

One could say that Paul (Saul) was a perfectionist. That might have come from his background as a Pharisee,¹ but the fact remains now that he was a new man in Christ he had great expectations of himself. And one would think from his writings that Paul would rise to great heights of spiritual prowess, even perfection – but that was not his assertion about himself.² He knew he had a struggle and he knew that he was a work in progress.³

So, we enter into this lesson with this idea – that God expects us to have a struggle but he has provided for victory. This lesson is about the struggle, the next, the victory in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Struggle

Paul begins this struggle with a clear statement that since he has died in Christ, the old demands of the Law no longer has a grip on him:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?
Romans 7:1 (King James Version).

What!? Just what is Paul saying here? Well, if we recall earlier in ch. [5:20](#), the Law enters much as a Prosecutor in a court of law – as sinners, we are a condemned lot – much more as the Law enters this grim scene - **“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound....”**⁴ if we were not aware of our circumstances as sinners, when we get through with the Prosecutor, Law – we know for sure that we are sinners and condemned. But then the sinner cries out “Lord, be merciful unto me, a sinner” and we are saved. Saved? Indeed, and one of the myriad of blessings we receive in our salvation is that we are the fortunate recipients of God’s Grace – **“... But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”**⁵ Abounded in that the condemnation was lifted we are now His children, forgiven, and have the imputed righteousness of Christ.

In the next chapter we see that this is not an opportunity for more sinning that grace might abound even more – rather is an opportunity for a new start as God’s child and a

¹ See [Phil 3:5](#)

² See further comments in this lesson and also Phil 3:10-12, [AMP](#), [NASB](#), [NIV](#), [KJV](#). AMP is wordy but I like the point it makes.

³ [Eph 2:10](#)

⁴ Rom 5:20a

⁵ Rom 5:20b

growing up to be more and more like Christ.⁶

So what about the spiritual expectations we might have now that we are children of God and the reality that we are constantly struggling in our spiritual walk? Well, the fact is that when we accepted Christ as Savior, we died – yes, we died to the old dreadful condition we found ourselves in and were born from above – spiritually and now are a new person (as in species – not reformed) in Christ. Look further in this passage:

⁴ Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. Romans 7:4-5 (KJV).

Yes, I did skip the part of Paul's illustration of marriage in the scope of this lesson – the point I wish to make here is that as long as we were sinners we were bound to the Law and as such were condemned *because we were condemned sinners*. Nothing was going to save us from that. The apostate Jewish religion of the day tried to assert that by keeping the “hedge” – the interpretations of the Law by the apostate Jewish religious leaders – the devout follower would somehow be ushered into their concept of Abraham's bosom – heaven. There were a whole system of “how to” rituals including giving to the temple for the poor – alms – that pretty much guaranteed (especially the rich) entrance into heaven. But this was a contrived, apostate belief system the left the follower of this religion mired in his sin with no hope of deliverance from it. In fact, the condemnation of Jesus was that these apostates were not only going to go to hell but they would be guilty of hindering those who were trying to know about God by taking the key of knowledge of Him away.⁷

But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. Romans 7:6 (King James Version).

All that to say that the saved were released⁸ from this death-grip so that we should serve (not death) but Christ in the newness of spirit (life). So, the thrilling news is that

⁶ 2 Cor 3:18, [KJV](#), [NASB](#). I do NOT recommend NIV here, I do like the (again, wordy [AMP](#)

⁷ See [Matt 23:13-33](#) and compare with [Luke 11:52](#).

⁸ Aorist, Passive of katergeo - to abolish, to do away with. Epistle usage is in reference to abolishing the powers that would hinder man's spiritual progress. See 1 Cor 2:6; 15:24-26; Eph 2:15; 2 Thes 2:8; Heb 2:14

we as God's children serve not the law wherein we were dead but in grace, we serve in life – God's life. That's exciting. Paul finishes out this section by insisting that the Law is not evil or to blame. The Law serves the purpose of bringing us to Christ. Were it not for the Law, we would not know that we were in need of a Savior. Let's move on.

The Spiritual Reality check.

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. Romans 7:14-15 (King James Version).

Now, we get a glimpse into the heart of Paul. This is not a statement of Paul before Christ – this was the struggle he was going through *after* Christ.^{1(Endnote)} Before Christ he was not in the slightest bit concerned about any spiritual struggle within – as with all sinners, there is none! Whatever conviction one experiences about his sin before Christ comes from *without* – namely, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin so that a sinner may come to a saving knowledge of Christ – not some good versus evil struggle within. Certainly, there is the conscience of a man where he wrestles with the issues of whether murder or stealing etc is wrong but that is taught him by his previous generation. Please refer to [Endnote 1](#) on this – MacArthur points out that: “...*The unbeliever not only hates God's truth and righteousness but suppresses them, he willfully rejects the natural evidence of God, he neither honors nor gives thanks to God, and he is totally dominated by sin so that he arrogantly disobeys God's law and encourages others to do so (1:18-21, 32).*”

