



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 23



INWARD STRUGGLE CONFIRMS JUSTIFICATION

7:15 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. – Romans 7:15-25 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

When believers become preoccupied with Law, or a regimented and lifeless approach to God, the real nature of spiritual life is obscured. Everything related to life and godliness are thrown out of focus when men address life as though they were merely measuring up to a moral standard. In such a case, they set their objectives too low, and think too small, coming under great restriction.

Make no mistake about this, the saints of God ARE being conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29), and they ARE being changed from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). That change,

however, is facilitated through faith, not works. Those who walk by faith and live in the Spirit have an intense regard for HOW they live. Like Paul they confess, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* ^{NKJV} (Gal 2:20). Armed with spiritual weaponry, they engage the powers of darkness, striving with all that is within them to *“stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Eph 6:10-18). Faith constrains us to *“abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11), and the grace of God

teaches us how to do it (Tit 2:11-12).

In the process of this type of living, tremendous outbreaks of unwanted thoughts occur within. These are the eruptions of *“the flesh,”* which remains linked to our earthly bodies. There is no limit as to how vile these thoughts can be, or how frequently we may have to contend with them. They may “pop” into our minds when we are engaged in the most focused spiritual activities, and when we least want them to show themselves.

The *“good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12) involves dealing with these wayward

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. SPIRITUAL FRUSTRATION (7:15)
- II. I AGREE WITH THE LAW (7:16)
- III. IT IS NOT REALLY ME (7:17)
- IV. I KNOW ABOUT THE FLESH (7:18a)
- V. THE FRUSTRATING CIRCUMSTANCE (7:18b-19)
- VI. SOUND SPIRITUAL THINKING (7:20-21)
- VII. THE RECONCILED WAY OF THINKING (7:22)
- VIII. A CONTRARY PRINCIPLE WITHIN (7:23)
- IX. YEARNING FOR DELIVERANCE (7:24)
- X. DUAL NATURES, DUAL SERVITUDE (7:25)

and unwanted thoughts. Spiritual weaponry has been provided in Christ that can be used to throw down these thoughts, refusing to allow them to dominate our minds, even though they enter into them. The Spirit says this of these weapons. *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:4-5). These weapons, however, cannot **stop** the thoughts from occurring.

This situation is a source of consternation to the believer. You will sense this in the text we are to consider. If there is no understanding of what is actually occurring, the child of God may conclude he is surely condemned, or has not even been born again. Many a fainting soul has interpreted the eruption of the *“old man”* as a personal decline in spirituality.

AFTER NEW LIFE, NOT BEFORE

Theologians, as men are wont to call them, have argued for centuries over this text. Some insist that it is the perspective of Paul BEFORE he was in Christ—a sort of lament of one who is under the Law. Others insist that it is the contemporary experience of believers. If we do not have the proper view of the text, it will only minister confusion.

The Theme of the Chapter

The theme of this chapter, as well as that of the sixth chapter, is life IN Christ, not out of Christ. Ponder the statements that have been made—statements that form the inspired context of the seventh chapter.

- We are *“dead to sin”* (6:2).
- We were baptized into Christ’s death (6:3).
- We also should walk in newness of life (6:4).
- We have been planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death (6:5).
- Our *“old man”* is crucified with Christ (6:6a).
- Henceforth we should not serve sin (6:6b).
- He that is dead is freed from sin (6:6).
- We are to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11a).
- We are to reckon ourselves as alive unto God through Jesus Christ (6:11b).
- We are not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (6:12).
- We are not to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness (6:13a).
- We are to yield ourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead (6:13b).
- We are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God (6:13c).
- Sin will not have dominion over us because we are not under law, but under grace (6:14).
- Salvation makes no provision for continuance in sin (6:15).
- We obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to us (6:17).
- Made free from sin, we have become servants of righteousness (6:18).
- Now we are to yield our members as servants of righteousness (6:19).
- We are free from sin and are servants to God (6:22).
- We have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ (7:4a).
- Our death to the Law in order that we might be married to Christ (7:4b).
- We have been delivered from the Law, becoming dead to it (7:6a).
- Our lives are now lived in service to God in the newness of spirit, not in the oldness of letter (7:6b).

It should be apparent that the perspective being presented is that of one

IN Christ, not one outside of Christ. The foundation of our acceptance in Christ is proclaimed in chapters four and five. The extended commentary on our past is found 1:20-3:20.

References to the Past

In the sixth and seventh chapters of Romans there are references to our past, but not in an extended way. A few comparisons are made to accent the glorious benefits that are realized in Christ Jesus.

- We **were** the servants of sin (6:17).
- We **did** yield our members as servants to iniquity and uncleanness (6:19).
- When we **were** the servants of sin, we **were** free from righteousness (6:20).
- We bore no fruit in our past, and are now ashamed of it (6:21).
- When we **were** in the flesh, the motions, or passions, of sin, were aroused by the Law (7:5a).
- In the flesh, our passions worked in us to bring forth fruit unto death (7:5b).
- Under the law, sin awakened, and we died, losing any sense of acceptance before God (7:8-9).
- The commandment of God produced death in us, not life (7:10).
- Sin worked through the commandment of God to deceive and slay us (7:11).
- Sin worked death in us through the good commandment of God, showing sin to be exceedingly sinful (7:13).

None of these statements are the central theme. They are all mentioned within the greater context of salvation, and what the believer experiences in Christ Jesus. The remainder of this chapter is a continuation of the Spirit’s exposition of our experience in Christ.

ONLY PRESENT TENSE WORDS

Previous to this passage, there were occasional references to the past: *“were baptized. . . were baptized. . . have been planted . . . were the servants of sin . . . have obeyed from the heart . . . ye have yielded. . . were the servants of sin . . . were free from righteousness . . . were in the flesh . . . motions of sin did work. . . I was alive once without the law . . . sin revived and I died . . . I found to be unto death . . . sin deceived me and slew me.”*

How dramatically the passage before us differs. There is NO reference to the

past. It is all in the present, and speaks of a present experience. *"I do . . . allow not . . . I would . . . do I not . . . what I hate . . . that do I . . . I do that . . . I would not . . . I consent . . . it is good . . . It is no more . . . sin that dwelleth . . . I know . . . dwelleth no good thing . . . to will is present . . . that which is good . . . I find not . . . I would . . . I do not . . . which I would not . . . that I do . . . I would . . . I do not . . . I would not . . . when I would . . . do good . . . evil is present . . . I delight . . . I see . . . in my members . . . warring against . . . bringing me . . . which is in . . . man that I am."*

There is no a single reference to the past. It takes an extraordinary amount of imagination to view this passage as a commentary on life when we were dead in sin. Such an approach would clash with

the entirety of the passage. Having made these observations, the meaning and weight of the passage will be very apparent to you. Here is an experience common to all believers, yet little understood by great segments of them. You will find yourself entering into this text as it shines Divine light upon your life. The nature of life in Christ will be clarified, and you will find great delight and revelation in that clarification.

THE SUBJECT IS THOUGHT, NOT DEED

It is important to see that thoughts are the subject of this text, not deeds. Remember, Paul has already said that the Law caused him to recognize lust, or unlawful desire, at the very core of his being. Lust is inherent in the flesh—it is part and parcel of it, and cannot be

separated from it. It would be absurd to introduce a lengthy dialog on outward deeds after elaborating so extensively on the matter of "lust."

When Paul says "doing" or "do," he is not referring to an outward act, but to activities of the mind, which is the battleground. He has already told us that the Law forthrightly condemned "lust," which is an inward thing. In order to confirm how great our deliverance from the law is, he will now confirm that we cannot stop the flesh from lusting. It will throw its thoughts into our minds whether we want them or not. While the Law condemns those desires because they found a way into our thoughts, we are not condemned for them in Christ Jesus. That is because they conflict with what we really want, or will to do.

SPIRITUAL FRUSTRATION

"7:15 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." People that are driven by Law, and seeking to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3), cannot make such a statement. First, they are not inclined to do so. Second, it is too incriminating and condemning for them. *Christians* who are serious, yet uninformed about the nature of the Kingdom, consider the condition described in this verse as an evidence they are wicked. They ponder the possibility of being unacceptable to God, and think maybe they were never really "converted" (Acts 3:19). The prevalence of the tenets of psychology in the professed church has only served to further obscure the significance of this experience. Approaching the various aspects of the believer's life from the standpoint of the human psyche as perceived by psychology, brings no advantage to those in Christ.

The Holy Spirit never approaches the inner-experience of the believer from the earthly point of view. Because there *"is neither Jew nor Greek . . . bond nor free . . . male nor female . . . in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28), **those distinctions are**

never presented as the basis for the analysis of life. If you are familiar with current religious trends, there is a

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phenomenal amount of such examinations in the Christian community. People are taught to view their emotional and intellectual lives from their status as men or women, ethnic origin, of other social distinctions. This is neither innocent nor inconsequential. Such approaches throw sand into the eyes of God's people, and are to be rejected.

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Inner struggle within the child of God will be viewed as a consequence of salvation. It will be set forth within the context of justification by faith and the imputation of righteousness. Our baptism into the death of Christ initiated this struggle, and our release from the body of flesh and blood will loose us from it. In the meantime, because it is not the basis for condemnation, the nature of it must be understood, even though the experience itself goes beyond our understanding.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND
"For what I am doing, I do not understand." Here is a most remarkable expression! Other versions read as follows. *"For that which I do I allow not."*^{KJV} *"I do not understand what I do."*^{NIV} *"I do not understand my own actions."*^{NRSV} *"For that which I do I know not."*^{ASV} *"And I have no clear knowledge of*

what I am doing.”^{BBE} **“I don’t understand myself at all.”**^{NLT}

Several preliminary observations are in order. First, Paul is declaring a present circumstance, not a past one: *“I AM doing . . . I DO not . . .”* Second, this is a circumstance that goes beyond human understanding: *“I do NOT understand.”* Third, he knows WHAT is happening, and later will affirm he knows WHY it is happening (v 23). Yet, that knowledge brings no satisfaction to him. How could wicked thoughts come to him unbidden and unwanted? The KJV reads *“allow not,”* emphasizing he had made no provision for such thoughts. He did not willingly go into areas that nurtured such thoughts. He had not sought them out. Yet they came to him.

We conclude from these things that **faith is superior to knowledge**. It brings a higher form of understanding than is possible in nature. If this were not the case, the experience that is now described would prove to be the total undoing of the tender hearted. With care, the Spirit moves Paul to open up a fact of spiritual life that is common to all believers.

By faith Paul is speaking of the unwanted expressions of the sinful nature. He is not confessing sin or transgression, but a grievous condition.

