Context of Romans 6-8

Romans 5 teaches that all those who place their trust in Christ become “brand new creatures;” — old things pass away, and everything becomes new (2 Cor 5:17). That’s the “bigger picture” of what happens when we are born again; with regard to our position, we are no longer children of darkness, we now become children of light (Acts 26:18). We become new creatures with a brand “new disposition toward God” – in short, we are given a brand “new nature.” When man rebelled against God in Eden, his total being became enslaved to a sinful disposition that was aligned against Him; that is, he became a slave to his “fallen nature;” theologians call it the “old nature.” Furthermore this sin nature gained the position of “master” over him. Since the Fall, all human beings are born with a “sinful disposition” – a disposition of impure hearts and evil lusts and desires – as such, all human beings are naturally inclined and disposed to living lives contrary to God and His commandments. The Bible refers to the old nature as being at “enmity with God” (cf. Gal 5:16) – since enmity against God is sin, the Bible calls the old nature “sin;” therefore many theologians refer to the old nature simply as “the sin nature.”

Whereas the “Old Nature” has a contrary disposition against God, the “New Nature” has a favorable disposition toward God – it consists of the “law of God” written upon the heart; the Holy Spirit places it inside the believer at the moment of regeneration/new birth. When a person is born again, the Old Nature loses its position of “master” over the individual, but it does not leave the believer’s life during this lifetime – it continues to dwell in him until he enters into the presence of the Lord in heaven. Therefore the believer experiences an ongoing “internal spiritual struggle,” because he now has two opposing natures dwelling in him. The Old Nature, because it is a disposition that is at enmity against God, tries to control the believer in opposition to God’s rule. The New Nature, because it is favorably disposed toward God (with the law of God in the heart), prompts the believer to concur with God’s standards and the desire to obey them. Though the New Nature is favorably disposed toward God, it does not have the “power” necessary to overcome the old sin nature. So, the Christian needs more than the New Nature to obey God’s will.

Whenever the believer relies upon the “Old Covenant Law” (or himself) for the power to overcome the old nature, he is defeated. The old nature takes him captive against his will, and prevents him from doing the will of God. This does not mean, however, that the believer is doomed to be continuously defeated. At the moment a person is born again, the “Holy Spirit” permanently indwells the believer – and He is the source of power needed to defeat the old sin nature in the believer. But that power will “not” operate in the Christian unless he personally appropriates it by faith. The believer must “moment by moment” trust the Holy Spirit rather than himself to experience victory over the old sin nature.

The resultant effect of Adam’s sin was that he became polluted in every area of his being; sin took possession of his heart and made it exceedingly corrupt (Jer 17:9). Like a cancer, sin permeates the entire being (body and soul). The effect of his sin was that he became locked into a “master-
slave relationship” with his sinful disposition; thus he became helplessly enslaved to a continuing state of sin. Romans 8:7 says, “The mind set on the flesh (man himself) is hostile toward God; it does not subject itself to the law of God; it is not even able to do so.” So, sin is not a matter of occasional deviation from the right way, but a constant expression of the natural tendency of his fallen nature; it is the governing disposition of his life (Jer 17:1, 9; Rom 3:10-12). It is because human beings are already sinners by nature that they think wrong thoughts and perform wrong actions. What unregenerate man needs is someone to redeem him from this slavery, and give him a “new disposition” or “new nature” which is favorably oriented toward God. The good news is that God in His grace has provided such redemption and a new nature for man, through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross – that place where grace super-abounded over all man’s sins. This complete transformation, however, raised a question in the minds of many in the early church – “Does salvation by grace permit or even encourage sinful living?” Note the argument presented by Paul in Romans 6:1. By the way, in the following pages when quoting the biblical text, you’ll notice some words are in “italics” (read the text of Rom 6:4-5 on the next page) – the reason for this is that those particular words in the New Testament language of Greek are “emphatic;” as such, be sure to give “extra emphasis” to them in the various contexts in which they are found. I have also “Capitalized” every pronoun that refers to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit – which should help the reader interpret the passage correctly. Because this is a detailed, verse-by-verse expository study of Romans 6-8, this is not material you speed read, casually browse over, or peruse when you are preoccupied with other matters – it requires that you carefully and prayerfully reflect upon the text and its corresponding commentary. You may need to read some sections more than once.

**Chapter 6**

**Believers are dead to sin, and alive to God**

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin (present tense – habitually persist in sin), that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! (strongest idiom of repudiation in NT Greek; it carries the sense of outrage that an idea of this kind would ever even be considered). How shall we who died to sin (aorist tense – this occurred at salvation) still live in it? (present tense – it is impossible for Christians to remain in a habitual state of sinfulness; though they stumble often, they do not live in a state of “habitual sin”).

**Though Christians obviously commit acts of sin, they do not live perpetually in sin** as they did prior to salvation. 1 John 3:9 says, “No one who is born of God practices sin.” This verse presents a problem for many believers, because it appears to contradict other passages. In short, this passage seems to say “believers do not sin,” yet other passages say that “believers do sin.” The problem isn’t that difficult to resolve – it simply requires an understanding of the “tense” of the verb, and what it really means to “sin.” It might be best to first “define sin” – according to Rom 14:23, “that which is not of faith if sin.” That definition is a lot broader than failing to abide by a list of “do’s or don'ts.” With this broad definition of sin, Rom 6:1 could read, “Shall we continue to live a life of not trusting God, that grace may increase?” or “Shall we continue to completely eliminate God as the primary concern of our lives that grace may increase?” The unbeliever lives his life with complete disregard for God – God isn’t “the concern” of his life; his own will and desires are his major concern. By the way, a believer CANNOT and DOES NOT live his life with complete disregard for God. The second issue deals with “tense” of the verb John uses in 1 John 3:9 – he uses the “present tense;” thus, the meaning of his statement is this: “believers do not continually, as a habit of life, disregard God as a concern in their lives.” Do they commit acts of sin from time to time? Absolutely (cf. 1 John 1:10; Jam 3:2). Do they disregard the promptings of God’s Spirit in their lives from time to time?
Absolutely. The truth is, they “disobey God” often, but they do not totally disregard Him in their lives. Another way of comparing the two is this: **Believers** habitually practice righteousness... whereas **unbelievers** habitually practice unrighteousness. Therefore, John teaches that “sin” is not the prevailing pattern or bent of the believer’s life – by the way, the reason he doesn’t sin habitually is that “God’s seed abides in Him” (cf. 1 Jn 3:9; 1 Pet 1:23) – that is, “God’s holy disposition abides in those who are born again; as does the Holy Spirit” (cf. Rom 8:9). Simple logic tells us that God does not abide (reside) in someone who habitually practices sin – that would be antithetical to His very nature; He is absolutely “holy” (cf. Is 6:3).

Furthermore, the “new man” is regenerate and his “new nature” is entirely godly and righteous. According to Scripture, it is impossible to be alive in Christ and also still be alive to sin – we’ll cover this concept in depth later. Again, it is not that a believer is totally without sin, but that from the moment he is “born again” he is totally separated from the controlling power of sin; i.e., the sin life from which Christ died to deliver him. Obviously the believer is not yet perfected, but he is now spiritually alive and holiness is at work in him by the Holy Spirit. The new man will continue to grow in that holiness – no matter how slowly – because, by its very nature, life grows. Paul tells believers in Col 3:3, “You have died and your [new born again] life is hidden with Christ in God.” In 2 Cor 5:17 he says, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; all things have become new.”

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into His death? (Did you notice that the word “death” in this verse is “highly emphatic”?)

All Christians have been baptized into Christ Jesus; as such, they are permanently “in Christ,” so as to be made one with Him. By trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we were, by an **unfathomable divine miracle** by the Holy Spirit, taken back 2,000 years, as it were, and made to participate in our Savior’s death, burial, and resurrection – that we might walk in newness of life. Paul said in Gal 3:27, “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” – the new life is a divine life. All Christians are identified with Christ in His death and His resurrection – that miraculous truth is far too wonderful for us to fully understand, but the basic reality of it is this: as believers we died and were raised with Christ in order that we might have life through Him and live like Him. Remember, Christ went to the cross to propitiate God’s anger and wrath against all sin and unhappiness (cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5; 3:24-25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:3; 1 Th 1:10; 5:9; Rev 14:10). God’s wrath was poured out upon Christ – He bore our sins (cf. Is 53:4-5; Mk 10:45; Mt 27:46; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24). The miracle of grace is that we as believers have become benefactors of His death. If being baptized in Christ’s death sounds a little too ethereal to you at this point, hang in there with me, it will become more clear later.

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was **raised from the dead through the glory of the Father**, so we too might walk in **newness of life**. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His **resurrection**, knowing this, that our **old self** was crucified with Him, that our **body of sin** (that is, our sin disposition) **might be done away with** (emphatic! – rendered inoperative by removing its power of control), **that we should no longer be slaves to sin**; 7 for he who has **died is freed from sin**. (Did you notice the various words that were **italicized**?)

