

Romans Chapter 7- John Karmelich

1. My title for Romans Chapter 7 is “A Christian guide to understanding frustration”.
 - a) Frustration comes when our expectations are not met. We mentally want something to happen a certain way. When things don't go as we expect, we get frustrated.
 - b) This lesson is about frustration that we can control. For example, if you're angry because you want sunshine and it's raining, my only advice is to pray for acceptance.
 - c) Chapter 7 of Romans is on the frustration of “wanting to act better” and then failing. The classic modern example is dieting to lose weight. People desire to keep those diets, but get frustrated because they fail to do the things they want to do.
 - d) A big part of this lesson has to do with understanding our expectations vs. frustration:
 - i) In this chapter, Paul, the author of Romans gets frustrated.
 - ii) The last half of the chapter is Paul's personal testimony on how he desires to please God based on his own efforts, and ultimately fails.
 - iii) The great lesson Paul learns by the last verse of the chapter is we cannot please God through our own efforts. It requires the power of God to work through us.
 - e) This leads back to, “Christian expectations and frustration”. Our desire as Christians is to do God's will in every aspect of our lives. That does not mean prayer and fasting around the clock. ☺ Brushing our teeth and going to work are part of “God's will”.
 - i) We get frustrated because we want to please God. Yet, there are moments, or long periods where we ignore God. Further, there are issues in our life we try to solve through our own efforts instead of praying over them. In the end, we fail in our efforts. In summary, “without God, we can't”. That motto applies to every part of our life. We get frustrated when we fail on our own.
2. My subtitle for this chapter is, “why bother?” In other words, shall we stop trying?
 - a) The specific focus of this chapter is on God's laws. These are all the do's and don'ts of the bible. You can think of it as the “10 Commandments and expanded commentary” to keep it simple. To keep it even easier, you can summarize it as “Love God with all of your heart, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” The rest is commentary.
 - b) What Paul figures out, two-thirds of the way through the chapter is that no matter how hard Paul tried, he could not be perfect in keeping God's commands. This is not based on a one-moment experience, but on years and years of his life trying to please God.
 - i) It's like the perennial dieter. They eventually hit a point of frustration because they are fighting “their old nature” to eat whatever they want.
 - ii) Paul gets to a point near the end of the chapter, where he effectively yells out in frustration, “why bother?” In Verse 24 Paul says “What I wretched man I am”. This is Paul's self-disgust because he couldn't live up to his own expectations.
 - iii) The solution to the problem, as described in Romans Chapter 8, is that God wants us to “give up” in the sense that the desire to please God is possible, but by God working through us, and not by self-discipline. Putting God “on the throne of our hearts” gives us the power to accomplish His will for our life.
 - iv) To put it another way, God does not want to share credit for life's victories with anyone, including you and me. Using self-discipline as a means to get God's will done gives us partial credit. In the long run, it just gets us frustrated. Remember God is perfect. A perfect God has this set of perfect rules for us to follow. We need to follow them perfectly. Since we are imperfect beings, it is impossible.
3. This leads to Paul's and our “expectation frustration”:
 - a) The secret to living the Christian life is not to try harder. If anything, it is about “stop trying” to please God and let God work through us. More on this as we go in Chapter 7.

4. Chapter 7 Verse 1: Do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law – that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?
- a) Let's establish a couple of things first about this verse:
 - i) Who is Paul speaking to? "I (Paul) am speaking to men who know the law".
 - ii) Who else is Paul speaking to? He uses the word "brothers".
 - a) Some argue Paul is referring to his fellow Christian "brothers".
 - b) More likely, it refers to Paul's fellow Jewish Christians as the emphasis over the past few chapters has been on the Jewish law.
 - iii) What is Paul speaking about? "The law". It is better-translated "law" as opposed to "the law". It doesn't just refer to say, the 10 commandments or all the laws of the Old Testament. It includes the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. For example, we instinctively know stealing is wrong. That is part of "law".
 - iv) With that understood, Paul is mainly speaking about all the Old Testament laws. Coming up in Verse 2, Paul gives a law example from the Old Testament.
 - b) The next phrase is, "The law has authority over a man only as long as he lives".
 - i) The phrase "the law" includes the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. Even someone raised and isolated on a desert island is under the "rule" of the law, as they should instinctively know basic right from wrong.
 - ii) The more you know about God's commands, the more accountable you are. Paul is mainly talking to Jewish Christians. These are people educated on God's commands in the bible. They are "under the law" as they are accountable to know and obey the law based on their education.
 - c) Next question: Why is Paul getting into this discussion?
 - i) The last chapter focused on habitual and occasional sin. Paul gave us some educational steps on how to live a sin-much-less-often lifestyle.
 - ii) The most important thing to remember from Chapter 6 is God gives us the power to overcome any and all sin. What we need to do is harness that power.
 - d) This leads to a discussion of "nobody's perfect". Even if we follow the steps perfectly in Chapter 6, we are still going to mess up. The question then becomes, "why bother in the first place?" If we know we can't do it perfectly, why try?