So, we are introduced to Paul's personal struggle with his own sin nature that would exert influence over him in spite of the fact that he is now a Justified, Spirit filled Christian. MacArthur goes on to say of this person (Paul): “...*It seems rather that Paul is here describing the most spiritual and mature of Christians, who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God's standards of righteousness the more they realize how much they fall short. The closer we get to God, the more we see our own sin. Thus it is immature, fleshly, and legalistic persons who tend to live under the illusion that they are spiritual and that they measure up well by God's standards. The level of spiritual insight, brokenness, contrition, and humility that characterize the person depicted in Romans 7 are marks of a spiritual and mature believer, who before God has no trust in his own goodness and achievements.*”⁹

I've said this many times: the real key to spiritual growth is transparency. The more we establish our personal spiritual goals and attempt to meet them, the more we tend to edit them so that we can achieve our expectations. We have at work an exercise we go through every year called a Performance Screen. In this exercise I and my supervisor establish realistic goals for the upcoming year and then at the end of the year we review this Performance Screen to see what my achievements were. Did I meet the

⁹ —MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The

very goals *that I created for myself?* This is not the Christian experience. We do not create the very criteria for spiritual living – God does. That is not to say we shouldn't have spiritual goals – but I am saying that these goals should not define a status of our having arrived to some state of sinless perfection. No. The honest, mature Christian admits to himself *and to God* that he has this struggle within but is confident that he will be victorious *in Christ*.

The Sin Nature is Realized in the Mature Christian.

¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 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. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 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.
Romans 7:17-20 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update)).

There is a part of us we will leave behind when either we die or we are raptured at the coming of Christ – we will leave behind our sin nature. It is this struggle over which we, as we live our present life, will become more and more able to resist – yet never to the point of perfection. We will see, as Paul points out in his own personal struggle, that the sin nature is not his new-born self but as Lenski points out is a duality: "

'Moreover, now no longer do I myself work it out, but the sin that dwells in me.'
This explains the duality that has thus far not been brought out. It is involved in v. 15, 16, in Paul's doing what he does not will but hates and thereby consenting to the law that condemns his own doing. Paul's personality itself is not divided, there are no two opposing [gk] ego in him, which would be unthinkable. Even when in common parlance we speak of a better self in some person we do not mean that two actual selves exist in him. This duality in Paul is the presence of an extraneous power in him beside his own [gk] ego : "the sin dwelling in me," i. e., the sin power mentioned so often before. This dwells in Paul, it does not possess and control him entirely, it is only lodged in him. It still maintains itself in him but is not really a part of him, it is a foreign element that has not yet been dislodged and expelled. Such is the duality."¹⁰

So, as we draw this lesson to a close we see that life for the believer does not consist of creating a checklist of goals that we think might make for a spiritual Christian – rather we see that it is a dynamic process of growing up in Christ where we become more and more like Him.

Accordingly, then, I myself with the mind keep slaving for God's law but with the flesh for sin's law. Romans 7:25 (Lenski New Testament Commentary).

Let us understand the strategic issues in our lives so that we might win the victory.

¹⁰ —Lenski New Testament Commentary

Begin Endnotes here

1. MacArthur states the question whether Paul is referring to this man (himself) before or after Christ: *"It is obviously important, therefore, to determine which sort of person Paul is talking about before any interpretation of the passage is attempted. It is also of some importance to determine whether Paul's first person singular refers to himself or whether that is simply a literary device he uses to identify more personally with his readers. The answer to those two questions will automatically answer a third: If Paul is speaking of himself, is he speaking of his condition before or after his conversion? Those who believe Paul is speaking about an unbeliever point out that he describes the person as being "of flesh, sold into bondage" (v. 14), as having nothing good dwelling in him (v. 18), and as a "wretched man" trapped in a "body of ... death" (v. 24). How then, it is argued, could such a person correspond to the Christian Paul describes in chapter 6 as having died to sin (v. 2), as having his old self crucified and no longer being enslaved to sin (v. 6), as being "freed from sin" (vv. 7, 18, 22), as considering himself dead to sin (v. 11), and as being obedient from the heart to God's Word (v. 17)? Those who contend Paul is speaking about a believer in chapter 7 point out that this person desires to obey God's law and hates doing what is evil (vv. 15, 19, 21), that he is humble before God, realizing that nothing good dwells in his humanness (v. 18), and that he sees sin as in him, but not all there is in him (vv. 17, 20-22). He gives thanks to Jesus Christ as his Lord and serves Him with his mind (v. 25). The apostle has already established that none of those things characterize the unsaved. The unbeliever not only hates God's truth and righteousness but suppresses them, he willfully rejects the natural evidence of God, he neither honors nor gives thanks to God, and he is totally dominated by sin so that he arrogantly disobeys God's law and encourages others to do so (1:18-21, 32)."* —MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The