When Christ redeemed us, our **old self** was crucified with Him on the cross – that is, put to death and destroyed. Paul says in Gal 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ” – that is, my old sinful self (my sinful disposition) is dead – “therefore it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me.” Our new life as Christians is not a “made-over old life,” but a “new divinely-bestowed life” that is Christ’s very own. The “old self"
is the unregenerate man who existed prior to salvation. True believers have already been removed from the presence and control of the old sinful self. Paul says in Gal 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." So, regardless of the level of one's spiritual maturity, every believer can claim that his old self already has been laid aside "with its evil practices"... and his new self in Christ is already in the process of "being renewed" into conformity with the very image of God who has re-created him. As every mature Christian learns, the more he grows in Christ, the more he becomes aware of sin in his life. Incidentally, Paul uses the terms body and flesh to refer to "sinful propensities" that are a part of old nature (our old sinful disposition). The new birth in Christ brings death to the "sinful self" (the sin disposition), but it does not completely eradicate its impact upon our lives until the future glorification.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones illustrates the believer's relation to his old "sinful disposition" – he pictures two adjoining fields, one owned by Satan and one owned by God, that are separated by a roadway. Before salvation, a person lives in Satan's field and is totally subject to his jurisdiction. After salvation, a person works in the other field, now subject only to God's jurisdiction. As he plows in the new field, however, the believer is often cajoled by his former master, who seeks to entice him back into the old sinful ways. Satan often succeeds in temporarily drawing the believer's attention away from his new Master and his new way of life; but he has absolutely "no power or authority" to draw or insist that the believer come back to the old field of sin and death.

8 Now if we have died with Christ (through a divine miracle at the cross), we believe that we shall also live with Him (living a life fully consistent with God's holiness in this present life – Paul's usage of the future tense here carries the idea of absolute certainty), 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death is no longer master over Him. 10 For the death He died, He died to sin, once for all (emphatic!); but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

The sin that made us subject to death is no longer master over us. Christ died to the penalty of sin by taking upon Himself the sins of the whole world. He met sin's legal demand for every individual who would trust in Him. Christ also died to the power of sin, forever breaking its power over those who belong to God through faith in His Son. Paul assured the immature and sin-prone believer in Corinth that God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ” (2 Corinth 5:21). And the death He died, He died "once for all" (emphatic) – He achieved a victory that will never need repeating; the Book of Hebrews stresses this again and again (cf. Hebrews 7:26-27; 9:12, 28;10:10; also 1 Peter 3:18).

No matter how radical our outer transformation at the time of salvation may have been, it is difficult to comprehend that we no longer have the “fallen sin nature” and that our "new nature is actually divine." Furthermore, it is also hard to realize that we are actually free from sin's bondage and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Because these things are hard to believe, many Christians think that salvation only brings transactional or forensic holiness – that God now regards them as holy because of their trust in Christ; but their basic relationship to sin [seemingly] is the same as it always has been, and that it will not be changed until they go to be with Christ in heaven. If they really have a “new holy disposition” and sins control has truly been broken, then "why," they reason, are we still so strongly tempted, and why do we so often succumb? Thus, they conclude that the Christian life must simply be an endless battle between “their two resident natures.” Another reason Christians find it hard to believe they are actually free from the tyranny of sin is that Satan does not want them to believe it. If the enemy of our souls can make us think he still dominates our earthly lives, he weakens our resolve to live righteously by making it appear hopeless. Paul gives the answer to this dilemma in verse 11.
11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul has described what is true of believers “positionally” – now he turns to the “practical outworking” of this truth in our lives. We are to reckon ourselves as being “dead to sin” and “alive to God” – to reckon here means to accept what God says about us as true and to live in the light of it. To apply this principle to “forgiveness of sins” – hardly ever do we “feel” forgiven after we have sinned – but that’s not the point; the issue is that God “really” has forgiven us if we have confessed our sins to Him. Either we live according to what God “says,” or how Satan wants us to “feel” – by accepting what God says, we live by FAITH; but accepting what Satan wants us to believe, we live by FEELINGS. The dynamic of the Spirit is “faith;” the dynamic of the flesh is “feeling.” Forgiveness is a fact that we must “accept” if we’re going to live joyful and guilt-free lives. Therefore we must “affirm the truth” (tell ourselves) that we indeed are “really forgiven” in spite of how we feel. For me personally, I may “affirm this truth” for 10-15 minutes sometimes – verbally articulating the biblical theology of forgiveness, and slowly but surely the truth settles in my heart (by the work of the Holy Spirit) and I am assured (cf. Heb 11:1) of its reality. Reckoning ourselves as being dead to sin and alive to God isn’t a psychological mind game, by which we keep affirming something over and over again until we are convinced against our better judgment or even against reality that it is true. Not at all. These are the foundational truths of the Christian faith that must be “affirmed” (realized as true); faith is affirming what is true to indeed be true. Until a believer accepts the truth that Christ has really broken the power of sin over his life, he cannot live victoriously, because in his innermost being he doesn't think it is possible. Following are four extremely important, practical results of “reckoning ourselves” dead to sin and alive to God – if we reckon these things as really being true in our lives, we will have confidence that...

1. We can successfully resist temptation in God’s power (1 Cor 10:13).
2. We cannot sin our way out of God’s grace (John 10:27-29).
3. Our eternal destiny is sure even in the face of death (John 11:25-26; Heb 2:14).
4. No matter what happens in life, God will be glorified and we will be blessed (Rom 8:28).

Incidentally, all of these things are true because we are “alive to God” in Christ Jesus. Carefully read and meditate upon all four of these realities – they are foundational truths.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you (emphatic!) – you are not under the law, but under grace.

In this life, sin will always be a powerful force for the Christian to reckon with. But it is no longer master, and it can and must be resisted. Sin is personified by Paul as a “dethroned but still powerful monarch” who is determined to reign in the believer’s life just as he did before salvation. The apostle’s admonition to believers is that they “not let their sin disposition reign,” because it no longer has a right to do so – it now has no power to control a believer as it did in his unregenerate state; the believer must now “willingly choose to obey it’s lusts.” Peter makes a similar appeal in First Peter (2:9, 11). The believer’s “immortal soul” is forever beyond sin’s reach; but his “mortal body” is not beyond sin’s reach – one day our bodies will be beyond sin’s reach (when we get to heaven), but in the meantime it is still “mortal,” subject to corruption and death; and it still has “sinful lusts and desires” (James 1:14), and Satan will use those lusts to lure God’s people back into sin in whatever ways he can. Our mortal bodies are eagerly awaiting their ultimate redemption (Rom 8:23; Phil 3:21; 1 Corinth 15:53). It is because our mortal bodies are still subject to
“THERE ARE TWO SPIRITUAL REALITIES”

Ultimately, there are just TWO SPIRITUAL REALITIES — God and Satan — Good and Evil. Following are some of the various ways Scripture contrasts these two realities:

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<tr>
<th>KINGDOM OF GOD</th>
<th>KINGDOM OF SATAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children of God</td>
<td>Children of Satan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disciples of Christ</td>
<td>Disciples of the Devil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slaves of Christ</td>
<td>Slaves of the Devil</td>
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<td>Believers</td>
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<td>Born Again</td>
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<td>Spiritual Perspective of Life</td>
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<td>Godly View of Life</td>
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<td>Slaves of Righteousness</td>
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<td>Anti-Satan</td>
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<td>Redeemed Sinners</td>
<td>Unredeemed Sinners</td>
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<td>Holy and Pure</td>
<td>Unholy and Impure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Godly and Righteous</td>
<td>Ungodly and Wicked</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have spiritual sight</td>
<td>Are spiritually blind</td>
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<td>Angelic support</td>
<td>Demonic support</td>
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<td>Love the Church</td>
<td>Love the World</td>
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<td>Heavenly minded</td>
<td>Worldly minded</td>
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<td>Indwelled by the Spirit</td>
<td>Controlled by Satan</td>
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<td>Produce spiritual fruit</td>
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<td>Serve God and Righteousness</td>
<td>Serve Satan, Self and Sin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haters of the Flesh</td>
<td>Lovers of the Flesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>People of Faith</td>
<td>People of Unbelief</td>
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Every human being is “ALIVE” to one of these realities, and is “DEAD” to the other reality; that is, every one of us is “rooted” has his “being,” has his “life source” in one of these realities. Every one of us is either a citizen of the Kingdom of God, or a citizen of the Kingdom of Satan. The problem for us as believers, however, is that “both of these realities” reside within us; hence, we live in a state of “constant conflict!” (cf. Rom 7:14-25; 8:5-9,13,18; Gal 5:17). Therefore we are enjoined to “fight the fight of faith” (cf. 1 Tim 1:18; 4:7; 6:12). The Christian life is a life of “continual warfare between the flesh and the Spirit,” and a life where we “practically work out” what “God has worked into us” (cf. Gal 2:20; 5:16-17; Eph 4:11-16, 22-24; Phil 1:6; 2:12-13; 3:13-14; Col 1:13; 3:1-5; 1 Pet 1:3-7; 4:12-13; 2 Pet 1:3-10).
When Paul says that we have “died with Christ” (cf. Rom 6:3, 6, 8), he is describing the process whereby we as believers become children of God – because we were children of the Evil One before we were saved, it was necessary to have our “sin problem” resolved. This was accomplished by the Holy Spirit when He mysteriously took us back in time some 2,000 yrs and “placed us in Christ”; i.e., we were “spiritually” baptized into Christ – the resultant effect was we actually experienced the death of Christ for our sins; thus, we now (like Christ) are “dead to sin.” Furthermore, just as we “died with Christ,” we were also “raised with Christ” to newness of life (Rom 6:4-5). Through this work of the Holy Spirit, we have become “brand new creatures in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). This incredible work of God’s Spirit miraculously and totally changed us; as such, we are no longer children of Satan, but children of God!