What I Am Doing

Remember, this is an expression of a sensitive heart. Those with calloused hearts will have no idea what he is talking about. *“What I am doing”* does not refer to the thrust of life, but to unwanted intrusions into the thought life. Further, it does not refer to an outward deed, although what is described can cause outward expressions. He is not speaking of an immoral deed he committed again and again. This is describing the battle between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal 5:17).

By saying *“I do not understand,”* or *“I allow not,”* Paul is saying **he did not fully understand the corruption of his own human nature**. It is as though he was stunned by the depth of the wickedness found in the *“old man.”* It is

one thing to know theologically that man is corrupt by nature. It is quite another to experience the outbreak of that corruption in our thoughts.

The use of the word *“actions”* in some translations tends to confuse the text, leading some to believe the reference is to an outward deed. This is not the case.

The thrust of Paul’s life was Godward. He had turned his back on the past, renounced the things that had separated him from God, and was pressing toward the mark with unrelenting zeal (Phil 3:7-14). Outwardly, he lived *“holily, justly, and unblameably”* (1 Thess 2:10). But there were inconsistencies within. He was not struggling with his will—that was consistent, and he confesses that to be the case. **But his will was not able to stop the eruptions of the “old man.”** He wanted no unacceptable thoughts in his mind, and yet they were found there

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anyway.

In this case, the phrase *“I do”* refers to any thoughts Paul did not want to have. By saying *“I do not understand,”* he means that he was unable to stop them. There were times when he was broadsided, so to speak, by defiled thoughts and lusts that exceeded what he thought was possible. He actually had to grapple with unwanted and intruding imaginations. He had to cast them down violently, even though he had made no place for them in his mind. That was the frustrating part of it all.

In using the word *“frustrating,”* I do

not mean the undoing of the believer, or his utter defeat. Rather, I am referring to discouragement, being humbled, and being baffled. The earnest desire to be utterly without spot NOW, is thwarted. The tender desire to be pleasing to the Lord in every part of our being is blasted by the entrance of things displeasing to us, to say nothing of our Lord.

WHAT I WILL TO DO

“For what I will to do, that I do not practice.” Paul will now show us that the human will, even when sanctified, is not the seat of our power. Through his will, as sanctified by faith, he was able to stop persecuting the church. After he believed on Christ, his will never again allowed him to consent to the stoning of a believer in Christ. There are things the will CAN do, and do well. It can move you to want to be absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). It can provoke you to give beyond your means (2 Cor 8:3,12). The will can move a rich believer to share his wealth with others (1 Tim 6:18). It can constrain us to *“live honestly”* (Heb 13:18). **However, there is an area where the will is powerless!** It is in the matter of stopping unwanted thoughts and lusts from entering the mind!

Other versions translate this expression as follows. *“For what I would, that do I not.”*^{KJV} *“For what I want to do I do not do.”*^{NIV} *“For I do not do what I want”*^{NRSV} *“For not what I would, that do I do, I do not”*^{BBE} *“For I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it.”*^{NLT}

This is an arresting word! It reveals a heart that has been sensitized by grace. Here is a condition in which the individual is acutely aware of the nature of everything that courses through the mind. **“I DO NOT DO WHAT I WANT!”** And what is it that Paul wanted? What was his will on the matter being considered?

At this point, we must rise above the details of life. *“What I want”* refers to the fervent desire for total purity before the Lord, with not a single deviation. **Speaking through Paul, the Spirit here throws down the notion that man can please the Lord in the**

energy of self strength, without the help of the Lord. Even when the will is strengthened by the Spirit, and the affection is set on things above, it cannot close the gate of the mind tight enough to forbid the entrance of profane thoughts. *"I do not do what I want!"*

It is as though he said, "I do not want my flesh to lust against the Spirit, but it does anyway. I want no part of my thinking to be unacceptable, yet I find such a part." Do not think for one moment that when Paul acknowledged he was not *"already perfect"* (Phil 3:12), it was a casual statement. He fervently desired to be *"absent from the body and present with the Lord"* (2 Cor 5:8), but he was not. His presence in the body, and current absence from the Lord, produced all manner of things he did not want. There were deviate thoughts so close to him they had to be taken captive and made to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

"What I want," then, refers to a perfectly consistent life for the Lord, with no interruptions or inconsistencies—particularly in the mind. However, Paul was not able to achieve such a condition because of the presence of the flesh, or sinful nature.

WHAT I HATE TO DO

"... but what I hate, that I do." It requires an honest and informed soul to make such a confession. This is not the acknowledgment of a murderer like Cain! It is not the acknowledgment of a covetous man like Achan. It is not the admission of a profane person like Esau. It is not even the confession of a godly person who sinned like David. This is the admission of a person who lived holily, justly, and blamelessly. If he had not told us of this, we would never have known it.

Other versions read as follows. *"But what I hate, that do I."*^{KJV} *"But what I hate I do."*^{NIV} *"But I do the very thing I hate."*^{NRSV} *"But what I have hate for, that I do."*^{BBE}

Again, this is the statement of a sensitive soul. He hated more than the outward show of sin, or the baser sort of transgressions. Some people who wear the name of Jesus do not *"hate iniquity"* as fully as they should (Psa 97:10). Romans 12:9). They are too calloused toward things that are hated by God, and are an

abomination unto Him. For this reason, they cannot comprehend why Paul speaks as he does.

It is important to see that Paul is not speaking as a sort of spiritual superman. His analysis is the result of living in the energy of the new creation—a privilege vouchsafed to every person in Christ Jesus. This is the experience of those who live by faith, walk in the Spirit, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The conditions declared in this passage were not sought, but were the result of living in the fellowship of Jesus (1 Cor 1:9) and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

I am sure Paul did **not** seek *"despair of life,"* but there was a time when he wrestled with it (2 Cor 1:8). He would rather have **not** experienced *"sorrow,"* but he did (Phil 2:27). I know he would **not** have preferred *"fears"* to come into his mind, but they did (2 Cor 7:5). These are the better part of unacceptable thoughts. There are also *"imagination"* that must be thrown down (2 Cor 10:5).

DOES THIS APPLY TO WORDS AND DEEDS?

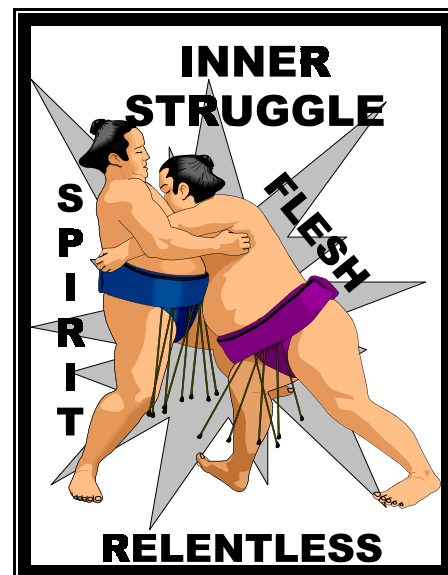
Some might ask if doing what is hated applies to words and deeds. There is certainly a senses in which we can say or do things we actually hate. But that is not the sense of our text. There is a critical difference, however, when we say or do things that we ourselves loath, and when unwanted lusts and thoughts invade our minds. We must confess ill-spoken words and contrary deeds as sin, and procure forgiveness for them. God is *"ready to forgive"* (Psa 86:5) these faults, and to *"cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). We DID them, and we must be forgiven of them.

However, this is not the situation in the text before us. Unwanted lusts and thoughts are not credited to us as sin, and are not to be confessed as sin. This is the whole point of this text. Paul will establish with unusual strength that such expressions do not belong to us. If we do not respond to them by entertaining and fulfilling them, they are not credited to us as personal transgression. This will now be developed more fully.

The New King James Version renders the word *"do"* as *"practice."* This is based on the use of the word in the Greek (ποιῶ). However, *"practice,"* as used in ordinary speech, does not reflect the intent of this verse. As ordinarily comprehended, the word *"practice"* speaks of voluntary and willing expressions. Indeed, this word is often used in Scripture to denote this type of action—a willing and preferable word or deed (Matt 21:24; John 4:34; 1 Cor 9:23; 2 Cor 11:12). But that is NOT the meaning of the word in this passage.

Two Natures

As this text will develop, there are two distinct natures resident in the believer: the *"old man"* and the *"new man."* Like Jacob and Esau before they were born, they reside in the same domain, and struggle with each other (Gen 25:22).



Each nature has a distinct personality, mind, and will. Each is ruled by a different master, and motivated by different principles, or laws. Both are powerful, and aggressively seek their own way. One is good, and one is evil. One is from Christ, one is from Adam. One is earth-centered, the other is oriented for heaven. The devil works in one, and the Holy Spirit in the other.

The phrases *"what I hate, that I DO,"* and *"I DO what I will not to do,"* refer to the DOING, or expressions, of the *"old man."* They are **internal**, not external, acts. Paul refers the word **"I"** because they occur within him. They are part of

his total makeup, but are NOT part of his essential person. They are foreign to his identity in Christ, and contrary to His new heart and spirit. They challenge him like Goliath, and taunt him like Sennacherib. Yet, they are not him!

I AGREE WITH THE LAW

“¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.” This is the first of a series of conclusions—conclusions drawn by faith, not by human knowledge or wisdom. The point under consideration is **doing** what is really hated: *“but what I hate, that do I.”* Once again, this is speaking of the intrusion of corrupt imaginations and thoughts. The perspective now put before us is that of a person who is in fellowship with Christ Jesus. This is NOT the view or utterance of a person alienated from God, and *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1).

While it should not be necessary to say this repeatedly, a veil of ignorance has been thrown over this passage by those who lack spiritual understanding. The result is that a very essential aspect of the Kingdom has been obscured to the people of God. They have been left to struggle with the corruption of the *“old man,”* thinking they are dealing with their basic self. As a result, some have doubted whether or not they are really saved. Others consider their baptism to have been invalid. Still others are persuaded they waffle in and out of God’s favor because of uncomely thoughts and imaginations within. These can extend into the area of dreams, which are often troubling to those who are tenderhearted.

The Spirit will now show us how to reason upon these things. When involuntary imaginations overtake us, intruding into our thoughts, here is how the believer is to reason about the situation.

DOING WHAT I WILL NOT

First, the believer is to acknowledge these are unsought and unwanted. The phrase, *“If, then, I do what I will not to do”* means this. If something occurs in me that is against my will – something I have neither sought nor cultured. The eruption is something I actually hate and despise. It is like a robber that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. It is as much out

of order as a Philistine in Israel, a heathen in the Holy of Holies, or the devil in heaven. It does not represent my preference. It is not what I muse and meditate upon. It is contrary to who I really am and where I am really going.

Erroneous Teaching

Those who insist this passage is referring to Paul prior to his life in Christ have revealed their failure to comprehend the nature of salvation. It makes little difference how they bend the words of the

evil, precisely what is the difference between that person and the saved? How is it that a sinner can eat the fruit of redemption, without having access to its tree of life?

