



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 186

Having thus far looked at key foundational teachings regarding the doctrine of sanctification, we can now turn to a very insightful passage regarding the Christian's struggle with sin, that is, Romans 7:14-25.

**Who is the man in Romans 7:14-25?** This is one of the most debated sections in the book of Romans. Given the intense and wretched language Paul uses in describing the struggle with sin, majority of Christians consider this to be Paul's description of his own inner struggle with sin before his salvation. However, such an interpretation is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Bible. In reality, this passage is Paul's description of his life as a Christian, and his lifelong and profound struggle with sin. We notice that in verse 14 Paul calls the law of God spiritual, and then in verse 16 says that he agrees with the law, that it is good. In verse 22 he says he delights in the law of God. In verses 15, 18 to 21, and 25 he speaks of a desire to do what is right and good, a desire to obey the law of God.

However, as Paul has said in many places, this does not describe an unbeliever; for the sinful man, the unregenerate, does not seek God, is hostile to God, hates the truth of God, suppresses it, does not submit to God's law, nor can he (Romans 1:18; 3:10-12; 8:5-8; Ephesians 2:1-3). The unregenerate are not at war with sin but only the consequences of sin – being caught, shamed, and penalized for their sins. The spiritual struggle with sin only begins when a person becomes a Christian. And though the reign and power of sin have been broken, sin remains and fights the believer every step of the way. In reality, the more a Christian grows in his sanctification the more he realizes how far he is from perfectly obeying God. The more we grow in holiness, and the more we understand the character of God, the more we see our sinfulness, the more intensely we feel the presence, repugnance, and darkness of sin in our lives. This is what Paul is talking about in verse 14 when he says, "I am of the flesh, sold under sin." In verses 15-19 he sees this severe conflict in his life, but cannot explain it. He is perplexed by the fact that he wants to do that which is in line with his new desires, but instead does that which he hates, that which is in line with his old desires. Paul had no such struggle before his conversion (Philippians 3:5-6).

In verse 20 Paul is not excusing his sin or saying that he was forced by something outside of him against his will to sin, and thus renouncing any personal responsibility for his actions. Neither is he espousing Greek dualistic teaching that the spirit is good but the physical body bad. Rather, he knew when he sinned he was acting contrary to who he really was in Christ, with his new identity (Romans 6:4-6). This bewildered and frustrated him, and though he sinned he was disappointed and disgusted by it.

In verse 21-23 Paul talks about two laws which at war in him, the war between the sinful principle and the spiritual principle, the old man and the new man, the outer man and the inner man; and all this is happening right inside of him. In verse 24 he laments his misery and grief over sin, the wretchedness of the remaining corrupt nature, which drives him to sin. He is eagerly hoping for the day when he will be free from the flesh. This is not a hopeless cry of doom and despair, for in the very next verse he answers his own question, and that answer is Jesus Christ, who will one day deliver him fully and finally from the presence and struggle of sin (Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 15:52-57; Philippians 3:20-21).

With verse 25 Paul sums up the Christian life, where the new man desires and serves God, but the remaining flesh desires and served sin. This is not the story of an unbeliever, but the story of a believer, no less the story of Paul the apostle. This is a heart wrenching account of a very real, personal and fierce battle, which gives us tremendous comfort and hope; not because we want to sin, or want to justify our sin; rather, because we see that even one of the greatest heroes of the faith had the same struggles as we do. This is not a story of instant triumph or perfectionism; rather, one of ongoing battle, with successes and failures in this life, but also of ultimate victory in the life to come.