



Struggle

BECAUSE SIN REMAINS A POWERFUL FORCE,
BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED WHEN
DOING RIGHT IS A STRUGGLE.

ROMANS 7:4-6,14-25

Everyone loves a good rescue story. Some rescue stories are dramatic, like the firefighter who pulls an elderly couple out of a bedroom window just before their house collapses in flames. Others are less dramatic but no less inspiring, like the teacher who stays after school to tutor students who are struggling in class. However, nothing compares to the way God rescued us through Jesus.

 **What is your favorite “rescue” story? Who comes to mind when you are asked to name the first person who ever rescued you?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 6:15–7:25

Paul returned to the question of whether Christians should continue to sin because they are under grace rather than the law (Rom. 6:15). Did grace give license to sin? Again, Paul strongly objected, “Absolutely not!” (see also 6:1-2).

The apostle used two illustrations to show the power of grace to battle sin rather than submit to it. First, he explained that everyone is a servant—either to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. Believers, freed from sin through Christ, now serve God, resulting in holiness and eternal life. Paul concluded that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus” (6:16-23).

Second, Paul used an illustration from marriage to show that believers are released from the law’s authority through Christ’s death. Just as death ends a marriage covenant, Christ’s death frees us from the law so we can belong to Him and bear fruit for God (7:1-6).

Paul clarified that the law itself is not sinful; rather, it reveals sin. The law exposes human inability to keep it perfectly, and sin uses the law to produce death in us. The law shows our need for grace (7:7-13).

However, just because believers are set free from sin’s power and are dead to sin, it doesn’t mean that they no longer struggle with sin. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul described the inner struggle of desiring to do good but being pulled by sin. This tension shows human weakness and dependence on Christ. Paul ended with gratitude: deliverance comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus is our Rescuer.



Read Romans 7:4-6,14-25 in your Bible and look for what Paul said about the believer’s struggle with sin. What do these verses reveal about our dependence on Christ?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

FREED (ROM. 7:4-6)

⁴ **Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.** ⁵ **For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death.** ⁶ **But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.**

VERSE 4

Paul began chapter 7 with an analogy. He wrote about a woman whose husband died. According to the law, she would be liberated from her marriage vow to him. Accordingly, she could get married again (Rom. 7:1-3). Paul used the analogy to make a point about believers being released from the authority of the law.

Starting with *therefore*, Paul identified believers as his *brothers and sisters*. He wanted his spiritual siblings to know that they shared with him a new relationship with God that began when they died *to the law*. Now they belonged to *Christ*. Because of Christ's death, we have died to the law with Him. Likewise, because He rose from *the dead*, so do we when we place our faith in Him.

VERSE 5

Paul looked back to the time when they lived *in the flesh*. Instead of living to please God, they lived for the sole purpose of indulging in whatever their bodies craved. The reign of sin had a destructive effect on them. They lived under the control of *sinful passions*. When they gave in to those passions, they sinned against God. As sin *aroused* their passions, they sinned even more. Their passions kept on *working* in them like seeds planted in the soil. The seeds became sprouts that kept on growing stronger. Eventually, the sprouts became plants that produced *fruit for death*. In other words, the law, meant to show us the righteous commandments of God, instead became an instrument that led to sin. The law provoked our old nature to sin, which led to death.

VERSE 6

Just as a widow can consider herself to be free to marry again, we live in freedom too. We’ve been *released from the law* and *have died to what held us*. The law held us captive because we could not meet its demands. The old letter of the law told us what to do but did not create true spirituality. What we needed was to serve in the *newness of the Spirit*. The law told us how to live, but we were unable to live that way. In Christ, we have both the desire to obey and the power for obedience.

 **What practical difference should it make that a believer belongs to Christ? In what ways does it change your identity and purpose?**

 **In what ways are you bearing fruit for God in your daily life? Where do you need to rely more on the Spirit than on your own effort?**

In Christ, we have both the desire to obey and the power for obedience.

CONFLICTED (ROM. 7:14-23)

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. ²¹ So I discover this

law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me.

²² **For in my inner self I delight in God's law,** ²³ **but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.**

VERSES 14-17

In verses 7-13, Paul explained that the law itself is not sinful; rather, it reveals sin. Without the law, we would not recognize sin. For example, we know coveting is sin because the law forbids it. In verses 14-16, Paul explained that the problem was not with the law but with human nature—*the flesh*.

As evidence, he pointed to the ongoing battle with sin in his own life. At times he did what he knew to be wrong and failed to do what he knew to be right. Bible teachers disagree on whether Paul was describing his experience before or after conversion. However, the context of the passage makes the case for this being Paul's post-conversion struggle with sin. Beginning in Romans 6:12, Paul had moved from a discussion of justification of the sinner to sanctification of the believer.

Paul is giving his own testimony regarding the conflict with sin that continued to trouble him. He testified that he found himself not practicing what he wanted to do. Just as difficult, he dealt consistently with the inner struggle that came from doing something sinful even though he hated it.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Sanctification*

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. (See Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.)

Paul acknowledged that the law is spiritual. His old nature struggled with the demands of the law and the lure of the flesh. He said in Galatians 5:17, "For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so you don't do what you want." Paul did not understand why he continued to be enslaved to sin when he had trusted Christ to die to sin. This was the conflict.

