

Gathering Question: Read Romans 7:4-24 aloud and try to summarize the passage in one or two key words that best describes your reactions, emotions, or thoughts about Paul’s struggle. Write your one or two words on a card or piece of paper and pass it to the person seated across from you in the room. Discuss how similar or dissimilar your words are.

Holding Back

Self-control is not a pleasant subject for anyone. There is not a person living that does not have some self-control issues in their lives. The struggles that Paul describes in Romans 7 are struggles with which we can all relate. Even though we have put the “old man” to death in the grave called baptism, we struggle to keep him in the grave. Everyone one of us engages in battle with the flesh, yet the Spirit of God dwells in believers, waging war against the flesh and shaping us continually into the image of God’s Son. The discipline of self-control is really the discipline of Spirit-control. It is as we allow the Spirit to control our lives that we see the real changes in our lives take place and we discover a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. If Paul, an apostle of God, found himself locked in mortal combat with the flesh, can’t we expect the same thing in our lives?

The Greek word *sarx*, “flesh,” has a wide range of meaning in the New Testament—both positive and negative. It can refer simply to the physical body, humanity in general or to all living creatures on the earth. But sometimes “flesh” refers to that impulse that humans have to do what is evil instead of what is good. Since the Fall, we continually struggle with the flesh.

Paul’s raw honesty about his struggle with the flesh should be instructive to us all. No one is immune—man, woman, child, grandparent, minister, elder—all of us struggle with the flesh. However, Paul does not end with the struggle but with the joyful realization that we are not condemned because of what Jesus has done.

When the Spirit dwells in a believer it produces good fruit. For the fruit of the Spirit to be seen in our lives we must first submit to him and not to our fleshly desires. The fruit of the Spirit are obvious, Paul writes. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We do not begin to realize self-control in our lives because of our determination to change but because of our willingness to let the Spirit do his work in our lives.

Read: Romans 7:14-end; Romans 12:1, 2; James 1:4-16; II Corinthians 10:5; Romans 8:5-8

Reflect:

1. Why do you think that your mind is such an important battlefield in the struggle for self-control? Explain the significance of II Corinthians 10:5 and James 1:4-16.
2. How can your mind ever hope to understand what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God?
3. Read Romans 8:5-8. What word repeated three times in verses 6, 7 tells us what the flesh and the Spirit fight to possess.