



## WHY AM I LIKE THIS?

### Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #38

Romans 7

David Sunday

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We're going into a very important chapter. They all are, but this one is especially important for us to understand. Today I'll take the "big picture" look at the whole of Romans 7. Let's pray together as we begin to look into this very probing chapter of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, when we look within ourselves, we can find lots of reasons why You would not love us. But when we trace Your love's design and see that You did not withhold Your own Son but gave Him up for us all on the cross of Calvary, then we can't doubt Your love for us. We know that if You gave Him up on the cross, You'll also give us everything else we need. Nothing in all creation and nothing dark that still lurks within our own hearts will be able to separate us from Your love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So help us, Lord, to be able to face whatever darkness still remains in us with confidence that it will not prevail, because we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. We pray for this in faith in Your Son's name, Jesus. Amen.

As I've gotten older, I've started taking more vitamins. I like to run, but my knees don't always like the running. So I've turned to glucosamine chondroitin and found a measure of health. Someone just recently was praising the benefits of turmeric, so I thought, "Why not try that?" Kate came home with some a few days ago, and we'll see if there are wonderful improvements because I'm taking it now.

I used to get cold sores a lot. One Sunday after church, years ago, Sally's dad—who's a doctor—came up to me and said, "I can solve that problem for you." He handed me a little white sheet that said "L-Lysine." It's an amino acid that can get rid of that cold sore problem. And the list could go on. Fish oil. Vitamin D-3. Fiber pills. Probiotics. I'm sure you'll give me more suggestions in the foyer after church.

But what about the sin we have in our lives? As Christians, we know sin is destructive and long to be free from it. We know that sin spoils our lives and spreads to other lives, separating us

from one another and hindering our communion with God. We long for the day when we will be free from sinning! And oh, how we struggle with sin until that day comes.

So what if there was a pill you could take that would free your life from sin once and for all? What if there was some secret—some shortcut to sanctification? Maybe you've heard churches advertise cures, like "The secret to the higher life," or "A new baptism in the Holy Spirit," or "A victorious life movement." Some make claims like this: "It is the privilege of every Christian to live every day of his life without breaking the laws of God either in thought, word or deed." Wouldn't it be wonderful if that were true? Is it true? I can only tell you that in my experience I have never yet met a Christian who exemplifies that level of perfection. The Christians whom I would think are closest to perfection would be some of the first to say, "I am nowhere close to the holiness that God requires of me."

I believe God's Word calls us to a different expectation for the Christian life. Romans 7 calls us to a realistic expectation of tension and struggle in our lives of following Jesus. It's not a life of constant defeat—thank the Lord! But it's not a life of complete victory either.

Romans 7 is probably one of the most challenging chapters in the Bible to interpret, and I hope you'll be patient with me as I try—in the fear of the Lord and love for you—to tell you what I think the best interpretation is. I'm not going to spend a lot of time discussing all the different options, because this isn't a lecture hall. This is a worship service, and we come needing to be fed and strengthened in our walk. I want to feed you by teaching this chapter in a way that will help you get the big picture of it.

This is a challenging chapter to interpret, but at the same time Romans 7 is probably the easiest chapter in the Bible with which to identify. We see ourselves here. As we're reading Romans 7, we can feel that it is reading us. It's searching and exposing our hearts. When you take an honest look into your heart, do you see what I see in mine? Anger. Rage. Cowardice. Bitterness. Gossip. Lust. Greed. And all this in the last seven days.

Do you see that there are sins you have not committed simply because you've not had the opportunity to commit them? Or maybe you were afraid of what other people would think. Has God ever lifted the lid of that garbage can called your heart and let the seething, stinking stuff come out—and you've been alarmed? You've been surprised, asking yourself, "I don't understand what I'm doing, why I said that, why I did that?" When we look into our hearts, we often cry out, "Why am I like this?" And when we do, Romans 7 can help us greatly. It can help us with the self-awareness Patrick was preaching about last week.

Romans 7 is not the whole story of the Christian life—thank God there's more. And we're going to spend a long time in Romans 8 this summer. But it is a vital part of the true story.

