

1. **Introduction**: Paul agonized over the fact it took him so long to realize obedience to God begins in the spiritual heart. If the spiritual heart is not aligned with the spirit of the Law, external behavior can only have the appearance of obedience.
 - Paul had been a zealous Pharisee, diligently obedient to the Law as interpreted in Jewish tradition. In Philippians 3:5-6, Paul says, during his life before conversion, he was blameless or faultless in his obedience to the law. He seems to mean his external actions faultlessly obeyed the Law.
 - After conversion, he later realized the 10th commandment (forbidding coveting) convinced him that true obedience to the Law involved thoughts, desires, and impulses he could not fully control.
 - How could he ever purge himself of every thought, desire, and impulse that defied the “no coveting” Law? It clearly was a requirement he could not satisfy.
2. **Romans 7:14-20**: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*
 - There is disagreement as to whom or to what period in life do the I’s in this passage refer? Does the “I” refer to Paul before conversion, to converted Paul, to Paul in some intermediate state, or does it refer to some other person, perhaps Adam?
 - As mentioned, verses 7:7-13 use past-tense statements and appear to be pre-conversion. Beginning with 7:14 the remainder of the passage uses present tense statements.
 - The most natural interpretation of 14-25 is it concerns Paul’s post-conversion situation.
 - But the language is difficult. Could Paul, as a mature Christian, say I am of the flesh sold under sin? Is it possible for a mature converted man to say that he cannot do the good he wants to do?
 - Could a mature Christian say, as Paul says in 7:24, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? If, instead, Paul is writing about pre-conversion experience, there is a different set of problems. Could an unconverted man say, I delight in the Law of God in my inner being?
 - A believer’s new life begins with regeneration and justification, a new life aimed at Christ-likeness. Regeneration enables within the believer a new nature that desires godly behavior. The new nature dominates, displaces but not replacing the old sin-nature.

- The sin-nature, which had been in dominion until regeneration and justification, is thus displaced to a secondary position but remains powerful. From justification until mortal death, a believer's new and old natures oppose one another in constant battle.
 - Paul taught that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who works to transform them into a moral likeness of Christ. Further, the justified are freed from slavery to sin and become slaves of righteousness "in Christ."
3. **John 15-17**: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,[f] to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*
- Is it possible a person could be justified (declared righteous before God) but not have the Holy Spirit indwelling? Consider the time before Pentecost.
 - "Justified but not indwelt by the Spirit" would seem to apply to every believer (including Jesus' disciples) until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was "with" but not "in" believers.
 - Before Pentecost, would those who by faith believed God be declared legally righteous but be under the Law for sanctification until they were filled with the indwelling Spirit.
 - If so, that condition appears very much like what Paul is expressing in 7:14-24.
 - So, is it possible that Paul writes about a half-way position of being regenerate but not yet indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If so, that condition appears very much like what Paul is expressing in 7:14-24.
 - The Holy Spirit, at and after Pentecost, was sent to indwell each believer to transform their "legal righteousness" into experiential righteousness.
 - Since Pentecost, regeneration and justification are accompanied by the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Sin problems continue because, though the sin-nature begins to dwindle, it remains.
 - From Paul's personal experience, we see that even godly Apostles struggle with a residual sin-nature. Everyone can identify with what Paul confesses about himself.
4. **The War Within**: Paul next discusses his internal conflict as a mature Christian. He wants to do that which he knows is right but finds himself influenced by his sin-nature. How can he ever be freed from that conflict?
5. **Romans 7:21-24**: *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*
- Paul has been justified, is being sanctified, and will be glorified. Justification is a legal action by the Father based on the vicarious obedient life and sacrificial death of the Man-God, Jesus. It is an instantaneous act and valid forever.

