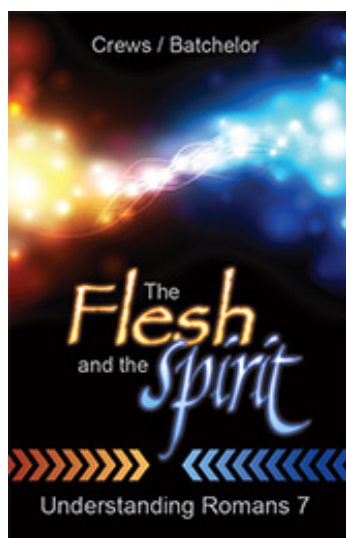


The Flesh and the Spirit



By Joe Crews & Doug Batchelor

Understanding Romans 7

An oxymoron is a phrase in which words of contradictory meanings are used together for special effect—for example, wise fool or legal murder. Some can be quite humorous, such as pretty ugly, working vacation, or jumbo shrimp. A new phrase used by some Christians also qualifies as an oxymoron: carnal Christians. These two words don't seem like they are supposed to go together.

After all, the word carnal means “animal, sensual, unregenerate, fleshly.” Can it really be used as a proper adjective for a born-again Christian, who has turned from the world to the kingdom of God? Still, many sincere people believe carnal is a helpful characterization of the normal Christian experience. Others, of course, strongly disagree. They say the term is self contradictory; they deny the existence of a hybrid creature who could be Christ-like and carnal at the same time.

At the heart of this complex issue is this question: Is the converted Christian controlled by the Spirit or by the flesh? This controversy is very much rooted in something the Apostle Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans. Sandwiched right between two of the most triumphant chapters in the Bible, Paul penned 25 verses that have given rise to all the theological conflict on this subject. In order to properly understand those cryptic 25 verses that make up Romans 7, we must briefly examine the companion chapters surrounding it.

Though written by the same author, the ideas found in chapters 6 and 8 seem to be at total odds with the one that is between them. A tremendous theme of total victory over sin flows powerfully through Romans 6 and 8, but Romans 7 seems to catalog only frustration and defeat. How could the same man describe such opposite personal experiences within the same few pages? The question becomes even more significant when we consider that in all his other prolific writings, Paul never repeated such expressions of hopelessness as he recorded in Romans 7. Let's take a closer look.

Sold Under Sin?

Can you imagine how these words could ever apply to that spiritual giant who was Paul: “I am carnal, sold under sin ... bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. ... What I hate, that do I. ... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:14, 23, 15, 24)? What does this miserable, sin-bound creature have in common with the experience described in the preceding chapter? “We ... are dead to sin, ... freed from sin. ... Let not sin therefore reign. ... Sin shall not have dominion over you. ... Shall we sin? God forbid ... being then made free from sin” (Romans 7:2, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18). And how could Paul himself harmonize this wretched state of Romans 7 with the soaring experience of Spirit-filled victory described in Romans 8? “There is therefore now no condemnation, ... made me free from the law of sin ... righteousness-fulfilled in us, ... mortify the deeds of the body. ... We are the children of God” (Romans 8:1, 2, 4, 13, 16).

The crux of the “carnal Christian” argument is brought into view by Paul's bold assertion that he is “carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14), yet declaring in chapter 8 that “to be carnally minded is death. The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:6, 7). Is Paul really saying that he is not a Christian and is the enemy of God? Is he conceding that his life is fleshly and therefore under the sentence of death? Of course not!

On the other hand, if Paul is describing his experience after his conversion, we must admit that there are irreconcilable differences between chapter 7 and the rest of his writing. Therefore, with an honest look, we are led to the unavoidable conclusion that Paul is not describing his born-again experience at all. We must reject the concept that one can be controlled by the flesh, at enmity with God and condemned to death, and still be in a spiritually saved condition. The wretched man who cries out in despair for deliverance has obviously never been delivered from his sins.