Here's what I believe God wants us to learn from this chapter. I'm going to give you the whole outline we're going to follow today:

You can expect victory over sin in the Christian life...

- But not through the law...
- Not without an ongoing struggle...
- Not completely until Jesus comes again.

So let's dig into God's Word. This is one of those sermons where you're really going to have to keep your eyes on the text. There are going to be questions I can't fully answer, but I want us to see the big picture today.

## **1. You can expect victory over sin in the Christian life, but not through the law.**

This is really at the heart of what Paul wants to teach us in Romans 7. In chapter six, Paul's intent was to show that we have died to the dominion of sin. Now in chapter seven, Paul wants to show that believers have died to the dominion of the law. So he states a principle in verse one: *"Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?"* If you owe a lot of money, when you die that debt is history because that money can't be collected from you anymore. If you're given a life sentence, the sentence ends when you die.

Paul wants to show that we have died to the dominion of the law over our lives. First he gives an illustration about marriage in verses two and three:

*Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.*

This isn't the place to try to develop a full understanding of what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. That's not really Paul's point here. His point is this: marriage is a binding legal covenant, but it's only binding "as long as we both shall live." A married woman is freed from her husband when he dies. He's not telling you that to give you any ideas if you want to get out of your marriage; he's just using this as an illustration.

Then the application of the truth comes in verses four through six. When Christ died, we died to the law through the body of Christ. Look at verse four: *"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ."* It's really the passive voice being used here: we

have been put to death to the law. This is something God did for us. We couldn't do it for ourselves. God did it through the body of Christ. Through His death on the cross, God killed us too and raised us to newness of life. The reason He did that is in verse four: "*so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*"

This means two things. We have been released from the law's authority to condemn us; it can hold no accusation against us anymore. It also means we've been set free from the law's inability to change us. We're not looking to the law to make us holy. We've been set free from this powerless law. We're no longer looking to our performance under God's law for approval and acceptance, and we're no longer using God's law as a means of self-improvement. Instead, we have a new relationship, a new allegiance, to Christ.

Verse four is so important, because it says we have been married to Christ, the Risen One. We've died with Him to the law, we've been raised to new life—a life that will never end. It's a marriage to Christ. This is telling us that being a Christian is being in a love relationship with Jesus, and it's through that love relationship with Jesus—that marriage—that we bear fruit for God. That's a beautiful thing when you think about it. Verse four is telling us that there is fruitfulness in the Christian life. There is victory over sin in the Christian. Don't read Romans 7 and think there is no hope. There is great hope here.

But don't expect that victory over sin to come through the law. Paul underscores that truth in verse five: "*For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.*" It's like law was a husband that kept bringing forth bad fruit, kept making us behave worse. To bear better fruit we have to marry a different husband. We have to be joined to Christ. We have to love Him.

But in this new marriage, there's good fruit. "*But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.*" This is new covenant language. Now the law is not just something that comes to us from the outside, from above, that we're trying to fulfill and failing all the time to fulfill. But the Spirit has come, and He has written God's law upon our hearts—making us want to do what pleases God. It's a way of life now. The way of the Spirit brings life and fruitfulness. I believe Romans 8 is designed to amplify the truth that Paul just spoke to us in seed form here in verse six.

What we need to see is that there's a new way of relating to God. It's no longer on the basis of law; it's through union with Jesus Christ. It's through a marriage, through a love

relationship with Jesus, and through His Spirit operating in our lives that we bear fruit unto God, that we grow in holiness.

Now, you might listen to what Paul says here and think, “Well, the law must really be bad,” because Paul has said some fairly negative things about God’s law. So in verses seven through 12, Paul wants to clarify that that’s not the case. He’s not demeaning God’s law at all. Look at verse seven: *“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!”* And he tells us that the law has two very important purposes.

First, the law exposes sin. It shows us what sin really is. Then secondly, sin exploits the law. He’s going to tell us how that happens here. *“Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”* Paul is saying, “I had sin lurking in my heart. I had evil desires in my heart. I would not have even known they were there if God’s law had not shined the light in my heart and brought the sin in my heart out of hiding into the light, to be seen for what it really is.”

