

# ROMANS

## THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

### STUDY SIXTEEN

## Portrait of a Struggling Christian

### *Romans 7*

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*In Romans 7, we are brought face-to-face with the reality of an old sin nature that has never left. It just moves over as the Holy Spirit brings in a new nature, and now the warfare begins—the battle that rages between the ugly and bad and the beautiful and good. The battle creates the struggling Christian. It's the story of every believer's life.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**T**HE ripe red apple falls to the ground. The beach ball lands on the sand. Even a bird's feather cannot escape the force of gravity. And like these objects, we humans don't float or fly away because we can't create enough lift to overcome Earth's gravitational pull, no matter how hard we try . . . unless we get inside an aircraft that uses another principle of physics to raise our feet off the ground.

Whether we became a believer yesterday or have been walking with the Lord for decades, we all struggle with sin's gravitational pull—strutting the stuff that we now have victory over, nurturing a secret love for the forbidden, or focusing our lens solely on earthly matters. The problem lies in the limits of our fallen nature.

In the previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we examined the difference between those who choose sin—their old master—and those who surrender to God. In this Bible study, we'll watch the apostle Paul pull back the curtain on his own struggles—and the need to *live by another principle to win the war within*.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Reflect on the psalmist's prayer, and then, in the space below, acknowledge your need for mercy as you approach God through His Word.

*LORD, if you kept a record of our sins,  
who, O Lord, could ever survive?  
But you offer forgiveness,  
that we might learn to fear You.  
I am counting on the LORD;  
yes, I am counting on him.  
I have put my hope in his word. (Psalm 130:3–5)*



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As a member of the strictest sect of his time—the Pharisees—Paul was well-acquainted with the Mosaic law and the Pharisees' oral traditions. Before his conversion, he considered himself blameless according to the righteousness stipulated in the law (*Philippians 3:5–6*). But when he met Christ, grace opened Paul's eyes to the truth—"No one can ever be made right before God by doing what the law commands" (Romans 3:20; see *Galatians 2:14–16*; *Titus 3:3–7*). There is only one way we can be made right with God—"by placing our faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22).

Is the Law obsolete, then, since we're under grace? What is its purpose for those who follow Christ? Before hearing Paul's answers in Romans 7, how would you answer these questions?

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### Observation: The Law, the Flesh, and Sin

As we step into Romans 7, let's review what Paul has taught so far, which we can picture as a series of portraits hanging in a gallery.

- In Romans 1–3, Paul portrayed *the lost person*—“everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23).
- In Romans 4–5, he depicted *the justified sinner*—“people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners” (4:5).
- In Romans 6, Paul painted *the victorious believer*—“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace” (6:14).

*We are freed from sin!* We are freed from sin because, as Paul explains in Romans 7, we’re freed from the Law. He used the analogy of slavery in Romans 6 to declare our freedom from sin. Use your skills of observation as you read carefully Romans 7 to see how he explains our freedom from the Law.

### Theoretically, Here’s Where We Stand—Romans 7:1–13

What metaphor does Paul use in [Romans 7:1–3](#)? What’s the point of Paul’s analogy?

Note how the particle, *therefore*, begins [7:4](#) NASB. What truth does the analogy emphasize about the Mosaic law and our relationship with Christ?

*Your first husband was the Mosaic law. Your second husband is the Lord Jesus Christ. The wife in this case is the believer. So having died to the first husband, you’re now married to the second so the obligations of the first marriage do not apply to the second marriage. Theologically speaking, we are freed from the Law. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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According to [Romans 7:5–6](#), what happened when we were “in the flesh” (Romans 7:5 NASB)? How has the believer’s relationship with the Law changed?

How did Paul answer the question, “Is the Law sin?” ([7:7–13](#) NASB)? What are the benefits of the Law?

God used the Law as a diagnostic tool to expose our disease and drive us to Christ for the cure. In Christ, we are *positionally* released from death’s grip, secure in the hope of eternal life. *Experientially*, though, we still struggle with sin because of our sinful condition—which Paul illustrated next with his own self-portrait of *the struggling Christian*.

