

**Romans Chapter 7 – “Delighting in the Law in the Inward Man”, A  
Sunday School study given in relation to Chapter 19 of the 1689  
Confession of Faith, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012,  
by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

**Verses 1-4** –

The law has dominion (Jurisdiction, has Lordship) over a man as long as he lives. Illustrated in verse 2 by the law of a married woman being bound to her husband as long as he lives. As long as he lives, she is legally and morally bound to be faithful to him. She cannot have another man, to be married to him, as long as he lives. If he dies, she is released from the law of her husband. She has no further obligation to go on serving him as her husband.

**Application** – The law is being personified here as the one to whom every unbeliever is married to. We, as those who have never been saved, are married to the law, bound to obey it and to be faithful to him in our unregenerate state. Even though we, because of Adam’s sin, are not capable of serving him perfectly, we still are under his dominion, rule, and authority. We can never make ourselves beautiful enough, we can never obey him so well as that he will be perfectly satisfied with us. He will always be faithful to show us where we are falling short, and yet he will not love us no matter how partially good we are. He is a perfectionist. Nor will he be able to give us life or strength to do what he requires. Yet we are married to him for all that.

**Compounding problem** – If we try to leave off obeying and serving God by and through this less-than-perfect service which we render to the law, we will be seen as spiritual adulterers and adulteresses. We may know that we are falling short in many ways. We even may be opposed to him as our husband and leave him for the world, but still the obligation for our faithfulness to him does not change unless he dies. Well, the law has not died, nor will the expectation of God change toward us while we are “in Adam”. Each of us is born “in Adam” and will remain “in Adam” unless we find some righteous way to keep the law. In Adam we have broken the covenant of works, yet God still has the right to command us to keep his holy law. There is nothing wrong with the law that a divorce should be granted to us, so that we might live for the world or for ourselves. We are sinners and unfaithful to God in many ways before we are saved.

**God’s Solution to our sinful Problem** – Verse 4 – We ourselves are made to die to the law through the body of Christ, that we might be spiritually married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Galatians 5: 19 I die to the idea that I can justify myself before God, or that I can be sanctified before God by my own efforts and works. All will now be done by Christ’s fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law. All of my being justified and sanctified will come to me on the basis of the grace of Christ; I myself meriting

nothing. The change in my heart and life is all from God, and on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection.

**Application** – When Christ died on behalf of all the sinners who would trust in Him for this great blessing, they are freed from being married to the law, and they are spiritually married to Christ who was raised from the dead. We are one spirit with Him. (1 Corinthians 6: 17) We can now bear fruit to God; we can go about to keep the commandments of God, knowing that we shall not be condemned for all the imperfections that God sees in us as we go about to do them. Indeed all kinds of good things come from the believer's works and the believer's life because even though the words are imperfect, they are seen by God as being "in Christ" as well. (2 Corinthians 5: 17) The believer trusts in Christ to be saved from all of His sins. Through Christ's perfect keeping of the law, we who believe die to the law; die to our trying to please God by our own fleshly attempts at trying to keep the law. We are justified by faith in Christ and we are definitively sanctified and progressively being sanctified because of His powerful grace and help to us. When we are born again we experience a death to sin; sin no longer has dominion over us, and neither does the law. And we also receive life from Christ, the planting of the seed of righteousness in our heart which will grow up to everlasting life. (Romans 6: 5 and 6) Yet since we are married to Christ, we still love the law and go about to keep it in relation to becoming more like our Lord Jesus. We are being changed by His mighty grace to become like Him who had the Law within His heart. The Old Man has been crucified with Christ and yet we must "put him off" because he will grow more corrupt. If we are attempting to live to God, having by faith been justified, we will put on Christ; we will "put on" the New Man. (Ephesians 4: 17-24 and Galatians 2: 20 and 21)