The law of God exposes our sin. Sometimes we’re doing wrong things and we don’t even know they’re wrong. They’re still wrong, but we don’t know it. Then God’s law comes and says, “This is sin,” and here’s what usually happens: When sin meets God’s law, sin wants to sin all the more. So sin exploits God’s holy law and uses it to go into further and further sin.

In verse eight, Paul says, *“But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.”* The phrase “seizing an opportunity” is military language. Sin used the law as a military base of operations. Like a strategic bridgehead. It got its foot in the door. *“Apart from the law, sin lies dead.”* It’s dormant. One commentator called sin is like “a sleeping monster attached to you.” Here’s what happens: The commandment of God comes into the room and shouts for obedience, and the sin monster wakes up and says, “Over my dead body will you obey.” Sin exploits God’s law.

Verse nine, *“I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.”* I think Paul is telling us how he was awakened to realize his need for salvation in Christ. He was convicted when the law shined its light into his heart and showed him the sinfulness of his heart. He then died to his own righteousness, realizing, “I don’t have it in me.” Look at verses 10-11: *“The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”*

The problem is not with the law of God. The problem is with the heart of man. You may have heard of St. Augustine’s Confessions, as he probes the workings of God’s grace in his life. He describes a time in his life when he stole some pears as a boy. He says,

Near our vineyard there was a pear tree loaded with fruit, though the fruit was not particularly attractive either in color or taste. And I and some other youths conceived the idea of shaking the pears off this tree and carrying them away. We set out late at night. We stole all the fruit that we could carry. And this was not to feed ourselves. We may have tasted a few, but then we threw the rest to the pigs. [*Here's a key phrase.*] Our real pleasure was simply in doing something that was not allowed.

"You shall not steal." When that commandment came, sin comes alive in the heart. I just wanted to do something that was not allowed. I had plenty of better pears of my own. I only took these ones in order that I might be a thief. Once I had taken them, I threw them away. And all I tasted in them was my own iniquity—which I enjoyed very much.

Here's his point. Underneath the surface of all our sins there's this primal sin—all the way back to the Garden of Eden—to want to take the place of God. There's this perverse pleasure that we find in breaking God's law and enjoying what is forbidden for no other reason except that it was forbidden. We enjoy the forbidden just because it's forbidden.

Paul concludes in verse 12, "*So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*" The problem is not with God's law. Verse 13: "*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin (not the law, but sin) producing death in me through what is good (the law), in order that sin might be shown to be sin.*" How bad is sin? Sin is utterly sinful because it can take something that is holy, righteous and good, and use it for evil. "*It was sin producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*"

Friends, the purpose of the law of God is not to bring you life. If you're thinking that maybe you can stand before God through your own morality, through your own goodness, I would encourage you to think again. I would encourage you to think about the last 24 hours. Have you loved God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength these last 24 hours? Have you been guiltless concerning God's law? What about the last week, the last month, or the last year? Think back over the whole course of your lifetime. Do you have sufficient obedience to God's law to stand before God and say, "I am righteous"?

What about what's coming in the future of your life? There is no refuge in the law of God. The purpose of God's law is not to bring you life. Mark Dever says, "God's law is not something you can guiltlessly break. In fact, you will not so much break God's law as be broken by it." That's the purpose of God's law. It's to break us from our self-righteousness.

But I also say to believers, these verses teach us that Bible study alone cannot change us. Simply hearing the truth, knowing the truth, studying the truth and believing the truth—in itself—doesn't change us. Don't think that simply by learning more about the Bible that you're going to become a more holy person. It's essential and wonderful and desirable to learn the Bible. But everything we learn in the Bible is designed to drive us out of ourselves into the arms of Christ, into a love relationship with Him.

This is because our salvation is in Christ alone and He's the only One Who can change us. It's only through faith in Him, and the operation of His Spirit taking the truth we're learning and transforming us from within, that we can bear any fruit for God. You can expect victory over sin in the Christian life, but not through the law and not through learning more. It's only through union with Christ that we can grow in victory over sin.