You say, “But my own heart wants to dispute the fact of the new birth, because I feel so very much alive to sin and temptation!” Due to the fact that “our behavior” (which is often sinful) does not fully reflect “our new identity” (being children of God), we are naturally inclined to dispute the fact (with Satan’s prompting) that we are really born again. Here is where it is critically important for us to understand the “three steps of salvation” – once we are saved, we enter into a stage where “we are in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ” by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). Though we indeed are “fully God’s children” (Jn 1:12), we start out as “babes in Christ” (1 Pet 2:2; 1 Cor 3:2), and are exhorted to “grow-up and mature in our faith” (Eph 4:15; 2 Pet 3:18); the more we grow, the more we reflect His image. This is the “sanctification” aspect of salvation – at the moment of conversion we experience “justification” (we are made righteous); after conversion we experience “sanctification” (we grow in holiness); when we get to heaven we then experience the final stage of salvation called “glorification” (at that point, we are fully transformed into the image of Christ). The second stage of sanctification is the “participatory stage,” where we get involved in the process; growing in Christ is not just a matter of “what we do,” however, it is also a matter of “what God does in us.” The truth is, God’s work in us is in this stage is far more transformational than our work, even though we often feel like “we’re doing all the work!” Paul puts it this way, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, but work with the realization that you’re not working alone, God is also at work in you both to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

The reality is, you have been “crucified with Christ” and have “died to sin.” Therefore the tyranny or mastery of sin over you has been broken – though you were once a helpless captive of sin, you have now been set free from sin. Sin’s dominion or absolute dominance over you has been shattered! That is a fact! You are now a new creation in Christ! That is the reality for every Christian! No matter how much you struggle and stumble in sin, you are a child of God. So what do you do with this TRUTH? You reckon or consider it as indeed being “true,” that is, you believe what God says about you – that is FAITH! The first step in living a “holy life” is that of believing who you now really are! As a believer, your primary appetite is no longer sin and self, it is now God and righteousness. As Paul puts it, “You have been given a new mindset! a brand new way of thinking!” (cf. Rom 8:5-9; 12:2; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

The “big hurdle” for us as believers in affirming the reality of Rom 6:11, is the fact that we are, in some sense, alive to the principle of sin that dwells within us; i.e., to our sin nature, our flesh, our sin disposition. Though sin is no longer our master (we are dead to its mastery), we are still under its persistent, antagonistic presence. Therefore, when interpreting this passage, it is important to remember that the emphasis of this verse is on our IDENTITY, not on our BEHAVIOR. As believers we are “dead to sin as the ruler of our lives,” and “alive to Christ as the ruler of our lives.” Another way of putting it is this – we are “dead to being against Christ” and “alive to being for Christ.” The “constitution” or “mindset” under which we as believers now live and process life is GOD, not SATAN. Hence, being “dead to sin” and “alive to God” describes our essence – these two spiritual realities are two sides of the same coin; one states it in positive terms, the other in negative terms. As Paul says, we need to move and grow in the direction of who we are in Christ – thus becoming more and more like Him. As Christians, we have a brand new Master! a brand new life! a brand new identity! The key to the Christian life is “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18); without growing in faith, joy and assurance decline, and sin and guilt increase. By the way, there is “no automatic spiritual cruise-control” in the Christian life — faith and obedience are essential!
sin that Paul says, “Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.” He does not worry about sin reigning in our souls or our spirits, but only about its reigning in our bodies, because that is the only place in a Christian where sin can operate.

That’s why Paul laments later in this epistle: “I know that nothing good dwells in me / in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not...” He then concludes, “I know that nothing good dwells in me / in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. . . . I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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” (Rom 7:18, 22-23). He then concludes, “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, with my mind I am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin” (Rom 7:24-25). It is because the Christian’s warfare with sin is waged in the body that the apostle also declared, “I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom 12:1). And to the Corinthians Paul says, “I buffet my body and make it my slave” (1 Cor 9:27).

When we were in an unregenerate state, our sin disposition reigned like a king over our bodies, making them “bodies of sin.” Because our death with Christ ended our “master-slave relationship” with our sinful disposition, we are to “keep on refusing to allow our sinful disposition to use our body as an instrument for unrighteousness” (note the “present tense” of the verb “keep on”). The believer is to say “NO” every time the sinful disposition stirs up “his inward desires” (James 1:14) and tries to dominate his body. Instead, the believer is to “present himself to God as one who is alive from the dead” (6:13). The command here is this: the Christian is to present his total being to God to be “His slave;” he is to make God his Lord and his Master. Since believers are no longer under the Law, they are to subject themselves to grace as a governing principle. As a governing principle for daily living, grace is able to do what the external law cannot do – only grace can release a person from the mastery of his sinful disposition. Paul develops this truth further in Romans 7. Paul teaches believers that practical holiness and sanctification cannot be achieved through an “external law.” The believer has been released from the entire “old covenant law” as a rule of life or as a means of sanctification.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? No! Never!

Scripture refers to “sin” as that which defiles – it is pollution of the soul; it is to the human soul what “smog” is to a beautiful sky, or what “corrosion” is to a precious piece of metal. In God’s sight, the righteousness of men is like “filthy rags” (Is 64:6; Zech 3:3-4). Sin is overpowering; it dominates the mind, the affections, and the will (cf. Rom 1:21; Jn 3:19-21; Jer 44:15-17). Although sin promises satisfaction, instead it brings misery, frustration, and hopelessness. Job lamented, “man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). The natural unredeemed person is under the tyranny of sin – it controls his thoughts, words, actions, his entire existence. Worst of all, sin damns the unredeemed soul to hell, and is incurable by man’s efforts – the Puritan writer John Flavel described it this way: “If a sinner’s penitential tears were as numberless as all the drops of rain that have fallen since the day of Creation, they could not wash away one single sin.” The greatest gift God has given to fallen mankind is freedom from sin – that is the gift He offers through His Son, Jesus Christ. The very purpose of God’s grace is to “free man from sin” – not to give him license to sin! Grace means freedom to serve the Lord, not to sin against Him. Furthermore, God will not condone sin – He will deal with it according to the attitude of the heart of each believer.
16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

In relation to God’s will, a saved person has but two choices – he can choose to sin or obey. The end result of a life of sin is death… of a life of obedience is life. All men are either mastered by sin under the lordship of Satan, or they are mastered by righteousness under the lordship of Christ. By the way, there is no third alternative. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; either he will hate one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24). Conversely, a person cannot live in two different and opposing spiritual worlds at the same time – he is either a slave of sin (which he is by natural birth), or he is a slave of righteousness (which he becomes by the new birth). Paul is not teaching here that a Christian ought to be a slave of righteousness – No, he is saying that every Christian, by divine creation, is made a slave of righteousness and cannot be anything else – this is the wonderful mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. Paul says the same thing as the apostle John does – “No one who is born of God practices sin, because God’s seed abides in him; he cannot practice sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Though sinful disobedience may at times appear to dominate a Christian’s life, a true believer will not indefinitely continue in disobedience, because it is diametrically opposed to his new and holy nature, which cannot indefinitely endure sinful living; furthermore, God’s Spirit has taken up residency in him. For an explanation of this principle, read David’s response in Psalm 32:3-4.

17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin (as unbelievers), you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching (the truth of the Word of God – emphatic!) to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Paul first gives thanks to God that his believing readers were no longer subject to the slavery that leads to death. By the grace of God, habitual disobedience to God is in the past tense. Formerly, Paul says, “you were slaves of sin,” but no more (the imperfect Greek tense signifies ongoing reality). Paul goes on to say, “you became obedient from the heart” – God works His salvation in a person’s innermost being, and He changes their nature when they place their trust in Christ. Therefore, if a person’s heart has not been changed, he has not been saved. Habitual righteous living issues from a transformed heart. All Christians have a Spirit-led desire to know and to obey God’s truth – when they live contrary to the Spirit, they’re miserable (cf. Rom 7:24; Gal 5:16; Ps 32).

