he describes this "tug of war" with the soul, this **Jekyll and Hyde, Smeagle** -- the believer and indwelling sin.

### A. A Few Interpretive Matters

More has been written about Romans 7 than any other chapter in the Bible, verses 7-25 in particular. I would call it the most disputed chapter, but actually every chapter in Romans is disputed!

Verses 7-13 seems to be Paul sharing his own pre-conversion story.

In 7:14, he switches tenses....

#### 1. Does 14-25 refer to the (1) Christian or (2) a non-Christian?

##### a. This is a Non-Christian:

- "He looks so **defeated**."
- "This looks like a **contradiction** with chapters 6 and 8."
- Look at these two verses in particular: **7:14, 23**.
  - "sold under sin" (14)
  - "captive to the law of sin" (23)
  - Doesn't this contradict being a "slave of God" (6:22).
- The arguments for this position are very good.
- But I'm not persuaded. I think these can be explained.

##### b. This is a Christian:

- "This is an honest Christian fighting sin – it's a real life experience of a Christian."
- A few of the arguments:
  - There are over **20 present tense** verbs describing a Christian's present experience.
  - Verse 22** is important: "**Inner being – delighting in God's law**"
    - Schreiner, Piper – "Tom, I delight in the law of God in my inner being!"
    - **No non-believer says this.**

- **A desire to obey God seems to represent one who is awakened to the Spirit of God.**
- iii. **7:24-25:** Who will deliver me (future) – **that’s a Christian speaking.**
  - **It fits with 8:10 and 8:23**
- iv. **Theologically**, Sanctification **involves progression but not perfection.**
- v. This text is consistent with **Galatians 5:17**
- vi. Most Christians see this text confirms their own Christian **experience.** You read this and say, **“Yep, that’s me.”**

Regarding, **“sold under sin”** (7:14), I take this to mean **a temporary experience** of what Paul says not to let happen in **Gal 5:1** (Piper). In other words, we’re **not in constant slavery** to sin but may we **slip back into it** from time to time. This is actually consistent with **6:19**, “so now,” we are slaves of righteousness, but we must live out this identity. Positional vs. Practical. We do deal with indwelling sin as a believer, and must fight it.

**In Summary: Romans 7:14-25 is not the whole Christian experience, but a part of it.**

- There are **great victories, but also great failures.**
- It’s a fight – and we fight by the Spirit in view of the return of Christ.

### **c. The identity of the “I.”**

- **Paul, Israel, or Adam? There are a lot of similarities to Adam in this text.**
- **My view is that Paul is both telling his own story and universalizing it for everyone else. I think Paul is speaking about himself here as a Christian, & we can all relate to it.**

### **J.I. Packer:**

“Paul is not telling us that the life of the “wretched man” is as bad as it could be, only that it is not as good as it should be, and that because the man delights in the law and longs to keep it perfectly his continued inability to do so troubles him acutely.... The “wretched man” is Paul himself, spontaneously voicing his distress at not being a better Christian than he is, and all we know of Paul personally fits in with this supposition.

### **John MacArthur:**

Only a new creation in Christ lives with such tension of sin against righteousness, because only a Christian has the divine nature of God within him... The person depicted in Romans 7:14ff has a deep awareness of his own sin and an equally deep desire to please the Lord in all things. Only a mature Christian could be so characterized.

### **John Piper:**

I think what Paul is saying is not that Christians live in continual defeat, but that no Christian lives in continual victory over sin. And in those moments and times when we fail to triumph

over sin, Romans 7:14-25 is the normal way a healthy Christian should respond. He should say,

- I love the Law of God. V 22: "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man."
- I hate what I just did. V 15: "I am doing the very thing I hate."
- Oh the wretchedness I feel in these times! I long for deliverance from this body that constantly threatens to kill me, and that I have to mortify day after day. V 24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

... No lying. No hypocrisy. No posing. No vaunted perfectionism. Lord, deliver us from a church like that - with its pasted smiles, and chipper superficiality, and blindness to our own failures, and consequent quickness to judge others. God give us the honesty and candor and humility of the apostle Paul.

Amen.

**The closer we get to God, the more aware of our own weaknesses and sinfulness we become (eg., Isa 6:1-8), and the more we realize our desperate need for the grace of God everyday.**

### **B. The Value of the Law (7-13):**

Before we get to that **fight**, let's look at verses 7-13 briefly.