 - e) Paul spent the last few verses of Chapter 6 emphasizing that "sin leads to death". Yes we are saved, but Paul also is teaching how all sin is bad and if left unchecked, leads to a miserable life. If we are imperfect beings and are going to suffer no matter what, why try in the first place?
 - i) The answer is "Chapter 8". Unfortunately, we need Chapter 7 first to explain our depravity. We need to understand the frustration of how bad we are as humans without God's help before we can get to the solution in the next chapter.
 - ii) Where Paul is going with this is the idea that, "The more we realize how depraved we are as human beings, the more we realize our dependency upon God for every aspect of our lives."
 - f) There is a classic saying in Christianity about maturity. A mark of a mature Christian is: "How much do you hate sin? How much do you love the sinner?"
 - i) Chapter 7 focuses on the first question of "hating sin". It is teaching us how bad our inner-sin-nature is. If we understand how bad we are or "can be", it makes us appreciate God's love all the more for the price paid on the cross for forgiveness.
 - ii) As for "loving the sinner", that is an issue covered later in Romans and more so in other parts of the bible including other writings by Paul. If we realize how bad we are as sinners, we can learn to be more sympathetic to other who do harm to us.

5. Verse 2: For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.
 - a) Let's start with the first words: "For example". Verses 2-3 are an illustration of the principal of being "under the law".
 - b) Let me give you an illustration. In our marriage vows, we promise to "love, honor and obey". If our husband or wife commands us to bring them a soda, and then they die, we can save our self a trip to the refrigerator. ☺ That command is now null and void.
 - c) Let me give you another illustration: You owe somebody one hundred dollars. You drop dead. You are no longer obligated to pay that money. It would be hard to collect. ☺
 - d) My point of these illustrations is to show obligation and death "freeing one" of that obligation. There are situations where one is freed from an obligation due to death.
 - e) In the Old Testament law, a man has a right to divorce a wife, but a wife does not have a right to divorce a husband. (See Deuteronomy Chapter 24). The only way a wife could get out from under obedience to a husband was by his death.
 - i) Paul is going to tie this illustration to us being "released" from the requirements of keeping the law. We'll get to that in Verse 4.
6. Verse 3: So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.
 - a) The illustration of "marriage obligation and death" continues in Verse 3.
 - b) Paul's illustration is that a woman is called an adulteress if she marries a second husband while husband #1 is still alive. If husband #1 dies prior to her getting remarried, then she is not guilty of the sin of adultery.
 - c) Paul is saying the same principal of "no more marital obligations to a dead spouse" applies to our new Christian-relationship and God's laws. That doesn't mean God's laws are null and void. It means we are no longer bound as duty to obey them. We'll get a lot more into the implication of that concept in this lesson as well as the next one.
7. Verse 4: So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.
 - a) In the last chapter, we spent some time talking about "association" and baptism. To recap, when we go under water in baptism, we associate our old life "dead". When we come up out of the water, it is symbolic of our new life in Christ.
 - i) Tying that thought back to the "widow's remarriage" of Verses 2-3, we as Christians died to the obligation of keeping the law.
 - ii) Before we gave our lives to Jesus, we were obligated by "the law" whether we realized or not, and whether we liked it or not. Again, even if we just understood the "instinctive" law, we were obligated to that. If we had any head-knowledge of say, the 10 Commandments or all the Old Testament laws, we are accountable for keeping those laws. God holds us accountable based on what we know.
 - b) The next issue is that we "died to the law". What does that mean?
 - i) We are guilty of breaking the law. However, we as Christians accept Jesus' payment on the cross as our payment for breaking that law.
 - ii) Since the payment was taken care of, we are no longer under the requirements of the law. The same way a widow is no longer required to obey a dead husband, we as Christians are no longer required to obey "dead laws to us".
 - iii) Does that mean we can do whatever we want and ignore all those laws? No. You forgot to read the fine print. ☺ If we are "free" from the law, like a widow freed from marriage vows, it is because we now are married to another, which is Jesus. The church, collectively, is called "the bride of Christ". (See Revelation 19:7 and 21:9). Our behavior still matters. The methodology of obedience is the issue.

- iv) We are not “dead to the law” so we can go live an immoral lifestyle. I guess that in theory, you can put your trust in Jesus and go live how you want. The question becomes, why would you want to? God loves us with an unconditional love. He wants us to respond to that love. He wants us to show Him unconditional love. Remember in the last lesson the idea of “volunteer slavery”. God wants us to respond to Him as if we are “volunteer slaves” to Him. It is the idea that all that we have and “are” and all we will ever be, now belongs to God.
- c) Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17, NIV)
 - i) Jesus fulfilled the law by paying the full price of punishment for our disobedience to the law. The requirements of keeping those laws still exist, past, present and future. That is why Jesus said, “He did not come to abolish the law”. He came to “fulfill” the law in terms of bearing our punishment for failure to keep those laws.
- d) The next phrase of Verse 7 says, “In order that we might bear fruit to God.”
 - i) What is a (not the) purpose of the cross? “That we might bear fruit to God.”
