

ROMANS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Romans chapter 7 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Last week we started the third main division of Paul's letter to the Romans, a section on sanctification or how God is molding and shaping our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit into His image and this section covers Romans chapters 6, 7 and 8.

We saw in Romans chapter 6 the word "sin" is used some 17 times, it is truly the theme of that chapter. Paul's point is this, "**Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**" Romans 6:16-18.

Then, in Romans chapter 7, which we will look at tonight, the word "Law" is used some 23 times, it is the theme of this chapter. Paul's point is this, "**But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.**" Romans 7:6.

And lastly, next week, in Romans chapter 8 we will see the word “**spirit**” used some 23 times, it is the theme of that chapter. Paul’s point is this, “**For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**” Romans 8:6-10.

And think of this section here in Romans that is dealing with sanctification like this,
 Romans chapter 6 deals with – “*sin shall not have dominion over you.*” (Romans 6:14)
 Romans chapter 7 deals with – “*for you are not under Law.*” (Romans 6:14)
 Romans chapter 8 deals with – “*but under grace.*” (Romans 6:14)

Simple and yet it shows us where the Lord is leading us. Not to be under bondage to sin, free from the Law and under that amazing grace that God has extended to us.

Tonight, in Romans chapter 7, Paul is going to pick up where he left off in Romans 6:14, where he said, “**For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**”

Then, from Romans 6:15-23 Paul describes the practical implications of being set free from the bondage of sin.

Now, starting in verse 1 of Romans chapter 7, Paul is going to explain more fully on how we are no longer under the power of the Law but under grace.

And here's the thing, and many have become confused over this. You can't use the flesh to defeat the flesh! What do I mean by that? Simply, "**Walk in the Spirit and you will not obey the lusts of the flesh.**" Galatians 5:16.

And some will not like this, but here in Romans chapter 7 Paul takes on legalism. And when I say "legalism" I am speaking of believing that you can become holy and please God by obeying the Laws of God! It ends up being a list of does and don'ts!

One writer put it like this, "The weakness of legalism is that it sees sins (plural) but not sin (the root of the trouble). It judges by the outward and not the inward." And let's face it, even with the outward actions on our part, we fall far short of perfection, what God requires!

And please understand that legalism is not something that you just ignore, or it is not that big of a deal! Legalism causes great emotional and spiritual damage and leads a person to one of two consequences. Either they become a hypocrite, pretending to be holy, or they give up all together of ever being able to live a godly life.

J. Vernon McGee put it like this. He wrote,

In this "struggle of a saved soul" a believer reaches out and grabs a straw. Sometimes that straw is the Mosaic Law. And he finds that he has gotten hold, not of a straw, nor even of a life preserver, but actually of a sack of cement, and it is pulling him under. He can't live that way. As a result, multitudes of the saints accept defeat as normal Christian living. There are many saints who are satisfied to continue on the low level of a sad, shoddy, sloppy life. God doesn't want us to come that route.

The “powerless sanctification” of this chapter shows us the way we are *not* to live. Many years ago a cartoon appeared in a daily paper - when it was popular to make things and repair things yourself - showing a mild-mannered man in a “Do-It-Yourself Shop.” His hands were bandaged, and one arm was in a sling. He was asking the clerk behind the counter, “Do you have any undo-it-yourself kits?” Today we as believers need to know that *we* cannot live the Christian life; we need to learn that we cannot do it ourselves. In fact, we need an undo-it-yourself kit; that is, we need to turn our lives over to the Spirit of God, yield to Him, and let Him do for us what we cannot do ourselves.

The Mosaic Law is where many Christians go to try to find Christian living. Now Paul is going to show that the Mosaic Law has no claim on the believer. Actually, the Law condemned man to die; it was a ministration of condemnation (see 2 Cor. 3:9). You don’t contact the judge who sentenced you to die and ask him how you are going to live!

- J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, Vol. IV, p. 689

Some powerful lessons the Lord has for us this evening as we deal with the struggles that Paul had in his Christian life and, like I have said, as we get to Romans chapter 8 next time, we see where the victory is found, walking in the Spirit.

With that as our background, let’s begin reading in Romans chapter 7, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word.

ROMANS 7**VERSES 1-3**

Make no mistake about it, to the Jew, the Law had become an idol, a source of salvation. Rabbi Judah, a noted Talmudic commentator said, “The nature of the Holy One differs from that of mortal men. When a man prescribes a remedy, it may benefit one individual but injure another. But God gave the Torah to Israel as a source of healing for all.” (Erubin, 54 a).

