

# SUPERNATURAL LIVING IN A SECULAR WORLD

## Portrait of a Struggling Christian

*Romans 7:1–7, 13–24*



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Let's face it: every one of us who knows Christ as Savior has been torn within while fighting battles with the flesh. We feel frustrated, and we are occasionally defeated in that struggle. We realize we have God's power within us, and we know that His Spirit is at work, prompting us to do what is right—but we do wrong. Knowing we should obey, we disobey. Wanting to think, say, and do what is best, we covertly rebel. We're not short on desire, but when it comes to pulling it off, *we blow it!* Paul, speaking for all of us, brought truth out of the closet and exposed it for what it is: SIN. He put it this way: "I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (Romans 7:14). When Charles Haddon Spurgeon stood to preach on this awful reality, he appropriately titled his message, "The Monster Dragged to Light." Now, let's face that monster head-on.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Theoretically, Here's Where We Stand (Romans 6:1–7:13)

- The Sin Nature (Romans 6:1–23)
  - The Christian is freed from sin's dominion.
  
- The Mosaic Law (7:1–13)
  - The Christian is relieved from rules and regulations of the Law.
  - Though Christians are not under the Mosaic Law for righteousness, the Law affects us in three important ways:
    1. It defines specific sins.
    2. It arouses desire to sin.
    3. It exposes the cause of sin.



## Quotable

*When grace  
is our guide,  
it brings a  
freshness to  
our obedience.  
We now obey  
out of delight.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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### 2. Experientially, Here's Why We Struggle (Romans 7:14–24)

Three important facts emerge regarding our struggle:

- First, we cannot curb our disobedience on our own.
- Second, we do not fulfill our own wishes to be good.
- Third, we dare not ignore our own sinful nature; left to ourselves, we are wretched people.



#### DIGGING DEEPER

##### *Who Is “I” in Romans 7?*

Romans 7:14–24 has been debated by theologians for centuries. The main issue centers on the identity of Paul's *I*. Was Paul speaking of himself as if he were an unsaved, pre-conversion man? Or was he speaking of himself as a redeemed believer, now living in a state of grace and struggling with the lingering old nature? Those who take the former position point to Paul's descriptions of being “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (Romans 7:14), a condition they feel is incompatible with a saved person. Had Paul not already stated that he and all Christians are set free from sin (6:2, 14, 17–18, 22) and were formerly “in the flesh” (7:5)? How, then, could he speak of himself in terms of slavery and flesh? On the other hand, those who argue that Paul was speaking of himself as a struggling saved person cite his joyful concurrence with the goodness of God's Law (7:22) and the ability to want to do good (7:18–21) as descriptive of someone who has been saved.<sup>1</sup>

It seems best to take Paul's description as applying to himself as a believer. He was, after all, speaking in the present tense. And the struggle he described—desiring to do what is right and hating the wrong—hardly seems likely for a person still lost in his sins and untouched by grace, for it is God's Spirit who works in believers both to will and to do good (Philippians 2:13).



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## LET'S LIVE IT

It is a sad but sobering truth that the lingering power of our fallen flesh constantly seeks to ambush our good intentions and take us hostage again to sin. Realistically, here's how we should respond:

- First, we should freely admit we do not understand.
- Second, we should fully accept that nothing good dwells in our flesh.
- Third, we should always leave room for imperfection.
- Fourth, we should openly admit our true feelings of frustration.

How does it make you feel to know that the apostle Paul himself struggled with following through on his willingness to do good?

## ENDNOTE

1. See a summary of views and the corresponding arguments in James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, vol. 2, *The Reign of Grace: Romans 5:1–8:39* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 755–62.



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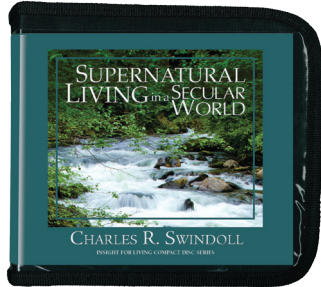
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Portrait of a Struggling Christian

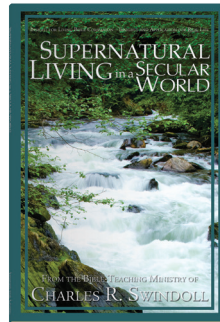
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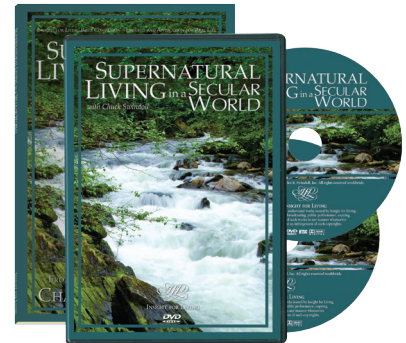
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