Why, then, does Paul portray himself in such a state of hopeless bondage? Although the picture at this point might be a little confusing, we can have assurance that Paul has a very clear and convincing reason for writing Romans 7. When we follow the logic of this man, the prince of apostles, we can understand perfectly why he worked in this material exactly as he did, when he did.

The Law in Salvation

It is important to clearly understand that Romans 7 is given entirely as an explanation of the law and its role in the process of salvation. In the preceding chapter, Paul explains how justification came upon all the world through one man. Most of the material presented in chapters 1 through 5 deal with the theology of righteousness by faith, with the chief focus on justification.

Then in Romans 6, Paul moves into the area of sanctification and begins to describe the effect of being saved by grace. This chapter is taken up with a portrayal of perfect obedience and sin-free living. Over and over, Paul asserts that sin (breaking the law) cannot prevail against the power of God's justifying grace. The consistent, habitual pattern of the child of God will be to reject sin. Obedience to the law is the fruit of true justification.

But even though holy living and law keeping will mark the lifestyle of every true Christian, Paul doesn't want anyone to misunderstand the specific role of the law in the process of salvation. Important as it is, the law has its limitations. It cannot cleanse or sanctify. Although it marks out the path of God's perfect will, there is no redeeming grace in the law to justify a single person. Its primary function is to convict, condemn, and create a desire for deliverance. Then, like a loving schoolmaster, it will conduct the sinner to Jesus for free cleansing and grace.

So what does Paul do at this point? He inserts 25 verses that carefully define the function of the law in leading a person to Christ. And by way of illustration, he uses his own experience with the law to show how it affected him when he fell under its influence. He tells, in retrospect, how the law opened his eyes to the real nature of sin within him and "slew" him with its devastating exposé of gross disobedience. It is most important to acknowledge that Romans 7 is Paul's description of his reactions to the law before he was converted. He is laying out his unconverted heart's bondage to the carnal nature and his utter helplessness in trying to fulfill the requirements of God's law. Step by step, he gives a heart-rending account of his anguish under the prodding convictions of the law.

Yet many Christians conclude that Paul is really describing his converted Christian experience in Romans 7, comforting themselves with the notion that it is normal—and therefore acceptable—to be overcome by sin. They express it in this way: "If Paul had no power to do what he knew to be right, surely we cannot be held accountable for disobeying also. After all, it is not us, but sin in us, that is guilty of the wrongdoing. God will not let us be lost as long as we have the desire to do His will, even though we do not 'perform that which is good.'"

Yet if such an interpretation is correct, we are immediately faced with the problem of harmonizing hundreds of other texts in Scripture that assure us that we should live without sin. Can you see what a serious issue this becomes for every one of us? Surely, it must be apparent that such a teaching, if true, would have to be the best news in the world for those who are not willing to crucify their fleshly nature completely. With two

memorized texts, they could biblically justify any act of disobedience and still feel secure: “I am carnal, sold under sin ... the evil which I would not, that I do ... it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”

On the other hand, if this interpretation is wrong, it is, without question, one of the most dangerous teachings on Satan’s long list of deceptions. The horrible import of teaching people to tolerate that which God hates boggles the mind. If sin really is non-negotiable in His sight and will never enter into His kingdom, then any doctrine that tries to make sin acceptable to God could lead millions to damnation.

The Law Did Not Die

Because this crucial chapter has been twisted to support such a dangerous doctrine, we need to analyze it carefully verse by verse. Not even the smallest question should linger concerning God’s attitude toward the practice of sin. “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.

So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:1–6).

Here Paul uses the law of marriage to represent the spiritual relationship with Christ. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. When he dies, she is free to marry someone else without being branded an adulteress. Likewise, the sinner is represented as being loosed from one relationship in order to be bound by another. Many people assume that Paul here is doing away with the Ten Commandments. Not so. Paul is actually speaking about the sinner in his experience of turning from sin and becoming married to Christ. The law itself did not die. Paul writes, “Ye also are become dead ... that ye should be married to another.”