- **Here, Paul is speaking of his pre-Christian life.**
- ***While we are not under the written code, we still need to see the value of the law.***

***V. 7: Is the law sin?*** Certainly not! It has great value.

#### **1. The law shows sin in its true colors. (7-8)**

**V. 7:** Paul illustrates this with **coveting**.

- James tells us that the law is like a mirror; it exposes our failures.
- In Galatians, Paul says it is a "tutor" leading us to faith.
- Ferguson argues this was what crushed Paul: his own coveting, particularly in his attempt to be the best of Pharisees. Galatians 1, he was trying to outrun all his peers. Not being able to overcome the wisdom of Stephen, he argues had an effect on him. **He was like the straight A student who didn't get an A, and others did, and it crushed him.**

The law continues to have that value today. No one comes to Christ in faith, even today, without a clear recognition of his or her sin. This is a gracious thing.

#### **The law reveals the human proclivity to sin (8)**

- **Being enticed by forbidden fruit is as old as the garden.**
- The law acts as a **catalyst** – **it quickens the reaction but is unchanged by the action.**

- **The problem is not the law, but the reaction to it.**

- Kid in grocery store, “You can’t have that one.” “**You never give me anything!**”
- **“No one is going to tell me what to do, not even God!”**
- Sin twists the function of the law from revealing, exposing and condemning sin into encouraging and even provoking it.
- We cannot blame the law for proclaiming God’s will.
- The problem isn’t with the law but our sinful nature.

## **2. The law exposes our need for spiritual life (9-11).**

All three of these verses (9, 10 and 11) speak of the commandment in relation to **death**. They anticipate verse 13, where Paul will clarify that what caused his death was not the law but sin.

- Many Jews believed, “the more law, the more life.”
- But actually the law exposes are sin and leads to death.
- We need something other than the law to have life --- we need the Spirit!
- The gospel brings life – 2 Timothy 1:1; 1:9

Sin twists it. It makes us question the God and his law.

- The Serpent twisted it.
- God said, “you can have the world except for that...”

## **3. The Law shows the nature of the Lawgiver (12)**

Because the law comes from a holy, righteous, and good God, the law itself must reveal those same characteristics, which it does.

- Are there any unholy commandments?
  - No, because God is holy (Lev. 19:2).
- Are there any unrighteous commandments?
  - No, because God is righteous (Dan. 9:14).
- Are there any evil commandments?
  - No, because God is good (Mark 10:18).

## **4. The Law reveals the sinfulness of sin (13)**

Ignorance is bliss.

- Before hearing the Scriptures, I was more unaware of the depth of my sin.
- But then our sinfulness became painfully evident.
- The more we grow in Christ, the more we are aware of how we fall short – in word, deed, motive.

## **C. The Believer’s Conflict with the Law (14-25)**

Now Paul switches to the **present tense**, as he speaks about fighting indwelling sin (14-25). **You never thought you’d care about a verb tense did you!?**



We see the frustration, anguish, and struggle.  
This is the process of sanctification.

### **The Presence of Spiritual Warfare (14-25)**

We should not think of spiritual warfare as just **demons and dramatic deliverances**.

- Warfare is going on in your **kitchen, bedroom, cubical, dugout, dinner table, desk**.
- It's in the **mundane** things of life.
- **It's everywhere because the war is inside you!**
- We fight this battle on the turf of our hearts everyday.

Look at verse 21 – **“this law is at work.”** And verse 25, **“the law of sin.”**

- He calls **sin** a **“law,”** a principle, a reality.
- **It's like gravity. You have to deal with it everyday. You can't just wake up and say, “I'm tired of gravity. I want to live a gravity free life. Everyday I'm just pressed to the earth.”**
- Many Christians live as if there's **no war**, or that the problem is **external not internal**.
- **It's easy to look outside of ourselves for the problem: our teacher, our wife, or boss, our environment, etc.** These are factors, but the ultimate problem is not **external but internal**.
- G.K. Chesterton once responded to a newspaper article that invited people to respond to the question, “What's wrong with the world?” **His reply was simple: “I am.”**
- Many Christians are consumed with questions related to their **career**, but the Bible places a much bigger emphasis on **your character**.

