

# Romans 7:12-25 “How to Live for God”

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**Thesis:** C.S. Lewis observed, “No one knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good. We never know how hard it is to stop sinning until we try.” This is the reality for every follower of Jesus. Each of us have areas of our life that we have yielded to God, and each of us have aspects of our attitudes and actions that are not yet set-apart to God. This is the unpleasant reality: we do things that we know we shouldn’t, and fail to do things that we know we should. In the midst of this epic struggle, how can you live for God? The good news is that the way to please God is not burdensome, but is a blessing.

**Subject:** How to be set apart to God [Sanctification]

**Object:** Please God through life with Christ

Sanctification, or being set-apart to God, has two aspects. First, there is *positional* sanctification.

When you receive Christ, you are immediately and completely perfect in your position before God.

Second, there is *practical* sanctification which is the idea of yielding more of your will to God’s will.

Practical sanctification is a process. Jesus’ followers make progress in the process.

## 1. The Benefit of The Law [12-16]

*Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good [12].<sup>13</sup> Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.*

Paul reminds us that God's commands through Moses are holy, just, spiritual, and good [12-16]. The law is a compass that reveals God's moral perfection; and what we are to be, do, and not do. The law reveals your sin that separates you from God [13]. The problem is that the law doesn't provide the power to stop sinning. Like a bathroom scale that reveals your weight, it can motivate, but can also frustrate. Trying to please God by perfect performance of the law is an onerous burden. As Peter observed, "The law is a yoke that neither we or our fathers could bear" [Ac. 15:10-11].

## 2. The Battle with The Flesh [14-23]

*<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. <sup>16</sup> If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. <sup>17</sup> But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I will not to do, it is*

*no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* <sup>21</sup> *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.*

Paul declares, *I am carnal, sold under sin* [14]. This is a reference to the flesh nature opposed to God and controlled by sin.

**The will and flesh struggle so that we don't do what we want to do; and do what we don't want to do [14-21].** Seven times in these verses, we see the term *will* referring to intent or desire. We may truly want to do the right thing, or avoid doing the wrong thing, but despite truly good intentions and desires, we end up with actions and attitudes that are not pleasing to God. We cannot be set-apart to God in our own strength. The problem is not a lack of knowledge or desire, but power. Our fallen human nature lacks power to overcome sin, and is not motivated to glorify God, or live to please God.

When Jesus foretold that all the disciples would deny Him, Peter proudly declared that he would never deny Jesus. Soon thereafter, Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane with Peter, and he repeatedly fell asleep. Jesus warned, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak" [Matt. 25:31-41].

When Paul writes, *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me* [17], he is not disavowing responsibility for his sin, but he recognizes that sin is contrary to his new nature in Christ [2Cor. 5:17].

*In verse 18, Paul distills the essence of the problem, For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find [18]. There is nothing in the flesh nature that wants to yield to God, and when you truly desire to please God discovering how to do what is good can be elusive.*

**The believer's mind and flesh struggle [22-23].** *<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. <sup>23</sup> 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.*

The believer's mind wants to please God, but the flesh nature is just as prone to sin as before you were saved.

This battle between our old flesh nature and the mind and will is discouraging, difficult, and discovering how to be set apart to God and please Him can be elusive as noted by Paul in verse eighteen. So, what's the answer?

### **3. The blessing of the Christ [24-25]**

*<sup>24</sup> O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> 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.*

Paul cries out, *O wretched man that I am!* [24]. The Greek refers to a person who is exhausted and desperate. Trying to please God apart from Jesus and His gospel is exhausting and frustrating. Paul asks, *Who will deliver me from this body of death?* [24]. Knowing *who* can deliver us from domination by the flesh, answers the elusive *how* [25,18].

*I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* [25]. The way to experience positional and practical sanctification is by making Jesus Lord.

**You please God through Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, yielding to Him, and progressive submission to Him.** It is the Person, Jesus, and what He has done. Self-help is not the answer. In verses 9-25 there are more than forty (40) first person pronouns. Paul bemoans the inadequacy of his strength, we simply cannot please God apart from Christ [25]. Remembering what Christ has done, the gospel of grace and God's love motivates us to live as people set-apart to God. How can you grow in Christ?

**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [2Pet. 3:18].**

We simply yield to Jesus, learn of Him and from Him, and we discover His peace and contentment as we progressively are transformed to be more like Him [Matt. 11:28-30] and have greater victory over the flesh by the power of the Spirit [Rom. 8:1-17]. In practice, it may be helpful to think about exercising to godliness [1Tim. 4:7-10]. Bodily exercise profits a little because it is temporal, but

growing in godliness or sanctification has eternal benefits. Here is a simple spiritual exercise plan that can help you make progress [Ac .2:42-47] :

**Bible learning:** personal study, and regularly attend a large gathering and small group where you learn the Bible together.

**Prayer:** create and protect time to pray for your own needs and the needs of others, and to simply listen and contemplate Jesus and His still small voice speaking to you.

**Fellowship:** Commit to regularly gather with other believers to grow in Christ, and grow with one another.

**Serving:** We serve God by serving others, as led by God's Spirit [Rom. 7:6] not to earn God's favor, avoid punishment, nor do we serve due to a sense of obligation. Spiritual service is a means to and by-product of growing in Christ.

## Study Guide Qs

*Q1. How have you felt about your experiences with the battle of the flesh?*

*Q2. What advice would you give to someone who is discouraged about their battle with the flesh?*

**Q3. How are you discovering that you please God through life with Christ?**

**Q4. Consider the “spiritual exercise plan” of Bible learning, prayer, fellowship, and serving.**

**How have these spiritual disciplines helped you to grow in Christ, and make progress in pleasing God?**

### **Digging Deeper**

1. Here is an insightful article on sanctification (being set-apart to God): [https://](https://www.gotquestions.org/sanctification.html)

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2. Here is another helpful article regarding positional and practical sanctification: [https://](https://www.gotquestions.org/positional-sanctification.html)

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