

The Struggle with Sin in the Believer's Life Pt. 1

Romans 7:14–25 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷ But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 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. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. 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.

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Introduction:

The Bible says in
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)
17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

And one of the most dramatic changes in a believers life is his relationship to sin.

From a positional standpoint, i.e. his standing with God.

He is no longer under the penalty of sin

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 7:6 (NKJV)

6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

He is no longer under the Power of sin.

Romans 6:6–7 (NKJV)

⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

He will soon be removed from the Presence of Sin

Romans 8:22–23 (NKJV)

²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that, but we also* who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

But from a Practical Standpoint i.e. what we live with now every every day

We Struggle with remaining presence of Sin in the unredeemed body, or flesh.

One of the clear marks of a true christian is his new relationship with sin.

Sin is no longer the love of his life, it is the loathing of his life.

Sin is no longer the primary pleasure of his life, it is the perpetual poison in his life

Sin is no longer sought after in his life, it is the the seething serpent left in his life.

Sin is no longer the direction of his life, it is that which is disgusting in his life.

Sin is a unwelcome presence. An unwanted foe. A disease desirous of being rid of.

There is no more clear a picture of regeneration that ones change in attitude toward sin.

1 John 1:5–2:2 (NKJV)

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Psalm 32:5 (NKJV)

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
 And my iniquity I have not hidden.
 I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the
 Lord,”
 And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Selah

Psalm 51:2–5 (NKJV)

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 And cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I acknowledge my transgressions,
 And my sin *is* always before me.

⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned,
 And done *this* evil in Your sight—
 That You may be found just when You speak,
 And blameless when You judge.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
 And in sin my mother conceived me.

Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

¹³ He who covers his sins will not prosper,
But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will
have mercy.

Daniel 9:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴ And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made
confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome
God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those
who love Him, and with those who keep His
commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and committed
iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even
by departing from Your precepts and Your
judgments.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all
acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to
save sinners, of whom I am chief.

We say all of this to remind of of the the relationship
of the Christian with sin.

It will play an important role in our understanding of
Romans 7:14-25

“....perhaps as long as the church has known this text, however, interpreters have disagreed as to whether the person described is a Christian or a non-Christian.

In the early church most people thought that Paul was here referring to the unregenerate state. Augustine held this at first, but more mature reflection caused him to affirm that what Paul said was true of the regenerate, too. This view came to be widely accepted, and throughout the Middle Ages most exegetes saw the passage this way. There was a variety of opinion at the Reformation, with thinkers like Erasmus favoring the reference to the unregenerate and Luther, Calvin, and others seeing Paul as speaking of the regenerate. Subsequently Arminians and Pietists have tended to take the passage of the unregenerate, while those in the Calvinist tradition have argued that the regenerate are in mind.

Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (pp. 284–285). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

Whole movements have arisen to promote one of those views or the other.

One side maintains that the person is too much in bondage to sin to be a believer,
 whereas the other side maintains that the person has too much love for the things of God and too much hatred of sin to be an unbeliever.”

Those who believe Paul is **speaking about an unbeliever** point out that he describes the person as

1. being “of flesh, sold into bondage” (v. 14),
2. as having nothing good dwelling in him (v. 18),
3. and as a “wretched man” trapped in a “body of ... death” (v. 24).

How then, it is argued, could such a person be the Christian Paul describes in **chapter 6**

- 1 as having died to sin (v. 2),
- 2 as having his old self crucified and
- 3 no longer being enslaved to sin (v. 6),
- 4 as being “freed from sin,” (vv. 7, 18, 22),
- 5 as considering himself dead to sin (v. 11),
- 7 and as being obedient from the heart to God’s Word (v. 17)?

Those who contend Paul is **speaking about a believer** in chapter 7 point out that this person

- 1 desires to obey God’s law and hates doing what is evil (vv. 15, 19, 21),
- 2 that he is humble before God, realizing that nothing good dwells in his humanness (v. 18),
- 3 and that he sees sin as in him, but not *all* there is in him (vv. 17, 20–22).

4 He gives thanks to Jesus Christ as his Lord and serves Him with his mind (v. 25).

The apostle has already established that none of those things characterize the unsaved.

The unbeliever not only hates God's truth and righteousness but suppresses them, he willfully rejects the natural evidence of God, he neither honors nor gives thanks to God, and he is totally dominated by sin so that he arrogantly disobeys God's law and encourages others to do so (1:18–21, 32).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 378). Chicago: Moody Press.

In Romans 6, Paul began his discussion of sanctification by focusing on the believer as a new creation, a completely new person in Christ. The emphasis is therefore on the holiness and righteousness of the believer, both imputed and imparted.

