

**5. Freedom from the Law (7:1–25)****a. Law and Sin (7:7–12)**

***7:7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."***

In Romans 7:1–6 Paul explained that we have been delivered from the Law of Moses by means of our union with the death of Christ. But why is such deliverance necessary? Is the Law bad? That is, "Is the Law sin?" (7:7) Of course not! The Law has a purpose. "I would not have known sin except through the Law." The Law isn't sin; it is good. The Law reveals that which does not conform to the will of God. Romans 3:20 says, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." If the standard of right is not known, there is no sense of having fallen short of it (Hodge, 221).

The Law awakened in Paul his true moral condition. He says, "I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet' (7:7; Exo. 20:17)." Men who do not have the Law may be aware that they are sinful, but the Law was given to increase this knowledge. Through the Law man becomes more fully conscious of his sin and his need of help from something outside the Law. In this sense the Law prepares men for the gospel, for it makes men aware of their need.

***7:8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.***

***7:9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;***

***7:10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;***

***7:11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.***

***7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.***

Verses 8–10 fit together as follows:

Apart from the Law

*Sin is dead (7:8)*

*I was alive (7:9)*

When the commandment came

*sin sprang to life (7:9)*

*I died (7:10)*

**Verse 8** gives additional information about the nature of the Law. Though the Law isn't sin (7:7), it prods the sinful nature and causes evil desires to arise. The noun "opportunity" is used here and in verse 11, also; "Sin took up a base of operation in the Law itself and worked the sin of coveting" (McClain, 154). Every time a man tries to be holy or righteous by keeping the Law, the very Law he desires to follow will provoke him to acts of sin. This is called "contra-suggestibility" meaning that some people tend to react negatively to any directive (Stott, 203). For example, some people, as soon as they see a sign on a door saying, "do not enter," want to know why they were told to stay out, while a door without a sign doesn't create any urge to open it at all.

Again, it should be stated that this does not imply that the Law is evil or the originator of sin, rather, it highlights the heinousness of sin. Humans are not freed from sin's dominion when they are under the Law; sin uses the Law to accomplish its own ends.

Paul is speaking in an autobiographical and confessional sense, not in a theological one (Schreiner). However, Paul speaks in a way that is general enough to include others (Stott, 199). His experiences are typical of all who are confronted with the commands of God. It is Paul's story, Adam's story, Israel's story, and our story (Stott, 201).

When Paul says, "apart from the Law sin is dead," he is probably referring to the time in his life before he became consciously aware of what the Law demanded. At that time he was oblivious to his sin, but the tenth commandment about coveting opened Paul's eyes to his inner sinfulness and caused sin to spring to life (7:9).

**Verse 9** must not be taken in an absolute sense, for Paul, as a Jew, was never without the Law, nor could he mean that he had eternal life without the Law. Rather, he still must again be referring to the time in his life "when he was living in a state of blissful indifference to the intensely searching demands that the Law made upon the inner man" (Harrison, 80). Prior to seeing what the Law was revealing about him, Paul had a feeling of security in his own righteousness and innate goodness (Phil. 3:4–6). But when the reality of his sinfulness struck him, he "died," in that his undisturbed, self-complacent, self-righteous life crumbled before him. And sin "sprang to life" ("became alive"—NAS — ἀνέζησεν— a verb that conveys the image of a predator ready to pounce upon its prey). He had no hope or security in himself left.

In **verse 10** Paul says that sin used the commandment to slay him rather than to bring the blessedness he had hoped for (7:11). Romans 7:5 says, "while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death."

Paul expected to find life and happiness in the Law but he was utterly deceived (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1Tim. 2:14). He discovered that the Law brought the knowledge of sin (3:20), it aroused sinful passion (7:5), it produced all manner of evil desire (7:8), and revived sin (7:9). The more he sought life through the commandment, the more he saw himself as condemned. Though the Law promises life (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1), it conceals the fact that sin leads us to do what the commandment forbids, thus bringing us under condemnation as lawbreakers (7:10; Harrison, 81). All of these are reasons why death to the Law is necessary (Ro. 7:1–6).

