

Romans 7:14-25 — The Struggle Of Obedience In Our Own Strength

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Revision of Romans 7:7-13—The Law Reveals The Power And Deceptiveness Of Sin

1. Is the Law sin? (7:7a)
No it is not. It is good and perfect and holy.
2. The Law is good: It's a perfect moral X-ray machine to reveal sin, especially hidden sin (7:7b)
"Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4)—If what I believe doesn't agree with the Scriptures, then it's not the Scriptures that are wrong, but rather me. I'm deceived.
Romans 3:4 AMP
Let God be found true though every human being is false and a liar, as it is written, That You may be justified and shown to be upright in what You say, and prevail when You are judged [by sinful men]. [Psalm 51:4.]
3. Sin is so sinful that it takes what is good and perfect and uses it for evil (7:8)
The law says, "Don't do that", but what does the sinful nature hear? "Let's do that!"
4. Living as an unbeliever before knowing the law (7:9)
The unbeliever is "alive" until the law condemns them, and they die. Example, the rich young ruler who went away sad after Jesus used to law to reveal how desperately wicked his heart was, even though he led an outwardly moral life. The same was true for Paul.
5. Sin corrupts the law and defeats its purpose of giving life; once law is corrupted by sin, it brings death (7:10-12)
"Legalistic Christians and churches do not grow and bear spiritual fruit. They are living by Law, and the Law always kills" (Wiersbe)
6. The purpose of the law is to reveal and highlight the sinfulness of sin (7:13)
*Truly, we would never know just how wretched and wicked sin really is without the law to reveal it to us. The question we must all ask and the conclusion we must all come to is very simple: **"What is the problem? The problem is me."** Remember, the moment I try to justify myself, I am deceiving myself.*

Outline

1. The Law is powerless to change our sinful nature (v 14)
2. The law is powerless to enable our sinful nature to do anything good (15-20)
3. The battle between the old and new natures (21-23)
4. The law is powerless to free us from the power of the sinful nature (24-25)

Romans 7:7-25 NKJV

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. ¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

¹³ Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 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. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 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.

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 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. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ 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.

1. The Law is powerless to change our sinful nature

Romans 7:14 NKJV

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:14 NLT

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin.

Romans 7:14 AMP

We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am a creature of the flesh [carnal, unspiritual], having been sold into slavery under [the control of] sin.

Why is it important to know that the law is spiritual?—GOD! HATES! LEGALISM!

v 14 **For we know that the law is...**: Previously we have learned that the law is holy and just, because it was given to us by a holy and just God. Also we know that the law is good, because it has a good purpose, that is, to reveal our sinfulness so we can see our need for a saviour.

v 14 **For we know that the law is spiritual:** Here we learn something new about the law; **the law is spiritual**. What does this mean? It means that it deals with the inner man, the spiritual part of man, and not just the outer actions. It doesn't just deal with the outer or material or fleshly part of us, but also the inner or spiritual. It's not just about an external change in behaviour, but rather an internal change in attitude and desire. Consider Deuteronomy 10:12-13 and 16 (below), where Moses emphasises that the law has everything to do with the inner man, with the heart. There are also many other passages (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:37; 6:4-6; 10:12; 11:1; 30:6, 16, 20) that show that the law is can only be kept if the person first loves God—the motive for obeying God must be agape love and gratitude for all that He has first done for us (see 1 John 4:19).

Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 16 AMP

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but [reverently] to fear the Lord your God, [that is] to walk in all His ways, **and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being,** ¹³ To keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?

¹⁶ **So circumcise the foreskin of your [minds and] hearts; be no longer stubborn and hardened.**

So why is it important to **know that the law is spiritual**? Because knowing that the law is spiritual means that we understand why *GOD! HATES! LEGALISM!* Legalism or empty religion is just going through the motions—it's living in the shadows and not experiencing the reality of a love relationship with God (see Colossians 2:16-23, Hebrews 8:5, 10:1-4, and Isaiah 1:10-16)—it's pretending to love God and give something to God or do something for God, but in reality it only wants something from God—it's substituting an external or behavioural change for a genuine heart change—it's dead faith—it's doing something only because I want to get something in return—it's pure selfishness—it's loveless, cold, and hard-hearted—it's only skin deep—it's pretending to be someone you're not—it's living according to the sinful and selfish desires of the sinful nature—*legalism is sin.*

Colossians 2:16-23 NLT—*the reason why legalism is useless; it doesn't change desires*
So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. ¹⁷ For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ Himself is that reality. ¹⁸ Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. **Their sinful minds have made them proud, ¹⁹ and they are not connected to Christ, the Head of the body.** For He holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.