 - ii) God the Father did not send Jesus to die on the cross so we can then go live an immoral lifestyle, knowing our sins are paid for. There is a greater purpose.
 - iii) It starts with accepting the fact that God created us. He created us with a purpose in mind. That purpose has to do with a love relationship. I’ll explain further:
 - a) God is perfect. He is perfect in His love. If you have a gift as an artist, you want to express that gift even if you can’t get paid for it. Let’s say you really love playing the violin. You hear music in your head that you want to express that music on the violin. Assuming you have the time, finances and physical ability, you “just play” because you love it so much, even if people don’t ask you to play.
 - iv) God has love for us in that same sense. God has so much love, He needs to express that love upon someone, and He picked humans. That is why He created us, as God wanted someone to express His love upon. If God stuck a gun to our head and said, “love me back”, we would obligate under fear. “True love” back to God requires free will. God demonstrated how much He loves us by sending His son to die on our behalf. God is looking for us to respond to that love.
- e) This leads back to Verse 7: Again, “In order that we might bear fruit to God”.
 - i) It is not as simple as saying, “Gee God, thanks for the cross-thingy, I’ll be on my way now.” ☺ God wants to have a love-relationship.
 - a) He wants us to grow in our love for Him.
 - b) That comes by appreciating what He has done for us.
 - c) That comes by realizing just how bad our sinful life is.
 - d) That comes by growing in our dependency upon God. Again, think of it as “volunteer slavery” of us to God.
 - e) That comes from us harnessing God’s power through our lives to make it better. We do that from prayer and trust in Him.
 - f) It is through that power that we “bear fruit to God”.
- f) Let’s talk about “bearing fruit”. Think of a fruit tree:
 - i) Does a tree stress and worry to bear its fruit? Does a tree go out to a bar after work and tell his buddies, “Boy, did I have a tough day at the farm today!” ☺
 - ii) No, a tree is dependant “upon God”. It has its roots deep in the ground and then “let God do its thing”.
 - iii) In this overly simple illustration, God asks us to trust Him, and then move forward in our life knowing God is guiding us. God never asks us to sit still so He can drag us around. God asks us to move in life knowing that He is guiding us.

- iv) Are things going wrong? Than God maybe is “closing doors” and wants us to change direction. We need to love God with all our might, pray for guidance, study the God-inspired bible for guidance, and then “go do what we want”. Then, we “bear fruit” for God because, like the tree, we are “deep rooted” in God.
 - v) Jesus said, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:7-8 NIV).
 - g) To sum up Verse 4 of Romans 7, we are “widowed” to marital-like obligation of law-obedience and God then desires we “re-marry” to Him in a love relationship so strong we desire to live like a volunteer slave to God’s commands. Through God’s power, we can then bear fruit like a fruit tree, as we are deep rooted in God’s power.
8. Verse 5: For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.
- a) Let’s get back to the concept of “nobody’s perfect”: No matter how well we can try to be a good moral person without God’s help, we can’t do it. We are born with a sin nature as an inherit trait. Trying to remove one’s sin nature would be like trying to change the color of one’s eyes. You can put color contacts over those eyes, but it won’t change what’s on the inside. Like our eye colors, we are born and stuck with a sin-nature.
 - b) So why doesn’t God just take that away from us when we are born again? The answer is if we never sinned, we would easily forget about God. The illustration I like is, “When you send your child off to college, you don’t give them all the money they need on day one. You give it to them a little at a time so they stay in contact”. ☺ God keeps the sin nature inside of us to keep us close to Him.
 - c) Now let’s get back to the law. All people are “subjected” to the law:
 - i) Those living on say, deserted islands are under “instinctive law”.
 - ii) Those with knowledge of the bible are accountable to that law.
 - iii) Those living say, in the United States where just about any literate adult can get a bible for free is accountable because the law is “readily available”.
 - iv) Just so you know, we’ll get to the subject of little kids and accountability later in this lesson. Hold tight if you’re thinking about that one. ☺
 - d) No matter what level of knowledge we have, we are accountable to that knowledge. God sets up His standards of right and wrong and we are accountable to those standards. A perfect God requires a perfect score in obligation to that law. There is no grading curve. ☺
 - i) Therefore, any violation of the law at any point in our “accountable life” leads to a death sentence. There is an old joke that says, “There are two ways to get into heaven. One is to be perfect all of your life and never sin. Then you can tell Jesus to move over. ☺ The other is to accept Jesus’ payment for your sins.
 - ii) Whether or not we like it, God makes the rules. We play by His rules and not ours. His rules say we must be perfect to be with Him in heaven.
 - e) Now, we can get back to the verse itself. Paul is keeping on the point that like a widow dead to the obligations of her deceased husband, we are dead to the obligations of keeping the law as the penalty has been paid.
 - i) Did you sin in the past? The penalty has been paid on the cross.
 - ii) Did you sin this day? The penalty has been paid on the cross.
 - iii) Are you going to sin in the future? The penalty has been paid on the cross.
 - iv) There is a mistaken notion that Jesus only died for the sins up to the point where we became born-again. That is wrong thinking. He died for all of our sins, past present and future. That is why we are “dead” to the payment obligation of sin.