In **verse 11** sin is again seen as using the Law as a base of operation; it takes opportunity through the commandment. Sin uses the Law to generate sinful desire so people are put to death by the commandment. Sin uses the commandment to kill people, for "the wages of sin is death" (Ro. 6:23).

**Verse 12** is Paul's conclusion and the answer to his question in 7:7a—"Is the Law sin?" The Law isn't sin; "the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

**b. Life under the Law (7:13–25)**

**7:13** *Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.*

**7:14** *For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.*

In **verse 13** the problem is posed, if Paul died “through the commandment” (7:11), has the Law become a cause of death? Paul answers this question as he answered the first one. The Law does not cause sin; it exposes and condemns it. And the Law does not cause death; sin does (Stott, 204).

**Therefore did that which is good** [the Law] **become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin** [that has become the cause of death], [and sin was made the cause of death] **in order that it** [sin] **might be shown to be sin** [sin was shown to be sin] **by effecting my death through that which is good** [the Law], **so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.** [That is, God designed it so that sin is seen to be utterly sinful as it uses the Law to produce more sin and death].

The power of sin is such that it makes even that which is good (the Law) a vehicle for evil. In other words, the sinfulness of sin is brought out by the Law. Stott explains this by giving the example of a man caught breaking the law who is arrested, brought to trial and found guilty, and imprisoned. The man cannot blame the law for his imprisonment. True, it is the law that convicted and sentenced him, but had he not sinned the law would have not had any effect upon him (Stott, 204).

There is a great debate as to whether **verses 14–25** refer to Paul *before* or *after* he became a Christian. Both views have impressive arguments which cannot be fully developed here<sup>1</sup>. Determining which Paul has in mind is based on which verses one chooses to emphasize. I presently lean toward the view that Paul is referring to his perception of life when he was not a Christian but a Jew under the Law. However, the conflict that he describes is not limited to Jews but includes all who try to live under God’s commands. It even is comparable to feelings that Christians have as they continue to struggle with sin; however, *the following explanation will reflect the view that Paul is remembering what it was like prior to coming to Christ when he was still under the Law and in bondage to sin.* As Moo says, it appears that his thoughts are indicative of someone enslaved to sin as a way of life (7:14b). That is *not* typical, and not even possible, for a Christian (Moo, 456). Moo summarizes my perspective of the passage:

Paul now explains how it is that sin has been able to work death in “me” through that which is good (v. 13). This could happen, Paul asserts, because, while the Law is indeed good and “spiritual,” I am “fleshly” [v. 14]. Verses 15–25 justify and develop this statement about himself, concluding from his tragic inability to put into practice what he knows to be right (vv. 15–21) that he is controlled by an alien and negative force—“the law of sin” (vv. 22–23). It is because of his captivity to the power of sin that the law can become the instrument of death (Moo, 453).

In **verse 14** Paul changes from “I” to “we” because he assumes that his readers would have had similar experiences—they believed the Law was spiritual but they were sold in bondage to sin.

If the Law is spiritual (if it comes from God) why can't it produce holiness?

The Law is good but it is also weak. We are “of flesh” (“fleshly”) sold into bondage to sin. The Law cannot make us holy because the Law cannot destroy sin.

The statement, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” is critical to the view that Paul is referring to his pre-conversion experience. The law is spiritual; the condition that Paul is describing is the opposite of that; it is fleshly.

Although “fleshly” can simply mean human, subject to frailty (whether Christian or not), the contrast to “spiritual” gives it a negative connotation. Here it means under the influence of this world and was used in verse 5 to describe the unbeliever who is “sold into bondage to sin” (contrast Ro. 6:6–7). The person in Romans 8:5–9 is clearly an unbeliever and is described as one who sets his mind on the flesh and is hostile toward God. In 8:8 it says, “those in the flesh cannot please God.” Romans 8:9 clearly states, “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit” and anyone who does not have the Spirit does not belong to Christ.

