

### Victory Over Sin by Following Biblical Directions

#### Romans 7:21-25

Romans 7:21-25 - *"I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. <sup>23</sup> But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup> O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."*

#### Background Notes

Romans 5-8 contains some wonderful truths for the believer. In these chapters we learn about the great blessings and benefits of our salvation (Romans 5). We learn about our spiritual position in Christ (Romans 5 and 6). We learn that we are free from the law (Romans 7) – not free to sin or be lawless, but free to serve the Lord in love. And in Romans 8, we will learn that the strength we need to have victory over sin and to serve the Lord in love is available in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before we come to Romans 8, in the second half of Romans 7 Paul shows us what it's like to try to live as a Christian apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice the number of times the Apostle Paul uses the pronoun "I" in the second half of Romans 7. Paul had found that there was an inward struggle going on – doing the right thing was not automatic, even as a Christian. Sometimes he ended up doing the very thing that he didn't want to do! Verse 15: *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."*

I think that we can all identify here, especially if we are Christians. How many of you have ever had the experience of wanting to spend an hour in prayer, but you ended up daydreaming or falling asleep on your knees within fifteen minutes? I'm sure you've had that experience. In other words, what you wanted to do as a Christian (pray for an hour), you didn't do -- and what you didn't want to do (fall asleep), that you did. Now maybe some of you say, "I have no problems with that. I really do pray for a solid hour." Well, if that's the case, you just may be struggling with religious pride because you're thinking, "Ah, I did it! Everyone else falls asleep, but I don't. I'm really spiritual!" If so, indwelling sin got you there! What you didn't want to do (become proud of your "spiritual accomplishments"), that you did -- and what you wanted to do (be humble) you didn't do! This is just one of many illustrations that could be given of how indwelling sin works in our lives as believers.

For example, last week I was doing a project in our home. I was building some storage shelves, and I needed 21 shelf brackets. I went to the hardware store bin where the brackets were, and it looked like maybe, "Wow – there may not be

21 brackets here!" So I grabbed all of them and put them in my cart, and then began to count them out. Well, guess what? There were 22 brackets in the bin, but as I was driving home I began to think, "What if someone had come along as I was counting out those brackets, and needed a bracket?" Well, I would have been happy to give them **one** -- but you can't put up a shelf with just one bracket. They would have needed at least **two**. What would I have done, as a Christian? Would I have said, "I'm so sorry, but I was here first." As a Christian, what I would **want** to do is to not be selfish. I would **want** to give that person two brackets -- but would I have ended up doing what I should **want** to do, or what I **don't** want to do, because I have to get my project done?

As you think through this Romans 7 passage, you realize that we can all identify with what Paul is saying here. So many times, because of indwelling sin, we end up doing what we don't want to do, and we don't do what as Christians we should want to do! What's the problem here anyway? The problem here is that sin that still indwells us, even as believers. Look at verses 17 and 20: *"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."* And verse 20 *"Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."*

Paul was not making excuses for himself here -- he was telling us the **source of the problem**. Notice that he used the **present tense**. This was Paul's experience as a believer, and we can all identify. Don't get the idea that Paul was leading a sinful life, or was overwhelmed with sin! No, he was sharing with us the truth that as believers we are not free (yet) from the problem of sin, and because of that we struggle in our lives as believers. Furthermore, Paul was sharing with us what it is like if we try to live life as a Christian in our own strength, and don't avail ourselves of the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The new nature in the believer serves the law of God.

Verses 21-22: *"I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."* When we become Christians, we not only receive forgiveness of sins -- we are born again! We are given new life in Christ; we are brought into the family of God. Because of this new life in Christ, we have a **new nature**. 2 Peter 1:4 says that this new nature is divine; it is from God himself. 2 Peter 1:4: *"by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

The new nature doesn't have to work at pleasing God -- it automatically pleases God! It is the new nature, or the new divine life, that we possess as members of the family of God. This is what the Apostle John most likely had in mind with he wrote 1 John 3:9, *"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."* At the core of our being, the inner man, we have been regenerated by God. We are new creations. 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*

This divine life that we receive as a result of being born into the family of God is sinless. It can't sin. It is from God and of God. So the new nature doesn't have to try to keep the law of God – in fact, it delights in the law of God. Verse 22: *“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.”* The new nature in the believer serves the law of God.

## 2. The old nature in the believer serves the law of sin.

Verse 21: *“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”* And verse 23: *“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”* Although the new life that we have in Christ delights in the things of God and has no tendencies to sin, yet we still sin. Why? Because we still have indwelling sin, or the sinful nature -- what the New Testament calls “the flesh.” In fact, the sinful nature acts as an evil principle or law in our bodies, always trying to overcome the desires of the new nature and bring us down into the bondage of sin. The sinful nature is never reformed. The sinful nature never changes. So we cry out with Paul in verse 24, *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever cried out like that? Have you ever wanted to worship the Lord and think only pure and holy thoughts? What usually happens? So often other thoughts creep into our minds, thoughts about who's going to win the big game tonight, or thoughts about our work or plans for the weekend, or thoughts about our selfish desires, or thoughts about other people -- even thoughts that aren't so nice about other people. What's going on? The law of sin is in operation to disrupt our worship of God.

The law of sin operates on us because we still have the sinful nature. The old nature in the believer serves the law of sin.

## Practical Application

**Remember -- it's “Who,” not “what.”**

Verse 24 again: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* Notice that Paul didn't say **what** shall deliver me from this body of death? No, he said **Who** shall deliver me from this body of death? The Apostle Paul knew the solution to the problem, and he'll share the details with us in Romans 8.

But notice, in verse 25, that the solution is focused in **God Himself**: *“I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* The solution to dealing with the sinful nature (that we will have until the day we die) is **“WHO,”** not **“what.”** Just as the key to **salvation** is not **what** you **do**, but **“Who** you **know,”** so the key to **sanctification** is not **what** you **do**, but **“Who** you **know”!**

Sanctification is the process by which we are made more holy and become more “conformed to the image of Christ.” As a result, we sin less. Notice, we don't become sinless, but we will **sin less**.

This process is going on all the time in our lives, but we don't do it – God does. Philippians 1:6 *“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...”* The good work here in Philippians 1:6 is our sanctification. Notice the key is **not what, but WHO**. It's **Who** is working in us, **not what** we try to do in our own strength. Sanctification doesn't come by trying as hard as we can in our own strength to be good and keep the Law. No! It comes by focusing our attention on the “Who” – on the Lord Himself.

Here's an illustration: What's the best way for a married man **not** to commit adultery? Answer: To truly be in love with his wife. The best solution is not for that man to try with all his might not to look at other women, or to repeat the seventh commandment, *“Thou shall not commit adultery,”* ten times every day. That man will never have a problem with adultery if he is truly in love with his wife!

Are you in love with Christ? If you are, your focus will be on Him, and that's the key for dealing with the problem of our sinful nature. Remember -- **it's “Who,” not “what”!**