

Verses 18-19 are similar to verses 14-15, for Paul focuses on the battle generated by the power of sin that lived in his “*flesh*”:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.
(Romans 7:18-19)

As has already been determined, Paul realized that the initiator of the “*evil*” is “*sin*,” the power of “*sin*,” as verified by verse 20 of the same chapter:

“But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” (Romans 7:20)

Again, the word “*it*” (v.20) points to the evil thoughts generated by the power of sin living in the New Testament believer’s body. Applying what we have discussed, verse 20 may be more clearly stated:

“But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one producing the evil thoughts that wage war against my mind, for they are produced by the power of sin which dwells in my body.”

Paul is not advocating that the body is evil, but rather that the body houses the power of sin. After all, the New Testament believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 6:19).

This amazing truth means that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can catch the power of sin at its game and refuse whatever it sends our way. Because the new self is incapable of producing sinful thoughts (even though the new self is capable of committing sin), and since the “*old self*” has been eradicated (Romans 6:6), we can “*consider*” ourselves “*dead*” to these thoughts (Romans 6:11), living abundantly through God’s life within (Romans 6:13).

The phrase, “*But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish...*” (Romans 7:20), confirms that Paul, as a New Testament believer, sometimes acted against (contrary to) his strongest inclination. We do the same when we walk in sin, for our strongest inclination is to walk in righteousness. In fact, should you place the new man in a temptation-free environment, he would never sin. Thus, when we eject out of our earthly bodies and are taken to heaven, we will experience sinless perfection (behave perfectly) for the first time in our existence. Our strongest inclination as holy and blameless saints is to obey. Therefore, when we sin we are acting against (contrary to) our strongest inclination. Those people who view the depraved as incapable of exercising personal repentance and faith teach that man cannot respond against (opposite) his strongest inclination. Paul proves such thinking invalid.

Paul made a great discovery—that “*evil*” was “*present*” in him, even though he wished “*to do good*” (Romans 7:21):

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. (Romans 7:21)

The “evil” is the power of sin which lived in Paul’s body, the same power Paul mentioned indirectly in verse 18. (The power of sin is an organized power controlled by Satan and must never be viewed as a demon.)

Verses 17 and 20 of Romans 7 (both of which make use of the word “it”) are followed by verses that address the power of sin living in the New Testament believer’s body. Thus, the contextual view of “it” (in verses 17 and 20) points to the evil thoughts generated by the power of sin. In fact, verse 23 records specific information regarding the “it” of verses 17 and 20.

Paul “joyfully” concurred “with the law of God in the inner man” (Romans 7:22), “law” in this case meaning “principle”:

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (Romans 7:22)

Paul (as a believer) desired to walk with God to the greatest degree possible. However, he had a problem: A “law” (or principle—the power of sin) lived “in the members of” his “body,” which waged “war against” his “mind,” and made him “a prisoner of the law of sin” (power of sin) which was in the “members” of his body (Romans 7:23):

but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:23)

Romans 7:23 records truth that set Paul free! I believe he came to realize that the evil thoughts entering his mind were not generated by the old self—which he had incorrectly viewed as alive and well in a New Testament believer. Hence, he was suddenly awakened to the fact that every sinful (evil) thought entering his mind could be traced to the power of sin living in his body. Thus, he records in Romans 7:24-25:

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:24-25)

“Jesus Christ” had set Paul “free from the body of this death,” from having to be controlled by the power of sin as it worked through his physical “body.” He was “free,” therefore, to reject sin’s lie “through” the authority and power of “Jesus Christ our Lord.” When he responded correctly, he served “the law [principle] of God.” When he listened to sin’s lie, he served “the law [principle] of sin.” The choice was his, for every New Testament believer has the option of walking according to God’s truth or according to the enemy’s (sin’s) deceptions.

Deliverance through Christ Alone

Some people have wrestled with Paul's words in Romans 7:24. They question why he would refer to himself as "*wretched*" when he taught that his "*old self*" was "*crucified*" (Romans 6:6), that he was "*a new creation*" (2Corinthians 5:17), in fact, a "*holy and blameless*" (Ephesians 1:4) "*saint*" (1Corinthians 1:2). This concern is easily diffused. The word "*wretched*" actually means "distressed" or "miserable." Paul was not saying that he was a "*wretched*" person in the sense of being worthless. He knew well that he was a saint who sometimes sinned, not a worthless, wretched sinner saved by grace. Basically he was communicating his frustration over the battle that raged in his mind due to the power of sin working through his "*body*," "*the body of this death*" (v.24). However, he found victory through Jesus' life within (v.25).

Romans 7 – The Victorious Christian's Chapter

Romans 7 does not describe the defeated Christian. Rather, it explains how a New Testament believer can (through Christ's indwelling presence) experience victory over the power of sin! Paul realized that the evil thoughts bombarding his mind were not self-generated, but were produced by the power of sin disguising itself as the old self. If the power of sin can convince us that the old self is still alive, we will view ourselves as part evil and part good and, in turn, lowly sinners saved by grace. As a result, we will be unable to appropriate our true identity (the fact that we are saints who through Christ have authority over the power of sin) and will live in defeat. Yes, deception is one of our enemy's most powerful weapons.

Make use of Diagram 9 in the Reference Section as we continue.

Some followers of Christ perceive only the spirit (instead of the spirit and soul) of a New Testament believer as having been perfected at the point of salvation (justification). In such an arrangement, the perfected spirit is viewed as progressively affecting the soul until the soul is eventually made holy and righteous through the spirit's influence. According to this view, the soul of the New Testament believer increases in holiness and righteousness as his behavior increases in holiness and righteousness. This arrangement is impossible, for the cross alone is responsible for perfecting both the spirit and soul of those who believe. Otherwise, the soul would be perfected through good works—an idea totally foreign to the Scriptures. In fact, should our spirit alone have been perfected through Jesus' death, our soul would be on a performance-based acceptance with God. Stated differently, our soul would increase in holiness and righteousness as our behavior increased in holiness and righteousness. Scripture teaches, however, that both the spirit and soul are made perfect through Jesus' work on the cross once the depraved exercise personal repentance and faith.

The soul cannot be made perfect through good works. Nor can it be made perfect through the physical death of the believer. The cross alone is sufficient to accomplish this special work! Hence, both the spirit and soul of a New Testament believer are perfected at the point of salvation (justification).

This truth can withstand the fact that the New Testament believer sometimes disobeys subsequent to salvation/justification (1John 1:8), for a perfect and blameless saint can

commit sin and remain a saint in the process. Paul, while addressing the church at Corinth, refers to each of them as saints—even though a man within the church was committing adultery with his own stepmother (1Corinthians 5:1) and several within the fellowship were abusing the Lord's Supper (1Corinthians 11:20-21, 27-34). Again we see that what we do is not who we are, even though who we are has a tremendous impact on what we do. Our person (spirit and soul) was perfected at the point of salvation (justification)—long before our behavior began to line up with who God made us into (in spirit and soul) when we repented and believed. We will not reach the place of sinless perfection (in our behavior) this side of heaven, but we can be certain that our spirit and soul were perfected (never to be improved upon) when God made us new.