“Bondage to sin” carries a stronger connotation than being influenced by sin. “The Greek is *πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν*. The participle comes from the verb *πιπράσκω*, which means “sell”, and often—though certainly not always—of the selling of slaves; 11 of its 24 LXX occurrences have this reference, and it is so used in Matt. 18:25. The *ὑπό* suggests that, in being sold, *ἐγὼ* has placed “under the authority of” sin. Because of this, and because Paul has just been using slavery imagery (6:6, 16–22; 7:6), allusions to slavery here are probable” (Moo, 454 note 38). In other words, Paul’s language points to a condition of slavery under sin’s power. Romans 3:9 says, “all, both Jews and Greeks, are *under* sin.” Roman 6 says that sin’s power over Christians has been broken by the death of Christ. Christians have died to sin (6:2) and are therefore no longer slaves to sin (6:18, 22). If 7:14 is speaking of Paul’s experience as a Christian (as some believe), it would be hard to fathom why Paul would say something of himself that he just said was not true of Christians in the previous chapter.

Although freedom from sin’s power must be lived out, appropriated, and put into action, and it is well known that Christians sometimes fail to do this, freedom from sin’s power is absolute and irreversible, even though freedom from sin’s influence is not (Moo, 454). Romans 7 describes someone still under sin’s power:

**7:15** *For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.*

**7:16** *But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.*

**7:17** *So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.*

Beginning with **verse 15**, Paul describes the slavery spoken of in verse 14 as the word “for” indicates. In other words, he is answering the question, “what does being sold into bondage to sin look like for the person in the flesh?” Paul will show the effects of the Law on the mind.

Paul had used the example of the Law convicting him of coveting (7:7). In his mind he knew that coveting was sin and wanted to stop coveting, but he couldn't. He continued to covet even though he hated it. He confessed that the Law was good (7:16), but in the flesh he was helpless in obeying it for he was sold in bondage to sin (7:14).

If someone wants to obey the commands of God, then he is not in hostility to the Law but in agreement with it (7:16). To condemn what the Law condemns is proof that the problem is in the person, not the Law.

"So now" (in light of the conflict spoken of in verses 15 and 16) it can no longer be considered true that Paul was the one acting, rather it was the sin that dwelled in him (7:17). Sin dictated his actions.

When Paul says, "no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me," he is not trying to say that he is not responsible for his actions; rather, "his point is that his failure to put into action what he wills to do shows that there is something besides himself involved in the situation" (Moo, 457). Paul sees a conflict in the will. "Sin operates from within the person, ruling over him like a master over a slave" (Moo, 458). We need to die to be freed from sin (Ro. 6).

Don't Christians have these same experiences?

It is certainly true that we often do the very things of which we disapprove. We, like the unbeliever, live as if we were still in Adam instead of in Christ. As a result, we feel like Paul is describing our experience. The difference is that we are not "of the flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (7:14). "Our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (6:6). We are free from sin's bondage, but must affirm our new position in Christ and walk in newness of life (6:4, 11, contrast 8:4). If a Christian tries to live under the Law, he will live a defeated life. As Paul has said, the Law is weak.

Though we are free from sin (Ro. 6), we find that there is always a gap between what we know and desire to do and our actions (Ro. 7). Recognition of our failure to appropriate all that God has given us causes us to grow downward in humility and to turn again to Christ as the sole source of righteousness that we need to please God (Ro. 8:1). We then respond to God with thankful hearts and press on anticipating the final redemption of our bodies in the life beyond (Ro. 8:23).

***7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.***

***7:19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.***

***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.***

These verses reassert and explain the nature of the struggle. Paul says, “nothing good dwells in me,” but then clarifies that he means “in his flesh” (his fallen nature apart from God’s influence).

Paul reaches the same conclusion as he did in verse 17; if I do what I don’t want to do, then I do it as an unwilling slave. An alien master, sin, is in control (7:20).

