

Romans 6... 7... 8

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Romans 7:18 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.

Romans 7:19 For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

Romans 7:23 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.

Most of you know that our state prison system has been renamed as the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Ideally we want to rehabilitate offenders, not just incarcerate them. Some offenders can be rehabilitated. Others seem to be career criminals destined to reoffend.

Keep that in mind as we read verse eighteen.

Romans 7:18 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.

The **flesh** is not my physical body. It is a principle, a tendency, to use the members of my physical body to sin.

Nothing good dwells in my flesh. Think of your flesh as a criminal. Ideally we want to rehabilitate criminals. We want to somehow get them to quit being criminals and instead do good and be productive members of society.

Your flesh is like a criminal who cannot ever be rehabilitated. It is a criminal who will always reoffend. It can reform for a time but it will always reoffend.

As a believer Paul had the **will** to do **good**. But he said **how to perform what is good I do not find**. It can't mean he was going

around living a defeated life and committing all kinds of sins. We know he went around in victory. He could say, *Follow me as I follow Jesus Christ*. That isn't the claim of a man bound by sin.

What he meant in verse eighteen was that in his own strength he could not do what his new nature desired. If he depended upon his own strength and will power he experienced verse nineteen:

Romans 7:19 For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.

If we are honest we admit that we too often have this experience as believers. It's because of what Paul said in verse twenty.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Sin... dwells in me. Paul was not shifting the blame. He was being honest. He found himself in a struggle against sin because of the flesh.

Let me give you what I think is the bottom line here. Even as a born again man with a new nature, with a mind set on Jesus, with the will and desire to do good, you will struggle against sin. As long as we are in our current physical bodies we will have the flesh to contend against. *being changed to bring change -*

It's like a cage fight with my body as the cage. Only one combatant can win. There are no draws. If I give in to my flesh it will dominate.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

It might be a good time to remember the man who was writing these words. Paul described himself in Philippians:

Philippians 3:5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

Philippians 3:6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

That was Paul's description of himself when he was Saul – before his conversion to Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. It was quite a resume, really. Any Jew would be proud to be described in those terms.

After his conversion Saul realized that these accomplishments of his flesh were a pile of rubbish:

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

The man who had all his life tried to keep God's Law found that there was another **law** at work. Think of **law** like the way we describe the law of gravity or other laws of physics. It is a matter of indisputable fact, it is a law, that **evil is present with me**. As long as I am in my current physical body **evil** will be present.

When Paul said he was **the one who wills to do good** he meant that he wanted to keep God's Law. Outwardly he thought he had done a pretty good job before he was a Christian. Now that he was a saved man he could see that he hadn't done a very good job of keeping the Law at all. He accomplished a few things outwardly but inwardly he was no less sinful.

Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

When we started chapter seven I might have mentioned that many commentators and scholars feel that Paul was describing himself before he was saved. Therefore these experiences would not apply to you as a believer.

This one verse proves that Paul was most definitely describing his experiences as a saved man. He spoke of the **inward man**. The **inward man** is his new nature in Christ, the new man that he became and we became when saved. Only a born again man can speak this way.

As saved men we **delight in the law of God**. We see God's nature and character revealed in His Law and we are in awe of His righteousness and holiness.

Although Paul could previously brag about keeping God's Law, keeping it was a burden. The requirements were intense and always being scrutinized and redefined.

When the Law is a burden it paints a portrait of God as a cruel taskmaster whom you can never appease or please. As a saved man he could see the nature of God behind the Law and it brought him **delight**.

Romans 7:23 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.

The **law in [his] members** is another description of the flesh. It is the propensity and tendency to use your physical body in ways that are indulgent and sinful. Calling the flesh a **law in his members** is to say it will always act in the following way: **warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members**.

Paul used the word **mind** as a synonym for the **inward man**. The flesh will *always* war **against the law of my mind**.

The goal of my flesh (which works through my **members**) is to bring me back under its control. The flesh wants to satisfy itself but when I give in to it I am brought into **captivity** to its lusts.

Mind versus **members** is your on-going cage fight. The flesh working through my members is at war with my inward man.

How do we ever defeat the flesh and walk in victory?

By depending upon the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Paul was saved; he had this constant struggle; but he wasn't resigned to defeat or even to despair at the battle. He was instead yielded to the Holy Spirit. We'll learn how to do the same in subsequent studies.