## **2. You can expect victory over sin in the Christian life, but not without an ongoing struggle.**

Look at verses 13 and 14. See if you can discern what changes between verses 13 and 14:

*<sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.*

Look at the verbs. Do you see a change? What tense is Paul using through verse 13? He's talking about his past, right? This *was* what happened. But now look at verses 14 and following and you see that Paul moves into the present tense. He's speaking, I believe, autobiographically. He's speaking personally and with an immediacy.

We'll notice that there's a fairly anguished tone in Paul's voice as he speaks. There's a struggle with which we can readily identify. There's a tension in these verses, because sin brings a tension into the life of a believer. Listen to this tension in Paul's words, beginning in verse 14:

*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now*

*if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 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. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Maybe you can understand why believers wrestle, and good people struggle, with how to interpret who this “wretched man” is who’s speaking. Is Paul representing his present life as a believer, or his life before he was converted? Is Paul talking about a sub-standard level of Christian living that we are supposed to rise above? Some would even say he’s speaking metaphorically here of Israel and Israel’s experience.

There are so many different interpretations to these verses. That’s because, on the one hand, Paul says some pretty strongly negative things. Look at verse 14. He says he is fleshly: “*I am of the flesh, sold under sin.*” Then we say, “Paul, didn’t you just tell us in chapter six that the slavery to sin in the believer’s life has been broken? How can you say you’re sold under sin?”

Paul speaks in these verses as if sin is a very present reality in his life. Verse 15, “What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.” He says sin lives in him in verses 17 and 20. He says in verse 18 that his best desires get thwarted: “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” And in verse 21 he says that evil is right there with him. He’s never outside the possibility of the presence of evil corrupting him. He says in verse 23 he is a prisoner of the law of sin at work within his members, and in verse 24, he’s a “wretched man.”

Some believers look at this and say, “Well, this cannot be the normal Christian experience. It doesn’t jive with chapter six or chapter eight.” Yet notice what Paul also says repeatedly. He says he really does want to do what God wants him to do. Did you hear that? Over and over again—verses 15, 16, 18, 19, 20 and 21. Paul keeps saying, “I want to do what God wants me to do.”

There’s a very significant statement in verse 22. Paul says, “*I delight in the law of God, in my inner being.*” In my heart of hearts, I rejoice in God’s law “*like one who finds great spoil,*” using Psalm 119:162 language. In verse 25 he expresses heartfelt thanks “*to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” And he says in verse 25 that in his mind he is a slave to God’s law. Now, you’re

going to have to ponder these things, but I believe that this is a true expression of Christian experience. Not the whole of Christian experience, but it's a vital part of Christian reality.

Christopher Ash describes well what's going on here. "We have here a present-tense description of the normal Christian life portrayed as a life in urgent, day-by-day need of the grace of God." Why would we come to that conclusion? Notice first of all that from verse 14 on all the verbs are in present tense. I think when we read this we naturally think Paul's talking about himself now. In verses 7-13, Paul speaks of sin killing him. He's dead. But in verse 14 onward, it's this ongoing struggle with sin, and he's not surrendering in this struggle. He's fighting. He's not giving up, but fighting the good fight of faith—something that only someone indwelt by the Spirit of God could experience.

That whole statement in verse 22 of delighting in God's law in his inner being, even though sin is at work within him—he has the mark of the new covenant believer. The Spirit has written the law of God upon his heart and he longs to obey it. Unbelievers don't have that kind of inner delight in God's law. Paul says in Romans 8:7 the sinful mind is "*hostile to God.*" It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Paul admits he cannot save himself, which is something unbelievers don't admit.

So I say that what we have here is the struggle of becoming righteous in reality after having been declared righteous by faith. It's the struggle of a justified believer pursuing a sanctification that is not yet finished and a glorification that is still in the future. It's the experience of one who has been freed from the condemnation of sin, but who is still living with the condition of sin dwelling in him. It's describing the battlefield of our souls as believers.

So what are the tensions of this conflict? Let's just trace out three of the tensions we see here that I believe are in every believer's life.