- f) That “release” from our old way of live now gives us the privilege to serve God in a new way. Since the payment was taken care of, we are now free to live a “love relationship” with God. We are free to be a “volunteer slave” to Him. God now gives us power, through the Holy Spirit living inside of us to live a productive life as His witnesses.
 - i) This leads back to the sin-less-often lifestyle as described in Chapter 6. As a “bride” of Jesus, we now have the power to sin-less-often. It is a matter of us harnessing that power, mainly through prayer. It starts with the idea that we are trusting that God is working through us for the better. We trust in that fact as we go forward in life. In 2nd Corinthians 1:22, for example, we learn that the Holy Spirit is indwelling all believers. Part of the Holy Spirit’s job is giving us the power to live the life that God desires for us.
 - ii) The great lesson of the Old Testament is man’s failure to please God by self-discipline and through one’s own efforts. The great lesson of the New Testament is that it is possible to live a life pleasing to God by letting the power of God work through us. With that, we can live a life pleasing to God.
 - g) “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” (Col. 1:10-12, NIV)
 - i) My point here is that in Paul’s letter to the Colossians (“Col. 1:10-12”), he would not have offered that prayer (see the third word above) unless it was possible to please God “in every way”.
 - ii) With all of this in mind, it may help to reread Verses 5-6 of Romans 7 again.
9. Verse 7: What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”
- a) Verse 7 opens with the question: “Is the law sin?” Paul is asking in effect, “Since we are saved by God’s grace, is the law itself sinful?” In other words, Paul is implying, “Is God’s law a waste of time? If we are no longer under the obligation of the law, do we just ignore it? Why was it necessary in the first place?” The answer is no, and I’ll explain.
 - b) Let me give you an illustration: If we were driving down a road and a sign said 35 miles per hour, and we were driving 50 miles per hour, we are guilty of speeding. If there were no signs that said 35 miles per hour, how could we know that we were speeding?
 - i) My point here is that God’s law shows us how guilty we are.
 - ii) If we didn’t know God’s laws in the first place, then we are not guilty.
 - iii) That is what Paul meant by “I would not have known what sin was except through the law.” We need to have God’s laws in order to know we are guilty of violating those laws. Again, at the least, we all have this instinctive law that murder and theft is wrong. Over and above that, most of us today have information on God’s laws readily available to us.
 - c) If you study through the Old Testament laws, they are “good and reasonable”. You can think of God’s laws as an expanded commentary on how to love God and how to love your neighbor as yourself. If you desire to love God and your neighbor, all the Old Testament laws fall under those categories. (Jesus said so in effect in Matthew 22:40.)
 - d) What about all those food laws? The Old Testament (Leviticus) has a bunch of “You can eat this, but not that” rules. The answer is if you knew you could only eat certain foods, this would help you get your focus upon God when pondering what’s for dinner. ☺ Those food laws also are word-pictures designed to teach us things about our relationship with God. Further, Christians are not required to keep those food laws. Christians and the “food laws” are a whole other lesson.

- i) The New Testament is our guide to which Old Testament laws apply today. Obviously stealing and murder are still on the books. ☺ There are others, such as the food laws, which strictly apply to the Jewish people.
 - ii) Many of those laws are behavior laws. They are designed to give us a productive and happy life. In summary, the laws themselves are not bad. It is our violation of those laws that cause problems.
 - e) There is a mistake many people make in preaching the Gospel message. You can't give the "good news" unless you give the "bad news" first. My point is people have to know they are sinner before they are willing to accept Jesus payment for their sins.
 - f) Unfortunately, most people think they get to go to heaven because their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. They don't accept the Gospel message because they think they are "good people". People need to understand they are "sinners" before they are willing to accept Jesus as payment for their sins. Part of the Holy Spirit's job is to convict people of that guilt. All we have to ask is for example, "Have you ever violated one of the 10 commandments even once? What does that make you? (A sinner). Our job is to present the Gospel message. God himself (through the Holy Spirit) is the one who convicts people of their sins and draws them to Jesus. Our job is just to present the message.
 - g) Now let's get back to these verses. Paul picks one of the 10 commandments: "Do not covet." (Exodus 20:17). To covet means to desire something that does not belong to you. It is desiring something that is not legally yours. It can be a "thing" or a person, like say, someone else's spouse. Paul is saying he would never have known he was guilty of "coveting" unless he understood what that law meant in the first place.
10. Verse 8: But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.
- a) Let me get back to an illustration I gave several lessons back. There is something inside of us that when we read a sign that says, "Do not push this button", it makes us all the more want to push that button.
 - i) It may be because our ego wants to be charge and not take authority from others.
 - ii) It may be because of the adrenaline rush we get. It is addictive. We know we are violating some sort of law. That guilt produces an adrenaline rush inside of us.
 - iii) Paul's point is the same as "wanting to push the button". There is something about knowing the law that makes it want to violate it all the more.
 - b) Paul's next point is, "For apart from law, sin is dead".
 - i) Going back to the speeding illustration, if there were no signs posted as to the speed limit, we can legally plead not guilty.