**7:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.  
7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,  
7:23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.**

Verses 21–23 are clearly intended to summarize and conclude what has come before. Three laws are mentioned—the law of God, the law in the members of my body, and the law of the mind. And there are two aspects of a person—the inner part (the mind, the inner person) and the outer part (the members of the body). The law of sin works through the body and wages war against the mind. The law of God, which is good, holy, just, and spiritual, is intended for life, but the law of sin uses it for death. Thus, the total person is enslaved (“a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members”).

When Paul says in **verse 22** that “he joyfully concurs with the law of God in the inner man,” he is speaking of the Mosaic Law and his desire to conform to its demands. As J.I. Packer says, “The ‘law of sin’ means sin operating as a driving force, irrationally anti-God in its thrust. The words ‘I see’ tell us how Paul perceives himself when, by the light of the Law that he longs to keep, he looks at himself and measures his actual achievement . . . Each time he does so he sees that his reach has exceeded his grasp, that nothing he said or did was as good and right as it should have been, and that his noblest, wisest, most selfless, pure minded, God honoring, generous acts were all flawed in some discernible way” (Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 150–151).

Later in **verse 23** he speaks of the law “in his members” and “of his mind” which is another sense of the meaning of the word law. These laws are “acting *forces*” within us.

In other words, there is a law or a principle at work, an evil which wars against our minds, bringing us under the slavery of sin. The flesh fights against the mind making people prisoners to sin. This is why no one can perfectly follow God’s commands even if they wanted to. This is also why we must die with Christ to sin.

**7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?  
7:25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! 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.**

Paul’s conclusion is that without Christ he was wretched. He was enslaved to a body of death. As a devout Jew, a Pharisee, he desired to serve the Law of God, yet he was imprisoned to a sin nature that kept him doing as he pleased.

In relation to the Law, Paul remained under the power of sin. He can serve the Law only with his mind, but complete deliverance from the power of sin in his experience could not be attained.

“Always he finds that he could have done better than he did. . . This discovery . . . is unquestionably depressing. Hence Paul’s agonized cry in Romans 7:24, “What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”” (Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 150-151).

The reason for his praise, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” is that he prematurely anticipates chapter 8. What was true of him then is no longer true of him in Christ. “There is **now** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Ro. 8:1–4).

### END NOTE 1

The following, however, combines summaries given by Douglas Moo (pp 445, 446) and Tom Schreiner (379–390).

**VIEW 1:** Paul is speaking of his **post-conversion experience** (summarized from Moo, 446; Schreiner, 379–384):

#### PROS

\*\*1) “I” must refer to Paul himself; the shift from past tense verbs (7:7–13) to present tenses (7:14–25) is deliberate and can only be explained if Paul is describing a present experience.

\* In response to PRO 1: The present tense verbs do not always indicate present time (Schreiner, 386). In verses 7–11 Paul could be relaying his experience in narrative form (and therefore uses past and perfect tenses), while in verses 14–25 he is using the present tense because it stresses the condition or state of the person enslaved to sin.

2) Only a believer can truly “delight in the Law” (v. 22), seek to obey it (vv15–20) and serve it (v. 25). The unbeliever does not seek after God (3:11) nor can he submit to God’s Law (8:7).

While the mind of unbelievers are described by Paul as universally opposed to God and His will (Ro. 1:28; 8:7; Eph. 4:17; Col. 2:18; I Tim. 6:5; II Tim. 3:8; Tit. 2:15), the mind in these verses are positively inclined toward God (7:22, 25). The mind of the flesh is at enmity with God (8:7). By contrast, Paul says in Romans 7:25, “I myself *with my mind* am serving the law of God.” The person portrayed has a will oriented toward that which is good (7:15, 18, 19, 21) and the evil he does is in violation of what he wills and loves (7:16, 19, 20). This means that the prevailing bent of his will is toward good. In this case, I am no longer a willing slave to sin, but sin’s power is still being exerted over me. Deliverance from sin cannot be found in my own strength, it can only be found in the power of the Holy Spirit.

\*In response to PRO 2: this could also be describing a pious Jew (2:1–29; 9:30–10:8) who discovers that he cannot put into practice what he desires to do (following Paul’s argument in 7:7–13). His new perspective as a Christian allows him to see the conflict more clearly than he had before for he can see the intent of the Law more clearly than he could when he was a Jew who felt justified by outward observance. This is why Paul is so pessimistic about anyone’s ability to keep the Law.