Verse 5 makes it very clear that the sinner is bound to his sinful nature. “For when we were in the flesh, the motions [passions] of sin did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” How did he get released from that fleshly nature that wrought death in him? “Ye ... are become dead ... by the body of Christ.” In other words, by accepting the atoning death of Jesus, the carnal mind was destroyed, and “being dead wherein we were held,” Paul says we are free to be married to another, even Christ.

Some might question why Paul writes that we become “dead to the law” by the death of Jesus. We must understand the context in which this teaching is used. It is obvious from verse 5 that we become dead to what the law condemns in our nature: “the motions of sins, which were by the law.” Here Paul introduces the chief function of the law that he will reiterate throughout the chapter: The law exposes the works of sin. It brings to light the activities of the flesh. And in doing so, the law ratifies the death sentence against all who are breaking it. To be “dead to the law” and to be “delivered from the law ... wherein we were held” means to be delivered from the sins that it condemns and from the penalty of death that applies to all who break the law. Being married to Christ does not deliver us from obeying the law, but it does deliver us from the penalty of death that results from having violated it.

What happens next? Because Paul has identified the law as the instrument for pointing out sin, he now feels it necessary to exonerate the law from any charges of being evil itself. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou

shalt not covet” (Romans 7:7). Even though its very nature reveals our sin, Paul defends the law throughout the chapter as holy, just, good, and spiritual. Many Christians make the very mistake that Paul strongly warns against. With varying degrees of animosity, they make the law of absolutely no effect in the experience of salvation.

Not only do they reject its claims as the perfect blueprint of right living, they also deny its assigned mission to convince of sin. Yet in the most positive language, Paul declares earlier in his epistle that there can be no sin without the law: “For where no law is there, is no transgression” (Romans 4:15). He reinforces that point by recounting his own experience with the Ten Commandments: “I had not known sin, but by the law.”

The Law Confronts Paul

Here we now find the important transition point in chapter 7; it holds the key to the “carnal Christian” controversy. For the first time, Paul begins to speak of his own personal relationship to the law. But notice that he carries his readers back with him into the past. He begins to write about his first encounter with the law. At that time, Paul says, “I had not known sin.” In other words, he had not been aware of breaking the law before that moment of spiritual conviction and enlightenment.

As a teacher of the Sanhedrin, there is little doubt that Paul had vast intellectual knowledge regarding all the religious laws of Israel, including the Ten Commandments. He prided himself as being flawless in meeting all the legal requirements of those statutes. But all that was changed on the day the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the superficial nature of his obedience. For the first time, he recognized that he was only observing the letter of the law. His empty works of self-justification appeared in their true light.

Paul does not tell us, and neither is it necessary to know, just when this initial conviction began to operate in his life. It is sufficient to say that there was a period of time, whether short or long, when his eyes were opened to what he really should be before God. The law had accomplished its task very well, and he clearly discerned how broad and deep and comprehensive are its principles. In recalling the agony of his soul during those days of conflict, Paul writes:

“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:8–13).

Paul here continues to describe the personal reactions of his Pharisaical nature to that initial conviction of sin. It was absolutely shattering for this famous religious teacher to be exposed as a transgressor before God. The experience was so intense that he could only compare it to being happily alive without the law, and then suddenly crushed to death by the consciousness of his guilt—the guilt that was generated by the revelations of the law. Paul marvels that something so righteous and so good and so pure could stir up within him such consciousness of evil. Like a powerful magnifying lens, the law had probed the recesses of his legalistic soul, making sin appear “exceeding sinful.”

No Power to Obey

Confessing that sin was “working death in me,” Paul launches into the famous verses that have been so terribly misapplied to the experience of beleaguered saints:

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:14–25).

Some take the position that Paul’s statement here, that the law is spiritual, proves that he was a converted man. Yet the rest of the verse plainly declares that he was carnal and sold out to sin. Is it unusual for a sinner to make such an admission about the law? Not at all. At the end of time, millions of unconverted will acknowledge the truth of the Ten Commandments. But believing the truth and consenting to the law is not enough. It must also be obeyed. And Paul knew that.