 - ii) Suppose there was neither a written set of God's laws nor any instinctive law. Let's suppose that we also understand there is a God. We would then wonder, "What do I have to do to get into heaven? What are the rules? How do I know I have obeyed those rules? "Rules" are necessary for us so we can have assurance of what it takes to get into heaven in the first place. Paul is making the argument of why God's laws are necessary for our benefit.
11. Verse 9: Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.
- a) Let's look at the first phrase: Once I was alive apart from law". What does that mean?
 - i) It refers to babies. They have no idea what "law" means. They have no concept of right and wrong. They just want their bottles, blankets and clean diapers. ☺
 - ii) This verse means that babies are "saved" until some age of accountability. When does that age begin? My theory is that it is different with each person.

- iii) Many Christian churches use age 13 as a starting age of accountability. The Roman Catholic Church has a formal ritual of “confirmation” that occurs when one is at least 13. In Judaism, 13-year old boys confirm their faith with a “Bar-Mitzvah” ceremony. Science has shown that around the age of 13, one develops the idea of reason and one can think for themselves as to right and wrong.
 - a) Am I sure “age 13” is it? No. That is just what is practiced. My personal view is that it is different with every individual.
 - b) The classic bible example is about child-salvation is David and the death of his son:
 - i) David and Bathsheba had an affair. She got pregnant. After the baby was born, God pronounced judgment that the baby would die. David fasted and prayed for God to change His mind. God didn’t and the baby died. After the baby died, David went back to living his life. David believed the baby is in heaven and stated as much. It wasn’t the baby’s fault that David had sinned. My point here is that the baby is saved as he was not accountable. (Reference: 2nd Samuel Chapter 12).
 - ii) Does that mean every baby of every pagan person is saved? Don’t know, the bible is silent on that issue and we can only speculate. My view is that God is perfect and a perfect God will judge all people fairly. If I believe God is perfect, I don’t have to lose sleep worrying about that issue. I have enough problems. ☺
 - c) Verse 9 then says, “But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.”
 - i) That means that once Paul understood the law, he realized that he was now accountable to it. Once Paul understood he was not perfect and had violated the law even as a youth, he is now guilty. That is what he meant by “I died”.
 - ii) An age of accountability does not mean the “sin meter” starts from that point. The age of accountability is when we are old enough and rational enough to comprehend that we are accountable to God’s standards of right and wrong. Again, many churches use the age of 13 as a rough guideline. I’ve personally seen younger children who get it. I know many adults who suppress it. ☺
- 12. Verse 10: I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.
 - a) Let me paraphrase Paul’s line of thinking here: “There was a time in my (Paul’s) life when I thought that I could get into heaven by being obedient to the law. After all, the Old Testament has a whole set of animal sacrifice rituals to perform when I sinned. I thought that all I had to do is obey all of the laws. I studied all of the famous rabbi’s and their interpretation of the laws and how to obey them. I mentally put a “check” next to my name as I thought I was following them with a strict sense of obedience.”
 - i) In modern terms, “Paul thought he was a good person”. Walk down the street and ask people if they believe they are going to heaven. The most common answer will be “Yes, because I am a good person”. They will list the good things they have done with their lives. Many people mistakenly think of their life as an accomplishment list for God to accept and then let them into heaven. People tend to make their own list of right and wrong and live by those standards as opposed to God’s laws.
 - ii) In both Paul’s case, and the “average person not turning their lives over to God”, they believe it is possible to get into heaven by obeying “some” set of laws.
 - b) Which leads to a comment in Verse 11: “sin...deceived me”. What does that mean?
 - i) It means Paul figured out that no matter how hard he tried, how disciplined he became, he could never be perfect. No matter how hard he tried to please God by keeping the law, it was never enough. Once Paul fully comprehended God’s standards for obedience, Paul figured out he couldn’t do it.

- c) Let's go back to the Old Testament's laws on forgiveness. The book of Leviticus has a whole set of rituals in order to get forgiveness. Chapters 4 and 5 especially have about eight references to forgiveness if a certain ritual is performed.
 - i) That is about God forgiving our individual sins. It doesn't get rid of our inherited "sin disease". Leviticus says in effect, "When you commit a particular sin, do this ritual and God will forgive that sin". The book never deals with our sin-nature. The 2,000 history of Judaism from Abraham to Jesus shows that the sin problem never went away. The last 2,000 year history of the Christian church also shows the sin problem is still within us. My point is the confession of individual sins has never released us of the "sin disease" within us.
 - d) Now let's get back to Verse 11 and "sin...deceived me": Paul understood that no matter how he tried, he could never be perfect. Paul had a life-changing moment where he realized he needed to "stop trying to be perfect" in keeping the law as it is not possible. That does not mean one ignores God's laws. It just means that we are unable to keep those laws through our own power.
13. Verses 12: So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.
- a) Let me paraphrase Paul's point: "It's not the law's themselves that are bad, just me. I have no problem with God's laws themselves. They are a great set of rules in order to live a happy and productive life. My (Paul's) problem is no matter how hard I try, I can't obey them all of the time. No matter how hard I push myself, I can't do it."