²⁰ You have died with Christ, and He has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, ²¹ "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? ²² Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. ²³ **These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.**

Isaiah 1:10-16 NLT—*God rebuking the legalism of the religious Jews living in Judah*
Listen to the Lord, you leaders of "Sodom." Listen to the law of our God, people of "Gomorrah." ¹¹ "What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

¹² When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? ¹³ Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting—they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings.

¹⁴ **I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!**

¹⁵ When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims.

¹⁶ Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways.

Walking in the Spirit: the opposite of legalism and/or licentiousness

The believer who is not walking in the Spirit behaves in one of two ways, often both of these at the same time—legalism (pretending to love God by an outward observance of the law or any self-determined standard) and licentiousness (sinning it up!). However, walking in the Spirit means that I obey God because I want to, not because I have to—I want to give instead of get, to bless others instead of seeking to be blessed. To keep the law first and foremost means to agape love God, to respond to God by returning His unconditional love. For this to happen, I must first have a change of heart; I need a new heart, a soft heart, a heart that loves and reverences God.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NLT

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will [naturally want to] follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

What it means to be carnal—a spiritual law cannot change a carnal or fleshly man

v 14 **But I am carnal:** The word **carnal** simply means “material, physical, human, fleshly, natural, of the flesh”. A **spiritual** law cannot change or help a **carnal** man.

v 14 **But I am carnal:** “As outlined in 1 Corinthians 2–3, there are basically three types of people. The natural man is what we all were before we were saved. The spiritual man is the one who is saved and who walks in the Spirit. The carnal man is born again but lives in the energy of his flesh. Therefore, although the carnal man can appear to be saintly and righteous, he is miserable internally because he knows he can’t live up to the rules, regulations, and expectations he has placed upon himself. That’s where Paul was. Yes, he was converted, but he was miserable in his carnality.” (Jon Courson)

Notice that a carnal man is a Christian man who is not walking in the Spirit. Instead they are walking according to the power and desires of the sinful nature. We know that this man is saved, because God has made him aware of his carnal nature. The natural or unsaved man doesn’t have this awareness because his spirit is still dead to God.

Galatians 5:16-17, 25 AMP

But I say, walk and live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit]; then you will certainly not gratify the cravings and desires of the flesh (of human nature without God)[carnal living]. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the [Holy] Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], so that you are not free but are prevented from doing what you desire to do.

²⁵ If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit.]

“**Carnal** uses the ancient Greek word *sarkikos*, which means, “characterised by the flesh.” In this context it speaks of the person who can and should do differently but does not. Paul sees this carnality in himself, and knows that the law, though it is spiritual, has no answer for his carnal nature.” (David Guzik)

This is why the only solution for the desires of the sinful nature is to put them to death—*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.* ²⁵ *Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives* (Galatians 5:24-25 NLT).

The need for the believer to be constantly aware of and guarding against their sinful nature that still lurks within them

v 14 **Sold under sin:** This represents our flesh or sinful nature. My sinful nature will always hate God and be in open rebellion against Him (see Romans 8:7-8). The law can’t help my sinful nature because it is by nature a slave to sin, or controlled by sin. Rather the law can only condemn it. This is why understanding *justification by faith alone* (not by works or law keeping) is so important (see Romans 3:21-5:21). Otherwise we will try to earn God’s favour and forgiveness in a futile attempt to save ourselves. Also, we will try to change ourselves, but we will never be able to change the sinful nature—it just needs to be reckoned as dead and crucified.

“Paul is in bondage **under sin** and the **law** can’t help him out. He is like a man arrested for a crime and thrown in jail. The law will only help him if he is innocent, but Paul knows that he is guilty and that the law argues *against* him, not *for* him.” (David Guzik)

Romans 3:27-28, 4:5, 15 NLT

^{3:27-28} Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, **because our acquittal [justification, declared righteous] is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith.** ²⁸ So we are made right with God [justified or declared righteous] through faith and not by obeying the law.

^{4:5} But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.

^{4:15} For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

“That is the proof of the spiritual and wise man. He knows that he is carnal [that he has a wicked and sinful human nature], and he is displeased with himself; indeed, he hates himself and praises the Law of God, which he recognises because he is spiritual. But the proof of a foolish, carnal man is this, that he regards himself as spiritual and is pleased with himself [blind to his sinful human nature or flesh].” (Luther)

“Our nature is carnal (fleshly); but the Law’s nature is spiritual. This explains why the old nature responds as it does to the Law. It has well been said, **“The old nature knows no Law, the new nature needs no Law.”** *The Law cannot transform the old nature; it can only reveal how sinful that old nature is. The believer who tries to live under Law will only activate the old nature; he will not eradicate it.*” (Warren Wiersbe)

Also remember what Paul said about trying to change ourselves by our own strength.