- Sanctification is a continuing process in which the Holy Spirit works in us transforming us to be more and more like Christ.
- As sanctification progresses, we become increasingly aware of how sinful we are and more and more aware of the absolute necessity of the salvation Jesus made possible. Without being able to lean on His everlasting arms, we would never reach glorification.
- In verses 7:14-24, Paul repeats the same issue 3 times. First, in verses 14-17. Next is in verses 18-20. The third is in verses 21-24. He begins each with the problem statement.
- NIV Verse 14: ***“I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”*** Verse 18: ***“Nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”*** Verse 21: ***“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”***
- Verse 15: ***“What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*** Verse 18-19: ***“I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not to do – I keep on doing.”*** Verse 22-23: ***“In my inner begin I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members.”***
- Each description ends with a brief statement of why the problem exists. Verse 17: ***“It is sin living in me.”*** Verse 20: ***“It is sin living in me.”*** Verse 24: ***“This body of death.”***
- Note the sequence: First Paul states the problem in general terms then states it in terms of often doing something wrong that he didn’t consciously want to do. Finally, he realizes that no matter how hard he tries to do what he knows to be right, other things keep getting in the way and it seems impossible to do the right that he genuinely wants to do.
- He sees the problem clearly. He knows what is right and wants to do it. But he can’t fully control his thoughts, desires, and impulses so that he ends up doing things he doesn’t want to do. What can he do to solve his dilemma?
- His victory comes to him through Jesus Christ our Lord!
- **NIV Romans 7:25: Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.**
- As believers mature as a Christian, growing closer to Jesus and increasingly wanting to be more like Him and to please Him more and more, the struggle against sinful tendencies requires increasing spiritual strength.
- Those, who must struggle most vigorously against sin, are not immature Christians. The more mature a believer is in Christ, the greater the struggle against sin. The easy sins to eliminate are taken care of soon after salvation.
- God’s reason for permitting the mature Christian to struggle against sin is to teach them to not rely on themselves, but rely on God, who raises the dead. The victory we look forward will be the outcome of our continuing struggle.

- By giving us salvation through grace by faith, God has saved us from the deadly peril of His judgement on evil. Jesus paid the price that enables us to be pardoned from the penalty due our sins. He adopts us into His family. Having begun His good work in us, He will finish the task, and we will be glorified, that is, made holy as He is holy and dwell in His presence in eternity.
- Paul's overall point is, we are sinners, and even as redeemed Christians will continue to be sinners throughout our life until we are glorified. We continually struggle against sin.
- We need to face that struggle against ongoing sin with spiritual realism (see Packer, **Keep in Step with the Spirit**, 1984, p. 258). Boice identifies four key thoughts about spiritual realism.
- (1.) When God called us to Himself by grace through faith, He called us to a lifetime struggle against sin. Though supported by the power of progressive sanctification, our battle against sin will continue as long as our sin nature is present. The ongoing battle is focused within us as our new "life in Christ" fights against our residual sin-nature.
- (2.) Our efforts alone can never achieve victory in our struggle against sin. Both the internal and external fight against sin requires power we don't possess, but Jesus does. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ constantly intercedes on our behalf. His power will bring the victory.
- (3.) When we win a battle against a present sin, the victory we experience is by the power and grace of God and not of ourselves. We win no personal glory.
- (4.) We are not to falter in our battle against sin. The primary tools made available to us for our continuing struggle against sin are prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, service to others, and the sacraments. The reason for the long struggle is, the root problem of sin remains active in our heart, our mission control center.
- Despite the struggle, believers are on the path to final victory over sin. Paul comments:
- **Romans 6:11-14: you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.** ¹² *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* ¹³ *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* ¹⁴ *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*
- Believers' victory over sin is assured. We have been saved from the penalty of death due sin, and we are being saved from sin's power.
- The final deliverance from sin and its power will occur when we are glorified. Paul says in Romans 8 that those who are justified will be glorified. The good work God has begun in believers will be completed.
- That final deliverance will be through mortal death (resulting in glorification) and resurrection that will bring a new glorious body like Jesus' resurrection body.