Also, Rabbi Raba wrote in the Babylonian Talmud, which was a collection of ancient rabbinical commentaries on the Torah or the Mosaic Law, “The Holy One created man’s evil inclination but created the Torah [the Mosaic law] to overcome it.” (Baba Bathra, 16 a).

The Law superseded their own relationship with God and keeping the Law brought to them salvation, at least that is what they thought. But, remember what Paul said in Romans 6:14, **“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”**

Now I don’t believe Paul is speaking just to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles here. You see, the literal translation here is **“those who know law.”**

In other words, any Law has dominion over us, even the Law of Moses, while we live. That seems obvious. If a man robs a bank and in the process of robbing the bank he kills three people, he has broken the Law and he will be arrested.

But, while he is trying to escape he is shot and killed, the Law has no power to do anything. You would not bring this dead man into court to try him for these crimes, the man is dead! And Paul’s point is that we should already know this, it is obvious!

Then, as Paul goes on in Romans 7:2-3 many get confused and think he is teaching on marriage.

Please understand that Paul is trying to illustrate a point here, he is not teaching on marriage and divorce as some like to say, making their own doctrine out of this section. There are other places in the Bible that deal with this issue, but this is not what Paul is speaking on.

Paul is saying that the death of a husband frees the wife to marry another so too the death of ourselves frees us from the Law.

And please understand that Paul is not saying that the Law died, for the Law is good, the Law is perfect, and we need to die to self, die to the Law so we can be married to grace, to Jesus. Paul will explain that in the next few verses.

VERSE 4

Again, this is a hot topic today, and I am not sure why because the Scriptures are very clear on this. But some may think, “Yes, I believe that we are saved by grace, but we must now live by the Law to please God!”

But listen to what Paul is saying here. That believers are “**dead to the Law.**” Morris put it like this, “Believers are through with the law. It is not for them an option as a way of salvation. They do not seek to be right with God by obeying some form of law, as the adherents of almost all religions have done.”

And keep in mind that Paul is picking up on what he said in Romans 6:3-8, **“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”**

Also, Paul said in Galatians 2:19-21, **“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”**

What is interesting here in this illustration that Paul uses about marriage is that the husband does not die, but the wife dies. If the husband represents the Law and the wife is a picture of you and me, that means if we died the only way we can marry again is that we would have to come back from the dead!

And that is exactly what the Scriptures teach us. When we trusted Christ, we died to the Law; but in Christ, we arose from the dead and now are “married” (united) to Christ to live a new kind of life!

The Law did not die, and it has a valid ministry in producing conviction of sin, but it can't save us! We are not under the Law, we are under grace! The Law did not die we died to the Law, and it no longer has dominion over us.

It is as the great theologian Charles Hodge wrote, "As far as we are concerned, redemption is in order to [produce] holiness. We are delivered from the Law, that we may be united to Christ; and we are united to Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God. . . As deliverance from the penalty of the Law is in order to [produce] holiness, it is vain to expect that deliverance, except with a view to the end for which it is granted."

That is the fruit that is produced in our lives – ***HOLINESS!***

VERSES 5-6

Please understand that the Law did not enable people to produce fruits of righteousness. In fact, the Law had the opposite effect. The Law actually stirred up the evil passions of my flesh, which led to sin, and eventually would have led me to death.

And in these verses, we see Paul contrast the Law and grace. The Law can't save us, the Law can't make us holy people, the Law does not justify us; it does not make us right with God. The Law does not sanctify us; it does not take us deeper with God and make us more holy before Him.

Then what does the Law do? All the Law can do is show us we are sinners, we have fallen far short of God's standard of perfection. Paul will pick up on this more in a few verses, that the Law arouses the sin nature in us, it stirs it up, as I have said.

But then there is grace. You see, we as believers have died with Jesus, died to the Law and now we live under grace not the Law.

Here in Romans 7:6 Kenneth Wuest gives to us this rendering, “But now, we were discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were constantly held down, insomuch that we are rendering habitually a bondslave’s obedience.”

You see, now, as believers we love to serve the Lord, to do His will, to obey the Law, out of love though, not constraint!

VERSE 7

The logical conclusion then is that the Law is evil, the Law is bad – but that is a wrong conclusion to come to.

In fact, in regard to that idea Paul says, “**Certainly not!**” or “**God forbid!**”

The Law is like an x-ray machine; it reveals plainly what might have always been there but hidden before; and you can’t blame an x-ray for what it exposes!