Paul never criticizes the Jews for their desire to follow the Law, but for their legalism and inability to keep the Law. In Romans 10:2 Paul refers to the Jews as having a zeal for God.

3) “I” must be a Christian because only a Christian possesses the “inner person” of verse 22. The expression only appears here and in 2 Cor. 4:16 and Eph. 3:16. In Corinthians and Ephesians it is clearly a reference to believers.

The inner man is that part of the person that is the most determinative part of his personality—that which is central to his will and affection (Murray, 257). The person spoken of delights in God’s Law. This cannot be said of an unregenerate person.

4) The passage concludes after Paul’s mention of deliverance, with a reiteration of the divided state of the will. This shows the struggle of Paul as his desires battle against each other (cf. Gal. 5:17).

In response to PRO 4: the assumption that the phrase, “the inner person,” in verse 22 must be a believer (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16) is questionable. “Inner person” may not be a phrase reserved for Christians, but could be used of unbelievers as well. Paul does not call this person the “new man.” It may just mean something like “one’s inward being,” not the new person we are in Christ.

Throughout this passage, Paul has used words to contrast the “outer,” or bodily, aspect of the person with the “inner,” or mental, or spiritual aspect of the person: “flesh” (vv.18, 25) and “members” (v. 23) on the one hand, and “mind” (vv. 23, 25) on the other hand. These words, as we have seen, correspond to the two contrasting activities of “willing” and “doing” (vv. 15–21). In this context, it is much more likely that “inner person” has its well-attested anthropological meaning than a questionable soteriological meaning (Moo, 462).

5) “While the passage contains nothing inconsistent with the *experience* of true believers, it is inconsistent with the experience of unbelievers. They are not the subjects of the inward conflict here depicted. There is in them indeed often a struggle between reason and conscience on the one side, and evil passion on the other, but there is not an utter renunciation of self, a looking for help to God in Christ alone, and a delight in the Law of God, of which the Apostle here speaks” (Hodge, Systematic Theology, III, 224).

\*\*6) These verses support the “already/not yet” character of the Christian life (see my notes on Romans 6:7–14). Some things in our salvation have happened already, yet they will not be enjoyed in their fullness until our salvation is complete. This “already/not yet” is seen in Romans 6–9. For example, in Romans 7:24 Paul asks, “*Who will set me free from the body of this death?*” This is a future request. Likewise, Romans 8:11 says, “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead *will also give* life to your mortal bodies.” We have been delivered from sin and death, but the deliverance that Paul thanks God for is not complete. Thus, in Romans 6:12 Paul must still say, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,” and in Romans 8:13 he says that the deeds of the body must still be put to death: “if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” In other words, the deeds of the body are still operative though we need not be mastered by them anymore. Although the believer has the Holy Spirit, his body is still unredeemed and dead to sin. Total liberation will not be experienced until we are raised bodily from the dead. Because of this, “we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Ro. 8:23).

7) Some see a connection of Romans 7–8 to Galatians 5:16–18: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” In these verses the believer has the power to prevent sinful actions, but is not freed from sinful desires. Those who are led by the Spirit are those who put to death the deeds of the body. Romans 8:13–14 helps to clarify what it means to walk by the Spirit. It says, “if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” The Holy Spirit leads us to kill sin, rather than to indulge it. But according to Galatians 5:17, this does not come naturally; life in the Spirit is a life of conflict. The flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to one another, and both try to prevent the other from manifesting itself; the flesh tries to quench the manifestation of the Spirit and the Spirit the manifestation of the flesh. “It is this opposition which explains why walking by the Spirit will inevitably result in the desires of the flesh not being carried out” (Fung, 249).

8) It is common knowledge that believers experience this conflict.

#### ADDITIONAL CONS

\*1) When Paul says in Romans 7:19, “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want,” are we to suppose that the powers of grace are so feeble in the life of the believer that he is destitute of good works which are the fruit of the Spirit?