19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Paul speaks in “human terms” as an accommodation to his readers’ humanness (flesh). Here, Paul admonishes believers to make their lives correspond to their “new natures.” Again, although it is still possible for Christians to sin, they are no longer “enslaved to sin.” Because it is possible for Christians to resist sin and live righteously, Paul says they should now present their members as “slaves of righteousness” – the ultimate end of which is complete sanctification (holiness). As the believer goes on living the righteous life, he will become cleaner and cleaner, purer and purer, and more and more conformed to the image of Christ. No one stands still morally or spiritually – just as unbelievers progress from sinfulness to greater sinfulness, so a believer who is not growing in righteousness, will slip further and further back into sin. God delivers us from enslavement to sin for the sole purpose of our becoming enslaved to Him and to His righteousness – resulting in holiness.
20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Unsaved persons are free in regard to righteousness; that is, they have no connection to divine righteousness – they were bound by every evil, and free from every good – they had absolutely no freedom to live righteously. Unsaved persons possess neither the desire nor the ability to meet the standards and demands of righteousness. They are controlled and ruled by sin, the master whom they are in bondage to serve. One of the marks of true salvation is a sense of being “ashamed” of one’s life before coming to Christ. No matter how it may appear before the world, the life apart from God is a life apart from righteousness. However, those who have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, they experience the benefits of sanctification and eternal life. Though some believers are more faithful and more obedient than others, every Christian has equally been “set free from bondage to sin” and “enslavement to God.” The two inexorable absolutes are these: 1) the wages of sin is death; and 2) the gift of God is eternal life. Jesus Christ calls to Himself those who are willing to exchange their sinfulness for His holiness – their life for God’s life. He calls to Himself those who are willing to be inwardly transformed by Him, and who desire an entirely new nature that is created in His own holy likeness. When men come to Him on His terms, He changes their destiny from eternal death to eternal life.

Chapter 7

Believers United to Christ

1 Or do you not know, brethren, (I am speaking to those who know the law) that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.

Paul uses the essence of civil law to build his argument. He says, any law has jurisdiction over a person only for as long as that person lives. If a criminal dies, he is no longer subject to prosecution and punishment, no matter how heinous his crimes. Paul makes the case that “marriage laws” are binding only as long as both partners are alive. Being joined to another man while her husband is alive makes a woman an adulteress, an offender of the law. A widow, however, is absolutely free from the law that bound her to her former husband. By way of application to the subject of Romans 7, the first husband represents the “sinful disposition” – as the wife is bound to her husband, so the unbeliever is bound to his sinful disposition as master. Furthermore, just as a wife is released from the law which bound her to her husband when death takes place, so the believer has been released from the Old Covenant Law. Paul here teaches that the believer has been released from the “entire old covenant law” as a rule of life or as a means of sanctification – look at the next verse.
4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

Spiritually speaking, the Christian was made to “die to the Law” (Mosaic Law). The aorist tense in Greek emphasizes the completeness and finality of death. The passive voice of the verb, indicates that the believer is “put to death” by a divine act of God in response to the believer’s faith in Christ. Like the widow in verse 3, the believer is joined to another husband, to Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. Salvation brings a complete change of spiritual relationship – believers are no longer married to the law, but are now married to Jesus Christ. The purpose of our being joined to Christ is that “we might bear fruit for God.” We are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10). The transformed life will bear fruit for God. Godly fruit exists basically in two dimensions – attitude and action. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested internally in our attitudes (Gal 5:22-23). The fruit of Godly actions is the subject of John 15 (the vine and the branches). While we were “in the flesh,” the unregenerate person only operated in the area of the flesh – the natural and sinful sphere of fallen man; his life was characterized by sinful passions, which were continually being aroused by the Law. The flesh of the unregenerate is aroused to sin, because his naturally rebellious sinful nature makes him want to do the very things that are forbidden – such fruit ultimately results in eternal divine judgment in death.

6 But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter [written law].

As believers we have been released from our old bondage to the Law, having died to that by which we were formerly bound in the flesh. Because we as believers died in Christ, we were thereby released from the power and penalty of the Law – death. Paul writes, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). God releases believers from their bondage to the law, so that they might serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the written law. The service of the believer is motivated by love, not fear – it is a service of freedom, not bondage. It is no longer a question of adhering to minute details of forms and ceremonies, but of the joyful outpouring of ourselves for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

The Law not only is not sinful, but continues to have great value for the Christian by convicting him of sin – the Law reveals sin (v.7b). Because God has disclosed His divine standards of righteousness, men are able more accurately to identify sin, which is a failure to meet His standards. Paul said, “Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20) – he went on to say that he would not have known about “coveting” if the Law had not said, “Do not covet.” Thus, Paul realized that his “thought life” was corrupt, because coveting takes place in the mind. He came to understand that evil thoughts are sinful as well as evil deeds. He now knew he had a polluted thought life. His outward life may have been relatively blameless, but his inward life was a chamber of horrors. By the way, even pagan Gentiles have God’s Law “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15). The real battle with sin is internal – in the heart and mind (Matt 15:18-19). People can modify their behavior, but only the transforming power of the Holy Spirit can take a sinful heart and make it pure and acceptable to God. The Law’s part in that transformation is to make a person aware of his sin and of his need for divine forgiveness.
8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

Paul makes it clear that “the Law” itself is not sinful and is not responsible for sin. It is the individual's “sinful disposition” that takes opportunity through the commandment of the law to produce coveting of every kind. The sin disposition seizes the opportunity afforded it when the Law reveals what is right and what is wrong. So, the problem is not with the Law, but with our “sin disposition.” It is no secret that man has a natural rebellious streak that causes him almost reflexively to resent a command or prohibition. When the law forbids all kinds of evil coveting, man's corrupt nature is inflamed all the more to do it. For example, the law forbids lustful fantasies, unfortunately, it doesn't give the individual the power to overcome them – the result is, people under the law become more involved in a dream-world of sexual lust than ever before. They come to realize that whenever an act is forbidden, the fallen nature wants to do it all the more. The more the light of God's law shines into our depraved hearts (that is, the more we’re exposed to it), the more our minds are aroused to opposition, proving that the mind of the flesh is not subject to the law of God – it is antithetical to the law of God. When a person is confronted by God’s Law, the forbidden thing becomes all the more attractive. Thus, the Law agitates the sinful disposition.

9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.

Before Paul was convicted of his sinfulness by the law – he “felt alive;” but his sinful nature was comparatively dormant and he was blissfully ignorant of the iniquity in his heart. When Paul was awakened to the truth of his sinfulness, he came to the realization that he had long been alive apart from the Law. As a highly-trained and educated Pharisee, he was certainly not apart from the Law in the sense of not knowing it or being concerned about it; he was an expert on the Law and considered himself to be blameless in regard to it (Phil 3:6). But throughout all his years of proud self-effort, he had only served the "oldness of the letter of the Law" (Rom 7:6). When he came to a true understanding of the commandment, however, he began to see himself as he really was and began to understand how far short he came to the Law’s righteous standards. His sin then became alive; that is, he came to realize his true evil condition in its fullness. He died in the sense of his realizing that all his religious accomplishments were spiritual rubbish (Phil 3:7-8). His self-esteem and pride were devastated and in ruins. Paul died as far as his being hopeful of achieving salvation by his own character or efforts. He died to any thought of his own inherent goodness. He died to any dream of being justified by lawkeeping… and for the first time, he realized he was spiritually dead, and recognized he was one of the helpless and ungodly for whom Christ had died (Rom 5:6).

12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

The fact that the Law reveals, arouses, and condemns sin and brings death to the sinner, does not make the law itself evil. It is not the “law against murder” that is bad, but the committing of murder that merits punishment. The Law itself is good; it is the breaking of it that is evil. It is not the Law that is the cause of spiritual death, but rather it is sin. Paul found that the commandment, which he thought would bring life (ideally, the law promised life to those who kept it – cf. Lev 18:5), actually turned out to bring
death for him. The Law reveals and arouses sin in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting death through that which is good. God gave us His righteous and holy law in order that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

The Conflict of Two Natures

14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do; but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the law, confessing that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. (carefully note all of the "emphatic" words in these verses)

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul describes the “great spiritual struggle with sin” that he experienced.

According to this passage and Gal 5:16-24, the “sinful disposition” is still very much alive and active in the Christian. In Gal 2:20, Paul says “he was crucified with Christ” – note carefully what he did not say; he did not say “his sinful disposition was crucified.” So what Paul is teaching here is this – there is some sense in which the “unregenerate person” actually dies when he becomes a Christian; that means the unsaved person dies with Christ in the sense that he ceases to be an “unregenerate person.” Before regeneration he was an unregenerate or “old man” – at the moment of the new birth he ceases to be an “old man;” he now becomes a “new man” (cf. Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Although the Christian remains the same person metaphysically, the Scriptures regard him as a different person in some sense – it describes him as a “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17), a “new creation” (Gal 6:15); a “newborn babe” (1 Pet 2:2). The difference is a spiritual difference – therefore, when we were crucified with Christ, we were crucified with Him in some “spiritual sense.”