And this is really very simple. The Law shows us that we are sinners, it exposes our sins.

Now, by the time of Jesus the Jewish Rabbis had come up with 613 commandments. Of those 248 were positive and 365 negative.

They sought to be righteous before God by outward actions, keeping the Law but the reality is, it is a matter of the heart.

What a heavy burden the Law became upon the Jewish people, all those rules and regulations, what kind of relationship with God did that bring? It was a horrible one! Can you imagine a marriage relationship like that, based upon 613 commandments? Of course not! Then why do we try to have a relationship with God by the Law through works?

Paul, in Philippians 3:3-6, speaking of his life before he was saved, said **“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”**

That is how Paul felt but then I believe God was working on his heart as he began to see his failure in keeping the Law, he saw it more than just being external, it was internal.

Yes, Paul thought of himself as a good Jewish man who kept the Law. But I believe, those three days in Damascus, after he got saved, he looked at his life. And yes, maybe he kept many of the commandments of God, they were outward actions but there was one that nailed him. *Covetousness!* And as he examined his life he saw that he was guilty of breaking the Law that he once prided himself in keeping. It was the work of the Holy Spirit breaking Paul.

Of this Charles Hodge wrote, “The law, although it cannot secure either the justification or sanctification of men, performs an essential part in the economy of salvation. It enlightens conscience and secures its verdict against a multitude of evils, which we should not otherwise have recognized as sins. It arouses sin, increasing its power, and making it, both in itself and in our consciousness, exceedingly sinful. It therefore produces that state of mind which is a necessary preparation for the reception of the gospel. . . . Conviction of sin, that is, an adequate knowledge of its nature, and a sense of its power over us, is an indispensable part of evangelical religion. Before the gospel can be embraced as a means of deliverance from sin, we must feel we are involved in corruption and misery.” Exactly!

VERSE 8

Please understand that the weakness of the Law isn't in the Law, it is in us. God sets boundaries and we then are enticed to go beyond those boundaries, it is the sin nature in us. Let me explain this with this example.

In Florida there was this waterfront hotel that was concerned that people would try to fish from their balcony, so they made several signs that said: ***“NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY!”***

As soon as that was done people were fishing all the time, breaking windows with the sinker weights they were using on their lines and bothering the people who were below them.

How did they solve the problem? Believe it or not, they just took down the signs and no one fished from the balcony! You see, because of our evil hearts, the Law can actually drive us to sin!

And that is the idea here. Paul is saying that once God draws a boundary for us, we are immediately enticed to cross that boundary – which is no fault of God or His boundary, but the fault of our sinful hearts.

And notice what Paul says here. **“But sin, taking opportunity . . .”** The word **“opportunity”** or APHORME (af-or-may') in the Greek speaks of a base of operations.

In other words, “Don't step on the grass!” ends up being a spring board or a base of operations for us to walk all over the grass!

I will give you one more example that happened several years ago with our dog Brandy. I guess you can say, she was a fine girl. Sorry.

It was during the summer and my wife was watering the flowers in our yard and I was sitting on our deck studying with Brandy, our dog at my side.

Everything was good, no problems until my wife screamed and pointed saying, “Look, a bunny!”

Sure enough, it was, and this thing took off.

Now, as soon as it ran across the yard, with my wife pointing it out and screaming, Brandy took off and you can guess what happened, the bunny is no longer with us!

If Julie didn’t point out the rabbit, it would still be alive, but now it is not. Regarding this incident, please send your letters “C/O Julie Guglielmo . . .”

You see, the Law awakens sin in us, not because the Law is bad, or the Law is evil, we are!

VERSES 9-11

When Paul saw the Law as external he felt safe, secure in keeping it. One writer summed it up like this, “He was quite secure amid all his sin and sinfulness. He lived in the sense that the deathblow had not yet killed him. He sat secure in the house of his ignorance like a man living on a volcano and thought that all was well.” (Lenski)

But, once he saw that it goes far deeper, it is internal, he saw that he failed, he fell far short of God’s standards!

The end result is death. Thus, as we have said before, the Law can’t save us, it can only show us that we are lost in our sins, just as looking in a mirror can’t cleanse us of the dirt on our face, it can only show it to us!

What is interesting is that here in verse 11 of Romans 7 Paul says, “**For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.**” What is he talking about?

How did the Law deceive Paul? By leading him to expect one thing while he was experiencing another. And it really wasn't that the Law deceived Paul, but sin did as it used the Law to deceive Paul into thinking he was something that he was not, holy before God!