**Verses 5-13** – "When we were in the flesh the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." This is a very revealing phrase, "When we were in the flesh..." It describes the state of the unbeliever who is trying to keep the law by his own strength. When he realizes that there are sinful passions at work in his heart, the hearing of the law aggravates those passions by giving them a greater strength when he realizes that he is being given a commandment to do something that he cannot do it perfectly, or perhaps he does not want to keep the commandment at all. But being commanded to do it by God, and then realizing that the Law will not be able to give him help in keeping it, he fights back by going all the more passionately and deeply into sin. He becomes angry with God that He should expect perfection of obedience and he does not have strength to perform it. Listen to Matthew Henry – "The law, by commanding, forbidding, threatening, corrupt and fallen man, but offering no grace to cure and strengthen, did but stir up the corruption, and, like the sun shining upon a dunghill, excite and draw up the filthy steams. We being

lamed by the fall, the law comes and directs us, but provides nothing to heal and help our lameness, and so makes us halt and stumble the more.”

Verse 6 says that the Christian has been delivered from the law, by his having died to that by which he was held. Therefore He can serve God in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. He does not simply observe the law of God outwardly, but he rejoices in learning to do it in his heart according to the motions of the Spirit of God working in his heart. He now sees the spirituality of the law. He sees that love is the fulfillment of the law. He sees that he can serve God without the fear and terror which so often came to the people of God under the Old Covenant when they drew near to God. Instead it is the reality of 1 John 5: 3. “For this is the love of god, that we keep His commandments.” “And His commandments are not burdensome.”

**In verse 7** Paul deals with the question which might naturally arise in the mind of a believer who has heard that the law arouses sinful passions in unbelieving people – “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have know sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” Here is one of the main uses of the law; that of defining what sin is. Paul uses the example of the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment which told him that covetousness was sin.

**Verse 8** - Sin working in Paul’s heart used that commandment to produce in him all kinds of covetous desire.

**Verse 9** - This sin had laid dead and dormant in his heart until the commandment came. He felt alive to his own righteousness. He was confident in his own evaluation of himself as keeping God’s commandments. And then Paul’s self-righteousness was slain. He was alive once without the law. (Phil. 3: 6). But the commandment came with convicting power. And then he died to the idea that he could keep that commandment and that he could be justify in his thinking that he had been keeping it.

**Verse 10** - The commandment which was supposed to bring life to him, he found to bring death. The intention of all of God’s commandments is for our good, to do us good, and to bring us life if we keep them with our heart. Paul thought that he was “blameless”, but he was now finding out that this was not the case. He had been deceived by his own sinful heart and mind into thinking that the commandment was something that he could keep outwardly, without having to have his heart changed.

**Verse 11** – Sin within his heart as an unbeliever took the opportunity of riding on the back of the commandment in order to conceal its true evil nature. It sought to bring him to the point of inward frustration and anger. Sin would use the strictness and perfection of the law to make him feel as though it was the law that was hemming him in, and taking his freedom away from him, not allowing him to do what he had secretly and ignorantly wanted to do before in his covetousness.

This would then lead him to the false conclusion that if he could not keep the commandment, he should then attempt to demonstrate how strong he really was, how free he really was, to sin against it. Thereby, as he thought more and more about the commandment, covetousness of every kind was engendered by sin in relation to the good commandment of God. (1 Corinthians 15: 56 – “The strength of sin is the law.”)

**John Gill says on verse 11** – “The meaning here seems to be, that his corrupt and rebellious propensities, excited by the Law, led him astray; caused him more and more to sin; practiced a species of deception on him by urging him on headlong, and without deliberation, into aggravated transgression. In this sense, all sinners are deceived.” “Their passions urge them on, deluding them, and leading them further and further from happiness, and involving them, before they are aware, in crime and death.” “No being in the universe is more deluded than a sinner in the indulgence of evil passions.”

**Verse 12** - tells us that all of this was not the law’s fault. It was the fault of the sinful nature of the man. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good.” Psalm 119: 97 – “Oh, how I love Your law!” “It is my meditation all the day.” “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.”