In Romans 7:14, Paul begins by affirming that the Law is not the problem, because it is spiritual.

Salvation by grace through faith does not replace or devalue the Law, because the Law never was a means of salvation. The only means of salvation has always been the provision and power of God’s grace working through the channel of man’s faith. “But I am still of the flesh,” Paul continues. He has already explained that believers are no longer “in the flesh” (Rom 7:5; 8:8 – i.e., no longer bound by and enslaved to its sinfulness), but they are still “of the flesh.” Although believers are not still “in the flesh,” the flesh is still in them – and as “flesh” man is weak (cf. Matt 26:41; Rom 6:19). Therefore Paul could say, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:18). To reiterate what Renald Showers stated in the last chapter, Paul uses the word “I” twenty-four times in these twelve verses (v.14-25), and the last “I” he makes very emphatic by the way in which he positions it and by adding the word “myself” (v. 25). The “self-effort” is the result of using the old covenant law as the means of sanctification (growing in holiness).

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul is emphasizing the fact that, even though he is a regenerate man with a new disposition, two things are still true of him: 1) he is still only a man, and 2) apart from divine empowerment he is powerless to do the will of God. The expression “sold into bondage to sin” implies he is in bondage in some way to his sinful disposition. Though the believer's sinful disposition loses its position of “master” over him when he becomes regenerate – in that sense he has been “freed from bondage to sin” (cf. 6:17) – the sinful disposition continues to reside in him throughout his earthly life, and he is susceptible to its influence whenever he relies upon his own “self-effort” rather than on the power of the “Holy Spirit” to live a godly life. Every honest Christian is aware that his life falls far short of God’s perfect standard of righteousness, and he falls back into sin with disturbing frequency. 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 is not happy with his sin, because it is completely contrary to his new nature.

Paul says he is “sold into bondage to sin;” thus his fleshly body is a “prisoner of the law of sin.” That means that lingering part of his unredeemed humanness is still sinful and, as such, makes warfare against the new and redeemed part of him. Sin is so wretched and powerful that, even in a redeemed person, it hangs on and contaminates his life and frustrates his inner desire to obey the will of God. Paul's proof that sin still indwelt him was what he said in verse 15 – “that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do.” Paul found himself doing things he did not approve of – as such, he discovered he simply “couldn't measure up” to God's standard of righteousness. This great contrast between “desire and performance” caused real consternation in Paul's mind – in verse 15 he was expressing an “inner turmoil” of the most profound kind; he sincerely desired in his heart to fulfill the spirit as well as the letter of the law, but realized that he was simply unable to live up the Lord's perfect standards. It seemed natural to Paul to expect that the new disposition would cause him to be favorably oriented toward the old covenant law, but when he tried to live it out in the flesh, he discovered it was simply not possible.

The spirit of “humble contrition” is a mark of every spiritual disciple of Christ, who cries out, “Lord, I can't be all you want me to be... I'm unable to fulfill your perfect and holy law.” Paul goes on to say, “My new self, the new creation in which God's incorruptible and eternal seed has been placed, agrees wholeheartedly that the law is good, and that I desire to fulfill it to the letter; but I am also aware that I simply do not have the ability to do so.” So Paul's struggle in verses 14-25 has led to several conclusions:

- The regenerate person who struggles against his sin disposition thru self-effort is defeated.
- The new disposition causes the believer to agree with the will of God in the inner man.
- The sinful disposition is still present and active in the believer, and wages war against him.
- The new disposition is limited in what it can do; it does not provide him with the power he needs.
- The regenerate person is not condemned to live in a permanent state of defeat.

18 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. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. 20 But if I am doing the very thing that I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin (the principle of sin/the sin disposition) which dwells in me.

Like Paul, every Christian longs to fulfill God's Law. So, what then is the problem? Paul explains, “It is sin which indwells me” – “it is the sin disposition that is still in me” – “it is the sin that still clings to my flesh.” If the regenerate person had only the “new disposition” inside him, he wouldn't have a problem doing the will of God; but he also has the “sinful disposition” in him. Furthermore, if the sin disposition were not in the Christian, then the struggle between the Holy Spirit and the flesh described in Gal 5:17 would not take place. Conversely, Paul indicates that God gave him his “thorn in the flesh” to prevent him from exalting himself (2 Cor 12:7) – if Paul had not had the sinful disposition within him even as an apostle, there could have been no danger of his exalting himself. Therefore the “sin disposition” is still resident in the believer's life – like a deposed and exiled ruler, it no longer has absolute control over his life, as it did when he was an unbeliever, but it still manages to survive; it no longer resides in the inner-most self, but it finds a dwelling in his unredeemed flesh.

So, Paul makes it clear that not only does he have the “sin disposition” residing in him as a regenerate person, but it is an extremely active and powerful force – it exercises great power to make him
act contrary to what his inner self wills. In all his efforts to do right and to abstain from evil, Paul was blocked by a power which he could not overcome (Rom 7:22-23). The "old covenant law," which he was relying upon as his means of sanctification, did not give him the power to overcome the power of the sinful disposition to do right; instead, it actually aroused the sinful disposition to a greater exercise of its power (vv.7-13). Therefore, since the law did not provide him with the power of performance, Paul was forced to resort to "self-effort" in his struggle with the sinful disposition – that also resulted in defeat. In great frustration he gave vocal expression to the wretchedness which he felt (cf. Rom 7:24). Paul states in Gal 5:17, "The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." The only way the believer can live victoriously is to walk by Christ's own Spirit and in His power, in order not to "carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal 5:16).

The part of Paul's being in which sin still dwelled was "his flesh" – his own humanness; the only residence of sin in a believer's life is "his flesh" (his unredeemed humanness). Wishing to do good was very much present within his redeemed being; unfortunately, the doing of the good was not present in his life. As a believer grows in his spiritual life, he inevitably will have both an increased hatred of sin and an increased love for righteousness. As his desire for holiness increases, so will his sensitivity to and antipathy toward sin. Paul says the following of himself: "I practice the very evil that I hate" – it is important to understand here that this great inner struggle with sin is not being experienced and described by an undeveloped or young believer, but by a very mature man of God – Paul himself! He goes on to argue, "If I am doing the very thing I do not wish, then it follows that I am no longer the one doing it – it is sin (the sin disposition) that indwells me."

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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.

The continuing presence of evil in a believer's life is so universal in the lives of believers that Paul refers to it not as an uncommon thing, but as such a common reality that he refers to it as a continually operating spiritual principle – a sin disposition. The Lord warned Cain when he became angry because Abel's sacrifice was accepted but his own was not – "Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7). Sin continues to crouch at the door of believers, in order to lead people into disobedience. The proof that sin is no longer Paul's master is his being able to say, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" – he was on the side of the law of God, and no longer on the side of sin. This is true of every saved person. The deepest recesses of Paul's redeemed person hungers and thirsts for God's righteousness (cf. Matt 5:6). The "opposing principle" (the sin disposition) is continually waging war against the law of the believer's mind... and the "fleshy principle" (the sin disposition) undermines the law of his mind and temporarily makes him a prisoner of the law of sin which is in his members. Therefore, Paul sometimes found himself to be a prisoner of the law of sin – the principle that evil was still present in him (cf. 7:21); that is, his sinful disposition.

During their earthly lives, Christians will always have "residual weaknesses" from their old humanness, the old fleshly persons they used to be. No matter how closely they walk with the Lord, they are not yet completely free from sin's power. This is the discomforting reality of Romans 7. But the Christian is no longer a slave to sin as he once was – he is no longer under sin's total domination and control. Now he is free from sin's bondage and its ultimate penalty. Though Satan, the world, and the
Deliverance from Bondage

1 There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Verse 1 – Immediately after talking about the “problem of the flesh” and God’s provision of victory through Jesus Christ, Paul enlarges upon the provision by writing Romans 8:1-4. From the valley of despair and defeat, the apostle now climbs the heights with a triumphant shout, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

But “no condemnation” with regard to what? Carefully note the context – Paul is talking about “sanctification” – not “justification” – so what Paul is teaching here is this: “There is no reason why those who are in Christ Jesus should go on doing ‘penal servitude’ as though they had never been pardoned and never been liberated from the prison-house of sin.” This verse could be paraphrased, “Believers need never fear condemnation to a life of servitude to their sinful disposition.”