### **A Series of Conflicts/Laments**

Notice how Paul develops this warfare: It's a conflict between **delighting in God's law** and failing to keep it because of **indwelling sin; or between desire and human inability**.

#### **Conflict #1 (14)**

- **Delighting in the Law (7:14):** <sup>14</sup>For we know that the law is spiritual”
- **Acknowledgement of indwelling sin (7:14b):** “but I am of the flesh, sold under sin”

#### **Conflict #2 (15)**

- **What I want to do/Doing what I hate:** <sup>5</sup>For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
- **A Christian hates sin. A Christian repents of sin.**

#### **Conflict #3 (16-17)**



- **Delighting in the Law (7:16).** <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
- **Acknowledgement of indwelling sin (7:17):** <sup>17</sup>So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
  - **“indwelling sin”** (“remaining sin”) comes from this text.
  - Again in **7:20**: “But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

#### **Conflict #4 (18-20)**

- **Wanting to do Good/Acknowledging Human Inability:** <sup>18</sup> For 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. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
- **The ability we need comes from the Spirit.**
- **Hughes: “Paul wants us to feel the emotion he experiences in trying to live up to God’s standards in his own strength. A believer who tries to please God in his or her own strength will always come to disheartening, aching frustration—*always!*”**
- **It’s like we are a train, and the law is the tracks. And someone says “Go.” But there’s no engine. The law tells the train to go, but there’s no power to do it. The Gospel gives us the engine; by the power of the Spirit we can obey God.**

#### **The Law of Sin at work – verse 21**

#### **Conflict #5: (22-23)**

- **Delighting in the Law (7:22):** <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,
- **Acknowledgement of indwelling sin (7:23):** <sup>23</sup> but 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.
  - When it is Paul the believer talking, he makes himself a **slave to God’s law**.
  - But when his sinful capacity speaks out, he is a **slave to the law of sin**.

#### **Summary of 7:14-23:**

- **A Christian loves the Law of God.**
- **A Christian delights in it.**
- **A Christian desires obedience.**
- **A Christian hates their sin (at last after a sin is committed!).**
- **The Christian admits as this fallen age lasts, we will deal with the reality of "indwelling sin" (7:17, 20).**
- **We need something more than the law to fight sin.**
- **Romans 8 will magnify the work of the Spirit.**

Here's why this is so important for your growth:

**Mounce:**

**Recognition of our inability to live up to our deepest spiritual longings (ch. 7) leads us to cast ourselves upon God's Spirit for power and victory (ch. 8). Failure to continue in reliance upon the power of the Spirit places us once again in a position of inviting defeat.**

**So are you relying on the Spirit to overcome temptation and sin?**

You should wake up and pray everyday the following:

- "Father, I need your help today."
- "Father, will you grant me the humility to rely on your help."

**D. The End of the War, Back to the Gospel (24-25)**

The lure of sin is not dead even though we have died to it. It will not die until we die and see Jesus.

The Christian life is filled with **highs and lows**.

- We can live in Romans 7:4 – with sweet intimate union with Jesus, bearing fruit.
- We can live in Romans 7:14-24, "O wretched man that I am!"

When you are in the latter, be reminded of the reality of war, and the reality that one day Jesus will save us from the very presence of sin!

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (v. 24).

- Not, "What must I do?" but "Who will rescue me?"
- Then he answers, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25).

**25b: He actually ends with yet another statement of Conflict (#6)**

"So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin"

- When it is Paul the believer talking, he makes himself a **slave to God's law**.
- But when his sinful capacity speaks out, he is a **slave to the law of sin**.
- **This fight has him longing for glorification.**
- **At glorification, we will be saved from the very presence of sin.**

Cranfield on 25b:

**"it sums up with clear-sighted honesty ... the tension, with all its real anguish and also all its real hopefulness, in which the Christian never ceases to be involved so long as he is living this present life."**

Yes, the anguish. Yes, the hopefulness.

**Anguished, weary Christian, look to Christ.**

**M'Cheyne, "For every one look at yourself, take ten looks to Christ."**

**We look to Him for daily victories.**

**We look to Him for ultimate victory.**

**The whole chapter is a call to treasure Jesus and rely on the Spirit.**

**Treasure Him.**

**Love Him.**

**Your great Groom.**

**Adore Him.**

**Depend on the Spirit's work, not your own efforts.**