**Verse 13** – It would appear then that what was good had become a source of death to him. But Paul says that this was certainly not true. Rather it was sin; so that it might appear to be sin, which was producing in him death through what was good, so that sin might become exceedingly sinful. Does sin appear to be exceedingly sinful to you? Then the law has discharged one of its main duties to you. “The law is spiritual (Verse 14), but he knew himself to be carnal, sold under sin.”

**Verse 14** - Carnal – Greek – *Σαρκικος* (Sarkikos) The word carnal and the word “fleshly” are the same word in the Greek. Carnality is not simply related to the physical body or physical flesh; it is related to the mind as well. “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” (Romans 8: 7) The Old Man is our nature as affected by the sin of Adam. By nature we want to be independent of God’s law; His righteous rule over us. We think, mistakenly, that this is freedom. We are born with this aversion to obeying God and submitting to Him, and as we get older, this sinful nature develops and becomes more corrupt with time. Ephesians 4: 22 – “That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the Old Man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” The New Man is created in us by the working of the Holy Spirit. He circumcises our heart, He takes away the heart of stone, and gives us a heart of flesh. (flesh being used here in the sense of being tender and sensitive to doing the will of God.) He plants the seed of righteousness in our heart. He causes us to be “partakers of the divine nature” as it says in 2 Peter. He works to renew our mind through our willingly receiving the Word of

God. This New nature grows into maturity and bears fruit in righteous living and righteous deeds. Our responsibility is to make this tree of our nature good, by helping forward the work of God in our soul after we are born again. In regeneration we are perfectly passive. But in sanctification we are very active in cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

Now it is here that Paul transitions into his experience of his great struggle, as a believer, in relation to the two opposing principles, or laws at work in his heart – The law of sin and death which was warring against the law of his renewed mind. In and of himself Paul was carnal. He would say in just a few verses, that “in his flesh was no good thing”. It is this sense that he is carnal. When Paul says that he is carnal he is speaking of the fact that even though sin has been dethroned from his life, that he still felt at many points the motions of sin within his heart, trying to crawl back up on the throne of his life. At many points he did not feel spiritual, or think spiritual thoughts. At many points his thoughts were not noble enough or pure enough in regard to what he should be doing or what he should not be doing in relation to keeping God’s commandments. Vine’s Expository Dictionary says – “Speaking broadly, the carnal denotes the sinful element in man’s nature, by reason of descent from Adam; the spiritual is that which comes by the regenerating operation of the Holy Spirit.” Paul called the Corinth church “carnal” in 1 Corinthians 3: 1 But he was addressing them as believers. This did not mean that they were “carnal” Christians; that somehow they could continue in sin and not repent of it and still be true Christians. No, later on in 2 Corinthians 13: 5 he would ask them to “examine themselves to see whether they were in the faith.” They could not be true Christians without repentance.

Similarly, to be “sold under sin” does not mean that Paul had done what Ahab had done in 1 Kings 21: 20. “So Ahab said to Elijah, ‘Have you found me, O my enemy?’ “And he answered, ‘I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord.” John Murray say in his commentary on Romans 7: 14 – “It is assumed by some expositors that the terms used here by Paul must have the same force as this Old Testament expression.” ‘If this were the case the question would be settled.” “For, as applied to Ahab, it means that he abandoned himself to iniquity, a characterization which cannot belong to a regenerate man and, most obviously, not to Paul after his conversion.” “It is strange, however, that expositors would so easily have taken for granted that the two forms of expression have the same force.” It is one thing to sell oneself to do iniquity; it is another to be sold under the power of sin.” “In the former case the person is the active agent, in the latter he is subjected to a power that is alien to his own will.” “It is the latter that appears here.” Albert Barnes says – “It does not, mean that they choose or prefer sins. It strongly implies that the prevailing bent of their mind is against it, but that such is its strength that it brings them into slavery to it. The expression used here, “sold under sin,” is “borrowed from the practice of selling captives taken in war, as slaves.” (Stuart.) It hence, means to deliver into the power of

anyone, so that he shall be dependent on his will and control. (Schleusner.) The emphasis is not on the word “sold,” as if any act of selling had taken place, but the effect was as if he had been sold; that is, he was subject to it, and under its control, and it means that sin, contrary to the prevailing inclination of his mind Romans 7:15-17, had such an influence over him as to lead him to commit it, and thus to produce a state of conflict and grief.”