Paul cries out in utter anguish and frustration, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” Paul had struggled so long and strenuously through self-effort against his sinful disposition that he had exhausted all his strength – with no reserve left upon which to draw, he collapses in the clutches of his sinful disposition. Finally, Paul recognized that he simply didn’t possess the power necessary to overcome the controlling power of his sinful disposition – he came to understand that his own humanness (the body of this death) was his problem. As such, it dawned upon him that if he was ever to get “victory over sin” something outside of himself would have to provide that victory for him. Without hesitation, the apostle testifies to the certainty of his eventual rescue, and gives thanks to his Lord who sets him free – “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Later, Paul testifies, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18). As frustrating and painful as the reality of his eventual rescue and great thanks to his Lord may be, these temporary earthly predicaments are nothing when compared with the eternal glory that awaits him in heaven. So writes Paul, “We groan within ourselves, and eagerly await our adoption as sons, and the redemption of our body!” (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:4). Paul’s primary emphasis here in Romans 7 is on the conflict with sin that torments every spiritually sensitive child of God. He ends by summarizing the two sides of that struggle – “On one hand I myself am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh I am serving the law of sin.”

Chapter 8

Deliverance from Bondage

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirements of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

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also makes it clear that the believer won’t be subjected to “further judgment” because of continuing struggles with sin – the believer will never (emphatic!), under any circumstance be subject to divine condemnation or punishment for any sins – past or future; this is the heart and soul of the gospel. Deliverance from condemnation is not based in any way upon some level of perfection achieved by the believer. Furthermore, the believer does not attain to a total eradication of sin during his earthly life. It should be noted, this does not mean the believer is delivered from divine discipline or that he escapes divine accountability. The reason there is no condemnation for believers is that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set him free from the law of sin and death.” The believer’s new life in Christ is the very divine life of God’s own Spirit.

Verse 2 presents the reason why believers are not under condemnation – this verse deals with “freedom from the controlling power of the sin disposition” (sanctification), not with freedom from guilt (justification). Note that Rom 8:1 is joined to what immediately precedes it with the word “therefore;” thus, 8:1 is a conclusion drawn from what Paul has just said in Romans 7. Since Paul has just dealt with the problem of the believer being over-powered by his sinful disposition and God’s provision of deliverance from the power of that disposition (7:24-25), his conclusion in Romans 8:1 must be referring to “no condemnation” with regard to the power of the sinful disposition (sanctification), not to no condemnation with regard to guilt (justification). Incidentally, Paul’s use of the word “now” in his announcement of no condemnation indicates that “the believer is free from this condemnation – NOW – during this present lifetime.” Paul begins verse 2 with the word “For” – this indicates that he is giving the “reason” for the believer not being condemned to a life of servitude to the sinful disposition: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you FREE from the law of sin and death.” In other words, God has provided a means of deliverance – “the law of the Spirit of life.” Paul mentions two distinct laws – the law of the Spirit of life and the law of sin and death. LAW, no matter what kind it may be, is established for the purpose of governing or controlling. In light of this, the law of the Spirit of life is the controlling power of the Holy Spirit; this controlling power produces newness of life (Rom 6:4; 7:6). As note earlier (7:23), the law of sin is the controlling power of the sinful disposition; this controlling power works death. Again, the “reason” that the believer is not condemned to a life of servitude to his sinful disposition, is that the controlling power of the Holy Spirit has set him free from the controlling power of his sinful disposition.

Verse 3 – Though the Law is holy and good, it was rendered powerless to save because of the sinful corruption of men’s flesh. The Law cannot make men perfect – it can only reveal their imperfections. God’s Law commands righteousness, but it cannot provide the means to achieve that righteousness. Therefore, what the law was unable to do for fallen man, God Himself did – He came to earth in the likeness of sinful flesh and gave His life as an offering for sin on their behalf. He took upon Himself the penalty of death for the sins of all man-kind. Jesus Christ condemned sin in the flesh, delivering the believer from sin’s power and penalty. Though the law condemns sin and exposes it for what it really is, it is unable to condemn sin in the sense of delivering a sinner from his sinfulness – only Jesus Christ was able to do that.

Verse 4 – By delivering the believer from his sinfulness, the requirement of the Law is able to be fulfilled in him. God does not redeem men in order that they may continue sinning, but in order that they may begin to live righteously by fulfilling the requirement of the Law, and this is done as the believer “walks according to the Spirit.” Paul here asserts that a true believer, whether young or old, mature or immature, does not walk according to the flesh – rather, he walks according to the Spirit. Because every true believer is indwelt by the Spirit, every true believer will produce the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23). Scripture is clear that, in some mystical way known only to God, a person begins to walk by the Spirit the moment he believes. Nevertheless, on the other hand, he is also admonished to walk by the Spirit as he lives out his earthly life.
under the lordship of Christ. Though the Holy Spirit will produce spiritual fruit in the believer's life, he is also admonished to bear fruit (cf. Phil 2:12-13). Those truths are part of the amazing and seemingly **paradoxical tension** between God's sovereignty and the believer's will.

**Although the Holy Spirit sets the believer free at the time of regeneration,** the believer does not always **experience** that freedom. Only when the believer “appropriates” the controlling power of the Holy Spirit, as a result of relying upon God’s grace as the means of sanctification, does he experience the freedom that is his. Walking in the Spirit is what makes “newness of life” possible (6:4), and “bearing fruit for God” possible (7:4). The grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit is able to do that which the old covenant law through self-effort of the believer is not able to do – free the believer from the controlling power of his sinful disposition. The reason why the old covenant law could not nullify the power of the sinful disposition is that it was “weak through the flesh” (8:3); the law could not produce holy living because of the weakness of man's flesh. So, the problem was not with the law, but with fallen human nature. Paul says the holy life required by the old covenant law will be fulfilled in those “who do not walk according to the **flesh,** but walk according to the **Spirit.**” The power of the flesh is no match for the power of the sinful disposition. Those who walk according to the power of the Holy Spirit will have the holy life required by the law fulfilled in them. The power of the Spirit will overcome the power of the sin disposition and enable the believer to do God's will.

**Appropriating the power of the Spirit is not a “once-for-all” act which delivers the believer from the controlling power of his sinful disposition forever.** Just as walking is a “step-by-step” procedure, so the appropriation of the controlling power of the Holy Spirit is a “moment-by-moment” procedure. The key is depending upon or relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit. In Eph 3:16, Paul prays for Christians that God would “strengthen them with power through His Spirit in the inner man” – the fact that Paul prays for this to happen indicates that the potential for strengthening is there. The actual strengthening depends upon the appropriation of the power of the Spirit by the believer (by faith). The Spirit comes to reside in each believer at regeneration, but must be relied upon continually to furnish power for Christian living. Since the “new disposition” in the inner man prompts the believer to will God's will, he needs to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in his inner man in order to do God's will. Eph 3:17 presents the intended purpose of the strengthening with power through the Spirit – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts.”

**Eph 5:18 refers to a fuller dwelling or filling of the Spirit** – being “filled with the Spirit” is not a “one time” exercise or practice; it is a “progressive thing,” and the means by which these fillings takes place is “through faith.” As the believer trusts the Holy Spirit rather than his own humanity to make him more like Christ, the Holy Spirit empowers him to experience the progressive fulfillment of that goal. Paul wants Christians to “be filled up to all the fullness of God’s moral character;” that is, becoming fully Christ-like – producing the fruit of the Spirit – this is the essence of progressive sanctification. The believer is sanctified “step-by-step” throughout his lifetime as the Holy Spirit gives him one victory after another over the controlling power of the sinful disposition. Many skirmishes can be won during the course of one’s life as he appropriates the power of the Holy Spirit, but the whole war is not completed in victory until the believer has gone home to be with Christ.

**The transformation of the believer into the image of Christ is not an instantaneous, once-for-all event.** It is a gradual, step-by-step process throughout the life of the believer. Paul says in 2 Corinth 3:18, “We all are [in the process of] being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” The believer passes from one stage of glory to another in a progressive movement forward. The process is emphasized
again in Col 3:10 – “The new man is [in the process of] being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.” The “present tense” of these statements indicates that transformation and renewal are processes – and the transforming process will not be completed until the believer sees Christ (cf. 1 John 3:2). Christians start as “babes” and they “grow” into the fullness and stature of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13; 1 Pet 2:2) – they are Christians all the while, but they grow; a Christian should never stop growing. During this life it is impossible to reach the perfection to which the believer shall attain when he sees Christ in heaven (1 John 3:2). Paul himself tells us in Phil 3:12 that he himself had not attained the state of perfection. Although perfection is impossible during this life, steady progress toward that final goal is to be made. The believer is to become more and more and more like Christ every day – that’s the pilgrimage of the believer! The process of being transformed or renewed to the moral image of God is called “sanctification,” becoming more holy.

5 For those who are according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; 8 and those that are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

Verses 5-6 – In God’s eyes, there are only two kinds of people in the world – those who belong to Him and those who do not – there are only those who are according to the flesh, and those according to the Spirit. Both individuals “set their minds and affections” either on earthly things or heavenly things – the basic disposition of the unredeemed is to indulge the flesh in its corrupt selfish desires (2 Pet 2:10); conversely, the basic disposition of the redeemed is that they have deep longings after God and sanctification – despite their many spiritual failures, their basic orientation and innermost concerns have to do with the things of the Spirit. The mind of the flesh “is” death – it does not lead to death (cf. Eph 2:1); and the mind of the Spirit “is” life and peace.