But when he saw the reality of the situation, he saw that the Law brought about death and not life.

Paul came to this conclusion in Philippians 3:7-9, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”**

Do not be deceived, the Law does not bring life, but it does bring death. And there are many out there who are very religious, doing all kinds of good works, even keeping the Sabbath and dietary Laws, and so many other things, and in the end, that does not bring life, only Jesus does!

VERSE 12

Again, Paul wants us to understand that the Law is holy, it is just, it is good, which means that we aren't!

David, in Psalm 19:7-11 said the following in regard to the Law of God, **“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.”**

That is the Law, it is good, it is perfect!

Then what is the problem? One writer put it like this, “The weakness of the law lay in the “raw materials” it had to work with: it was given to people who were already sinners. They needed the law to give them the knowledge of sin, but beyond that they needed a Savior to deliver them from the penalty and power of sin.”

VERSE 13

The problem today is that we don't see sin as sin. And that is exactly what we need to see. We need sin to appear to us as sin, because it always wants to hide in us and conceal its true depths and strength.

Spurgeon put it like this, “This is one of the most deplorable results of sin. It injures us most by taking from us the capacity to know how much we are injured. It undermines the man's constitution, and yet leads him to boast of unfailing health; it beggars him, and tells him he is rich; it strips him, and makes him glory in his fancied robes.”

Please understand that the ultimate purpose of the Law was to expose man's sin and drive him to the cross, to Jesus, who fulfilled the demands of the Law for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!

It is as Paul said in Galatians 3:23-26, **“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”**

Of this C. E. B. Cranfield said, “The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to . . . the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him – and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly.”

And Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Instead of being a dynamo that gives us power to overcome, the Law is a magnet that draws out of us all kinds of sin and corruption.”

And lastly, William MacDonald put it like this, “There might seem to be a contradiction between what Paul says here and in 7:10. There he said he found the Law to bring death. Here he denies that the Law became death to him. The solution is this: The Law by itself can neither improve the old nature on the one hand nor cause it to sin on the other. It can reveal sin, just as a thermometer reveals the temperature. But it cannot control sin like a thermostat controls the temperature.

But what happens is this. Man's fallen human nature instinctively wants to do whatever is forbidden. So it uses the Law to awaken otherwise-dormant lusts in the sinner's life. The more man tries, the worse it gets, till at last he is brought to despair of all hope. Thus sin uses the Law to cause any hope of improvement to die in him. And he sees the exceeding sinfulness of his old nature as he never saw it before."

I hope that is clear for you.

Now, as we move on, here in Romans 7:14-25, you need to understand that it is a highly controversial section. Not for me, but for many and I am not sure why, because I think Paul is clear on this.

What is the issue? One side says, "There is too much bondage to sin in this passage for it to be talking about a Christian therefore Paul is talking about his 'B. C.' days."

The other side says, "There is too much desire for good for it to be talking about a non-Christian." So they see this as a Christian who is carnal or backslidden!

For me, I think Paul is describing his struggles with the flesh **AFTER** his conversion. And you will see why as we read on.

VERSES 14-17

Like I have said, I believe Paul is speaking of his life after he was saved. And please understand that Paul is not speaking of himself being in a backslidden condition or that he was living a carnal life. I think Paul was at the very pinnacle of spirituality and maturity in his walk.

And think about that. Have you met a carnal Christian or a backslidden Christian or even someone who is not saved, that will see his sin? Of course not, they are doing what they want and there is no struggle. Paul is struggling here, he is in a battle with the flesh!

And if you are struggling with this being about Paul's life when he was a Christian, let me ask you this. Do any of you struggle with sin? Do you feel like you have to battle with sin daily?

Of course you do and if you say that you don't, you are a liar!

And we see Paul describing himself locked in a battle with his flesh, wanting with all of his heart to obey God but confessing that he didn't always do it, and in so doing he is describing the struggles that all of us experience after we get saved, typifying the frustrations that all of us can relate to.

And think about it. If Paul the apostle wrestled with his flesh like this why do we think we shouldn't if we are really walking with God?

So I think it is very clear, Paul is speaking of himself, after his conversion to Christ and the struggles with sin that he had.

Also, as you look at this section here in Romans, Paul uses the first person singular some forty-six times in Romans 7:7-25, and thus, he must be speaking of himself! Paul is showing us how a normal, mature Christian can have a struggle with the spirit and the flesh!

Not only that, but another reason I see this as Paul after his salvation is because he speaks of wanting to obey the Lord, obey God's Law and hating sin, Romans 7:15, 19, and 21.