Emphatically, this passage refers to those with a new will, a new heart, and a new spirit! That newness is precisely what has produced this experience. It is not one of rote, but one flowing from the heart. *“What I will not”* is what I do not will, or want, to do, and it applies to THOUGHTS, not deeds.

A novice may very well imagine that a sinner, under the domination of the Law, does not really want to murder, or steal, or commit adultery. That is, from one point of view, conceivable. But what about coveting, lusting, or desiring—for that is the matter now being discussed? Where is the person outside of Christ that is alarmed when they want something that displeases God?

If the matter still seems too distant, think of wanting to be secure in this world, as opposed to desiring to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:1-8). Ponder fearing death (Heb 2:15), or being occupied with thoughts of what we will eat, or what we will wear (Matt 6:25). What of the love of money, or an inordinate attachment to mother, father, brother, and sister (Lk 14:26). What of a failure to WANT to crucify the flesh, together with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). What about wanting to stay in this world, and not being *“willing to depart”* (Phil 1:23). Such conditions DOMINATE the sinner, even though they are covered with the veneer of culture. They show that sin is really not hated, even though some more heinous expressions may be repulsive.

Sin Hated in its Totality

The words *“I do what I do not want to do,”* ^{NIV} refer to the outbreak of the old nature in any sinful thought. They do not speak of a certain class of sin, but of sin in

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text, or attempt to correlate what is being said with other texts of Scripture. In their teaching, they have affirmed those outside of Christ, (in their very best state noted for *“ignorance and unbelief”* – 1 Tim 1:13) have no preference for sin. Rather, they hate it, and have no desire to do it. What is more, if these pretentious teachers are right, the alienated sinner is not even guilty of sin at all, as will be affirmed later in this chapter.

There is not a person outside of Christ who does not **prefer** to sin. That sin may take a mild form that is not offensive to an insensitive society, but it is enough to bring the wrath of God upon the sinner. If *“A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin”* (Prov 21:4), how can goodness be ascribed to such people? And, it is good to love righteousness and hate iniquity, a trait of Jesus Himself (Heb 1:9).

If the sinner, or the person under the Law, prefers to do good and hates to do

its totality. The intrusions may take the form of questioning the reality heaven, or the validity of Scripture. They may include imagining God has abandoned us, or that there is no need to fight the good fight of faith. They may take the form of discouragement, fear, or hopelessness. They may be the intrusion of mysterious dreams that are so contrary to our nature in Christ that they cause confusion within the believer.

These sinful intrusions include all manner of evil lusts, but are not limited to them. The temptation to commit adultery, for example, may take the form prostituting our affection for Christ. We may be tempted to seek counsel or solace from men. We may be tempted to steal time and money from God, with never a thought of taking them from men.

The closer one is to the Lord, the

profitable to the individual. It is seen as precious, needful, honorable, and comforting. All of that is inherent in the word "good."

The Law IS good, whether men see it that way or not. There is no flaw in it, and no disadvantage in its statutes. It reflects the nature of God, and is therefore good. It defines sin, and is therefore good. However, when someone **acknowledges**, consents to, or agrees that it is good, a milestone of life has been reached.

Not Heartless Agreement

This is no mechanical or academic agreement! It is not agreeing with your back, so to speak, pinned against the wall, as though you were forced to agree. This is the expression of the heart. The affection consents. The will consents. Even the intellect consents. No part of the essential person—the "new creation in

keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart" (Psa 119:34).

- "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever"* (Psa 119:44).
- "I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law"* (Psa 119:55).
- "I have not forgotten thy law"* (Psa 119:61).
- "I delight in thy law"* (Psa 119:70).
- "Thy law is my delight"* (Psa 119:77).
- "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction"* (Psa 119:92).
- "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day"* (Psa 119:97).
- "My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law"* (Psa 119:109).
- "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love"* (Psa 119:113).
- "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love"* (Psa 119:163).
- "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight"* (Psa 119:174).

Consenting that the Law is good involves delighting in it, preferring it, not forgetting it, and meditating upon it. David's expressions were preparatory for what would be realized in Christ. Paul is acknowledging participation in the salvation for which David longed (Psa 119:81,123, 160,174).

THE STRUGGLE IS THE EVIDENCE

The invasion of his mind with unwanted passions and desires were Paul's evidence that he agreed with the Law. He made no attempt to justify such thoughts, but acknowledged that he hated them. That hatred was only possible because he consented to the goodness of God's holy Law.

But the word "consent" also carries the idea of verbalization, or confession. Coming from the word *σύμφημι*, "consent," or "agree with," means to affirm or confess. It is as though the intrusion of unlawful desires into his mind caused him to shout out, "THY LAW IS GOOD!" It was good by contrast as well as nature.

The closer one is to the Lord, the broader the range of sinful expression. Just as surely as there will be more the person WILLS to do, there will be more he WILLS NOT to do.

broader the range of sinful expression. Just as surely as there will be more the person WILLS to do, there will be more he WILLS NOT to do.

AGREEING WITH THE LAW

"I agree with the law that it is good." Here is a most blessed conclusion, comforting to the heart and strengthening to the spirit. Make no mistake about this! God Almighty places a high value on agreeing with His Law! Those who are at variance with it in their wills, are headed for disaster!

Other versions read, *"I consent unto the law that it is good,"* ^{KJV} *"I am in agreement with the law that the law is good,"* ^{BBE} *"I still acknowledge the Law as good."* ^{NJB} Notice, the heart does not admit the Law is right, but agrees that it is GOOD. "Good" means flawless by nature and perceived as desirable and

Christ Jesus—disagrees with the good Law of God!

Much before his time, David, the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam 23:1), put this "consent" or "agreement" into words. Although he lived and died under the Old Covenant, his faith took him beyond the perimeter of the Law. In his measure, he was able to speak in harmony with the New Covenant, even though it was not enacted until nearly 1,000 years after his death. That is a most remarkable circumstance! Read some of David's expressions and see if they do not reflect the nature of the New Covenant.

- "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"* (Psa 119:18).
- "For thy judgments are good"* (Psa 119:39).
- "Give me understanding, and I shall*

IT IS NOT REALLY ME

¹⁷ *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* Here

we come to grips with the heart of this passage. This is the second conclusion

drawn from the intrusion of foreign desires and thoughts—expressions of the

“old man.” Without controversy this is one of the most liberating practical proclamations of Scripture. I use the word “practical” because the affirmation is associated with human experience. Foundational freedom is based upon the belief of the Gospel and consequent identity with Jesus. That aspect of liberty was powerfully declared in the sixth chapter. We were freed from sin: liberated from guilt, and emancipated from an obligation to the flesh. It is essential that this liberty be grasped by the heart. It is not enough to only know it theoretically.

BUT NOW

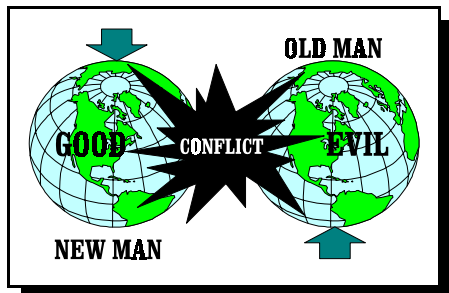
The words “But now” refer to our status in Christ Jesus. This is the life that has resulted from our burial, death, and resurrection with Christ. It is equivalent to saying, “But now that I am in Christ,” or “Now that I am justified,” or “Now that I have received the righteousness of God.” It is the same as saying, “Now that the body of the sins of the flesh has been removed,” or “Now that I am risen with Christ.”

Here is something vital to see. This is not the result of perception, but of identity with Jesus. This is true whether the believer sees it or not. It obtains power when it is seen, but it exists as soon as a person is “joined to the Lord.” If you are in Christ, what follows is true of you, whether you have ever seen it or not. **The role of this passage is to show us the condition of the saved, not their potential!**

IT IS NO LONGER I

On the surface, this may appear to contradict what Paul has just confessed. First he says, “For what I hate, I do” (verse 15). Then he says, “I do what I will not to do” (verse 16). Now he says, “It is no longer I who do it.”

Among other things, this shows the complexity of life in Christ Jesus. Too often there is an oversimplification of life in Christ. Actually, the believer is a microcosm of world conflict—a sort of miniature world in which both good and evil reside, temporal and eternal, earth and heaven. Within the child of God two worlds collide! One is favorable and one is unfavorable. One promotes destruction and the other promotes life. One is tainted, and one is pure.



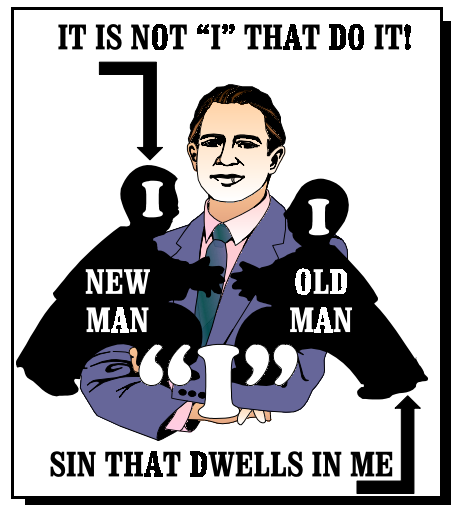
In Christ we receive a new identity. “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”^{NASB} (2 Cor 5:17). The “old things” have “passed away” in several ways.

- They are no longer the center of our attention.
- They no longer have dominion over us.
- They no longer condemn us.
- They are no longer an integral part of us.
- Our view of them has changed.

“Old things,” however, have not become extinct, or non-existent. We still have to contend with them, even though they cannot exercise total control of us. We are required to mortify, or put to death, our “members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col 3:5-8). In the place of “your members that are upon the earth,” the NIV reads, “whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” That is the sense of the text. The members properly belong to our body and the Adamic nature, or what we are by natural birth. They are a part of our human constitution, even though they have been circumcised from our regenerated self, or the “new man.”

IT IS NO LONGER I because these eruptions do not come from my “new man,” or identity in Christ Jesus. The part of me that is in fellowship with Christ has nothing to do with them, and in that sense, “It is not I.” That part is real, not merely theoretical.

It is important to understand this is not a mere excuse or alibi, as the wicked are wont to make. It is not a “devil-made-me-do-it” explanation for transgression. There is no transgression here. Paul is not admitting to having fallen into immortality. Something was done, but it was not overt or external. He is speaking of the expressions of old nature that remains in him, tied, as it was, to his tabernacle of clay.



It was not him because he did not WANT what was expressed. His will was against it. His heart was not in accord with it. That is why he did not allow it to foam out through his words and deeds.

IT IS SIN THAT DWELLS IN ME

If “I do” it, yet “I” do not do it, then who is it that really does it? It may sound like a lot of double-talk, but it is not. The guilty party is that part that has been circumcised from the regenerated part. It is the “law of sin,” or sin principle, that remains in me, and expresses itself exclusively through the “old man.”