For the reasons given in the previous paragraph, as well as for other reasons that will be mentioned later, it seems certain that in chapter 7 the apostle is still talking about the believer. Here, however, the focus is on the conflict a believer continues to have with sin. Even in chapter 6, Paul indicates that

believers still must continually do battle with sin in their lives. He therefore admonishes them:

Rom. 6:12–13

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness”.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, pp. 378–379). Chicago: Moody Press.

Some interpreters see the passage as clearly representing a believer but only a certain kind of believer.

1. **The Legalistic believer.** The one who has a high legalistic view of the law and law keeping but is failing to do so.

Problem: Those who are legalistic and self righteous rarely see themselves as evil and having sin ever present with them. They are self satisfied in their fulfillment of the law.

2. **The Carnal Christian.** The christian who live in a perpetual state of unholiness or sin.

Problem. First the Carnal Christian idea is not Biblical

Second, if it were, then he would not have a delight in the law of God.

3. **The Immature Christian.** This christian has not reached maturity in his battle with sin.

Problem. Although this one on its surface may seem more likely, a closer look at the text seems to indicate an intensity of frustration with sin that the new convert would not have. The longer you are a Christian and the Longer you pursue God and Holiness, the more intense the battle become and the more severe sin is seen in your life.

It seems rather that Paul is here describing the most spiritual and mature of Christians, who, the more they honestly measure themselves against God's standards of righteousness the more they realize how much they fall short

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 379). Chicago: Moody Press.

It also seems, as one would naturally suppose from the use of the first person singular (which appears **forty-six times** in Rom. 7:7–25), that Paul is speaking of himself.

Not only is he the subject of this passage, but it is the mature and spiritually seasoned apostle that is portrayed. Only a Christian at the height of spiritual maturity would either experience or be concerned

about such deep struggles of heart, mind, and conscience.

The more clearly and completely he saw God's holiness and goodness, the more Paul recognized and grieved over his own sinfulness.

Paul reflects the same humility many places in his writings.

I Cor 15:9

"I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God"

Eph 3:8 To the Ephesian believers he spoke of himself as "the very least of all saints"

I Tim 1:12,15

to Timothy he marveled that the Lord "considered me faithful, putting me into service" and refers to himself as the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:12, 15).

I Cor. 15:10 He knew and confessed that whatever he was in Christ was fully due to the grace of God.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 379–380). Chicago: Moody Press.

Also it needs to be noted that textually there is strong evidence the Paul is speaking on the Condition as a believer

The present tense is used throughout this section, which contrasts with the past tenses throughout the

preceding section. It is argued that it would be unnatural and artificial to take this to mean something that was completely in the past. It is countered that no attention is drawn to this, so that Paul is not making a clear contrast with his former way of life. There is something in this, but it is still true that the string of present tenses is impressive and difficult to refer to something that lies wholly in the past. It is also pointed out that Paul uses the emphatic *egō* six times in this passage, which more naturally refers to Paul as he is than to Paul as he was. Paul's language, the way he chooses to express himself, points more naturally to his present experience than to his recollection of the past.

Romans 7:7–13 (NKJV) Aorist Imperfect, Perfect Present Future

⁷ What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* Certainly not! On the contrary, **I would not have known sin** except through the law. For **I would not have known** covetousness unless the **law had said**, “*You shall not covet.*”⁸ But sin, **taking** opportunity by the commandment, **produced** in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead.⁹ **I was alive** once without the law, but **when the commandment came, sin revived** and **I died.**¹⁰ And

the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, **I found** to *bring* death. ¹¹ For sin, **taking** occasion by the commandment, **deceived me**, and by **it killed me**.
¹² Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

¹³ Has then what is good **become** death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might **appear** sin, **was producing** death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment **might become** exceedingly sinful.

Romans 7:14–25 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For we **know** that the law is spiritual, but **I am** carnal, **sold** under sin. ¹⁵ 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**. ¹⁶ If, then, **I do what I will not to do, I agree** with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷ But now, *it is* no longer **I who do it**, but sin that **dwells** in me. 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**. ¹⁹ For the good that **I will to do, I do not do**; but the evil **I will not to do, that I practice**. 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.

²¹ I **find** then a law, that evil **is present** with me, the one who **wills** to do good. ²² For I **delight** in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I **see** another law in my members, **warring** against the law of my mind, and **bringing me into captivity** to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! **Who will deliver** me from this body of death? ²⁵ I **thank** God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I **myself serve** the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because

he knows it grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30), because it dishonors God (1 Cor. 6:19–20), because sin keeps his prayers from being answered (1 Pet. 3:12), and because sin makes his life spiritually powerless (1 Cor. 9:27).