A. If you're a believer, you want—from the depth of your heart—to walk in the way of God. We know from verse 14 that the law is spiritual. We agree with the law, verse 16, that it is good. Verse 18, the "new me" in Christ really wants to do what is right and pleasing to God. Verse 20, we don't want to go on sinning. We desire righteousness. Verse 22, we delight in the law of God in our inner being. So there is in the depths of our hearts a desire to walk in the ways of God—to go God's way.

B. We also see that, though we have this desire, we still have indwelling sin that battles fiercely against our desires for holiness. We're still in the flesh. We're still in these bodies of flesh and blood, and we'll remain so until the resurrection. God didn't come to renovate or improve your flesh. The flesh is under the control of sin and it will remain so. Nothing good lives in our flesh, verse 18 says. We have the desire to do what is right, but we don't have the ability in

ourselves to carry it out. We cannot obey God's law on our own. Even as believers, we don't have the ability in ourselves to do what pleases God.

Even when we do good—and we do, through the Spirit—it's never the good we want to do (verse 19). What does Paul mean by that? Don't you have the experience, as a believer, of someone praising you and thanking God for the evidences of grace in your life? Don't you think in your mind and heart, "Oh yes, but if only you knew. If only you knew how far short I fall." Even the good I do is not the good I want to do. The good I do is not the good that I want to do to be pleasing to God; it's not necessarily what God wants of me.

We're never going to get to the point where we can say, "I've stopped sinning now. Evil is no longer present with me." Because Paul says, "The evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." There's just this constant battle going on. That's the second contour of tension. But there's encouragement in the third.

C. The struggle is a sign of life. The internal battle with sin is something only a believer indwelt by the Spirit can experience. If you see that battle going on inside you, don't be disheartened. Don't be discouraged and think it means you're not spiritual. It means the Spirit does dwell in you. It's a sign of life.

Paul makes a very significant statement in verse 17, repeating it in verse 20. I want you to try to lay hold of this. I realize I'm giving you a lot here to think about. Paul says, "*So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*" And then he repeats it again in verse 20. "*Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*"

Paul is not letting himself off the hook. He's not making excuses for himself. But he's preaching the gospel to himself here. He's recognizing there's an enemy within, but that enemy of indwelling sin is no longer his truest self. He's saying, "Not that I'm not responsible for sinning." If he thought he wasn't responsible, he wouldn't be crying out in verse 24, "*Wretched man that I am!*" He recognizes and owns his sin.

But what he's saying is that his new identity in Christ is the true Paul now. Who you are in Christ is the real you. It's the you that's going to live forever. Who you were in Adam no longer defines you. Christian, you need to realize you are not defined by your sin. Your struggle with sin isn't the dominant reality of your life anymore. It's your identity with Christ. You are married to Him, indwelt by His Spirit. And who you are in Christ is the real you, the true you. You're still battling that old man, but now the real you wants to go God's way. The battle, the struggle, is a sign of life.

And if you're a believer, as you see more and more of God's holiness and His glory and the truth in His Word, you're going to see more and more of your own sinfulness too. But as that gap

grows between God's glory and holiness and your sinfulness, what gets bigger? The cross of Jesus. You see more and more of what you've been rescued from. Don't let the battle, the struggle, make you feel defeated. If this was the Apostle Paul's experience—and I believe it was—then we're in good company if we have this experience.

And what humility too. What is Romans? It's a missionary support letter. He's writing to get support for his mission of taking the gospel to Spain. How many mission support letters do you read where the person says, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate," confessing the reality of ongoing sin? Paul is so humble here, and his humility gives us hope.

I want to read a little poem by John Newton. Amazing grace as well gives us hope. He says:

I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith, and love, and every grace;  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek, more earnestly, His face.

I hoped that in some favored hour,  
At once He'd answer my request;  
And by His love's constraining pow'r,  
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

He's saying, "I wish there was a pill for sanctification. I wish there was a shortcut, that it could happen in some crisis, and it would be over." But Newton says, "God didn't do that."

Instead of this, He made me feel  
The hidden evils of my heart;  
And let the angry pow'rs of hell  
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea more, with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe;  
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,  
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?  
"Tis in this way, the Lord replied,  
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,  
From self, and pride, to set thee free;  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,  
That thou may'st find thy all in Me."