 - b) Going back to the speeding illustration early in this lesson, it would be like us realizing, "You know 35 mph is a good speed limit for this location. I don't have a problem with that law. It is my fault I violated the law and I can't blame the law itself."
 - c) That's the idea of God's laws. They're good laws. "We" are the problem, not God's laws.
14. Verse 13: Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.
- a) A few verses back, Paul asked the question in effect, "Is the law itself sin? If God's laws show us how bad we are, is it wrong to have those laws in the first place?" The answer is no, because it is not God's laws themselves that are bad, it is our own failure to live up to those laws that is the problem.
 - b) Verse 13 is a similar question: I like "The Living Bible's" translation of Verse 13. It says, "Didn't the law cause my doom?" In other words, can we blame a "perfect God" for giving us a set of laws we can't live up to?
 - i) At some point in our lives, we comprehend the existence of God. We know at the least, instinctively murder and theft is wrong. Most of us get exposure to say, the 10 Commandments or all of the Old Testament laws. Those who seek God then accept the idea those laws are God's standards to get into heaven.
 - ii) We then realize we are not perfect. We think back in our lives and realize that we have failed to be fully obedient. Those laws convicted us of our sins.
 - c) What Paul is saying in effect is "Don't blame the messenger for the bad news". The laws themselves are not bad. It's not God's fault we can't obey them, but ours. Even though our sin nature is an inherit trait, we can't blame God for our sinful nature.
 - i) This leads us back to Romans 5 and the discussion of Adam sinning. Adam was our "representative" of the best of mankind before God. Adam lived in a perfect setting. He had no emotional baggage from his past. He had no excuses. He didn't resist the temptation to sin. What makes us think we can do better?
15. Verse 14: We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.
- a) Paul is saying God's set of laws is from God, and since God is perfect by definition, that makes the laws a good thing, whether we obey them or not. That is what Paul meant by the first phrase, "The law is spiritual".

- b) Paul then says, “I am unspiritual”. Remember that a purpose of the Spirit of God (i.e. The Holy Spirit) is to remind us of how guilty we are before God the Father when we sin.
 - i) Which reminds us: it is not our job as humans to make others feel guilty of sin. Our job is simply to say, “Here are God’s commandments for right and wrong”. The Holy Spirit is more than capable all by himself of convicting people of sins. He doesn’t need us to criticize and put others down!
 - c) Paul is referring to himself in a “past tense”. He is describing the fact that all humans inherit this “sin disease” whether we realize it or not.
 - d) Are you saying a cute innocent baby has sin from day one? Yes, although it takes some time to manifest itself. I’ve yet to see little child tell other children, “No go ahead, you play with this toy for awhile. I’ll pick something else”. ☺ I’m sure that if a baby had adult strength, they would punch out their parents when they wanted their bottle. My point is I’m convinced “innocent” children are born with the inherit sin trait.
 - e) The last phrase is “slave to sin”. The next set of verses is where Paul gives his own early life story of how he became a slave to sin. To paraphrase “slave to sin”, it means that no matter how hard we try, we fail. Self-discipline is never enough.
16. Verse 15: I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.
- a) From Verse 15 to the end of the chapter, Paul is going to focus on himself as an example.
 - i) Paul refers to himself 46 times in Chapter 7. That’s self-indulgent. ☺
 - b) Paul is saying of himself in this verse, “No matter how hard I try, sooner or later I fail.”
 - c) The point of this chapter is, “No matter how hard we try on our own, we can’t please God. Paul is saying in this personal story, “Believe me, I tried to do it on my own. I probably tried as hard as anyone in history. It’s not that I’m weaker than other people. I gave it my best shot for many years. I had to learn the hard way it’s impossible.”
 - d) For those of us who have ever tried dieting, we can relate to this verse. We want to lose weight. We discipline ourselves to only eat certain foods. Sooner or later temptation comes back and then we say like Paul, “what I want to do I do not do”.
 - i) For others, it may be trying to go a period of time without losing our temper. For some, it may be going a time without cursing. “Pick your poison”. No matter how hard we try to stop something through self-discipline it can’t be done.
 - e) In the last lesson, I talked about the idea that the only way to kill a bad habit like a drug addiction is to “crucify it to death”. It has to be ignored in order for the urges to go away. The difference between Verse 15 and the last lesson has to do with God’s power to help us. Paul is saying he can’t be a better person based on his own efforts. The last chapter taught how we need God’s power in order to accomplish everything and anything.
 - f) So why can’t I pray my way into losing weight or stop cursing? Maybe you can. It starts by asking! Beware of the danger of saying “I (emphasis) did it with God’s help”. God doesn’t share credit with anyone, including us. A better approach is “God, this is up to you. If it is your desire for me to stop (fill in the blank), work through me to change. May I give You all the credit and learn to work on your timing and not mine. Help me to accept Your will for my life and at the same time, work through Your power to be the person You desire me to be, Amen”.
