

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME VII // CONSEQUENCE OF THE STRUGGLE
MAY 8, 2022

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: Do Christians still struggle with sin after they are saved? Why or why not?

Key Text: *“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. ¹⁴ 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.”* (Romans 7:13-20)

Les Misérables, written by Victor Hugo and first published in 1862, is considered one of the greatest novels of the 19th century. Tackling the topics of law and grace, the novel focuses on the struggle of French peasant and ex-convict Jean Valjean and his experience with forgiveness and redemption. The novel has been popularized more recently through adaptations for movies, television, stage plays, and even an award-winning Broadway musical. In the opening scene of *Les Misérables*, convict Jean Valjean is caught stealing a priest’s silver. Valjean expects to be returned to hard labor in the mines, but the priest surprises everyone when he claims he had given the silver to Valjean. After the police leave, the priest says to Valjean: “You belong no longer to evil, but to good.”

The message the priest gave to Valjean in *Les Misérables* is the same message Paul is reminding believers of in Romans 7: We are no longer slaves to the taskmaster sin. By God’s grace and through faith in Jesus, we have been set free from sin’s chains and are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to live for God and His glory. In Christ, we belong no longer to evil but to good! Let’s look closely at our main text, Romans 7:13-20, and discover God’s perspective of sin, the law, and redemption.

1. Our sinfulness—not God’s good law—is what causes our spiritual death and separation from God (v.13).

“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.” (v.13) Paul is very careful to clarify that Moses’ law is not sinful. In v.13, he says the law simply informs us what sin is, and then sin actually leverages our rebellious nature to use our knowledge of the law as an inspiration to sin even more! The law shines a spotlight on just how sinful we really are—after we know God’s law and understand what sin is; we just keep sinning all the more.

Discuss: When have you seen the principle taught in v.13 (that knowing the law causes us to keep sinning all the more) play out in human experience?

2. **The law is spiritual—it addresses our spiritual condition—but our unspiritual bodies, which urge sinful impulses, keep us from obeying the spiritual law (v.14).**

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin” (v.14). We live in a body: *“of the flesh, sold under sin” (v.14)*—we cannot obey a spiritual law. Notice that Paul’s language shifts from the more general terms he has used in Romans and now becomes intensely personal and transparent as he describes his own struggle with sin. He uses the personal pronouns “I” or “me” 20 times in v.14-20!

Discuss: Why must we recognize our own sinfulness before enjoying redemption?

3. **The Christian is no longer a slave to sin, but we are still divided over competing desires between our old sin nature and our new nature in Christ (v.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” (v.15). Paul says he continually does the opposite of what he wants to do. Rather than doing the things he wants to do, he does what he hates! We Christians have been freed by sin’s power, yet we still wrestle with its influence.

4. **The problem is not with our intentions which may be good, but with sin’s pull on us that overcomes our intentions and leads us to sin anyway (v.16-17, 20).**

“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.... ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (v.16-17, 20). Our desire to do good proves that God’s law is good since the law tells us what is good. But the pull of sin in us remains powerful and persuasive even though we have been freed from its ultimate authority and it is no longer our master. We choose to do what we hate—we sin—even when we mean to do what is right. This doesn’t mean that we are still slaves to sin, but that we are divided by competing desires in our heart. Note that Paul repeats and reemphasizes in verse 20 what he already said in verse 17.

5. **Nothing spiritually good can come from our unspiritual body. (v.18-19)**

“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” (v.18-19). Despite our most sincere intentions and efforts to do good, righteousness cannot come out of us. It’s impossible for us to obey God’s law perfectly in our own strength. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we successfully live lives that are pleasing to God.

Discuss: Summarize v.15-20 in your own words, and then describe what it’s like to experience this division between your desire to sin and your desire to obey God.

For Further Study:

“Why Do I Do What I Hate?” article at www.crosswalk.com

“If I’m Saved and Forgiven, Why not Continue to Sin?” article at www.gotquestions.org

Free Online Romans Commentary at www.enduringword.com