If anybody could appreciate the necessity of doing the works of the law, it would certainly be Paul. And he did try! The rest of the chapter is replete with his frustrated report of trying and failing, trying and failing. Sadly, on the basis of these texts, thousands of sermons have been preached to explain why we should not be too hung up on achieving a life of perfect obedience. If Paul found it impossible to do good, and constantly did evil instead, why should we get a guilt trip over our failures? Interestingly, the dispensers of these soothing tranquilizers are not really comparing apples with apples. Rather, they are comparing spiritual things with fleshly things. Let’s allow Paul to clear up the matter for us quickly.

He writes, “I am carnal.” How does he define the carnal condition? Just 18 verses down the page, he explains: “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). This is the third time that Paul admits to being under the condemnation of death. In Romans 7:10, he says, “The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.” In verse 13, he speaks of sin “working death in me.” Can anyone accuse the great apostle of being confused about the status of the justified believer? No. This is his specialty. He understands very clearly that justification and condemnation could not coexist in the same person at the same time. Dozens of times the regenerated Paul declares his freedom from the guilt and condemnation of the law. Only in this chapter, where he describes his unconverted experience, does he ever place himself back under the death sentence.

Convicted But Unconverted

Paul’s eyes had been opened. He had been instructed and convicted by the law. He knew what was right and desired to do it, but he had not yet laid hold of the delivering power of Christ. He was miserable. He hated himself and everything he was doing. “But what I hate, that do I” (Romans 7:15). The problem was with his flesh. It was too weak to obey. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

Why could Paul not obey in the flesh? Because he uses that expression to repeatedly describe the unconverted nature. In verse 5, he says, “When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins ... did work in our members.” In Romans 8:3, he writes that the law could not be kept by us because it was “weak through the

flesh” The old carnal power of sin made it impossible for him to obey. In Paul’s mind, he was willing, but he describes another law “in my members, warring against the law of my mind.” That other law was stronger than his good desires and intentions—indeed, the rest of the sentence reads, “and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23).

How clear it really is that the law of sin in his members, or in his flesh, was the unregenerate carnal nature. It made a perfect slave out of his body, compelling him to do evil things that he hated and forcing out of him, finally, that despairing cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

Here again, for the fourth time, Paul indicates that the penalty of death was residing in his body, or in his flesh, where sin had taken control of him. Many will now point to verse 22 as the final proof that Paul was converted during this losing battle against sin: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” No one, they say, could delight in the law unless he was born again. But that is not true. In Romans 2:17, 18, Paul addresses the Jews, saying even they have an exalted concept of the law: “Behold, thou are called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law.” Paul’s delight in the law in the inward man merely reveals his total mental acceptance of the law’s principles. He holds the law in the very highest esteem. Prior to his conversion, he had no problem with believing or being willing to obey. Yet without Christ in his life, there was no enabling grace to perform that which is good.

Did the apostle ever find the answer to his plaintive cry for help? Did the wretched slave ever obtain freedom? Was he finally loosed from the captivity of the law of sin? Of course he was. Just as soon as he accepted the Lord Jesus, his chains fell off, his carnal nature was crucified, and he was set free from sin. Four verses further, we read how the miracle happened: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

What a dramatic turnaround! But how has Paul been set free from the very law of sin that had captured him in Romans 7:23? He answers that question himself: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This point of conversion in Paul’s experience has been acknowledged in the writings of many well-known Bible commentators. Here are three source statements that confirm Romans 7 is describing his unregenerate nature:

1. “It is difficult to conceive how the opinion could have crept into the Church, or prevailed there, that ‘the apostle speaks here of his regenerate state; and that what was, in such a state, true of himself, must be true of all others in the same state.’ This opinion has, most pitifully and most shamefully, not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character” (Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible).