 - g) What about people who does accomplish things through self-discipline? There are some things in life that can be done this way. Some people have more willpower than others do. Paul’s point is no matter how much willpower one has, there is some limit. We all have our strong suites and our weak suites.
17. Verse 16: And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.
- a) Let’s go back to my diet illustration: Suppose a doctor tells you that you need to go on a low fat diet and avoid certain foods. You do so for a while and then fall into temptation. Do you then blame the doctor for giving you this “impossible” lifestyle to live by?

- i) Although we do blame the doctor, it is not his or her fault. A healthy eating lifestyle will help us to lose excess fat. The problem isn't the doctor or their advice, but our ability to follow that advice.
 - b) The same applies to God's laws. Paul is saying his failure to keep God's laws is not God's fault for giving those laws or the laws themselves. The blame fully falls on ourselves even though we are born with this sin nature. Paul's whole point is we have no one to blame but ourselves when we fail.
 - c) So, what does this mean practically? Should we never try to please God in the first place? If we are born with this sin disease, and no matter how hard we try, we're going to mess up. Should we not try in the first place? This is Paul's big point throughout the chapter. The answer comes mainly in Chapter 8 and the remainder of Romans. We can live a life pleasing to God through God's power working in us. Paul's main point in Chapter 7 is we can't do it through self-discipline.
18. Verse 17: As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.
- a) The bad part about studying these verses a little at a time is we miss the flow of the entire chapter as a whole. Paul is spending the last half of Chapter 7 putting himself down. If you study Chapter 7 without this commentary, it's pretty depressing. I make it worse. ☹
 - b) Paul is stating how he realized how bad his own sin was. Near the opening of this lesson that a mark of a mature Christian is the realization of just how bad sin is, and how much damage it does to our lives. Paul is giving his own personal testimony to that fact.
 - c) Now let's discuss Verse 17: Notice the words "do it". That refers to any and all sin. Paul is saying in effect, that no matter how hard he tries not to sin, it still happens, because Paul understands he is born with this "sin disease" and he's stuck with it.
19. Verse 18: I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.
- a) If you think Chapter 7 is depressing so far, it gets worse. ☹
 - b) The key word here is "nothing". Paul says there is nothing good inside of us. We're fully rotten on the inside, other than God's help. It is like bad fruit that has to be thrown away.
 - i) Does that mean we're not capable of doing any good on our own? What about people who accomplish great things who never seek God? The answer is, who do you think gave those people the ability to accomplish those things in the first place? Just because those people don't honor God with their talents, doesn't mean God didn't give it to them in the first place!
 - ii) If God only gave great gifts to say, Christians, people would turn to God for the "benefits", and not for the love-relationship with God desires for us.
 - c) Remember the cliché of "Without God, we can't". If we understand the fact that we can't do any good thing without God's help, it should make us all the more dependant upon God for every aspect of our lives. We then give God all the credit for the good we do.
 - d) The mistake we make as Christians is to tell God in so many words, "OK, God, I need your help with "a, b, and c", but I have "x, y and z" covered all by myself and I don't need your help." I have found in life God let's us stumble more in our "strong suits" than our "weak suits". The classic biblical example is Peter. If you study the Gospels, Peter was known for boldness. He was a "shoot first, ask questions later" kind of guy. Yet, the one area of his life where he stumbled was that he was too afraid to stand up for Jesus during the times of Jesus' trial. (i.e., when Peter denied Jesus three times).
20. Verse 19: For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.
- a) Remember that Paul was a Pharisee prior to his conversion. (See Philippians 3:5). That means that Paul lived a strict, disciplined life to follow God's commands.
 - b) Back in Verse 7 of this chapter, Paul said he was guilty of "Do not covet". That means to desire something that doesn't belong to you.

- c) Paul realized that by working so hard by self-discipline, he was making a “little god” out of his ability to try to keep the law. What Paul “coveted” was the desire to please God based on his own efforts. It would give Paul the glory, and not God. Paul realized that all of his efforts made him a “sinner”. That was Paul’s great realization.
 - d) To paraphrase this verse, “No matter how hard I try, I keep messing up. No matter how hard I try to diet, that chocolate cake keeps disappearing from the fridge. ☺ No matter how hard I say I won’t curse anyone, I lose it when people cut me off in traffic. No matter how much tell myself I will have love for my neighbors, I get angry at them when their dogs relieve themselves on my lawn. ☺
21. Verse 20: Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.
- a) To paraphrase Paul, “I can’t help myself. No matter how hard I try to do good, I get the idea that this sin nature is inside of me and it’s not going away no matter how hard I try.”
 - b) There is a sense that the last few verses is Paul going on and on with the same point. I think Paul spent years trying to live a self-disciplined life and the realization he couldn’t do it hurt him badly. These last few verses are Paul pouring out his frustration on paper.
 - i) Paul is pleading with us over and over again to not make the same mistake. He is pounding the point of “It can’t be done”. You can’t make God happy by trying hard enough.
 - ii) To a veteran Christian this may be an old point. To a nonbeliever this is a shocker.