The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because it causes good things from God to be withheld (Jer. 5:25),

because it robs him of the joy of salvation (Ps. 51:12),

because it inhibits spiritual growth (1 Cor. 3:1),
because it brings chastisement from the Lord
(Heb. 12:5–7),

and because it prevents his being a fit vessel for
the Lord to use (2 Tim. 2:21).

The spiritual believer is sensitive to sin because
it pollutes Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 10:21),

because it prevents participating properly in the
Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:28–29),

and because it can even endanger his physical
life and health (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 380). Chicago: Moody Press.

In Romans 7:14–25 Paul gives a series of laments
about his spiritual predicament and difficulties.

The **first three laments** (vv. 14–17, 18–20, 21–
23) follow the same pattern.

- 1** Paul first describes the spiritual condition he
is lamenting,
- 2** then gives proof of its reality,
- 3** and finally reveals the source of the problem.

The final lament (vv. 24–25) also includes a beautiful
exultation of gratitude to God for His Son Jesus
Christ, because of whose gracious sacrifice
believers in Him are no longer under condemnation,

in spite of the lingering power of sin (8:1) MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, p. 381). Chicago: Moody Press.

LAMENT # 1

The Condition

Romans 7:14 (NKJV)

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

14 Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστίν ἐγὼ δὲ σαρκικός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν

This verse marks the change from the past tense so common in the previous section to the present, which is equally characteristic of the verses to which we now come. As we have already noticed, the most natural way of understanding this is to see it as pointing to Paul's present experience.

Morris, L. (1988). [The Epistle to the Romans](#) (p. 290). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

14 For

γάρ.

Definition: for, indeed (a conjunction used to express cause, explanation, inference or continuation)

Usage: for.

1063 γάρ (a conjunction) – for. its sense is shaped by the preceding statement – the "A" statement which precedes the 1063 (γάρ) statement in the "A-B" unit.

The conjunction **for** carries the idea of *because* and indicates that Paul is not introducing a new subject but is giving a defense of what he has just said

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 382). Chicago: Moody Press.

14 For we know

14 Οἶδαμεν γάρ. Pf.Act.Ind.

εἰδῶ (oida) – properly, to see with physical eyes (cf. Ro 1:11), as it naturally bridges to the metaphorical sense: perceiving ("mentally seeing"). This is akin to the expressions: "I see what You mean"; "I see what you are saying."

1492 /eídō ("seeing that becomes knowing") then is a gateway to grasp spiritual truth (reality) from a physical plane. 1492 (eídō) then is physical seeing (sight) which should be the constant bridge to mental and spiritual seeing (comprehension).

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

14 Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικός ἐστὶν ἐγὼ δὲ σαρκικός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπο τὴν ἁμαρτίαν

The Law is spiritual

1. In its origin. It came from God, not man.

Directly by God and then by means of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 12:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ For David himself said by the Holy Spirit:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’

Acts 1:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ “Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;

Acts 28:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, ²⁶ saying,

‘Go to this people and say:

“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;

And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

2 Peter 1:21 (NKJV)

²¹ for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

That this was a fundamental dogma of Judaism is of course clear (cf., e.g., *Sanh.* 10:1: ‘And these are they that have no share in the world to come:

..., and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, ...') Mishnah

Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (p. 355). London; New York: T&T Clark International.

But an affirmation of the divine origin of the law is also by **implication an affirmation of its divine authority, of the majesty with which it confronts men,**

Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (pp. 355–356). London; New York: T&T Clark International.

1 Corinthians 2:10–14 (NKJV)

¹⁰ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

Hebrews 4:12–13 (NKJV)

¹² For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

John 3:5–7 (NKJV)

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

1 Peter 1:23 (NKJV)

²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, **but I am carnal, sold under sin.**

14 Οίδαμεν γαρ οτι ο νομος
πνευματικός εστιν εγω **δε**
σαρκικός ειμι πεπραμένος
υπο την αμαρτιαν

The first person singular is again used, but now for the first time in this chapter with a present tense. The only natural way to understand this **ἐγὼ ... εἶμι** is surely the way indicated by Calvin's comment on the following verse: 'Paul ... is depicting in his own person the character and extent of the weakness of believers'.

Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (p. 356). London; New York: T&T Clark International.

sold under sin. Pf.Pass Pt. Having been sold under

πεπραμένος υπο την αμαρτιαν

He brings that out by saying that he is *sold as a slave to sin*. The imagery is that of a slave market. Paul regards himself as sold “under” sin, which is

more than NIV's *sold to*. It means that he is "under" sin's control. This is a vivid way of bringing out the truth that Paul sins, though he does not want to. It does not mean that he never does the right, but is a strong expression for his inability to do the right as he would like to. Calvin brings out the paradox: "It would not be sin if it were not voluntary. We are, however, so addicted to sin, that we can do nothing of our own accord but sin." The passive means that Paul is carried off by sin, not that he sold himself to sin, as Ahab did (1 Kings 21:20). He still desires to do the right, which is not true of the person who abandons himself to evil. Every earnest Christian advances in goodness, but he cannot arrive at perfection. Why not? Because he is sold under sin. There is that about him (he is "carnal") which prevents him from being the perfect being he would like to be

Morris, L. (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 291). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

But I," Paul continues, "**am still of the flesh.** I am still earth-bound and mortal." It is important to note that the apostle does not say he is still *in the flesh* but that he is still **of** it. He has already explained that believers are no longer "in the flesh" (7:5; cf. 8:8),

Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For 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.

Romans 8:8 (NKJV)

⁸ So then, those who are **in the flesh** cannot please God.

no longer bound by and enslaved to its sinfulness as they once were. The idea is that, although believers are not still in the flesh, the flesh is still in them. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes the Christians there as “men of flesh ... babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). As the apostle confesses later in the present passage, using the present tense, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (7:18). Even as an apostle of Jesus Christ he possessed a remnant of the sinfulness that characterizes all human beings, including those who, in Christ, are saved from its total mastery and its condemnation.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, p. 382). Chicago: Moody Press.

But the Christian's spirit, his inner self, has been completely and forever cleansed of sin. It is for that reason that, at death, he is prepared to enter God's presence in perfect holiness and purity. Because his spiritual rebirth has already occurred, his flesh, with its remaining sin, is left behind.

Every well-taught and honest Christian is aware that his life falls far short of God's perfect standard of righteousness and that he falls back into sin with disturbing frequency. He is no longer of his former father, the devil (John 8:44); he no longer loves the world (1 John 2:15); and he is no longer sin's slave, but he is still subject to its deceit and is still attracted by many of its allurements. Yet the Christian cannot be happy with his sin, because it is contrary to his new nature and because he knows that it grieves his Lord as well as his own conscience.

The story is told of an unbeliever who, when he heard of the gospel of salvation by grace alone, commented, "If I could believe that salvation is free and is received only by faith, I would believe and then take my fill of sin." The person witnessing to him wisely replied, "How much sin do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to satisfaction?" His point was that a person who has not lost his appetite for sin cannot be truly converted.

The phrase **sold into bondage to sin** has caused many interpreters to miss Paul's point and to take those words as evidence the person being talked about is not a Christian. But Paul uses a similar phrase in verse 23, where he makes clear that only his members, that is, his fleshly body, is "a prisoner of the law of sin." That lingering part of his unredeemed humanness is still sinful and consequently makes warfare against the new and redeemed part of him, which is no longer sin's prisoner and is now its avowed enemy.

Paul's strong words about his condition do not indicate he was only partially saved at the time but rather emphasize that sin can continue to have dreadful power in a Christian's life and is not to be trifled with. The believer's battle with sin is strenuous and life-long. And as Paul also points out later in this chapter, even a Christian can truthfully say, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom. 7:18). *In himself*, that is, in his remaining fleshly being, a Christian is no more holy or sinless than he was before salvation.

Probably many years after he became a believer, David prayed, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me

from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Ps. 51:1–3). The rendering in the *New International Version* of verse 5 of that psalm gives helpful insight: “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” David well understood the truth the apostle John would later proclaim to believers: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10).

It was in that humble spirit that Isaiah, although a prophet of God, confessed as he stood before the heavenly throne: “I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Like Isaiah, the more a Christian draws near to God, the more clearly he perceives the Lord’s holiness and his own sinfulness.

The commentator C. E. B. Cranfield observed, “The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to ... the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly” (*A Critical and Exegetical*

Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975], 1:358.

Thomas Scott, an evangelical preacher of the Church of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wrote that when a believer “compares his actual attainments with the spirituality of the law, and with his own desire and aim to obey it, he sees that he is yet, to a great degree, carnal in the state of his mind, and under the power of evil propensities, from which (like a man sold for a slave) he cannot wholly emancipate himself. He is carnal in exact proportion to the degree in which he falls short of perfect conformity to the law of God” (cited in Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* [London: Banner of Truth, 1969], p. 121).

Sin is so wretched and powerful that, even in a redeemed person, it hangs on and contaminates his living and frustrates his inner desire to obey the will of God.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 382–384). Chicago: Moody Press.