Don't be discouraged by the battle. It's a sign of life. It's designed to drive you deeper into Christ, into your union with Him in Whom you do have victory over sin, and through Whose Spirit you have fruitfulness.

### **3. You can expect victory over sin in the Christian life, but not completely until Jesus comes again.**

Verse 24, "*Wretched man that I am!*" There's frustration when you realize your sin. What do you do with that frustration? You be honest about it. You don't deny it. You don't try to cover over it. You don't pretend it didn't happen. You say, "No. Lord, I delight in Your law in my innermost being, and I hate what I did! I hate what I just thought! I hate the words I spoke! I don't understand my actions sometimes. I do the very things I hate, Lord."

You're honest. But you're not in despair. In humility, you recognize, "I need deliverance." And you cry out, "*Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" And you know there's an answer to that question, and that answer gives you hope and joy as you wait for the day "when faith shall be sight, the cloud be rolled back as a scroll," and Christ will descend, and we'll be found complete in Him. He will deliver me from this body of death.

"*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" There is joy in Romans 7. This battle with sin is not one of constant defeat. There will be tactical defeats along the way, but victory is ours in Jesus. And Romans 7 is here to tell you how to handle the tactical defeats. Romans 6 tells you victory is sure. Romans 7 says, "Here's how you deal with your failures." Romans 8 says, "Here's the source of your strength."

We need all three chapters all throughout our Christian lives. We never graduate from Romans 7 into a higher experience. We hold on to Romans 7 as we continue to pursue the life of the Spirit that's in Romans 8—and all of it is designed to make Christ more precious to us. If Paul thought there was an end to Romans 7, I think he would have stopped at the exclamation point in verse 25 and move straight into 8:1.

But he doesn't do that. He summarizes his point again. "*So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin,*" as if to say, "Don't expect this battle to end until you're with Christ in glory." Don't expect to reach sinless perfection in this life. But don't be discouraged either because it's so hard. Realize that the struggle is a sign of life. Sometimes you'll be defeated. There are no shortcuts. But there is victory, and it's in Jesus, and He can and He will deliver us from these bodies of sin and death. Amen.

There might be someone here today who says, “You know what? I’m realizing I cannot please God through my own performance. I need a Savior.” Right now, Jesus is calling you to put your trust in Him. I’m going to ask all of us to say this prayer on the screen together, but if you in particular are realizing, “I am lost if God doesn’t save me. I cannot produce holiness on my own. I need to be joined to Jesus”—if you say this from your heart, if the Spirit is working this prayer in your heart today, Jesus is here to save you. He’s here to give you new life. For the person who’s trusting in Jesus for the first time, this is the gateway to life in Christ.

“Father, I admit that I am a sinner, but I thank You that I don’t have to depend on my own goodness or my ability to obey Your law. Thank You that You are calling me to rely on Jesus Christ Your Son, Who died to save me and Who rose from the dead to make me right with You. I want to experience His power. I need Him to forgive me and join my life to His forever, so that I can become a new person whose life bears good fruit for You. Lord Jesus, please take my life and make it fully Yours forever. Amen.”

If you prayed that prayer for the first time and this is a new beginning for you, I’d love to talk with you so please give me a call. We want to introduce you to what it means to follow Jesus. It is a life of joy in the midst of the struggle. It’s the only life that really makes sense of the battle we’re in in this world. I want to pray for you.

Lord, for anyone today who is coming to You for the first time, we just unite our hearts in prayer that You would encourage this seed of faith, causing it to grow and bear fruit. I pray, Lord, that new people would be finding new life within the fellowship of this church and that we would encourage and fan that life into flame. Amen.

I would also like to pray for all of us who sometimes feel frustrated and defeated by sin in our lives. This gives you something you can cry out to God, to receive comfort, encouragement and strength to keep fighting. “Holy Father, oh, what a miserable person I am. Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God the answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Father, I give You thanks for Your unfailing love and faithfulness to complete the work You have begun in me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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