Galatians 3:2-3 NLT

Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? **After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?**

2. The law is powerless to enable our sinful nature to do anything good

The struggle of obedience in our own strength—How can I ever do anything good

Romans 7:15-20 NKJV

For what I [sinful nature] am doing, I [new nature] do not understand. For what I [new nature] will to do, that I [sinful nature] do not practice; but what I [new nature] hate, that I [sinful nature] do. ¹⁶ If, then, I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] will not to do, I [new nature] agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ But now, it is no longer I [new nature] who do it, but sin that dwells in me [sinful nature]. ¹⁸ For I [new nature] know that in me (that is, in my flesh [sinful nature]) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me [new nature], but how to perform what is good I [sinful nature] do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I [new nature] will to do, I [sinful nature] do not do; but the evil I [new nature] will not to do, that I [sinful nature] practice. ²⁰ Now if I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] will not to do, it is no longer I [new nature] who do it, but sin that dwells in me [sinful nature].

Romans 7:15-20 NLT

I [new nature] don't really understand myself [sinful nature], for I [new nature] want to do what is right, but I [sinful nature] don't do it. Instead, I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] hate. ¹⁶ But if I [new nature] know that what I [sinful nature] am doing is wrong, this shows that I [new nature] agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I [new nature] am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me [sinful nature] that does it. ¹⁸ And I [new nature] know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I [new nature] want to do what is right, but I [sinful nature] can't. ¹⁹ I [new nature] want to do what is good, but I [sinful nature] don't. I [new nature] don't want to do what is wrong, but I [sinful nature] do it anyway. ²⁰ But if I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] don't want to do, I [new nature] am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me [sinful nature] that does it.

Romans 7:15-20 AMP

For I [new nature] do not understand my own [sinful nature] actions [I am baffled, bewildered]. I [sinful nature] do not practice or accomplish what I [new nature] wish, but I [sinful nature] do the very thing that I [new nature] loathe [which my moral instinct condemns].

¹⁶ Now if I [sinful nature] do [habitually] what is contrary to my [new nature] desire, [that means that] I [new nature] acknowledge and agree that the Law is good (morally excellent) and that I [new nature] take sides with it.

¹⁷ However, it is no longer I [new nature] who do the deed, but the sin [principle] [sinful nature] which is at home in me and has possession of me.

¹⁸ For I [new nature] know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh [sinful nature]. [I [new nature] can will what is right, but I [sinful nature] cannot perform it. I [new nature] have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out.]

¹⁹ For I [sinful nature] fail to practice the good deeds I [new nature] desire to do, but the evil deeds that I [new nature] do not desire to do are what I [sinful nature] am [ever] doing.

²⁰ Now if I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] do not desire to do, it is no longer I [new nature] doing it [it is not myself (new nature) that acts], but the sin [principle] [sinful nature] which dwells within me [fixed and operating in my soul].

v 15 **For what I [sinful nature] am doing, I [new nature] do not understand:** The desires of the sinful nature are strange, foreign, and polar opposites to those of the new nature. Paul in Galatians 5:17 makes this very clear: "*The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions*" (NLT).

The problem is not a lack of desire or knowledge

v 15 **For what I [new nature] will to do, that I [sinful nature] do not practice; but what I [new nature] hate, that I [sinful nature] do:** The problem is not a lack of desire or knowledge. The new nature always knows what is right and always wants to do what is right, but the old nature always refuses to comply. Dieting is often a good practical illustration of the Christian walking according to the desires of their sinful nature—we often have great intentions, but very poor execution.

Recognising the source of all our sin

v 17 **It is no longer I [new nature] who do it, but sin that dwells in me [sin nature]:** Is this like saying, “the devil made me do it—I can’t help it so I’m not responsible?” No! We will see in chapter 8 that, because we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, we have the power to say no to the sinful nature, to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin, to deny ourselves, to crucify the passions and desires of our sinful nature to the cross. *What Paul is saying here is that the desire to sin never comes from his new nature, but always from his sinful nature.* It’s important to learn to distinguish between the desires of the sinful nature and the new nature so we know which desires need to be denied or crucified, and which desires need to be strengthened by prayer.