As he testified about his struggle, he acknowledged the truth about the law. He confessed that when he gave himself to sinful behavior, he did not want to do it at all. The spiritual conviction that tore at his heart because of his sinful behavior validated the purpose of the law. Paul noted that the law cast a bright light on sin. For that reason, he saw the law as altogether good.

Paul knew that the law was good. But he found himself battling between the new nature and old nature. As believers, we still battle the power of sin even though Jesus has set us free from it. This ongoing battle will not be settled until Jesus returns (1 John 3:2).

VERSES 18-23

Paul had *the desire to do what is good*. This desire comes from the Holy Spirit. However, there was no *ability* to do good. He struggled to *do the good* he wanted to do, doing instead *the evil* he did *not want to do*. In these verses, Paul was acknowledging that sin is still a formidable enemy, even after salvation.

Death to sin as a power did not remove sin's allurement, hence, the conflict in the believer's life. On the one hand, Paul had a *delight in God's law*. Such is a characteristic of the godly: "his delight is in the LORD's instruction" (Ps. 1:2). At the same time, however, he had to contend with *evil* that kept on presenting itself to him at every turn. As he took a long look at himself, he could see that the desire to obey God remained in his *inner self*. Sincerely and honestly, he testified that he experienced sheer *delight* at the thought of devoting himself to honoring *God's law* with his life. But much to his disappointment, he observed that a *different law* had an extremely powerful influence over the various parts of his body.

The opposing laws waged *war* with each other, and Paul's life became the battlefield. Consistently, the law that dictated his body fought against *the law* that guided *his mind*. The battle seemed to end in the same way. His mind surrendered to his body. That's when his body would make him a *prisoner*. The law in his body placed him in a prison, and the *law of sin* locked him up in his cell.



**Do these verses encourage you or discourage you?
Explain your answer.**



How does recognizing sin's presence in you change the way you depend on God?

HOPE (ROM. 7:24-25)

²⁴ **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?** ²⁵ **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.**

VERSE 24

Can't you identify with Paul's struggle? Like him, we agonize over our inner conflict. We're conflicted in that we don't do what we want to do, and we do what we don't want to do in our relationship with God. The frustration over the endless battle within ourselves because of the inner conflict compels us to echo his one-word description of himself: **wretched**. The word suits us well because it underscores the misery we feel in our hearts because we're disgusted with ourselves. But at the same time, we can't seem to do anything about changing our behavior because we simply lack the personal strength to do it.

For that reason, we join Paul in determining that we need help. As we consider his assessment of the help we need, we affirm that we need more than good advice from a person who understands our conflict. Good advice alone will not solve our problem. Like Paul, we need someone to **rescue** us from our struggle. Paul's statement about **this body of death** hits home with us. We have died to the reign of sin over us. However, we're frustrated with the way sin's corpse keeps hanging on to us. Sin still wants to control our lives and prevent us from experiencing spiritual joy in our walk with God. We long to be rescued.

VERSE 25

Paul concludes this section with gratitude to God. We can express our **thanks** to Him because He sent **Christ Jesus** to be the sacrifice for our sin. When we turn to Him by faith, we experience God's grace. He pardons us, and He gives us the gift of new life that is eternal. We thank Him wholeheartedly for His grace in setting us free from the tyranny of sin. Now Christ Jesus reigns supremely

as **our Lord**. For that reason, we live in hope that centers in Him alone. Because of our hope in Him, we rejoice in the certainty that He hears our cry for help by rescuing us.

Paul’s assertion about himself gives us the direction that we need as we face the conflict that goes on inside us. We know from experiences in life that certain conflicts can be resolved sometimes. In those cases, the intense struggle between two opposing forces, ideas, or people can be replaced with peace. However, some conflicts in our lives will never be resolved. Instead, they can be managed, but the struggle involving them will never end. In those cases, life will go on, and the conflict will continue to be a part of it. Like Paul, we trust Christ to help us as we manage the inner conflict with sin. Our minds will continue to serve **the law of God**. However, our **flesh** will keep on nudging us to obey **the law of sin**.

 **In light of the difficulty in battling sin, what keeps us from despair and hopelessness?**

 **In what ways can you live more consciously in the freedom Christ provides?**



BIBLE SKILL: *Bible Skill: Summarize the argument.*

Read through the entirety of Romans 6:15–7:25 to summarize the argument Paul made regarding the ongoing effects of sin. First, make an outline of the argument. Second, write a one-sentence summary of this argument. Consider how sin effects a believer’s life and the significance of dying to sin. Respond to these questions: How does this argument encourage you? Does it discourage you in any way?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers bear fruit for God when they live in the Spirit of God.
- + Believers need to recognize that the struggle with sin is real, and they need help.
- + Believers can express gratitude to God that they do not have to battle sin in their own power, but that Christ provides the victory.

 **Discuss with others in the Bible study group a believer’s conflict over sin. What approach do they take in dealing with it? How does the conflict make them more productive and grateful believers?**

 **When did you recognize that sin would always present a problem for you? How do you show your gratitude to God for helping you to be victorious through Christ?**



Memorize Romans 7:4.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.