This is a powerful example of the meaning of Titus 2:11-13. There “the grace of God” is said to effectively teach us “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

This **denial** is not pretending the

“*ungodliness and worldly lusts*” do not exist, or saying they are not in us. Rather, it is denying they are an expression of our will and preference. It is also a refusal to allow them to sit upon the throne of our heart and mind. It is as though we rejected their appeals, rejecting them through the energy and direction of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13).

Being made “*kings and priests unto God*” (Rev 1:5-6), we rule over the

petitions of our lower and sinful nature. We can reject their appeals in the power of the Holy Spirit. When they say “*follow me,*” we say “**NO!**” They are like Sanballot and Tobiah were to Nehemiah. They are in the place where we are. They shout at us as though they belonged to us, but they do not. They are enemies, living within the borders of our personality, but separate from our real persons. Whatever they say to us, and whatever suggestions they make, we say, “*It is not I! That kis*

not the expression of my true desires!”

In a sense, it is a humbling experience to find that we have “*sin*” dwelling in us, cohabiting with us in the same vessel. But it is a temporary situation from which we will be delivered. Until that deliverance comes, learn to capitalize on the truth revealed in this text. You are not responsible for what the sinful nature suggests! That is a privilege vouchsafed to you by the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

I KNOW ABOUT FLESH

^{18a} ***For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells . . .***” The dichotomy of our experience is frustrating, but we are not totally ignorant concerning the situation. When

Ignorance is lethal for the child of God. As soon as understanding eludes us, sin deceives us. What Paul here confesses must be the aim for every believer. Otherwise, Satan will gain the advantage over them through his craftiness and shrewd devices.

Here, the word “*know*” is unusually strong. Unlike many other uses of the word “*know,*” this does not come from the Greek word γινώσκω, which means experiential knowledge. Here, the Greek word οἶδα is used, which refers to a different kind of knowledge. This particular word is used eighteen times in Romans (1:11; 2:2; 3:19; 5:3; 6:9,16; 7:7, 14,18; 8:22,26,27,28; 11:2,22; 13:11; 14:14; 15:29). It means perceive, discern, understand, or be skilled in a given area. This is knowledge that comes through faith, not experience. Some examples of its use will serve to illustrate the point.

present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (6:19).

☐ “*What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not **KNOWN** sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet”* (7:7).

This does not refer to mere academic knowledge. Paul is not reciting the tenets of a discipline of life. This is something he understood. He had a grasp of the situation, and was able to reason upon it.

IN MY FLESH

It is one thing to have a sort of knowledge about the flesh itself. It is quite another to understand about your own flesh—to have insight into the nature of your natural man.

Doctrinally, the Spirit has already delineated the flesh in general. “*There is **NONE** righteous, no, **NOT ONE**: There is **NONE** that understandeth, there is **NONE** that seeketh after God. They are **ALL** gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is **NONE** that doeth good, no, **NOT ONE**.”* (3:10-19). That should be an end of all controversy. Yet, it is not enough to merely memorize those facts and spout them heartlessly. The sense of them must be grasped for them to have power in the individual.

Concerning the flesh, Paul had some of the most respectable flesh that has ever been on earth. Hear him speak about it. “*Though I might also have confidence in*

the later versions of Scripture read “*I do not understand what I do*” (v 15), it can be a bit misleading. This is an expression of frustration, not one of ignorance. Paul knew these unwanted intrusions were not issuing from His real self. He will now affirm he also knew that nothing good was resident in the natural self. This is now the third conclusion drawn concerning the involuntary outbreaks of the flesh within.

I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF

Ignorance is lethal for the child of God. **As soon as understanding eludes us, sin deceives us.** What Paul here confesses must be the aim for every believer. Otherwise, Satan will gain the advantage over them through his craftiness and shrewd devices.

☐ “*But we **KNOW** that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things”* (2:2).

☐ “*Now we **KNOW** that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (3:19).

☐ “*And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, **KNOWING** that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope”* (5:3-4).

☐ “***KNOWING** that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him”* (6:9).

☐ “*Do you not **KNOW** that to whom you*

the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil 3:4-6).

Mind you, this is distinction among a distinct people—a people chosen, led, and defended by God Almighty! These people had received more than any other people. They were the only people given a holy Law and a covenant with God. Paul excelled among **those** people. All of the prophets and all of the promises were directed to them. And Paul excelled among **THEM!**

NOTHING GOOD DWELLS

I am interested to hear what a man like that will say of himself. He is not hesitant to speak on the matter. *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”*^{NASB} He does not say some good is found in the flesh, but that NO good is found there. Not only is nothing good found in the flesh generally, nothing good is found in HIS flesh. This is what he comprehends about himself. He can see the truth of it.

There are professed Christian teachers who say they do not understand how Paul could say such a thing. By saying this, they only betray their own ignorance. Paul KNEW, they do not. You can rest assured if they do not understand NO good was in Paul’s flesh, they surely are not aware that no good is found in theirs.

What did Paul mean by this statement, and what compelled him to affirm it? He is speaking of his natural self, which he calls *“my flesh.”* The word *“flesh”* is used in distinction to *“spirit,”* and stands for everything that is indissolubly united with the body.

Whatever I will be freed from in death and the resurrection is *“my flesh.”* Whatever part of me cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, is *“my flesh.”* If it must be controlled and brought under subjection, it is *“my flesh.”* If it comes from Adam, it is *“my flesh.”* Everything

about me that required my new birth is *“my flesh.”*

This is *“the natural man”* that cannot receive *“the things of the Spirit of God,”* and to whom they are *“foolishness”* (1 Cor 2:16). Flesh is absolutely consistent in all of its ways.

Paul calls it *“MY flesh”* because it is resident in him, not because he is charged with its defense and protection. He preferred not to have it, but there it was with him, ever being a source of aggravation and inner contention.

Jesus Speaks

Jesus spoke to this point when He said, *“the flesh profits nothing”* (John 6:63). By this, Jesus did NOT mean the flesh was profitable in some, but not all, areas. He does NOT mean there are a few circumstances in which *“the flesh”* can yield benefit. Men may say this, but Jesus Christ does not.

Stated another way, Jesus said *“without me, you can do nothing”* – and *“the flesh”* is *“without”* Christ in every sense of the word (John 6:63). It is *“weak,”* incapable of contributing to or sustaining the *“new man”* (Matt 26:41). It cannot generate a child of God (John 1:13). It even made the law of God *“weak”* (Rom 8:3). This is the only part of you in which Satan can gain a foothold, for he cannot touch what has been born of God (1 John 5:18).

NO GOOD THING

This is not a lifeless theological statement. It is the confession of something that has been seen or perceived. In *“my flesh dwells no good thing.”* There is nothing there that will be honored in heaven, nothing that can be salvaged. Everything about *“the flesh”* must eventually be separated from me!

Knowing this, Paul could consider everything bringing gain to that part of him to be *“dung”* – worthless and to be discarded (Phil 3:8). He did not look to the flesh for spiritual support. Those who

remained in that realm could not edify him or bring heavenly benefits to him.

By nature, nothing good was found in Paul– or us! Any good must be received, for *“EVERY good gift and EVERY perfect*

Paul calls it *“MY flesh”* because it is resident in him, not because he is charged with its defense and protection. He preferred not to have it, but there it was with him, ever being a source of aggravation and inner contention.

gift is from above” (James 1:17). If nothing good is found in us by nature, then it follows that men are *“evil”* by nature, for evil is the total absence of good. This is why Jesus said to His disciples, *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”* (Matt 7:11). By this, Jesus did not mean His disciples were the dregs of humanity, wallowing in perversion and moral corruption. Rather, he meant they were not good in the eyes of God, and thus required regeneration, or the new birth.

This is the same as *“concluding all under sin”* (Gal 3:22). Sin has leveled the playing field of humanity. The part of us that made us sinners in the first place, remains with us. Although it is not the dominant part of us, it is a part with which we must contend. What Paul now says of himself is to be applied to everyone.

This circumstance was perfectly clear to Paul, even though he did not know the depths of it, he did realize the reason for and nature of the warfare. That is precisely why he was able to stand in the heat of the conflict, keep the faith and fighting the fight. Because he knew the situation was not unique to him, he elaborates upon it. He will show he knew this by spiritual reasoning as well as by revelation. The argument is unusually powerful, bringing liberty to the soul.

THE WORD “FLESH” SHOULD STAB US AWAKE, SOUNDING THE NEED FOR SOBRIETY AND CHALLENGING US TO TAKE THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD.

The Believer still Contends with Lust, that Intrudes into His Mind--yet is not Condemned by that Contention. --by Given O. Blakely

THE FRUSTRATING CIRCUMSTANCE

^{18b} . . . *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.*” Again, I want to point out the present tense of every aspect of this verse: “*IS present . . . I DO not find . . . I will to DO . . . I WILL not to do . . . I PRACTICE.*” This is not an exposition of the past! **Nowhere in Scripture is the believer’s past assessed as though it was still going on.** When reference is made to our former lives, the language itself confirms it is in the PAST. “*For when we WERE yet without strength . . . while we WERE yet sinners . . . when we WERE enemies . . . ye WERE the servants of sin . . . when ye WERE the servants of sin . . . when we WERE in the flesh . . . such WERE some of you . . . who WERE dead in trespasses and sins . . . Wherein IN TIME PAST ye walked according to the course of this world . . . also we all HAD our conversation IN TIMES PAST in the lusts of our flesh . . . at that time ye WERE without Christ . . . you, that WERE sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works . . . we ourselves also WERE sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another . . . who through fear of death WERE all their lifetime subject to bondage . . . Which IN TIME PAST were not a people.*” (Rom 5:6,8,10; 6:17,20; 7:1; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 2:1,2,3,12; Col 1:21; Tit 3:3; Heb 2:15; 1 Pet 2:10).

There is a sharp line of demarcation between our lives of alienation and our reconciliation to God. There came a point in time when we were no longer in sin but in Christ, when we were no longer enemies but made friends. No good purpose can be served by speaking of those times of death, enmity, and alienation, as though they were still present. Such vernacular would only serve to further confuse believers. Those experiencing a struggle within would then be led to conclude they were NOT in Christ, and that they remained dead in

their sins. **If the erroneous assumption that this text refers to Paul’s past life, inward struggle is actually a sign that we have NOT passed from death unto life.** It is evidence of NOT being saved and reconciled to God. There is no other way to view this passage! This is Paul’s assessment of the PRESENT – of our life in Christ, and the conflict it has produced with the flesh.