“Is Paul denying his responsibility as a sinner? No. He recognises that as he sins, he acts *against* his nature as a new man in Jesus Christ. A Christian must own up to his sin, yet realize that the impulse to sin does not come from who we really are in Jesus Christ.” (David Guzik)

“To be saved from sin, a man must at the same time own it and disown it; it is this practical paradox which is reflected in this verse. A true saint may say it in a moment of passion, but a sinner had better not make it a principle.” (Wuest)

“The many pronouns in this section indicate that the writer is having a problem with *self*. This is not to say that the Christian is a split personality, because he is not. Salvation makes a man whole. But it does indicate that the believer’s mind, will, and body can be controlled either by the old nature or the new nature, either by the flesh or the Spirit. The statements here indicate that the believer has two serious problems: (1) he cannot do the good he wants to do, and (2) he does the evil that he does not want to do.” (Warren Wiersbe)

The absolute moral depravity of the sinful nature (flesh)

v 18 **For I [new nature] know that in me (that is, in my flesh [sinful nature]) nothing good dwells:** The flesh or sinful nature is beyond help. God doesn’t bother with trying to improve it or change it: instead He gives us a brand new identity and nature that loves Him. We need to come to the same conclusion as God concerning our sinful nature—it is corrupted beyond repair, it’s a right-off, nothing is salvageable, there are no parts that can be taken off and sold or used on another car. Every part is broken. Going back to the law being the moral x-ray analogy, every body part is sick, no part of the body is healthy. Despite understanding what the Scriptures say, all of us to some degree try to “fix” the sinful nature—thinking, “surely there must be some part of the old me that’s not completely corrupted and evil?” Consider the following application from Jon Courson:

“Whenever I’m disappointed in myself, it’s because I’m denying what God said when He said, “Jon, in you dwells no good thing.” I still struggle with this. I understand the concept theologically and can quote the verse from memory. But sometimes I think, *There’s some good in me— isn’t there? Am I really this bad, Father?*

Every time I get down on myself, I hear His voice again saying, “Jon, didn’t I tell you straight out, didn’t I record it in black and white that in your flesh, in you personally, dwells no good thing? Why, then, are you disappointed in yourself?”

Those who have a tendency to despair of life do so because they think there’s something good in them that they’re failing to utilise. They’re not living up to their self-image. Although we want our kids to have high self-esteem, the Scriptures say, “Sorry. In you dwells no good thing.” Far from depressing me, I am incredibly free when I finally understand this.” (Jon Courson)

The problem is that the law tells us what to do, but doesn't give us the power to actually do it

v 18b (NKJV) **for to will is present with me [new nature], but how to perform what is good I [new nature] do not find.**

v 18b (NLT) **I [new nature] want to do what is right, but I [sinful nature] can't.**

v 18b (AMP) **I [new nature] can will what is right, but I [sinful nature] cannot perform it. [I have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out.]**

It's like me trying to lift up a 2 tonne block of concrete with only my hands—I can have great desire, and great knowledge, but no matter how hard I try, I'll never be able to lift up the concrete block—it's physically impossible for a human to do that. In the same way, the law tells us what is morally right and pure, including the correct motive for obeying—love. However, it is humanly impossible for anyone under the control of their sinful nature to actually obey what the law says—because it's impossible for the sinful nature to actually love God—the motive will always be selfish and prideful.

“The law says: “Here are the rules and you had better keep them.” But it gives us no power for keeping the law.” (David Guzik)

Telling the difference between a carnal (immature Christian), and an unbeliever

v 19-20 (AMP) **For I [sinful nature] fail to practice the good deeds I [new nature] desire to do, but the evil deeds that I [new nature] do not desire to do are what I [sinful nature] am [ever] doing. ²⁰ Now if I [sinful nature] do what I [new nature] do not desire to do, it is no longer I [new nature] doing it [it is not myself (new nature) that acts], but the sin [principle] [sinful nature] which dwells within me [fixed and operating in my soul].**

The key words here are desire to do (will to do - NKJV). Because the believer has been given a new nature with new desires to love and obey God, they won't be comfortable in sin. They may dabble, but they won't continue in it—they will be like the prodigal son who came to his senses and left the pig pen. They will cry out like Paul did in verse 24, *O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death?* (AMP).

However, the unbeliever does not have a new nature, and so does not have the desire to love and obey God. Thus they will be comfortable in sin, and will be happy to continue in it—just like a pig is comfortable wallowing in the mud.

3. The battle between the old and new natures

Romans 7:21-23 NKJV

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 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.

Romans 7:21-23 NLT

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

Romans 7:21-23 AMP

So I find it to be a law (rule of action of my being) that when I want to do what is right and good, evil is ever present with me and I am subject to its insistent demands.