Verses 7-8 – Every unredeemed person, whether religious or atheistic, is “hostile toward God” – he does not have a genuine love for God or the things of God – having a genuine love for God is to “desire God’s will above your own will.” Such a disposition never characterizes the mind and heart of the unredeemed. Furthermore, his sinful, fleshly mind does not subject itself to the law of God – it neither wants to do so, nor is not able to do so. His works are produced by the flesh for self-centered reasons and are never to God’s glory – as such, he cannot please God – one can only please God when he “trusts Him and obeys Him” – Heb 11:6 says, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Furthermore, men were created for the very purpose of pleasing God (cf. 2 Cor 5:9; Eph 5:10; Phil 4:18; 1 Th 4:1).

Verses 9-11 – A test of saving faith is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is at “home” (dwells) in you, you are one of God’s children. If the Spirit is “not at home” in you, you do not belong to Him. The person who demonstrates no desire for the things of God and does not avoid sin (i.e., running his own life), nor does he have a passion to please God – this person is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of divinely-impacted righteousness. The Holy Spirit gives “life” to our mortal bodies – that is what is referred to as the resurrection life (Phil 3:10).
12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Paul proceeds to set forth God's pattern for victory over the flesh. As God's children indwelt by the Spirit, we have "no obligation to live according to the flesh." The flesh is the perverse complex of human sinful desires that includes the ungodly motives, affections, principles, purposes, words, and actions that sin generates through our bodies. To live according to the flesh is to be ruled and controlled by that evil complex. Those who live that way are spiritually dead and are not true Christians (Eph 2:1). If they do not come to Christ, they will die the "second death" at God's final judgment (cf. Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14-15). The Christian's obligation is no longer to the flesh but to the Spirit. We have the resources of the Spirit within us to resist and put to death the deeds of the body. The Scottish theologian David Brown wisely wrote, "If you don't kill sin, sin will kill you!" Jesus was also dead serious about sin; He said in Matt 5:29, "If your right eye makes you stumble, pluck it out!" No action is too drastic in dealing with sin. Again, this does not mean that we will become spiritually flawless — that is not a possibility in this life — but it means the "direction" of our lives should be such that "we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). Paul did not achieve perfect righteousness in this life, but it was the "supreme objective" of his life — his basic heart's desire was to obey and please God.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are able to successfully resist and destroy sin in their lives. "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of strongholds" (2 Cor 10:4). It was confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit that gave hope to the frustration Paul experienced in Rom 7:24-25. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to the believer's continual need to rely on the Spirit's power (cf. Eph 5:18; Col 3:16) — being controlled by God's Spirit comes from being obedient to His Word. The Spirit-filled life does not come through mystical or ecstatic experiences, but from studying and submitting oneself to the teaching of Scripture — and affirming its truths (that's faith). As a believer faithfully and submissively saturates his mind and heart with God's truth, his Spirit-controlled behavior will follow as surely as night follows day. We'll cover this in more detail later.

14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

A person who is truly experiencing the leading of God at work in his life can be certain he is God's child. Though the children of God are irrevocably "secure" in Him, that does not mean they will always "feel secure." Note: The Christian who neglects the study of Scripture, Prayer, Fellowship, and who is careless about his obedience to God, will invariably have doubts about his salvation, because he is somewhat indifferent to God and the things of God. Satan is always ready to take advantage of such circumstances and plant seeds of uncertainty. Those who see victory over sin in their lives, who see their sinful desires and practices diminishing, will have the incredible confidence that they indeed are sons of God. It is through our faithful obedience to Christ that we experience the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit's divine work of sanctification in our lives that gives us assurance that we truly are sons of God (Read 1 Jn 5:13; Heb 11:1).
Furthermore, the Holy Spirit confirms our adoption as God’s children by freeing us from the “spirit of slavery” that inevitably leads us to fear again. Through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, God’s children are given a “spirit of adoption.” According to Roman Law “adoption” did not carry with the idea of “second-class status” in the family, as it does in some cultures. In Roman culture, an adopted son frequently had greater prestige and privilege than the natural children; Paul’s contemporaries understood adoption as that which signified a great honor and privilege. As God’s adopted children, He gives us the full right and privilege to cry out in the most intimate way, “Abba!” to God as our heavenly Father, just as every child does to his earthly father. This Aramaic term connotes relational intimacy, tenderness, dependence, and a complete lack of fear or anxiety. When Jesus was agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane, He used this name of endearment, praying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; if possible, remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wills” (Mk 14:36). So, in Christ we are given a new divine nature and become a true child of God, with all the attendant blessings, privileges, and inheritance. To give us even further assurance of our eternal relationship to Him, the Lord’s indwelling Holy Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are truly “children of God” (cf. Jn 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1-2).

17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Since they are indeed children of God, they are thereby “heirs” also. An heir, of course, eventually inherits his father’s estate, and that is what is meant here. All that the Father has is “ours!” We have not yet come into the possession and enjoyment of all of it, but nothing can prevent our doing so in the future. Scripture tells us that God the Father has appointed Jesus Christ the “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2); and incredible as it may seem, we are destined to receive all that He receives! When Jesus returns to take the scepter of universal government we will share with Him the title deeds to all of the Father’s wealth! Believers will one day enter into the eternal joy of their Master (Matt 25:21), and will sit on the heavenly throne with Christ and rule with Him for all eternity (cf. Rev 3:21; 20:4; Luke 22:30), bearing forever the very image of Christ! (cf. 1 Cor 15:49; 1 Jn 3:2). In His great high priestly prayer, Jesus spoke to His Father of the incredible and staggering truth that everyone who believes in Him will be with Him and will share His full glory (John 17:22). It is not that believers will become gods, as some cults teach, but that we will receive, by our joint-inheritance with Christ, all the blessings and grandeur that God has. The apostle John tells us, “Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I Jn 3:3). The hope and expectation of sharing in God’s own glory should motivate every believer to dedicate himself to living purely while he is still on earth. Only a “holy life” is fully usable by God.

The believer’s ultimate glory comes through “suffering” on his Lord’s behalf (1 Pet 4:13). Dying to our self is one aspect of the believer’s suffering – we are being “put to death all day long!” (Rom 8:36). Because we suffer with Him, we know that we will ultimately be glorified with Him. The more a believer suffers in this life for the sake of his Lord, the greater will be his capacity for glory in heaven (cf. Matt 20:21-23; also see 1 Cor 3:12-15). That is why Paul was so eager to experience “the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10), and was so determined to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). We have no greater privilege and no greater guarantee of glory than to suffer for Christ’s sake. The sufferings of this present time are “not worthy” (emphatic) to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Just as suffering was essential to Christ’s obedience to His Father (Heb 2:10), so it is essential to our obedience to Christ. Our suffering is short, whereas our glory is forever; our suffering is trivial, whereas our glory is limitless.
For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

The entire created order (outside of humanity) is standing on tiptoes, as it were, as it waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. It was common in Jewish literature to personify nature (cf. Is 35:1; 55:12). Col 3:4 says, “when Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then believers also will be revealed with Him in glory.” At that time all believers will be eternally separated from sin and their unredeemed humanness, to be glorified with Christ’s own holiness and splendor. After the “fall,” all creation was subjected to futility – because of man’s sin, no part of nature now exists as God originally intended; as it was at creation. At the fall, God executed a curse on the entire created order; yet in spite of this curse, much of the beauty, grandeur, and benefits of the natural world still remains. Although everything is deteriorating (law of entropy), it still possesses an incredible level of majesty and beauty. Nature’s destiny is inseparably linked to man’s – because man sinned, the rest of creation was corrupted with him. Likewise, when man’s glory is divinely restored, the natural world will be restored as well; as such, all creation is eagerly looking forward to a better day, when the curse will be removed, and everything will return to its original majestic grandeur – creation itself “will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Like humanity, the world remains in slavery to the corruption of sin. At that point when all believers are liberated from sin and humanness, all creation will be set free. We live in a sighing, sobbing, suffering world. All creation groans and suffers pains like that of childbirth; nature’s music is in the minor key; the blight of death is on everything; everything is in a state of decay (law of entropy).

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Not only does nature groan for deliverance from the destructive consequences of man’s sin, but so also does the believer – every true believer agonizes at times over the appalling manifestations and consequences of sin (in his own life, in the lives of others, and even in the natural world). We groan within ourselves over the dreadful curse of sin that is still manifested by our remaining humanness. Paul grieved over the remnants of his humanness that clung to him like a rotten garment that could not be cast off. That reality brought him great spiritual frustration and anguish – “Wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24; 2 Cor 5:4). As believers, we therefore find ourselves waiting eagerly in anticipation of our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. The work of the Holy Spirit is a type of spiritual “first fruits” – they are a foretaste of the glory that awaits us in heaven, when corruption shall put on incorruption.

