

The Anatomy of a Church (15)

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[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 03/16/14)

PERSONAL HOLINESS

STRUGGLE AND CONFESSION: THE BELIEVER IS TO BE FREE FROM THE LAW, [Romans 7:1-25](#)

The Confessions of a Man's Struggling Soul, [Romans 7:14-25](#)

[\(Romans 7:14-25\)](#) **Introduction:** this is a great passage of Scripture in that it portrays the struggling soul of the believer as he ploughs through life. It is a rare picture of the life of Paul, of what he sensed and learned and experienced as he struggled to please God and to become conformed to the glorious image of the Lord Jesus. It is the confession of a man's soul as he struggles through life.

1. **The law is spiritual (v.14).**
2. **Confession 1: he is carnal, sold under sin (v.14-17).**
3. **Confession 2: he is void of any good thing (v.18-20).**
4. **Confession 3: he finds two laws or forces within (v.21-23).**
5. **Confession 4: he is a desperate, wretched man who needs a Deliverer (v.24).**
6. **Confession 5: the Deliverer is Jesus Christ (v.25).**

1. [\(Romans 7:14\)](#) **Law: the law is spiritual.**

[Romans 7:14 \(NASB\)](#)

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

It is spiritual in at least three senses.

1. **The law was given to man by the Spirit of God (*pneumatikos*).**

The Greek word used is the very name of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of the law.

2. **The law is the expression of the will and nature of God.**

The law is spiritual because it describes the will of God and tells man just what God is like. The rules of the law reveal both the mind and nature of God.

3. **The law is spiritual because of its purposes (see below note # 1, [Law, Purpose—Romans 7:12](#) for discussion.**

Note # 1 Law, Purpose

Romans 7:12 (NASB)

¹²“So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

1. The law is holy: set apart and full of purity, majesty, and glory—set apart in that it reveals God’s nature and will—set apart in that it exposes sin, all that is contrary to God’s nature and will. The law is holy in that it is different and set apart from everything else on earth. The law is God’s way of holiness, the way to live a life of holiness, the way that is so different and so set apart that no man can reach its purity.

2. The law is just: righteous, fair, impartial, equitable, straight. The law treats a man exactly like he should be treated; it shows no partiality to anyone. It also reveals how a man should treat others. The law is just in that it reveals exactly how a man should live. It shows him how to live in relation to God and to his fellow man, and it judges him fairly and impartially.

3. The law is good: it shows man how to live and tells him when he fails to live that way. It exposes his sin and demonstrates his desperate need for a Savior. The law tells man the truth about the nature of man in a most explicit way, and it points him toward the need for *outside* help in order to be saved.

Psalm 19:7 (NASB)

⁷“The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”

Psalm 119:142 (NASB)

¹⁴²“Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Your law is truth.”

Romans 7:12 (NASB)

¹²“So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

Romans 7:14 (NASB)

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

1 Timothy 1:8 (NASB)

⁸“But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully.”

This passage is obviously a poignant account of a person’s inner conflict with himself, one part of him pulling one direction and another part pulling the opposite. The conflict is real and it is intense.

For perhaps as long as the church has known this text, however, interpreters have disagreed as to whether the person described is a Christian or a non-Christian. Whole movements have arisen to promote one of those views or the other. One side maintains that

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the person is too much in bondage to sin to be a believer, whereas the other side maintains that the person has too much love for the things of God and too much hatred of sin to be an unbeliever.

It is obviously important, therefore, to determine which sort of person Paul is talking about before any interpretation of the passage is attempted. It is also of some importance to determine whether Paul's first person singular refers to himself or whether that is simply a literary device he uses to identify more personally with his readers. The answer to those two questions will automatically answer a third: If Paul is speaking of himself, is he speaking of his condition before or after his conversion?

Those who believe Paul is speaking about an unbeliever point out that he describes the person as being **"of flesh, sold into bondage"** ([v. 14](#)), as having nothing good dwelling in him ([v. 18](#)), and as a **"wretched man"** trapped in a **"body of... death"** ([v. 24](#)). How then, it is argued, could such a person correspond to the Christian Paul describes in [chapter 6](#) as having died to sin ([v. 2](#)), as having his old self crucified and no longer being enslaved to sin ([v. 6](#)), as being **"freed from sin"** ([vv. 7, 18, 22](#)), as considering himself dead to sin ([v. 11](#)), and as being obedient from the heart to God's Word ([v. 17](#))?

Those who contend Paul is speaking about a believer in [chapter 7](#) point out that this person desires to obey God's law and hates doing what is evil ([vv. 15, 19, 21](#)), that he is humble before God, realizing that nothing good dwells in his humanness ([v. 18](#)), and that he sees sin as in him, but not *all* there is in him ([vv. 17, 20-22](#)).

He gives thanks to Jesus Christ as his Lord and serves Him with his mind ([v. 25](#)). The apostle has already established that none of those things characterize the unsaved. The unbeliever not only hates God's truth and righteousness but suppresses them, he willfully rejects the natural evidence of God, he neither honors nor gives thanks to God, and he is totally dominated by sin so that he arrogantly disobeys God's law and encourages others to do so ([1:18-21, 32](#)).

In [Romans 6](#), Paul began his discussion of sanctification by focusing on the believer as a new creation, a completely new person in Christ. The emphasis is therefore on the holiness and righteousness of the believer, both imputed and imparted. For the reasons given in the previous paragraph, as well as for other reasons that will be mentioned later, it seems certain that in [chapter 7](#) the apostle is still talking about the believer. Here, however, the focus is on the conflict a believer continues to have with sin. Even in [chapter 6](#), Paul indicates that believers still must continually do battle with sin in their lives. He therefore admonishes them: **"Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness"** ([Romans 6:12-13](#)).

Some interpreters believe that [chapter 7](#) describes the carnal, or fleshly, Christian, one who is living on a very low level of spirituality. Many suggest that this person is a frustrated, legalistic Christian who attempts in his own power to please God by trying to live up to the Mosaic Law.

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But the attitude expressed in [chapter 7](#) is not typical of legalists, who tend to be self-satisfied with their fulfillment of the law. Most people are attracted to legalism in the first place because it offers the prospect of living up to God's standards by one's own power.

It seems rather that Paul is here describing the most spiritual and mature of Christians, who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God's standards of righteousness the more they realize how much they fall short. The closer we get to God, the more we see our own sin. Thus it is immature, fleshly, and legalistic persons who tend to live under the illusion that they are spiritual and that they measure up well by God's standards. The level of spiritual insight, brokenness, contrition, and humility that characterize the person depicted in [Romans 7](#) are marks of a spiritual and mature believer, who before God has no trust in his own goodness and achievements.