\*2) Is “wretched man that I am” (7:24) Paul’s picture of himself as a Christian who has entered into the joy of the gospel (7:6)?

\*REPLY: This is simply the honest expression of the painful experience of internal conflict and contradiction. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25) is not the cry of defeat, but the confidence of assurance and hope (Murray, 259).

\*3) The relation to the Law is assumed in this passage, and there is no break from 7:1–13. Wouldn’t this necessitate that an unbeliever is being spoken of?

**VIEW 2:** Paul is reflecting on his experience before he became a Christian (summarized from Moo, 445, Schreiner, 385–390):

#### PROS

\*\*1) The structure of the text supports a pre-Christian experience.

- Romans 7:5: “the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.”
- Romans 7:6: “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

Romans 7:7–25 describes verse 5 in more detail, while 8:1–17 describes verse 6 in more detail.

- A Life under the law of the unsaved (7:5)
- B Life in the Spirit as a believer (7:6)

- A’ Life under the Law elaborated (7:7–25)
- B’ Life in the Spirit elaborated (8:1–17)

If verse 13 refers to an unbeliever, and verses 14–25 are an explanation of that verse, then it would follow that the person in 14–25 also refers to an unbeliever.

It also seems unlikely that Paul would shift from the experience of the unbeliever to the believer when the discussion is about being under the Law.

Verse 25b (“So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin”) functions as the conclusion of the main theme of verses 14–25. That Paul interjected the solution to the problem in verse 7:25a (“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”) before giving the conclusion is not surprising.

2) Nowhere do verses 14–25 mention the Holy Spirit, whereas chapter 8 refers to the Holy Spirit 19 times. The person Paul is describing struggles by himself without the aid of the Holy Spirit. When left to his own resources he lacks the ability to carry out God’s commands.

- According to 8:1–13, those who are of the flesh are unable to keep God’s law while those who have the Holy Spirit are able to fulfill the law by the Holy Spirit’s power.
- The fleshly person in 8:5–8 who cannot keep the law parallels the person in 7:14–25 who is in bondage to sin and Romans 8 makes it clear that that person is unregenerate.

\*\*3) Romans 7:14 says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold *under* ( ὑπὸ hupo) *sin*.” Paul consistently uses the negative ὑπὸ (hupo) phrases to denote *unbelievers* and the old era of salvation history; nowhere does this terminology refer to believers.

- Both Jews and Greeks are *under* sin and liable to judgment (Ro. 3:9; 19–20).
- Believers are *not under* the law (Ro. 6:14–15), but “under grace.”
- Those who rely on the works of the Law are *under* a curse (Gal. 3:10).
- Scripture has shut up all *under* sin (Gal. 3:22).
- Jesus was born *under* the Law to liberate those *under* the Law (Gal. 4:4–5).
- The unbelieving Jews are *under* the Law; Paul is not *under* the Law (1 Cor. 9:20).

The “I” that Paul speaks of is under the power of sin (v. 14b), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18–22).

While Paul is clear that believers continue to struggle with sin (6:12–13; 13:12–14; Gal. 5:17), what is pictured in 7:14–25 is not just a struggle; it is a defeat to sin. The struggle appears to be unsuccessful and illustrates that the person is still a “prisoner to sin” (v.23). Yet 8:2 stresses that believers are set free from sin (“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death”).

If this is a Christian, how do we explain the weakness of the Christian experience? The depth of defeat seems to contradict Romans 6 which asserts that Christians are dead to sin and no longer slaves to sin. According to Romans 6, the tyranny of sin has been broken for believers and they are now free to serve God.

\*6) The struggle is with the need to obey the Mosaic Law; yet Paul has already said that the believer is free from the Law (6:14; 7:4–6).

\*\*7) The contrast between Romans 7:14–25 and 8:1–17 is so dramatic it is difficult to believe that the experience delineated is a Christian experience in both cases. The “now” in 8:1 makes a sharp contrast to the person under the dominion of sin spoken of in 7:14–25.