Confirmed in Galatians

The very experience declared here is confirmed in the book of Galatians, leaving no doubt as to its application. “*For*

Here is the frustrating part of the faith-life. While we remain in the body, there are good things we want to do, yet cannot find a way to do them! Every believer knows this is the case. Daily we seek grace to help in these times of need, when we are, of ourselves, impotent to do what we already know is good.

the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). The NASB reads, “*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.*”

This is a brief description of the inner warfare explained more fully in the seventh chapter of Romans. The point being made in Galatians is precisely the one made in Romans. The struggle itself is not sinful, and does not condemn us. “*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law*” (Gal 5:18). The leading of the Spirit is presented within the

context of a struggle with the flesh. We choose to follow the Spirit rather than the flesh. While the Law condemns the flesh, together with all of its desires, it cannot condemn us if we follow the Spirit—even though the very lusts it condemns are found in our earthly constitution. That is good news!

I WANT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

“ . . . *for to will is present with me.*” Other versions read, “*For I have the desire to do what is good,*”^{NIV} “*I can will what is right,*”^{NRSV} With the person in Christ, it is not a matter of not wanting what is right. **Faith effects the will!** However, while willingness is imperative, it is not omnipotent. A modicum of honesty will confirm that being willing is not the same as accomplishing the thing willed.

Paul is saying he is willing to do what the Law demands, down to the smallest detail. To state it another way, he did not want to sin, and he did want to walk perfectly before God. That was his heart. These were such consistent desires that the thoughts presented by the flesh were foreign to his thinking—unwanted intrusions into his mind.

Being “*willing in the day of His power*” (Psa 110:3) is essential, but it is not the total answer. We will yet be delivered from a state wherein we are willing, yet cannot fully do what we want.

I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO DO IT

“ . . . *but how to perform what is good I do not find.*” Other versions read, “*but I cannot carry it out,*”^{NIV} “*but I cannot do it,*”^{NRSV} “*but to accomplish that which is good, I find not,*”^{DARBY} “*I have the mind but not the power to do what is right.*”^{BBE}

Here is the frustrating part of the faith-life. While we remain in the body, there are good things we want to do, yet cannot find a way to do them! Every believer knows this is the case. Daily we seek grace to help in these times of need, when we are, of ourselves, impotent to do

what we already know is good.

The word “DO” is not a casual word, as though Paul was satisfied with some token expressions of his will. Rather, he wanted to perfectly execute his will, with no element of dissatisfaction. It is like the disciples falling asleep when they really wanted to stay awake (Matt 26:41).

THE GOOD THAT I WILL TO DO

This does not refer to obeying moral laws, civil laws, and helping our neighbor. Faith moves our will into a higher realm—one that governs the domain of external expression. “The good” of reference is consistent and uninterrupted.

The individual being led by the Spirit wants no deviate thoughts—not a single one. He wants to “attend upon the Lord without distraction” (1 Cor 7:35). The desire is for uninterrupted communion with God. “The good” that is willed is to always have the things of God fresh, always be joyful, strong, and dominated by the peace of God.

The desire is for no taint, however small, to be found upon our service to God. It is for no spot or blemish to be found upon our lives. That is what we want! But who has discovered the power to realize those desires? That is the point of our text. Faith has made us willing, but not all-wise or all-powerful.

THE EVIL I DO NOT WANT TO DO

The believer does not want to contend with waywardness in his own self. We would to God we had no part of us that had to be subordinated, for evil **does** have to be subordinated. But such a condition, however greatly it is willed or desired, is not with us!

There are thoughts that have to be “cast down.” As it is written, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5). There is a sense of aggression and strong violence in the text.

Our will is **not** to have imaginations that must be thrown down, and thoughts

that must be captured. Such things are “evil.” But who is the soul that has experienced such a state? “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean fulfill. It means something surfaced in ME that needed to be put down!

We are NOT willing to have thoughts and lusts that must be denied, or rejected. Things like this are “evil.” Yet, such things DO arise in us. We must even be taught by the grace of God to reject them, thrusting them from us. “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*”

We are NOT willing to have thoughts and lusts that must be denied, or rejected. Things like this are “evil.” Yet, such things DO arise in us. We must even be taught by the grace of God to reject them, thrusting them from us.

(Tit 2:11-12). Our wills are NOT to ever have a worldly passion to which we must say “NO!”^{NIV} But what believer has ever experienced the thorough satisfaction of that desire in this world? “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean I executed the desire. It means something came up in ME that had to be denied, or rejected!

How grand it would be, says our will, if there was nothing in us that needed to be crucified, mortified, and put to death. Things that require crucifixion and death are evil. Are such things resident in our total makeup? Indeed they are! “*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Col 3:5). These things are “evil.”

Is there any among us who dares to boast they have no “members” that need to be put to death—mortified? “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (1 Pet 2:11). Who is the believer that will affirm he has not confronted “*fleshly lusts*” from which he had to “abstain?” “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean carry out. It means something arose in ME that

had to be put to death—something from which I had to abstain!

Our will prefers not to have anything about us that needs to be subdued or conquered. After all, we have been called to an inheritance into which nothing defiled can enter (Rev 21:27). That is the environment we want. Anything that has to be subjugated is “evil.” Ponder what Paul says of the body. “*No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*”^{NIV} (1 Cor 9:27).

Here is an enemy you carry with you

night and day. We are painfully aware of its presence every conscious moment. It shouts its desires and preferences in our minds at the most inopportune moments. “**The evil I do not want, I do.**” “DO” does not mean I followed the dictates of my body. It means I have a body that is wayward and must be ruled!

Withheld From the Saints

It is tragic beyond description that this perspective has been largely withheld from the saints. Even though the circumstance exists in every person that is in Christ Jesus, relatively few have any understanding of it, and no one totally comprehends it.

The perception of this text is a precious key that unlocks Kingdom mysteries to us. No person who sees this will question the need for the grace of God. The demand for an indwelling Spirit will not be doubted by those who see this. The need for perseverance and an aggressive fight of faith makes perfect sense to those who identify with this text! They will not question the need for edification, meeting with kindred spirits, or ingesting the Word of God. Their understanding moves them to seek every advantage possible. They will seek all of the graces afforded them in God’s great salvation.

SOUND SPIRITUAL THINKING

“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.” It is not enough to merely know what is happening within us. We must be able to draw valid conclusions from our condition—conclusions that make for edification and comfort. Men have considered this passage and arrived at all manner of erroneous and dangerous conclusions. Such reasonings have brought no advantage to the saints of God, but have been like weights upon them, hindering them in the race set before them.

The degenerative effects of much of the preaching of our time it most serious. Many contemporary interpretations of Scripture are no more than the mere opinions of men. They are subtle “doctrines of demons” designed to turn men in the wrong direction. As when Peter “walked on the water to go to Jesus” (Matt 14:29), these teachings constrain men to look at the storms of life instead of the Ruler of the storms. They do not culture a proper view of self, God, Christ, salvation, or life in this world.

IF I DO WHAT I WILL NOT

Now Paul begins to reason concerning his condition. He has acknowledged his will is far ahead of his ability to fulfill it. That acknowledgment is not intended to apply only to himself. He is elaborating on our death with Jesus—death to sin and death to the Law. He is expounding the truth of deliverance from condemnation and the appropriation of righteousness.

In Christ, a new WILL is received. This is the result of having God’s holy and spiritual law put into our minds and written upon our hearts (Heb 8:10). It flows from having our conscience purged from dead works so that we may “serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). Now, the thoughts that once found a home in our minds are unwanted and repulsive. When they present themselves, we have done what we did not want to do! We have thought what we did not want to think! These intruding thought have not been summoned by our wills, but shot into our thinking like poisonous arrows from our

“old man,” or sinful nature.

How are we to reason when this grievous circumstance introduces itself? Are we to throw up our hands in despair, concluding that we must be walking at a distance from God? Are we to deduce that we have not been regenerated, or that we must be forgiven for such things even asserting themselves in our thought processes? The Spirit will now teach us how to reason on these things.

IT IS NO LONGER I

This is the fourth conclusion drawn by the Apostle. Allow me to remind you of these four conclusions drawn at this point.

- “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good” (verse 16).
- “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (verse 17).
- “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (verse 18).
- “Now if I do that I would not, **it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me**” (verse 20).

“No More”

“It is **no more** I that do it!” “It **no longer** I who do it!”^{NIV} The same expression was used in verse seventeen: “**NO MORE** I that do it.” At this point, we need to more fully expound this expression, “no ,more,” or “no longer.” Why not say “It is not I?” Why add the words “no more,” or “no longer.” There is a reason for this manner of speaking.

The lusts which now intrude into our minds were once welcomed by us—often the very same lusts. What is now “the old man,” or the “not I,” was once us! That self was not “old” then, but in the vigor of its youth. It is what caused us to be dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God, and condemned. Our old self loves to remind us of our old self, and suggest to us that we return to the old ways, like a dog to its vomit, and a sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire.

But we are “no more,” or “no longer” that person. We are a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), the “sons of God” (1 John 3:1-

2), and “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). We admit those desires once felt at home in us, but “no more!” They are “no longer” an expression of our will. They are “no longer” welcome in our minds. They do not belong to our real self! What unspeakable liberty is realized by the soul who has a grasp of this reality!

I FIND LAW

“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Other versions read, “I find then **the principle** that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good,”^{NASB} “So I find **this law at work**: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me,”^{NIV} “So I find **this rule**: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side.”^{NJB}



This law is to spiritual life what the law of gravity is to nature. Every time a person wants to go up, he confronts a law, or principle, that pulls him down! No matter how often or how high the person jumps, the law of gravity is there. He cannot get rid of it, but must learn how to live with it. He can take measures that can counteract the law of gravity, like flying, or climbing, but he cannot get rid of the law.

So it is in spiritual life. The desire to do good is always mixed with the suggestions of our old nature. This is a spiritual principle, and should not surprise us. The point is not the **source** of this law, but the **PRESENCE** of it. It is an ever present truth that the determination to do good is always neutralized by the presence

of "evil."

"Evil," in this case, refers to all inner influences that compete with the good we want to do. While they are not always evil

morally, they ARE "evil" because they draw us away from the "good" we intend to do. Good and evil are always contending within us. It is a principle that remains with us while we are in the body.

This aspect of spiritual life will be further developed in verse twenty three. It has only been introduced in this verse. But it is a vital principle, and must be seen in larger measures by the elect.

THE RECONCILED WAY OF THINKING

"²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man." This is the sixth conclusion Paul draws from his perception of the turmoil within—the struggle of good and evil within the womb of the mind. I cannot overemphasize the importance of knowing how to assess our inward experiences. Many believers are at a tremendous disadvantage simply because they are ignorant of the cause and nature of inner conflict. They can imagine they are better than they really are, unaware of the "evil" that remains associated with them. They can also conclude they are worse than they really are, not understanding that the evil with which they struggle is IN them, yet is not an expression of their real persons. Thus, the high value of this passage is accentuated. Once seen, it becomes a weapon with which to do battle. It also becomes a sweet elixir to assuage the weary warrior.