2. “Oh, how many flatter themselves that they have goodness and righteousness, when the true light of God reveals that all their lives they have only lived to please themselves! Their whole conduct is abhorred of God. How many are alive without the law! In their gross darkness they view themselves with complacency; but let the law of God be revealed to their consciences, as it was to Paul, and they would see that they are sold under sin and must die to the carnal mind. Self must be slain” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 475).

3. “It is impossible for us, of our selves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. ... ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God.’ The Saviour said, ‘Except a man be born from above, ... he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ ... It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God, to see the benevolence, the fatherly tenderness, of His character. ... Paul the apostle saw all this when

he exclaimed, 'I consent unto the law that it is good. ... The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' But he added, in the bitterness of his soul-anguish and despair, 'I am carnal, sold under sin' (Romans 7:16, 12, 14). He longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was powerless to attain, and cried out, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' (Romans 7:24). Such is the cry that has gone up from burdened hearts in all lands and in all ages. To all there is but one answer, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29)" (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, pp. 18, 19).

Serving the Law of Sin

At this point, there remains one small perplexity in the wording of Romans 7:25. Some have questioned how Paul could still talk about serving the law of sin in the flesh after apparently being delivered from the flesh in the same text. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." In spite of the awkward phrasing, there is no contradiction of the main theme. Paul gives a quick, parenthetical answer to his desperate question, "Who shall deliver me?" Then he moves back to complete the point that he was making in verse 23, which is about being in captivity to the law of sin.

The very same sentence structure is found in Revelation 20:4, 5. After describing the first resurrection of people who would not receive the mark of the beast, John writes, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

As everyone recognizes, the "rest of the dead" are the wicked who arise in the second resurrection, not the first. So the very last sentence, about the first resurrection, is actually referring back to those who are described in verse 4—those saints who had not received the mark of the beast. Obviously, the first part of verse 5 is thrown in parenthetically, and the final sentence, "This is the first resurrection," completes the thought that was being developed in the previous verse.

In the same way, the final sentence of Romans 7:25 is referring back to the theme of verse 23 and is not directly related to the first part of verse 25. You see, Paul has just reached the climactic point of logic and pathos in describing his abject condition of condemnation.

Verse 23 speaks of his captivity to sin, and verse 24 reveals his agony of desire to be free: "WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?" Giving a quick answer to his rhetorical question, he encapsulates in one final sentence the basic point he has made throughout the chapter: His mind wills to serve God, but his flesh forces him to serve sin. "(I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord) so then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Thus closes chapter 7 with its dismal dirge of defeat, but Paul has not made this detour in his epistle without good reason. Now his readers are prepared to appreciate the scope of his transformed experience under grace. It seems to be one of Paul's penchants to illustrate by dramatic contrast the "much more" of grace over sin (Romans 5:20, 21), of justification over condemnation (Romans 5:16, 17), and of the Spirit over the flesh (Romans 8:5). And it is only because of the stark manner of portraying his misery under sin that Paul can now project, by comparison, the glory of Spirit-filled children of God.

The Power of the Will in Victory

There are yet two important points to be made before we leave chapter 7. Both relate to the manner in which we are able to choose the path of total victory over the flesh. Obviously, the will is very much involved in this process. Few understand the explosive power of this decision-making for every individual. Regardless of the physical frailties or incapacities, God has placed within each human brain the ability to choose one's course of action and direction. This independent, sovereign faculty constitutes the most obvious difference between people and animals. No other creature on earth has been given this power of choice. Monkeys cannot reason

abstractly; they move by instinct. Man thinks, and man chooses.

It is very likely that no other inherent power of mind or body is so deeply rooted as the power of choice. In bestowing this gift, the Creator laid upon each person the responsibility for his own salvation. Even though the fallen nature alone has no power to stop sinning, it does have the power to choose to stop sinning. Even the most vile and degraded of men may yet decide what actions to pursue.