²² For I endorse and delight in the Law of God in my inmost self [with my new nature]. [Psalm 1:2]

²³ But I discern in my bodily members [in the sensitive appetites and wills of the flesh] a different law (rule of action) at war against the law of my mind (my reason) and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that dwells in my bodily organs [in the sensitive appetites and wills of the flesh].

v 21 I find then a law, that evil [sinful nature] is present with me [new nature], the one who wills to do good: Paul here describes the struggle that we face every day of our Christian life—the battle between our sinful nature and the new nature. “Anyone who has tried to do good is aware of this struggle. We never know how hard it is to stop sinning until we try.” (David Guzik) “No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good.” (C.S. Lewis)

v 22-23a For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind (NKJV)

v22-23a For I endorse and delight in the Law of God in my inmost self [with my new nature]. ²³ But I discern in my bodily members [in the sensitive appetites and wills of the flesh] a different law (rule of action) at war against the law of my mind (my reason) (AMP)

Just like the sinful nature can *only* do evil, the new nature can *only* love and obey God. The new nature that God has given me is the real or eternal me—my new and true and real identity. The old man—my old identity—has been crucified with Christ. The flesh or sinful nature will one day be finally vanquished or destroyed when this body dies. However, the new nature—my new identity—will live on forever in my glorified body. Once in my glorified body I will not have the desire or ability to sin—I will be perfect like God is perfect—I will be eternally delighting in and fully obeying the law of God. Remember, only *perfect* people can live with a *perfect* God in His *perfect* heaven.

v 23b Bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (NKJV)

v 23b Making me a prisoner to the law of sin that dwells in my bodily organs [in the sensitive appetites and wills of the flesh] (AMP)

This shows the futility and foolishness of using the law (legalism) to overcome the sinful nature. Trying to overcome the sinful desires of my sinful nature using the sinful desires of my sinful nature is like me trying to lift myself up by grabbing my ankles and trying to lift my feet off the ground—the harder I try to lift myself up, the more I am actually pulling myself down. In the same way, any self or human-effort to overcome sin will only cause us to want to sin more. Trying to overcome sin in the power of self or human-effort can only result in living in captivity to sin, leading us to experience a wretched, helpless, miserable, and powerless existence.

Trying to take control of ourselves means we lose control of ourselves: The answer is that we must first surrender control of ourselves to God.

The fact is that, until we deny ourselves (see Luke 9:23), by crucifying the desires of the sinful nature (see Galatians 5:24), those sinful desires will control us. And so the battle lines are drawn. We must know our enemy—my own sinful nature is my own worst enemy. Remember what we learned in Romans 6:1-14. We already **know** that we are dead to sin, meaning that sin has no power or authority over us (see Romans 6:6). Will I now **reckon** this to be true (see Romans 6:11), and so **yield** my body to serve Christ (see Romans 6:12-13). All this can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We will learn about this new way of living next time in Romans 8.

The similarities between the natural or unsaved man, and the carnal or immature Christian

“There is a debate among Christians as to if Paul was a Christian during the experience he describes. Some look at his struggle with sin and believe that it must have been before he was born again. Others believe that he is just a Christian struggling with sin. In a sense this is an irrelevant question, for this is the struggle of anyone who tries to obey God in their own strength. This experience of struggle and defeat is something that a Christian *may* experience, but something that a non-Christian *can only* experience.” (David Guzik)

“The one point of the passages is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin; it thus refers to anyone, regenerate or unregenerate.” (Griffith Thomas)

4. The law is powerless to free us from the power of the sinful nature

Romans 7:24-25 NKJV

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ 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.

Romans 7:24-25 NLT

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Romans 7:24-25 AMP

O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death?

²⁵ O thank God! [He will!] through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One) our Lord! So then indeed I, of myself with the mind and heart, serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

We will cover these verses next time, when we go from experiencing the life of frustration, misery, depression, and defeat because we are living in the power of self (living according to the desires of the sinful nature), to finally surrendering to Jesus and asking Him to do for us what we can’t do ourselves. This is us finally learning to walk by faith, ceasing to depend on our own strength (see Hebrews 4:10), and trusting instead in God’s mighty power that is always within us (see Ephesians 3:20).

Summary and conclusion

v 25 So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin: Yes, the carnal Christian is saved and wants to obey God, but they still continue to live like an unbeliever. *Like the unbeliever, they remain a slave to sin because they are still controlled by their sinful nature.*

1 Corinthians 3:3 NLT

For you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?