DELIGHTING IN THE LAW OF GOD

The glaring absence of a delight in the Law of God is abundantly apparent in far too many assemblies. A lack of appetite for God's Word, and a studied effort to avoid being exposed to much of it, are altogether too common. This is a most serious condition, even though it is not common to so regard it.

"For I delight in the law of God." Other versions read, "I joyfully concur with the law of God,"^{NASB} "I take pleasure in the law of God,"^{BBE} "I dearly love God's law."^{NJB} How is it that Paul can conclude he delights in the Law of God, when evil has erupted within him? Does not "evil" being "present" with him suggest the law of God is not within him? Indeed not!

He knows he delights in the Law of God because he recognizes "evil" when it asserts itself. This is no academic

recognition, but one of the heart. He knows competing influences when he experiences them. Delighting in the Law of God shapes the will of the believer, causing him to want to do right things, and be repelled by the wrong things.

Rejoicing in the Law of God, and being satisfied by its message, are the results of having it written upon the heart and put into the mind (Heb 10:16). Delight includes the following conditions: approval of, preference for, and pleased with. This frame of mind is expressed by holy men of old time.

- ☐ **JOY.** "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me **the joy and rejoicing of mine heart**" (Jer 15:16).
- ☐ **VALUE.** "I have **esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food**" (Job 15:16).
- ☐ **DESIRED.** "The judgments of the **LORD are true and righteous**

*altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: **sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb***" (Psa 19:9-10).

- ☐ **NOT FORGET.** "I will **delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word**" (Psa 119:16).
- ☐ **TRUST.** "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I **trust in thy word**" (Psa 119:42).
- ☐ **KEPT.** "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I **kept thy word**" (Psa 119:67).

- ☐ **HOPEIN.** "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have **hoped in thy word**" (Psa 119:74,81).
- ☐ **BETTER.** "The law of thy mouth is **better unto me than thousands of gold and silver**" (Psa 119:72).
- ☐ **LOVED.** "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97).
- ☐ **PROVOKES HOLINESS.** "I have **refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word**" (Psa 119:101).
- ☐ **SATISFYING.** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, **sweeter than honey to my mouth!**" (Psa 119:103).
- ☐ **REJOICING.** "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are **the rejoicing of my heart**" (Psa 119:111).
- ☐ **MEDITATE IN.** "Mine eyes prevent (are awake in) the night watches, that I might **meditate in thy word**" (Psa 119:148).
- ☐ **STAND IN AWE OF.** "Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart **standeth in awe of thy word**" (Psa 119:161).
- ☐ **A TREASURE.** "I rejoice at thy word, as one that **findeth great spoil**" (Psa 119:162).
- ☐ **TALK ABOUT.** "My tongue shall **speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness**" (Psalm 119:172).

While all of these are surely involved in delighting in the Law of God, yet many of them may seem distant from us when "the law of sin" erupts within. Even at that time, however grievous it may be, the very fact that we abhor the expressions of the "old man" proves we really do "delight in the Law of God." That not only is a valid conclusion, if we are to overcome sin, it is an essential one!

The Absence of Such Delight

The glaring absence of a delight in the Law of God is abundantly apparent in far

too many assemblies. A lack of appetite for God's Word, and a studied effort to avoid being exposed to much of it, are altogether too common. This is a most serious condition, even though it is not common to so regard it. Many a local congregation tailors its activities for those who have no delight in, or high regard for the law of God. Various forms of entertainment and a variety of family activities are thought to be sufficient for the people. However, Jesus did not pour out his soul as an offering for sin in order for such things to occur among His saints.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke of people who lacked a delight in the Word of the Lord. Through the Spirit he defined their condition most precisely. You may rest assured, if this was true under the limited perspective of the Old Covenant, it is much more true in the "day of salvation."

Hear the prophet as he laments. People would not hear the Word, for whatever reason. As a result, they became subjects of the wrath of God. *"To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together"* (Jer 6:10-11).

An "uncircumcised ear" is the result of an unregenerate state. No good can be said about it, and there is no acceptable excuse for its presence (Acts 7:51). Such are people to whom God has not given "an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear" (Deut 29:4).

There exists in contemporary churches a completely intolerable situation. All of the vain explanations for this are unacceptable. In Christ Jesus there is forgiveness, regeneration, righteousness, the law written upon the heart and mind, and the conferment of a new nature. For people to live as though they were under the Old Covenant, with the same manners as Israel in the wilderness, is only evidence of their failure to believe the

Gospel and be born again. For such people, the seventh chapter of Romans has no comfort and no instruction.

THE INWARD MAN

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Other versions read, "in the inner man,"^{NASB} "in my inner being,"^{NIV} "in my inmost self."^{NRSV} This part of our being is associated with our hearts, or essential, persons. It is where the Law of God is written (Heb 10:16). It is where the Holy Spirit resides (Gal 4:6), and wherein we are "sealed" as God's own people (2 Cor 1:22). This is where the love of God is "shed abroad" (Rom 5:5). The heart is where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is beamed, so that we come to know the Lord through Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). It is also where assurance is placed (1 John 3:19). The "inward man," or the heart, is the focus of edification and comfort.

An "uncircumcised ear" is the result of an unregenerate state. No good can be said about it, and there is no acceptable excuse for its presence (Acts 7:51). Such are people to whom God has not given "an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear"

The delight and pleasure in the Law of God is found in the "inward man." This is not, as already confirmed, simply the unseen part of our being. Rather, it is "the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10). This is the re-created part, where Divine strength is imparted by the Holy Spirit of God! As it is written, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the **inner man**" (Eph 3:16). He is an "inward," or "inner" man as compared with our bodies, which are called the "outward man."

Renewal Within

Here is where spiritual progress is

made, where we are being "conformed to the image" of God's Son (Rom 8:29). It is where ongoing spiritual change takes place, as the Holy Spirit changes us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

In a very vivid portrayal of the "inward man," the Spirit confirms it is the focus of Divine attention and blessing. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, **yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal**"^{NASB} (2 Cor 4:16-18).

An excellent example of the renewal and revitalization of the "inward man" is found in our text. There, fatiguing and frustrating inner conflict becomes the evidence of a delight in the Law of the Lord. It becomes the occasion for the discovery of a wayward law within us – a law that shoots evil into our thinking as soon as we intend to do anything good and well pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. The knowledge of our real condition strengthens us for the battle, and enabled us to say "NO!" To the suggestions of our own "sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3).

Out of Touch

The *Christianity* (falsely so called) of our day causes people to be more aware of the outward man, which is "perishing." You can hear the effects of this emphasis in the prayer requests of the people. It is perceived in the administrative staff of their churches. Even the means of obtaining ministerial credentials roots in the "outward man." Sermons, programs, and even literature have very little for the "inward man."

As a result, believers are not acquainted with their "new man," or "inward man." The flesh speaks louder to them that the Spirit, and their eyes and ears are more closely tuned to things that are seen than to things unseen.

There are disadvantages to this condition that have eternal ramifications.

Unless we see something of what is being expounded in this seventh chapter, Satan WILL gain the advantage over us.

However, once our real situation is seen, or comprehended, we will be more demanding about feeding and nurturing

the inner man. We will not be content with religious novelties, powerless preaching, and distorted emphases.

A CONTRARY PRINCIPLE WITHIN

“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.” This is the seventh conclusion drawn from the presence of inner conflict. One might think delighting in the Law God within the inward man is the end of the matter. Some may even think this described the totality of our experience in Christ. But that is not the case at all. Through the Spirit, Paul will now elaborate on WHY “*evil is present with me.*” He does not say evil WAS present with him, but that it IS present with him. If you are in Christ, it is also “*present*” with you. If you are not in Christ, then you are totally “*evil*” with no vestige of good within. That condition requires a new birth. Those in Christ have already been born again, but require “*spiritual understanding.*”

I SEE ANOTHER LAW

Because of the war within, Paul sees, or perceives “*another*” working principle within his total self. Other versions read, “*I see a different law in the members of my body,*”^{NASB} “*I see another law at work in the members of my body,*”^{NIV} “*But there is another law at work within me,*”^{NLT} “*but I see that acting on my body there is a different law.*”^{NJB}

This law, or principle is presently within all believers. It is a law associated with our bodies – our “*members.*” It works in a temporal environment that is dominated by both sense and time. As long as we are “*in the body,*” we must contend with this law. No amount of discipline, or even deep spirituality, can get rid of this law. When we walk in the Spirit, we neutralize its power, and are able to subdue its lusts. However, we are not able, even in that state, to get rid of it. It travels with the body, and cannot be separated from it. When we lay the body in the grave, we will lay the working of

this principle in the grave also. When our spirit flies free from this body, it also moves beyond the influence of this wayward law.

Those who argue that this section of Scripture merely refers to our former lost condition have greatly erred. In that state, and in the sense of our text, we did **not** delight in the law of God after the inward man, which has an entirely new frame of reference. It “*is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*” (Col 3:10).

Paul did not see this law by his intellect, but through his spiritual experience. This understanding was not induced by a statement of Scripture, but by participation in the Divine nature.

Paul did not see this law by his intellect, but through his spiritual experience. This understanding was not induced by a statement of Scripture, but by participation in the Divine nature. It is quite true that “*all have sinned,*” committing transgression, saying and doing things contrary to both God’s nature and Law. However, it is also true that they “*come short of the glory of God,*” having in themselves things that do not exist in God (Rom 3:23). It is not merely that they have not done everything God does, or that they have not fully measured up to His law. Rather, there exists in us a condition that does NOT reflect the glory of God. That condition involves the presence of a contrary law within—a law that is tied to the flesh, and cannot be dissolved. Even though it is cut away from us through the “*circumcision of Christ*” (Col 2:11-12), yet it exercises

influence over us. It erupts against our will, and causes us to think things we abhor.

If we remained under the law, that circumstance would condemn us. The fact that we do want the things the flesh suggests has no relevance whatsoever under the Law. That is why this contrary law must be understood.

WARRING AGAINST THE LAW OF MY MIND

This principle is not only a working one, it is an aggressive one. It wages relentless war against “*the law*” of our mind, which is the result of having the Law written upon our minds. Other versions read, “*waging war against the law of my mind,*”^{NASB} “*at war with the law of my mind,*”^{NRSV} “*fighting against the law of my mind,*”^{DARBY} “*which battles against the law in my mind.*”^{NJB}

Not A Casual Circumstance

This is not a casual circumstance, and we dare not consider it as though it was. Nor, indeed, is it an obsolete experience, formerly endured, but at last far from us. It requires stupidity and ignorance to contend no such law exists in the believer. Only those who are strangers to “*the law of my mind*” are unfamiliar with “*another law in my members.*”

Inferior, But Powerful

Although this “*law*” is an inferior one, it is nevertheless a powerful one. The Canaanites were inferior to the Israelites, even though unbelief made them appear superior. By faith, Goliath was inferior to David, even though, in the flesh, he appeared superior to him.