### **Experientially, Here’s Why We Struggle—Romans 7:14–25**

Christ set us free from sin and from the Law so that we can *live* free—not just someday but now. But how? In [Romans 7:14–20](#), Paul described his attempts to overcome sin in his own strength. What frustrations did he encounter by trying to pull himself up by his own bootstraps?

Paul pointed to the source of our problem as the “flesh,” which the New Living Translation translates as “old nature” and “sinful nature” (Romans 7:5, 18). We’ll look closer at this concept in the interpretation section, but for now, what did Paul discover about his struggle with his own flesh, according to [7:21–23](#)?

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Paul summed up his conflict between his wanting and his doing—“the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not” (Romans 7:18 NASB)—by describing his inner conflict as a “war” (7:23). What did Paul exclaim in desperation in [7:24](#)?

*We lose if we fight it in the flesh. We quit if we focus on the flesh. Paul is to the point of quitting when he says, “Wretched man that I am!” This is a regenerate believer yearning for final deliverance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: The Struggle Within Us

In his commentary on Romans, Pastor Chuck defines *flesh*:

Paul used the term “flesh” symbolically to represent humanity in its fallen state. The flesh is programmed to think like the world system, which is a perverted version of God’s original created order, and it continues to oppose His will.<sup>2</sup>

Before Christ, we were “in the flesh” (Romans 7:5 NASB), enslaved to the sinful desires that the Law aroused. God commanded, “Do not,” but, in rebellion, our fleshly desires urged us, “Do,” and we were dominated by this impulse.

Write your definition of *flesh* as Paul used the term. The online *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) provides a helpful explanation of the three ways *flesh* is used in the New Testament, including Paul’s particular usage.

Obedying the Law *in the flesh* is as futile as trying to fly by flapping our arms. Thankfully, as believers, we are *in Christ*, and we can live in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, not in the flesh.

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Explain how “the new way of living in the Spirit” is better than “the old way of obeying the letter of the law” in [Romans 7:6](#).

Our renewed nature allows us to live in the power of the Spirit and “produce a harvest of good deeds for God” (Romans 7:4). Although we’re not in the flesh, we still *have* the flesh, and it wages war against the Spirit. Our flesh wants to pull us back to the way we lived before Christ.

*Every time Paul refers to this flesh, he’s referring to an old sin nature that we’ve had with us since birth and will go with us till death. It’ll never improve. It’ll never get better. Even though the Spirit of God is living inside the believer, there is this battle back and forth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

As attested by the Law, no matter how hard we try, we can’t overcome the drag of sin on our own. The secret lies in operating by another principle—the power of the Holy Spirit—that enables us to win the war within!



### Correlation: Winning the War Within

Compare our passage with [Zechariah 4:6](#) and [Galatians 5:16–25](#). What characterizes the life controlled by the flesh? What results from surrendering to the Holy Spirit? How can believers overcome the drag of sin?



### Application: Do Not Lean on the Flesh!

Paul teaches that we need more power than we can muster on our own to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh. When dealing with the ways of the sin nature, begin by admitting, “I don’t understand why I do what I don’t want to do.” You have a sinful nature, so leave room for imperfection. It’s not helpful to bog down in an endless cycle of guilt and shame. Instead, openly confess to the Lord your true feelings and frustrations, just as Paul did.

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Use this space for honest communication with the Lord. What would you like to share with Him about your struggles?

Thankfully, there's hope! "The answer is Jesus Christ our Lord," Paul declared (Romans 7:25). In the next *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll see how Christ gives us access to the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us moment-by-moment victory over the flesh.



### A FINAL PRAYER

As you anticipate our dive into Romans 8, close your study by praying this prayer along with Pastor Chuck:

*So, how do I fight it? "Spirit of God, I trust You now to strengthen me in this moment of temptation. Lord God, You live within me, and I don't have the strength to stop this. Help me stop this. You put the brakes on, and I'll cooperate with you. Get control of the drives of my mind and my sin nature."*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 162.

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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