Also, he is humble before God and he understands that nothing good dwells in the flesh nature, Romans 7:18.

And there is a struggle with sin in his life, Romans 7:17, 20-22.

Lastly, we see that he gives thanks to Jesus as His Lord and his desire is to serve Jesus, Romans 7:25.

Obviously, the unsaved religious would not care because they are fulfilling the Law in their minds and a backslidden Christian would not care because they continue to walk away from the Lord.

I don't know about you, but for me, this section does give me encouragement that even a man like Paul had this struggle within his life.

Paul, in Romans 6:12-13 said, **“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”**

Don't give in, keep up the fight and don't let sin rule your life, let God!

Now don't think that Paul lacked the desire to do what was right. I don't think that Paul lacked the knowledge to do what was right.

You see, the Law says, “Here are the rules, now keep them!” but it does not give us the power to keep them.

Now Romans 7:17 can be confusing and seem out of place. It says, **“But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”**

It seems that Paul is passing the blame for his sinfulness. Kind of like “The Devil made me do it!”

Not at all! Remember, we are speaking of a person who is saved, and thus, as Paul said, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** II Corinthians 5:17.

So as he tries to live for God, that old nature is rising up and trying to stop him from living that life that God wants for him. There is a battle of the flesh against the Spirit and that battle will continue until we go home to be with the Lord.

The thing we need to remember is that our victory over the flesh is not because of our strength, or doing this or doing that, but surrendering to the Lord and walking accordingly!

Think of it like this, “But now (since Jesus Christ has come into my life) it is no longer I (the old ‘I,’ the old me is dead and buried with Christ and there is now a new ‘I,’ the new me, the new creation who doesn’t sin) but sin that dwells in me (the old sin nature that stirs up my flesh to sin).”

All Paul is doing here is tracking down the source of his sinful behavior, not excusing it.

Look at what Paul says next.

VERSE 18

Let me be clear on this, because there is much confusion today. God isn’t looking to reform our flesh, He wants to crucify it and transform us by the renewing of our minds that the new man will grow and flourish in the things of God.

And what do we see in the church today? The building up of the flesh! “No Pastor Joe, that is not true!”

It is absolutely true. Self-esteem has come into the church and we are told that we need to build it up. But what is the problem with self-esteem? The first four letters, ***SELF!***

Interestingly enough, the word, “esteem” means, “to have a high opinion of, to value greatly.”

There is no place in the New Testament where we are told to build ourselves, the flesh up! We are told to crucify the flesh, deny the flesh, not to think highly of ourselves but to esteem others more highly or better than ourselves!

And if you are unsure about this self-esteem, think of it as ***PRIDE!***

That is what it truly is. One article summed it up like this,

Self-esteem can be defined as the subjective self-measure of an individual's worth and value. According to psychology, when every humanistic need is met, mankind can reach their *ultimate fulfillment*. This fulfillment is called "self-actualization." Therefore, a self-actualized individual is one who has fulfilled all humanistic needs - one of those being high self-esteem - in order to reach a point of self-fulfillment. Psychology teaches that promoting high self-esteem equates to showing people that ultimate satisfaction can be attained through self. At its very core, this is not a biblical concept, but a psychological construct.

- <https://theologicalmatters.com/2017/07/11/should-churches-promote-high-self-esteem/>

But what does the Bible say about this? In Romans 13:14 we are told, "**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**" That flesh nature is just looking for an open door and once you make a provision for the flesh, it will control your life!

And in Galatians 5:24 we are told, "**And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**" You don't build up the flesh, you crucify the flesh. You build up the spirit, the inner man!

What can we do about this problem of the flesh. Paul will talk more about that when we get to Romans 8. But listen to what Paul said in Galatians 5:16-17, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”** That is the secret and it is a daily battle of who you will surrender to!

Who you will feed the most is what will manifest itself in your life, either the Spirit or the flesh!

And that is truly the struggle for us. I know what is right but when I try to accomplish things in the power of my flesh, I fail.

It would be like me using power tools to build a house. I may be very sincere, but I lack the power, the talent to do it perfectly. The fault doesn't lie with the wood, the nails, the screws, the tools, the paint, the brushes, the cement, the shingles and-so-on, but with me.

That is why I need the Master Builder, Jesus Christ, to place His hands on mine in order that I can do with His strength and talent, by His Spirit, what I could not do on my own!

And Paul is going to show us this struggle that he had, and it is one that each of us have, as we read on.

VERSES 19-21

It is as C. S. Lewis said, “No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good.”