Those who fail to take the “*flesh,*” or sinful nature seriously, will be overcome by it. Those who nourish the flesh, always looking at things according to appearance, and speaking continually of life in the

body, have brought inner war to a feverish and dangerous level. There is a continual war going on within the believer. It may reach very high levels, or be decidedly reduced, but it is always there. Flesh and Spirit are locked in unending combat. Sin and grace are competing with one another. Faith and works are engaged in an unending contest. Good and evil are always against each other—within us.

But our text says this contrary law carries the battle against us. It forces the issue, and floods us with evil notions as soon as we determine to do good. This is not a docile principle, nor is it merciful and considerate. In times of great stress and difficulty, it will throw doubts and fears into your mind, and many wicked notions as well. It does not volunteer to cease the battle, nor does it refrain from its aggression. A departed brother from many years ago, Tzeror Hammer (early 1700's), once said, "As long as the righteous live, they are at war with the corruption of their nature. When they die, they are at rest."

The Corruption of Human Nature

Human nature is corrupt at its very foundation. It is not capable of yielding good or delighting in the Law of God. Even when it sits side-by-side with the new creation, it remains unchanged. It desires the same things it always desired, and is relentless against the "new man" and the "law of your mind."

Being evil-affected by the psychological thrust of our day, there is great resistance against this aspect of "spiritual understanding." If you are ever tempted to doubt the total corruption of human nature, consider that you must "partake" of the "Divine Nature" (2 Pet 1:4) and Jesus Christ (Heb 3:14) in order to dwell with the Lord.

If human nature could be reformed, do you not think God would be capable of doing so? Instead of a reformation program, however, through Christ God has instituted a transformation program. One in which we are born again, and created anew. That new creation is what launched the war now being described.

BRINGING ME INTO CAPTIVITY

As you can see, the expressions keep getting stronger and stronger. First, there was an acknowledgment that we did what

we did not want (v 15). Then, it was admitted that nothing good could be found in the flesh (v 18). The deficiency of the will was also declared, for Paul could find no way to do what he really wanted (v 18). It was also confessed that the good that was desired was not being done, and the evil that was abhorred was being done (v 19). There was a law resident in him that always competed with the good he wanted to do (v 21). Although he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, there was a contrary law within that viciously attacked that holy propensity.

domination by sin, but to captivity by the law of sin. Briefly stated, he means the "flesh," or "law of sin," can assert itself whenever it desires. To put it another way, he cannot stop it from shouting out from the cross. That law cannot force him to sin, but it can force him into the position of having to deal with it.

There is a vast difference in captivity to the law of sin, and enslavement by sin, which was our former condition. Unwanted thoughts course through the mind of the believer. Often they are like floods that wash away spiritually

But our text says this contrary law carries the battle against us. It forces the issue, and floods us with evil notions as soon as we determine to do good. This is not a docile principle, nor is it merciful and considerate. In times of great stress and difficulty, it will throw doubts and fears into your mind, and many wicked notions as well.

As if that was not enough, Paul now makes one of his strongest and most arresting statements. He does not refer to the past, but to the present. This contrary and wickedly militant law, he says, is "making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." ^{NASB} The statement is equally strong in every version of Scripture.

Not to Sin, But the Law of Sin

There is an important distinction to see here. The captivity is not to sin, but to "the law of sin" that resides in our "members," or human constitution. That is, Paul does not find himself continually transgressing the law, or falling into moral failures. It is not that he does not want to lie, but finds himself continually doing so. Or, that he does not want to be a thief, but continues to steal everything he can. Improvement in that area of morality can be achieved under the law, or even by those embracing a heathen religion.

Some, driven by a shallow understanding, assume this is the description of a person alienated from God—a person "under the Law." However, Paul says this of himself. He does not speak of the past, but of the present! Further, it does not refer to total

productive thoughts, forcing the believer into the defensive mode. Of course, for the spiritually insensitive, all of this is of no consequence. Sinful thoughts are not painful for them, so they think nothing of their entrance. But for those who walk in the light and live by faith, they are most abrasive and grievous. They contradict what the new heart seeks, enjoys, and ponders.

The very wording of our text confirms the regenerated person is under consideration. To be brought into captivity shows the individual was NOT in captivity before the described experience. But that is not the case with the sinner, for they live every day of their lives enslaved to sin, as formerly described (6:17-21). That is precisely why they need a Savior (5:8-10). That is why we were "delivered from the Law" (7:6). If men could control sinful impulses, they would need no Savior, no Intercessor, no hope by which they could be saved.

PUT THE TEXT TO THE TEST

If you want to put this text to the test, make some resolves for tomorrow. I trust you can do it heartily, with the full consent of your will. Determine to carefully guard your mind, so that no sinful thought will weave its way into

your thinking. Resolve to meditate day and night upon the Word of the Lord, and to fill your mind with wholesome Kingdom realities. Decide that you will fully comply with the exhortation, *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Phil 4:8).

You have all the tools that are necessary for the realization of that

commitment. Your will is in it. You have armor to protect you. The peace of God can keep your heart and your mind. You have an Intercessor in heaven (Heb 7:25), and One in your heart as well (Rom 8:26). You have the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit, and access to God. Surely you will be able to boast tomorrow night that your resolve has been realized!

I will tell you that the morning will not pass until you will be required to do battle. Your shield will have to be hoisted, and your sword unsheathed. You will have to call upon the name of the Lord, resist

the devil, and deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. There will be imaginations you will have to cast down, and thoughts you must take captive.

What will have happened to you? Why were you not able to perfectly do what you wholeheartedly wanted to do? It is then that you will be able to join in the confession of Paul. *“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.”*^{NKJV} Can you see this law? Can you identify with Paul’s conclusions? They are for every believer to know.

YEARNING FOR DELIVERANCE

“²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” This is the eighth conclusion provoked by the incessant struggle with the sinful nature. What a heart-wrenching cry! This is no casual word of a half-hearted church member! Here is the cry of a person with an undivided heart, but a divided nature. It pours out of a person whose inward man is growing strong, but whose outward man is weakening, and in the throes of death. This is a person with the law of God upon his heart and in his mind, and the law of sin in his earthly nature.

I AM A WRETCHED MAN

Virtually every version of the Scripture uses the word *“wretched.”* Some paraphrased translations use the words *“unhappy”*^{DARBY,BBE} and *“miserable.”*^{NLT} The word *“wretched”* means one who is enduring troubles and afflictions, and is in deep misery. It speaks of one who has been given *“the bread of affliction”* to eat (Deut 16:3; 1 Kgs 22:27). It is the kind of cry that came from Isaiah when he saw the Lord *“high and lifted up.”* *“Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips”* (Isa 6:5). To even a greater degree than Isaiah, we have reason to lament, for the remnant of our fallen nature remains in our bodies. We would long ago have escorted it from our frail tabernacles, but we have not been able to do it. It lives

where we live, and goes where we go. *“Wretched man that I am!”* It is humiliating and fatiguing to have to deal with an enemy in the land!

the pure heart desires. It is the lament of Galatians 5:17: *“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”*^{NASB} (Gal 5:17). Blessed is the person who is able to so lament. Such a person reveals a tender heart, a determined spirit, and a sanctified will.

This is the wretchedness that comes from knowing everything that is said or done is expressed imperfectly, and not as the pure heart desires.

DELIVERANCE FERVENTLY SOUGHT

“Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Notice that the association is with the *“body,”* not the heart or a condemning conscience. That is a critical distinction. The body is our source of shame, being a *“vile body,”* weak and frail, and requiring subjugation (Phil 3:20-21; 2 Cor 4:7). This is the point of our vulnerability—a *“lowly body,”*^{NKJV} that makes for *“humiliation.”*^{NRSV}

The is not wretchedness because of the guilt of sin, as expressed by David when he sinned against Uriah the Hititte. *“I have sinned against the LORD”* (2 Sam 12:13), or when he numbered Israel: *“I have sinned greatly in that I have done”* (2 Sam 24:10). This is not penitential wretchedness! It is not the wretchedness expressed by Judas when he betrayed our Lord. *“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood”* (Matt 27:4).

Our body is called *“this body of death”* because it has no inheritance in the kingdom of God. It is a part of the order that has been cursed—given the sentence of death. From yet another view, it is dead toward God. As the Spirit says later, *“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin”* (Rom 8:10).

This is the wretchedness that comes from knowing everything that is said or done is expressed imperfectly, and not as

If our bodies is to be employed in the service of the Lord, they must be *“quicken’d,”* or given life through the

Holy Spirit. As it is written, *“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you”* (Rom 8:10).

The *“deeds of the body,”* or the things it is inclined to do, must be put to death, for they have nothing to do with God. In fact, those deeds stand between us and God. If they are not mortified, they will

from temptations to persecution, come because we are in the body. It is the arena of battle in which the Spirit and the flesh converge for war. When we are liberated from our bodies, we will be done with the inward struggle, persecution, and every form of inability and restraint.

This is Groaning

The exasperating expressions of Romans seven are the groans of the eighth chapter of Romans. *“And not only*

chapter of Second Corinthians. *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life”* (2 Cor 5:2-4).

The Reason for the Condition

There is a reason for this experience. In it, we reveal our preferences. The strength of our determination is made known in this inner conflict. Our faith is tested, and our affection examined.

The first responsibility given to us as kings and priests unto God is the subduing of our own bodies. Bringing them into subjection is the testing area. How much we receive from God will be determined by how well we do in subduing the body and bringing it under subjection.

The first responsibility given to us as kings and priests unto God is the subduing of our own bodies. Bringing them into subjection is the testing area. How much we receive from God will be determined by how well we do in subduing the body and bringing it under subjection. In the work of subduing it, we will personally experience the feelings and frustrations of the seventh chapter of Romans. Although the battle wearies us, it also produces proof that we have a new nature. It confirms we have something from God. Truly, this is a *“good fight.”*

exclude us from the everlasting kingdom. Thus it is written, *“if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Rom 8:13).

The body is also associated with death because we can only be *“present with the Lord”* when we are *“absent from the body”* (2 Cor 5:6,8). All forms of suffering,

they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). Our spirits long for the time and the place when there will be no more struggle.

It is also the groaning of the fifth

DUAL NATURES, DUAL SERVITUDE

“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.” This represents the ninth and final conclusion to which the understanding of inner conflict led. Perhaps it will be well to enumerate those conclusions once again. They exemplify the godly way of assessing inner conflict.

- “If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good”* (verse 16).
- “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me”* (verse 17).
- “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing”* (verse 18).
- “Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me”* (verse 20).
- “I find then a law, that, when I would*

do good, evil is present with me” (verse 21).