It is “in hope” that we have been saved. We did not receive all the benefits of our salvation at the moment of conversion. From the outset we have looked forward to full and final deliverance from sin, suffering, disease, and death. Our salvation was planned by God in ages past, bestowed in the present, and is now characterized by “hope” for its future completion. The believer’s hope is not based on wishful thinking, but on the integrity of the clear promises of God. Paul states the axiomatic truth that “hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one hope for what he sees”? Therefore, as believers, with perseverance we
eagerly “wait” – this Hebrew term is frequently translated “hope” – for what we do not see. Peter writes, “Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

Our Victory in Christ

26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

“In the same way” refers back to the groans of the creation. Here Paul reveals the comforting truth that the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and all creation, in groaning for God’s ultimate day of restoration and His eternal reign of righteousness. Because of our remaining humanness and susceptibility to sin and doubt, the Holy Spirit also helps us in our weakness (our human condition in general). The point is that, even after salvation, we are characterized by spiritual weakness. The Holy Spirit supplies us with all we need to be faithful, effective, and protected children of God. To make clear how the Holy Spirit works, Paul turns to the subject of prayer, because we frequently pray selfishly, ignorantly, and narrowly. Because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God’s will. Even the Christian who prays sincerely and faithfully, cannot possibly know God’s purposes concerning all of his own needs or the needs of other for whom he prays; therefore, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us, oftentimes with groanings to deep for words (divine articulations by the Holy Spirit to the Father – cf. 1 Cor 2:11). If the Father knows the hearts of men, how much more does He know the mind of the Spirit. The Father understands exactly what the Spirit is thinking because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God – “Thy will be done.” Because the Spirit’s will and the Father’s will are identical, the very idea of communication between them might seem superfluous to us. It is a great mystery to our finite minds.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

For Christians, this verse contains one of the greatest promises in Scripture. It is breathtaking in its magnitude, encompassing absolutely everything that pertains to a believer’s life. God as Guarantor promises that He will ultimately cause everything in the believer’s life to result in blessing (the grammatical construction Paul uses here is that of the “causative verb” in Greek – the old King James Bible failed to convey that idea in its translation). Paul here emphasizes that it is GOD HIMSELF who brings about the good that comes to His people. There are no qualifications or limits to this promise – “all things” is utterly comprehensive. Paul is saying that the Lord takes all that He allows to happen to His children, even the worst things (every sinful failure, every trial, every evil, every painful experience, every lack of faith), and turns those things ultimately into blessings! The corollary of that truth is that “nothing” can ultimately work against us – nothing! Sometimes when we are suffering heartbreak, tragedy, disappointment, frustration, and bereavement, we wonder what good can possibly come out of it. In short, whatever God permits to come into our lives is designed to conform us to the image of His Son. When we see this, it takes the question mark out of our prayers. Our lives are not controlled by impersonal forces such as chance, luck, fate, or even by us, but by our wonderful, personal Lord, who is “too loving to be unkind and too wise to err.” Later in this chapter Paul asks the question, “He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32).
In the physical world, the right combination of otherwise harmful chemicals can produce substances that are extremely beneficial – for example, ordinary table salt is composed of two poisons: sodium and chlorine. In the spiritual realm, God can take the worst of all experiences and combine them together to produce indescribable blessing. With that in mind, the believer needs to have confidence in the fact that God uses EVERYTHING to produce blessing in our lives – be it the evil of suffering (cf. Joseph in Gen 50:20), the evil of temptation, or the evil of sin itself – God causes our own sin to work for our good by leading us to despise the sin and to desire His holiness. When we fall into sin, our spiritual weakness becomes evident and we are driven humbly to seek God's forgiveness and restoration. As evil as it is, sin can bring us good by stripping us of our pride and self-assurance. The supreme illustration of God's turning “all things” (even the most evil of things) to the good of His children is seen in the sacrificial death of His own Son – Jesus took the most diabolical evil act that Satan could devise and turned it into the greatest conceivable blessing He could ever offer to fallen mankind – our eternal salvation from sin! As one of my favorite authors, Steve Brown, would say, “You think about that.”

The only “qualification” in this marvelous promise has to do with the “recipients” – it is only reserved for “God’s children.” Every child of God is described in Scripture as “those who love God” and “those who are called according to His purpose.” God states in Isaiah 46:10-11, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure — truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it; surely I will do it.” So this incredible promise is an absolute certainty because it rests upon God as Guarantor.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Why is the foregoing (Rom 8:28) true? Because God has predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son! And nothing! is going to stop God from bringing His plan to fruition! Throughout history there have been factions in the church that have debated the possibility of a believer losing his salvation. It is important that believers know that Scripture is unambiguous in teaching that every person who is genuinely saved is eternally saved. No believer is in danger of losing the spiritual life God has given to him. Rom 8:29-30 is perhaps the clearest and most explicit presentation of that truth in all of God's Word. God's supreme purpose for bringing sinners to salvation is to “glorify His Son” by making Him preeminent in the eternal divine plan of redemption – therefore it is God's intent for Christ to be the “first-born” among many brethren; in the sense of Christ's being uniquely preeminent among the children of God. Paul beautifully portrays God's purpose of glorifying Christ in Phil 2:9-10 – “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Ultimately every believer is going to be glorified – it is stated emphatically in this verse (note the words in italics), and it is stated in the “past tense” which emphasizes its absolute certainty; in other words, God states it as though it has already happened! Furthermore, not one believer will be missing! (John 18:9).

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
With all the apostle has said previously in this chapter about the security of the believer, it would seem there was nothing left to add. Paul realizes that many fearful believers will still have doubts about their security and false teachers would be ready to exploit those doubts. So this closing passage is a crescendo of questions and answers regarding issues that some objectors might still raise. Paul begins with the rhetorical question, “Since God is for us, who can possibly be against us?” Ask yourself that question! If omnipotence is working on our behalf, how can any lesser power defeat us? And if He who is for us, “did not spare His own Son, how will He not also freely give us all things?” When a world of lost mankind needed to be saved by a sinless Savior, the great God of the universe did not hold back His heart's “best Treasure!” but gave Him over to a death of shame and loss on our behalf. I am reminded of that great hymn by Charles Wesley, “Amazing Love! How Can It Be that Thou My God Shouldst Die for Me?” How could it possibly be that God would sacrifice His own Son for us, and then cast some of them out of His family and His kingdom? Would God do less for believers after they have already been saved? Would He do less for us as His children than He did when we were His enemies? (Rom 5:8). If God has already given us the greatest gift, is there any lesser gift that He would withhold? After all He went through to redeem us… would He still at some point turn His back on us? Since God graciously and freely forgives us of every sin imaginable, is it possible for a believer to sin himself out of God’s grace? No! Never! That is why it is called Amazing Love!

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect, since God is the one who justifies?” The world and Satan are continually bringing charges against God’s elect, but those charges amount to nothing before the Lord, because He is the one who decides who is righteous before Him. He has declared us eternally guiltless and no longer under condemnation because of the cross of Christ! We might wonder if our Savior Himself would take back our salvation? Paul replies, “Christ is He who died and was raised, and who is now at the right hand of God interceding for us” – He will continue to intercede for us until we are in heaven – “He ever lives to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25).

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, “For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

After establishing that it is impossible for any person to take away our salvation, Paul anticipates a similar question that some will ask, “Is it possible for circumstances to rob a believer of his salvation?” Difficult circumstances can obviously have a detrimental impact on the faith and endurance of believers, but can they cause a believer to sin himself out of salvation? In verse 35, Paul lists a representative few of the countless circumstances that faithful believers may encounter while they still live in the world. If any of these things could separate the believer from the love of Christ, then the fatal severance would have taken place long ago, because the career of the Christian is a living death – we are being put to death all day long, and are like sheep that are doomed to be slaughtered (cf. Ps 44:22). But nothing has ever been able to separate us from the love Christ has for us. At issue here is the permanence of His love for those for whom He shed His blood.

The cost of faithfulness to God has always been high, but true believers persevere to the end, not because they are strong in themselves, but because they have the power of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit in them. Those who fail to persevere demonstrate their lack of genuine faith. God will keep and protect even the most fearful person who truly belongs to Him; therefore, only true Christians are “overcomers.” Just as we can only love God because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19), we can only hold on to God because He holds on to us. We can survive any threatening circumstance and overcome any spiritual obstacle
that the world or Satan puts in our way, because “in all these things (emphatic!) we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” – we do so entirely through the power of Him who loved us so much that He gave His life for us that we might have life in Him. We don't just conquer – we “overwhelmingly conquer” – because of God's divine grace and power!

38 For I am convinced, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Did you notice the one word in this passage that is “emphatic!”)

The apostle Paul was “fully convinced” that nothing could separate us from the love of Christ. He ransacks the entire universe for something that might conceivably separate us from God's love, then dismisses all the possibilities one by one. There is nothing anywhere at any time that can separate us from Him. Our salvation was secured by “God's decree” from eternity past and will be held secure by Christ's love through all eternity. Paul allows absolutely no exceptions in regard to the believer's security in Christ! You think about that!