 - iii) To a Christian, this should be a reminder to keep an internal checklist and watch for items that we still haven’t given over to God. One possible reason we still have some habitual problem is we want to give God and us the credit for change and/or the issue that we’re not willing to work on God’s timing or His methods.
 - c) Now let’s get back to the opening theme of “Why bother?” Let’s say we get the idea that we can’t make God happy based on self-discipline. We may even get the idea that we can be pleasing to God based on His power working through us. If we are saved by God’s grace alone, why bother trying to please God? The answer is gratitude. God wants a love relationship based on gratitude for His love expressed through the cross.
 - d) Paul’s error, like our error, is Paul wanted to show God how good Paul was. Paul figured out it’s impossible due to our inherit sin nature. We can only please God by trusting in what He did, not what we can do. We still need to “bother” to live a life pleasing to Him. The “trick” is not to rely on our own self-discipline to accomplish that pleasing life.
22. Verse 22: For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.
- a) If you recall from my last lesson, I talked about two fighting dogs, and the stronger dog was the one who was feed the most the past week. I then said we have “two fighting dogs within us”. One is our old sinful nature and the other is the Spirit of God living within us. Those two natures fight within us for control.
 - i) It is like asking at any one moment, “Is God in control of our lives, or ourselves?” That is the “two fighting dogs” within us.
 - b) Now let’s get back to Verses 22-23: In Verse 22, Paul says he “delights in Gods’ law”. That is the Spirit of God telling us that God’s law is right and good. We can’t feel guilty for violating God’s laws if we are not convinced those laws are good in the first place.
 - c) Verse 23 is Paul understanding sin as a physical law. A physical law is for example, gravity. You may say, “I don’t believe in gravity and I’m going to jump off this 10-story building to prove it”. Just because we may deny gravity, it still exists. The same applies to our sin nature. We may deny our internal sin’s existence, but it is still there.
 - i) Paul calls himself a “prisoner to the law of sin”. That is the same as us being a prisoner to the law of gravity. It’s there and we have to deal with it.

- d) Another nature all humans have is the desire to “worship something”. As I’ve stated, all humans have the need to worship God. Some suppress that need and most express that need through some other “god”, be it fame, fortune or some false religious concept.
 - i) Christians channel that desire to serve God by trying to please God.
 - ii) The “sin problem” exists just as much as that desire to serve God. Since they are contrary to each other, there is an “internal war” that goes on for control.
 - iii) We constantly struggle between “God on our throne” versus “us on our throne”. That is the internal battle of Verses 22-23. Paul got that.
23. Verse 24: What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!
- a) Verse 24 is Paul hitting rock-bottom. It is Paul’s realization of how bad sin is inside of him. Paul got it so bad he couldn’t sink any lower.
 - b) My opening theme of this lesson was, “A Christian guide to understanding frustration”. Paul got it. He understood how hopeless it was to please God based on his own efforts. Paul could now end his frustration because he understood the solution: Give up trying to please God on our own and let God take over”.
 - c) The first sentence of Verse 25 is a preview of the optimistic things to come. It is an insert of Paul saying, “Thank God the Father that there is a solution to the problem that I can’t please God no matter how I try.” That last sentence is the theme of Chapter 8. More on that in the next lesson. As a preview, Chapter 8 is the high point of Romans. If I were stuck on a desert island with only one chapter of Scripture, I’d probably take Romans 8 with me. It might be the best single chapter of “hope” one can find
24. Verse 25 b: So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.
- a) Paul just couldn’t end this section on a high note. He had to get in one more shot of depression. ☹
 - b) Paul understood that he had two natures inside of him. One is a “slave” to God’s law in that we are born with this inherit need to worship God. We are a “slave” to that built-in need whether we like it or not.
 - c) The other realization is that we are a “slave” to sin. It’s like gravity. We’re stuck with sin like we’re “stuck” with gravity.
 - d) The last sentence is a summary of Chapter 7. It is Paul understanding the fact that the Spirit of God, residing within Paul has to wrestle with Paul’s old sinful nature. Paul understood the source of his frustration.
25. In Chapter 8, we’ll deal with how to end this frustration. One has to understand the problem before one can deal with it. Chapter 7 is about understanding the frustration of pleasing God through our efforts. Chapter 8 is the solution, which is the next lesson.
- a) I’ll end with the thought that dealing with Christian “expectation-frustration” is not a one-time-and-it’s over thing. We can’t pray a magic prayer and then have bliss the rest of our lives. The rest of our lives will be a battle of “God’s in charge of our life” versus “Us in charge of our lives”. God keeps that sin-nature within us after we are born-again to:
 - i) 1) Keep us close to Him and dependent upon Him;
 - ii) 2) To teach us through life just how bad sin is; and finally:
 - iii) 3) God is teaching us a life-long lesson of “without God, we can’t”.
26. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, Help us to comprehend that we cannot please you through our own efforts. Help us to realize how dependant we are for You for every aspect of our lives. In moments of frustration in our lives, help us to remember that You are in charge and we are not. Help us to “let go and let God” rule over that aspect of our lives. Help us to abide in You in our lives. Let your power work through us, so that we can live a life pleasing to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.