**Verse 15** – Here Paul states his own experience as a model for what all Christians should expect to experience at various times in their Christian life. “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.” Here is a regenerate man; we know this for he had “a will to do” what was right, but he found he did not practice it consistently. The thing that he hated, which was sinning against God in his heart and his thoughts and at times even in some of his actions, and his neglect of doing God’s will at other times and not keeping His commandments, this was what he was doing. He was not committing gross sins; he was walking in the truth, but he found to his dismay that his progress in righteousness and holiness was not at all what he would have hoped or liked it to be. He does not understand this inconsistency, this conflict between what he willed to do and what he actually found himself doing which was sinful.

**Verse 16** – He then explains to us his conclusion in the fear of God. “If then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.” An unbeliever would not think like this. It is important how we think about sin and the corruptions of our heart. If we cannot agree with the law, then our conclusion is wrong. The law is good. It is I who has the problem. A true believer will always side with the law against himself and his sin. He will not try to justify it or rationalize it away.

**Verse 17** – “But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” This is not Paul trying to say that he does not assume responsibility for his own sins or the sinfulness of his heart. He is saying that it is not at all his intention as a New Creature to sin. It is not longer he (the New Man) who is doing these things in his heart. No, it is his flesh. It is the corrupt remnants of the Old Man which are putting forth these motions. It is not necessary to fight about whether there are two natures in the life of the believer. There is only one person in Christ and the I that I once was, no longer lives, but it is Christ who 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.” One person, but two laws or different principles of nature exist in the believer; the corrupt Old Man, and the righteous New Man. They are extremely opposite. Listen to Galatians 5: 16 – “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall no fulfill the lust of the flesh.” “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” Listen also to 1 John 3: 9 – “Whoever has been born of God does not sin , for His seed remains in him and he cannot sin, because he has been born

of God.” And 1 Peter 1: 23 – “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” Although we must acknowledge that the believer sins, we must attribute these sins to the corruption of his nature which is related to the flesh, the carnal self, the Old Man, and not to the New life which comes from Christ and His Spirit. It says in Ephesians 4: 24 that the New Man was “created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.” In regeneration and definitive sanctification there is a one time “putting off of the Old Man” and a “putting on of the New Man” as is stated in Colossians 3: 9 – “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the Old Man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” But in Ephesians it is something this is related to sanctification, and it is on-going.

**Verse 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.” This is confirmation of what I have been saying. There is nothing good in the flesh or the Old Man. He is corrupt and so even though the spirit (the renewed mind of the believer) is willing to do God’s will, the Christian is still so affected by the fleshly part of him that it is still trying to rise up against him in his best intentions; so much so, that he does not know “how to perform what is good”. It is a great perplexity and grief to the true believer that it is so.

**Verse 19** – “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” The true believer desires and even wills to do the good, but finds himself practicing the very evil that he wills not to do. The term evil seems to limit this God-dishonoring behavior to his secret heart life, but the word “practicing” tells us that this evil surfaces in his behavior at times as well.

**Verse 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.” This is a reiteration of verse 17. It is the same phrase – “no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” In other words, this is not simply a one time experience, but something that happens over and over again at certain points in his experience. It is for the most part, a private and secret discovery of how much corruption still exists, and has strength in his heart. If not dealt with in sincere repentance, with sorrow and mourning over it, it is liable to break out into more public view if the believer refuses to deal with it.