Paul is speaking of the war going on between the spirit and the flesh. It is truly a battle. Remember what we read in Galatians 5:16-18, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”**

The key is where are you walking, who are you walking with?

VERSE 22

Think about this for a minute. When we come to Christ we are in love with Him and want to obey His Word. In other words, like Paul is saying here, the inward man, the spiritual man loves the things of God.

And folks, that is what needs to grow, to mature in our lives as we feed on the Word of God and apply the Word of God to our lives. As we do then it is the nature of God that will flow from our lives, the fruit of the Spirit which is love instead of the works of the flesh, which is just plain ugly!

Paul, in Ephesians 3:16-21 is praying that the Lord, **“... would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”**

Build up the inner man, love what the Lord loves and hate what the Lord hates, and you will be growing in Him!

But, listen again to what Galatians 5:17 says, and this is from the New Living Translation. We are told, **“The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.”**

I think that sums it up for us. We are in a battle every day and we must crucify the flesh with its desires and build up the inner man!

VERSES 23-24

So Paul’s struggle finally brings him to the acknowledgment of his own inability. I am in this bondage to my flesh. Who shall deliver me? I tried to deliver myself. I can’t! Who shall deliver me?

Think about it like this.

It is reported that near Tarsus, where Paul was born, a tribe of people lived who inflicted a horrific penalty upon a murderer.

They fastened the body of the dead man to that of the killer, tying it shoulder-to-shoulder, back-to-back, thigh-to-thigh, arm-to-arm and then drove the murderer from the community into the hot Mediterranean sun.

So tight were the bonds that he could not free himself, and after a few days the decay in the one body began to spread to the flesh of the living body.

As he walked helplessly with no one to help him as he awaited his horrible death, he could have conceivably cried,

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

In other words, Paul is saying that's what the Christian life feels like at times. Like we're carrying around a dead, rotting corpse.

So, what can be done? Who can deliver us from this condition? Look at verse 25 and you will see the answer!

VERSE 25

The glorious truth remains: there *is* victory in Jesus! Jesus didn't come and die just to give us more or better rules, but to live out His victory through those who believe. The message of the gospel is that there is victory over sin, hate, death, and all evil as we surrender our lives to Jesus and let Him live out victory through us.

Of this verse, John MacArthur tells us: "Paul's primary emphasis in the present passage, however, is not on the believer's eventual deliverance from sin's presence but on the conflict with sin that torments every spiritually sensitive child of God. He therefore ends by summarizing the two sides of that struggle: So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. In the poem Maud (X. 5), one of Tennyson's characters yearns, 'Ah for a new man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be!' The Christian can say that a new man has already arisen in him, but he also must confess that the sinful part of his old man has not yet ceased to be." How true that is!

The problem for us, many times, is that we try to do this on our own. We look to the philosophy of the world for help. We consider the wisdom of man instead of the wisdom of God.

Remember what Paul said as he warned us in Colossians 2:8-10, **“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”**

That is what Paul is saying here, our help, our sufficiency is in Jesus and even though this war is going on inside of us, Jesus will give us the victory that we need!

Listen to what Stedman had to say in his book, From Guilt to Glory. We are told,

There are teachers who teach that this passage in Romans 7 is something a Christian goes through but once. Then he gets out of it and moves into Romans 8, never to return to Romans 7 again. Nothing could be further from the truth! Even as mighty a man as Paul went through it again and again. This is a description of what every believer will go through many times in his experience because sin has the power to deceive us and to cause us to trust in ourselves, even when we are not aware we are doing so. The law is what will expose that evil force and drive us to this place of wretchedness that we might then, in devotion of spirit, cry out, Lord Jesus, it is your problem; you take it.

- Stedman, From Guilt to glory, p. 195

Next time, as we move into Romans chapter 8, we will see where the victory is, which will be the life of the Spirit for the word **“spirit”** is the overall theme and is found some 23 times in this chapter.

It is as Paul said back in Romans 6:11-14, **“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”**

That is only accomplished as we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit; our victory is only found in Him!

And there is victory for you here tonight! There is no need for any of us to be continuing in the same pattern of sin. The moment that you recognize that you can't do anything about it and you turn it over, completely and fully, to Jesus Christ, you will find that victory! That moment you do that you will discover His power and His victory. And then he'll show you another area that needs cleaning up. But we are progressing. In other words, “I am not what I am going to be but thank God I am not what I was!” Praise the Lord for that!

Remember who can deliver us from this body of death – **“I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . .”**