8) The strong connection of the word “I” with the flesh (7:14, 18, 25) also suggests that Paul is speaking of an unsaved person (7:5).

In response to PRO 8: “flesh” need not refer to only the body, or the sensuous nature, but to the whole person apart from the Holy Spirit (Hodge, 229).

In I Corinthians 3:1–3 the word is used 3 times of believers; there it contrasts other believers who are also called “spiritual men” (πνευματικός – pneumatikos). Paul in addressing the church says, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men (πνευματικός – pneumatikos), but as to men of flesh (σάρκινος – sarkinos), as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly (σάρκινος – sarkinos). For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly (σάρκινος – sarkinos), and are you not walking like mere men?” “Men of flesh” emphasizes people who place the physical over the spiritual side of life (Fee, I Corinthians, 124). They are people “whose existence is determined not by God, but by considerations internal to themselves” (Barrett, I Corinthians, 80). Hodge concludes that the word has two meanings: “It designates those in whom the flesh is the only principle action [an unbeliever]. At other times it has a modified sense, and is applicable to those who, though under the dominion of the Spirit, are still polluted and influenced by the flesh [a believer]” (Hodge, 229). The flesh is “me” when I am under my own control instead of that of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 6 Paul spoke of his pre-Christian condition when he had no choice but to choose sin as his master. In that state, sin had authority over his life. The believer has been freed from this condition and sin is no longer in the position of authority over him. But now in Romans 7 Paul finds himself, one who has been freed from sin, being subject to a power that he cannot effectually resist. Though he knows he is free, he still struggles to resist the power of the flesh. As a believer he wants to resist, but he finds it still impossible to be completely free. This is a struggle that all believers are conscious of.

\*REPLY: The meaning behind the word is determined first by the context. In 1 Corinthians 3 it is clearly speaking of the believer for the context demands it. Romans 7 does not have that clarity. Furthermore, one wonders why Paul insists that we are free from the power of sin, only to let us know in the next chapter that he has never experienced the freedom he claims we have.

#### ADDITIONAL CONS

1) If verses 14–25 are Paul’s pre-Christian experience we would expect the section to end with “Thanks be to God!” (there is hope). But it doesn’t end there. After thanking God he reverts back to “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.” Although he can thank God, he still sees the struggle within him.

REPLY: The fact that Paul does not end with “thanks be to God” is evidence that this is not a Christian experience. It is easier to see Paul jumping ahead in thought to what he knows he is about to say about the believer’s deliverance in Christ, then to conclude that what he has just said is thankfulness for his new life in Christ although that life offers him no relief from his struggle with sin. It is better to see “but now. . .” in 8:1 as a switch to his present experience as a believer where he can now receive help in overcoming sin through the Holy Spirit where before he couldn’t.

**Believer? Unbeliever?**

Romans 6:2 How shall we who **died to sin** still live in it?

Romans 6:4 we have been buried with Him . . . so we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:6 **our old self was crucified** with Him, in order that our **body of sin might be done away with**, so that we would **no longer be slaves to sin**;

Romans 6:7 **he who has died is freed from sin.**

Romans 6:11 **consider yourselves to be dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:12 **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its lusts,

Romans 6:14 **sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

Romans 6:17-18 thanks be to God that **though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart** to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and **having been freed from sin**, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6:20 **when you were slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Romans 6:22 But now **having been freed from sin and enslaved to God**, you derive your benefit,

Romans 7:4 **you also were made to die to the Law** through the body of Christ. . . in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Romans 7:6 But now **we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound**, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Romans 7:14 **I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.**

Romans 7:17 sin which dwells in me

Romans 7:18 nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh

Romans 7:19 I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Romans 7:23 I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me **a prisoner of the law of sin** which is in my members.

Romans 7:24 **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?**

Romans 8:2 **the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**

Romans 8:3 what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did

Romans 8:5-8 those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. **6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Romans 8:9 However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Romans 8:12-13 So then, brethren, **we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh--** 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Romans 8:15 **you have not received a spirit of slavery** leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