**Verse 21** – “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”

### **Quotes from William Perkins:**

First - The spirit signifies a created quality of holiness, which by the Holy Spirit is wrought in the mind, the will and affections of man: and the flesh, the natural corruption or inclination of the mind, will, and affections to that which is against the law. In this sense these twain are taken in this place.

Secondly - it is to be considered how these twain, the flesh and the spirit can fight together, being but mere qualities. And we must know that they are not severed

asunder as though the flesh were placed in one part of the soul, and the spirit in another: but they are joined and mingled together in all the faculties of the soul. The mind or understanding part, is not one part flesh, and another spirit, but the whole mind is flesh, and the whole mind is spirit; partly one and partly the other. The whole will is partly flesh and partly spirit: the flesh and the spirit, that is grace and corruption, not severed in place onely in reason to be distinguished. As the air in the dawning of the day is not wholly light or wholly dark as at midnight and at noon day: neither is it in one part light, in another part dark: but the whole air is partly light and partly dark throughout. In a vessel of lukewarm water, the water itself is not only hot or only cold; in one part hot and in another part colder, but heat and cold are mixed together every part of the water. So is the flesh and the spirit mingled together in the soul of man: and this is the case why these two contrary qualities fight together.

Thirdly - in this combat we are to consider what equality there is between these two combaters, the flesh and the spirit. And we must know, that the flesh usually, is more in measure then the spirit. The flesh is like the mighty giant Goliath, and the spirit is little and small like young David. Hence it is, that Paul calls the Corinthians which were men justified and sanctified , carnal. "I could not," saith he, "speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ." And none can come to be tall men in Christ according to the age of the fullness of Christ, till after this life. And the speech which is used of some divines, that the man regenerate hath but the relics of sin in him, must be understood warily, else it may admit an untruth. As for the measure of grace it can be but small in respect, where as we do receive but the first fruits of the spirit in this life (Romans 8: 23): and must wait for the accomplishment of our redemption till the life to come. For all this, the power and efficacy of the spirit is such that it is able to prevail ordinarily against the flesh . For the flesh receives his deadly wound at the first instant of a man's conversion, and continually dies after by little and little: and therefore it fights but as a maimed soldier. And the spirit is continually confirmed and increased by the Holy Ghost: also it is lively and stirring, and the virtue of it like musk; one grain whereof will give a stronger smell, then many ounces of other perfumes. Some may say, that the godly man doeth more feel the flesh than the spirit: and therefore that the flesh is every way more then the spirit. I answer, that we must not measure our estate by feeling, which may easily deceive us. A man shall feel a pain which is but in the top of his finger more sensibly than the heath of his whole body, yet the health of the body is more than the pain of a finger. Secondly we feel corruption not by corruption, but by grace; and therefore men, the more they feel their inward corruptions, the more grace they have.

The will of a regenerate man is like him that hath one leg sound, the other lame: who in every step which he makes, doth not wholly halt, or wholly go upright, but



partly goes upright and partly halt. Or like a man in a boat on the water: who goes upward because he is carried upward by the vessel: and at the same time goes downward, because he walks downward in the same vessel at the same instant. If any shall say, that contraries cannot be in the same subject: the answer is, they cannot, if one of them be in his full strength in the highest degree: but if the force of them both be delayed and weakened, they may be joined together.

By reason of this combat, when corruption prevails against grace in the will and affections, there arises in the godly a certain deadness or hardness of heart, which is nothing else but a want of sense or feeling. Some may say, that this is a fearful judgment: but the answer is, that there be two kinds of hardness of heart: one which possesses the heart, and is never felt: this in them who have their consciences seared with a hot iron; who by reason of custom in sin are past all felling, who likewise despise the means of softening their hearts. And indeed this is a fearful judgment. There is another hardness of heart which is felt: and this is not so dangerous as the former: for as we feel our sickness by contrary life and health; so hardness of heart when it is felt, argues quickness of grace, and softness of heart. Of this David often complained in the Psalms: of this the children of Israel speak when they say, “Why hast thou hardened our hearts from Thy ways?”