Often the will has been weakened and traumatized by wrong choices and external pressures, but it remains the one human alternative by which deliverance can be initiated. Here it must be emphasized that the desire to make right choices is a result of God's grace acting on the mind. Not everyone is willing to give up the enjoyment of sinful indulgence. This is why some will need to pray, "Lord, make me willing to be willing," or even, "Lord, give me enough faith to believe that you can increase my faith and help my unbelief."

How true that our greatest enemy is self. Here within is where the most desperate battles are fought in the conquest of sin. It is only when the self surrenders its way and becomes willing to accept God's way that we are enabled to choose right over wrong. The contest over the control of the will lies at the heart of every victory and every defeat. It is not a sin to struggle, nor is it wrong to be tempted. Conversion does not remove temptation, but rather makes it possible for the struggle to culminate in victory. This is why Jesus warns us, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

Then there must be a clear perception that our decisions and initial actions against sin do not in themselves obtain the victory. Deliverance is only made possible as divine power responds to the active choice not to sin. How often we limit the Lord by refusing to do what He has given us the power to do ourselves in overcoming sin. We have a mind, and we have a will. By choosing not to sin and putting that decision into action, the way is instantly opened for God to move against the enemy and secure our deliverance.

Is there a struggle, then, in subduing the flesh and escaping from the authority of sin? Indeed, there will be continual conflict in resisting the inherited propensities to disobey God. But the encouraging thing is that none of these efforts need to end with defeat. God causes us always to triumph as we exercise the natural weapons of decisive action against the enemy.

Taking a Stand

Paul did not intend for us to linger too long in the anguished pathways of chapter 7. It is a necessary place to pass through, but it is not made for Christian dwelling and living. After the law has shown us our need for the cleansing grace of Christ, our relationship with the law changes. No longer is there the clash between what must be done and what cannot be done.

Although chapter 8 still speaks of the law—the very same law—the futile struggle to keep it is finished. The carnal mind, which was not subject to that law, has now been changed into a spiritual mind. As children of Adam, we will possess his fallen nature until we are translated into glory when Christ returns, but the converted mind no longer is forced to obey the dictates of that fallen nature. The power of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for every Christian to choose not to sin. By daily dying to self and sin, the justified believer is enabled to overpower completely the propensities of his fallen nature and to live a life of total obedience to God. The One who has condemned sin in the flesh now fulfills in us the just requirements of the law, making obedience not only possible, but a glorious privilege indeed.

Thanks be to God! The word carnival comes from the Latin word "carne," which means flesh. In around a.d. 400, the great Roman Coliseum was often packed with spectators who had come to view the violent games.

The bloody entertainment consisted of watching human beings and wild beasts battle one another to the death. The assembled multitude wildly reveled in such sport and roared with delight when a person or beast was brutally slain. This is from where we get the world carnival.

But on one day, when the vast Coliseum crowd was watching a bloody gladiatorial battle, a Syrian monk, Telemachus, took action. Deeply grieved and outraged by the utter disregard for human life, he boldly leaped into the arena in the midst of the butchery and cried out, "This thing is not right! This thing must stop!" Because he interfered with the entertainment, the emperor of Rome commanded that Telemachus be run through with a sword. Thus he died. But through his courage and death, he kindled a flame in the hearts of thinking persons. History records that his sacrifice caused attendance to decline and soon cease altogether. Why? Because one man dared to speak out against the evil celebration of carnage. Despite the popular opinions that appeal to our passions, Christians cannot live for the flesh and still walk in the Spirit. We must speak out against sin, even when unpopular.

But the good news is that though we all travel through the wilderness experience of Romans 7, we can enter the Promised Land of chapter 8. Let your soul feast upon the milk and honey of freedom, victory, and adoption into the family of God. It is the very best place to pitch your tent and remain forever. Paul reserves his choicest words, his most unrestrained language, to portray the joy and security of those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Meditate long and often upon these verses, which depict so beautifully the experience that God desires every one of His children to manifest moment by moment:

"The Spirit itself beareth witness ... that we are the children of God. Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. ... And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God. ... For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. ... If God be for us, who can be against us? How shall he not freely give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:16–39).

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