- “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man”* (verse 22).
- “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”* (verse 23).
- “O wretched man that I am!”* (Verse 24).
- “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin”* (verse 25).

THANKING GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

It is not the condition itself that produces this thanksgiving, but the understanding of it. It also comes because the answer to the dilemma is seen. In answer to the question, *“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* the

renewed heart shouts back, *“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* That is, God is going to deliver me from the source of this frustration. He will do it through Jesus Christ, when He returns for His own. As it is written, *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”* (Phil 3:20-21). Indeed, deliverance is on the way! This battle has an appointed time and place of termination.

SERVING WITH THE MIND

“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” And what is the summation of all that Paul has seen—all that we can see in this battle with the flesh. We can see there is a real *“me,”* and

an imposed “me.” There is a part of me that expresses my real desires. There is also a part of me that expresses things contrary to my desires.

When it comes to the real “me,” the part that is regenerated, in which the Holy spirit dwells, and which is reconciled to God, “I myself” serve “the Law of God.” That is what the real me thinks about, ponders, loves, and desires. I live by every Word of God, delight in it, and

expresses itself.

This means that regeneration confers upon men a mind that is devoted to the Word of the Lord. Wherever this is missing, a most serious condition exists.

SERVING WITH THE FLESH

“... but with the flesh the law of sin.” “The flesh” is the natural part of us. Nothing good is found in it, as has been powerfully affirmed. The “law of sin” is

The “law of sin” is the sin principle that dwells within the flesh. It is not that the flesh CAN serve this dreadful law. This is what it does. In fact, it cannot do anything else. “The flesh” cannot serve God or the law of God. It has been corrupted and cannot be changed.

desire it more than my necessary food. My mind is devoted to the Law of God. That is not surprising, for God has put it into my mind. He has given me the same nature as possessed by the Law: holy, just, and good. He has made me “spiritual” like the Law, and able to gladly receive what God has to say. Like Jesus, I also “delight” to do His will.

I understand “my mind” to be the part that has been “illuminated,” which comprehends the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The “mind” is not merely the part where thinking is done, for he has spent considerable time reminding us that is also the place where “the law of sin”

the sin principle that dwells within the flesh. It is not that the flesh CAN serve this dreadful law. This is what it does. In fact, it cannot do anything else. “The flesh” cannot serve God or the law of God. It has been corrupted and cannot be changed.

From time to time, novices in the faith may imagine they have made good progress in the faith. Satan will lead them to believe they are better in the flesh than they once were. As soon as they let down their guard, “the flesh” breaks forth, confirming that it consistently and without exception serves “the law of sin.”

There is a particular teaching that is making the rounds these days. It is not a new teaching, but an ancient heresy that has been revived. It states that we can be morally “perfect,” with no flaw whatsoever. Those who embrace it generally make no claim to having achieved this perfection. However, they do say it is possible here and now, while we are in the body. They reason that if Jesus told us to “be perfect” (Matt 5:48), then it surely must be possible.

This passage has devastated this false teaching. It is the testimony of one of the premier members of the human race. Among the most elite, the Apostles, this man “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). In a remarkable text, the Holy Spirit calls Paul to the witness stand to confirm the faith of the saints. With unmistakable words he states nothing good resides in the flesh. It is the realm in which “the law of sin” resides, and is the part of us which serves that law of sin. The very presence of the flesh, together with the “law of sin” that resides in it, makes us imperfect—whether sin has been expressed externally or not.

How thankful we must be for the promised deliverance from this vile body. Then nothing about us will serve “the law of sin.” Then we will never again have to contend with that law, or confess to its presence within us. It will never raise its ugly head, for be forever removed from us. In the meantime, we will receive help from God when we are able to identify and confess our real situation. In this case, what you do not know can really hurt you! You do well to make it your aim to see the conflict within correctly.

CONCLUSION

We have briefly reviewed one of the pivotal sections of Scripture that deals with our experience. Many a soul has succumbed to the battle simply because they were unaware of what was going on within them. The warfare that has been described reveals the foolishness of those who say we should be happy all of the time, and that there is never cause for any other feeling. Perhaps such people are sadly lacking in their desire for holiness,

and a fervent desire to dwell forever with the Lord.

When heaven is in your eye, and your affection is set on things above, and not on things on the earth, it is frustrating to confront the waywardness of the flesh, and have to contend with its imaginations. To be sure, there is grace for the battle, and we can come away with the victory. But that victory will not be achieved with

a light-hearted spirit and undiscerning heart. If we do not “know” that nothing good dwells in our flesh, we may be prone to listen to it, and entertain its lusts. That inclination will either result in giving in to its desires, or concluding that we may not be in Christ at all.

We have heard a telling explanation of why deliverance from the Law is necessary. Under the Law, men are

condemned for the very presence of wayward thoughts and desires, whether they are honored or not. When the commandment “*Thou shalt not covet*” came home to Paul’s understanding, that was the very thing he saw. He saw that his nature was ungodly and condemned.

If it is true that, even after we are in Christ Jesus, we cannot stop the eruptions of the flesh, we must come away from any notion that we are justified by the Law. If there is no grace, there is no hope! If there is not a new creation in Christ Jesus,

there is no hope! If we have not died to the Law, there is no hope. It will do no good to concoct a theology that says the Law has died, or that it has been abolished, or that it no longer exists. That foolish teaching does not come to grips with our situation. **Salvation is so marvelously thorough that it will sustain us while the Law remains in full vigor!** The grace of God is so sufficient that it will uphold us in the heat of an inward struggle that seems to contradict our profession of faith. It makes us equal to the battle.

The flesh has not changed! The natural man remains the same. All of the weaknesses of the flesh remain, and it still has no capacity to desire or please God. But that is not all there is to us. We are more than “*the flesh*.” There is more to us than the “*old man*.” The “*law of sin*” still remains within our earthly natures, but it cannot dominate us as we live by faith. You must never allow anyone or any teaching to rob you of this awareness! Now, be strong and of good courage to fight the fight of faith with confidence. You do have something from God!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/8/2000 Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 8:1-11, “**FREED FROM CONDEMNATION.**” Even though the believer contends with lusts, and cannot stop them from asserting themselves, yet he is not condemned by them. He has been liberated from the condemning Law, and thus can deny prominence to these lusts. In the energy of faith, he can cast them down BECAUSE he is NOT condemned. This passage powerfully proclaims the glory of our salvation. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship.

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COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING PAGE CONTAINS NINE CHARTS THAT GRAPHICALLY PORTRAY SOME OF THE MATTERS COVERED IN THIS LESSON. THEY ARE SUBMITTED FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION, AND TO ASSIST YOU IN COMPREHENDING THE REALITY, NATURE, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF INNER STRUGGLE AND WARFARE.

EVIL AND CONTRADICTION

EVERYTHING EVIL IS RESIDENT IN THE FLESH

EVIL

THE ESSENCE OF EVIL IS TO CONTRADICT GOD

TO BE UNAWARE OF THE CRITICALITY OF THIS BATTLE WILL CAUSE YOU TO LOSE IT!

THE VICTORY IS YOUR FAITH

YOU ARE A MICROCOSM OF WORLD CONFLICT

UNDERSTANDING "THE FLESH"

MY FLESH

<p>IN MY FLESH DWELLS NO GOOD THING <small>ROMANS 7:16</small></p>	← →	<p>THE FLESH DOES NOT PROFIT ANYTHING <small>JOHN 6:83</small></p>
<p>WITH THE FLESH I SERVE THE LAW OF SIN <small>ROMANS 7:25</small></p>	← →	<p>SOW TO THE FLESH AND REAP CORRUPTION <small>GALATIANS 6:8</small></p>
<p>THE FLESH IS WEAK <small>MATTHEW 26:41</small></p>	← →	<p>THOSE IN THE FLESH CANNOT PLEASE GOD <small>ROMANS 8:8</small></p>
<p>THE FLESH LUSTS AGAINST THE SPIRIT <small>GALATIANS 5:17</small></p>	← →	<p>FLESH CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM <small>1 CORINTHIANS 15:50</small></p>

IF YOU LIVE AFTER THE FLESH, YOU SHALL DIE - Rom 8:13

PERSONAL CONFLICT SEEN IN THE PSALMS

WITHIN

→

WITH THE WORLD

"WHY ART THOU CAST DOWN?" - Psalm 42:5

"I HAVE ROARED . . ." - Psalm 38:8

"MY SOUL THIRSTETH" - Psalm 42:1-2

"LET NOT THE HAND OF THE WICKED REMOVE ME" - Psalm 38:11

"HIDE ME FROM THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED" - Psalm 64:2

CONFLICT IN A MORAL ARENA

COMPETITION

Conflict is the experience of competitive influences

TEMPORALITY

Conflict is the unavoidable mark of temporality

CHOICE and COMMITMENT

Good and evil provide an opportunity for both choice and commitment.

THE "PROMISES" ARE GIVEN IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

A SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP

THE LAW WRITTEN ON THEM MIND
Jeremiah 31:33

SERVE THE LAW WITH THE MIND
Romans 7:25

**C
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GOD

AFFECTION PLACED ON THINGS ABOVE
Colossians 3:2

THE SPIRIT SENT INTO OUR HEARTS
Galatians 4:6

Satan strategizes to cause disruption within.

"FIERY DARTS"
-- Ephesians 6:16 --

DELIVERANCE IS DEMANDED

OUR CONDITION DEMANDS DELIVERANCE

We are basically peacemakers, not warriors - Matt. 5:9

THE EARTH IS THE REALM OF RESTRICTION
We are cohabiting with an unacceptable occupant
Romans 7:20

THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

THE "INNER MAN" AND THE "OUTWARD MAN" ARE INCOMPATIBLE

ONE IS PERISHING, THE OTHER IS BEING RENEWED
II CORINTHIANS 4:16

OUR BODIES ARE CORRUPT, DISHONORABLE, AND WEAK
I COR. 15:42-44

WE HAVE BEEN "WROUGHT" FOR THE RESURRECTION BODY
II CORINTHIANS 5:5

OUR CONDITION REQUIRES THAT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

LET IT BE HEARD

WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?

CONFLICT
CONFLICT

O WRETCHED MAN THAT I AM!

IN CHRIST, WE ARE CREATED FOR INCORRUPTION, FOR GLORY, AND FOR POWER! UNTIL OUR DELIVERANCE, WE STRUGGLE WITH CORRUPTION, DISHONOR, AND WEAKNESS!

THE STRUGGLE IS NOT WRONG - IT IS RIGHT! YET, WE ARE NOT RECONCILED TO IT. WE LONG FOR DELIVERANCE! WE LAMENT OUR PRESENT CONDITION! DELIVERANCE WE NEED! AND IT IS COMING!