



Struggle

BECAUSE SIN REMAINS A POWERFUL FORCE, BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED WHEN DOING RIGHT IS A STRUGGLE.

Scripture Passage: Romans 7:4-6,14-25 Memory Verse: Romans 7:4

As a child, I loved playing tug-of-war. Each side would grab the rope, dig in, and pull for all they were worth. The rope might lean one way or the other before one side would pull their opponents across the middle line. Today, we use “tug-of-war” to describe conflict: teams in a close game, parents in a custody dispute, a debate between political parties.

The apostle Paul saw our spiritual lives as a tug-of-war, a struggle between sin and the Savior. Even though we have died to sin through Christ, we still wrestle with Satan’s tricks and temptations. At times we are pulled by the old way of life, even as we strive to live in the power of Christ in us.

Sin remains a powerful force in our world, and that won’t change until Jesus comes back. Believers shouldn’t be surprised when obedience is a struggle, but we can remember that Jesus brings hope and help in our struggles. As you prepare to lead this session, consider your struggles with sin and how Jesus can give you victory. Ask Him to move in your life this week and to help you encourage the adults in your group to stand strong when the enemy tries to pull them in the wrong direction.



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Everyone loves a good rescue story. Some rescue stories are dramatic, like the firefighter who pulls an elderly couple out of a bedroom window just before their house collapses in flames. Others are less dramatic but no less inspiring, like the teacher who stays after school to tutor students who are struggling in class. However, nothing compares to the way God rescued us through Jesus. (PSG, p. 55)

What's your favorite "rescue" story? Who comes to mind when you're asked to name the first person who ever rescued you?



Understand the Context (Romans 6:15–7:25)

In chapter 6, Paul gave the first command found in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 6:11). He told believers to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to Jesus. He followed that command with a second command to help them make that a reality. In order to die to sin and live for Christ, believers must reject sin's rule in their lives. Paul called it refusing to let sin reign in our mortal bodies (6:12). When we die to sin, we can embrace the life that only Jesus makes possible.

These commands are vital to moving from justification (being declared righteous) to sanctification (living in righteousness). He also wanted his readers to remember that these commands are rooted in the grace of God at work in the believer's life. He reminded them they were not under the law but under grace (6:14). As he had pointed out already, the law holds no power to save, so we all need grace to move forward in our relationship with God.

Later in Romans 6, Paul returned to the question of whether Christians should continue to sin because they are under grace rather than law (6:15). Does grace give Christians a license to sin? Just as he had at the beginning of the chapter, Paul responded with a strong denial.

He also used two illustrations to show the power of grace to battle sin rather than submitting to it. First, he used slavery to illustrate the power to resist temptation. Christians once were slaves of sin. It ruled over them, and they yielded

to it because sin was their master. However, through Jesus, believers have been set free from sin's power and are slaves of righteousness.

As Christ followers yield themselves to Him, He sanctifies them. He instills in them the desire to live a holy life.

Second, Paul used marriage to illustrate freedom from sin. As long as a husband and wife are both alive, they are united to each other. However, when one of the spouses dies, the survivor is no longer bound to the other. He or she is free to remarry. He argued that believers were dead to sin, which severed the relationship. As a result, redeemed sinners no longer were bound to their sin. They are free to pursue Christ.

Just because believers are set free from sin's power and are dead to sin, though, that doesn't mean they no longer have any struggles with sin. It is not their master, but it can surely be a thief that robs them of energy, joy, influence, and other positive benefits of serving the Lord. Paul taught that they were freed (7:4-6), but he also acknowledged the conflict (7:14-23). Thankfully, they had hope through the life that Christ provides (7:24-25).

Read Romans 7:4-6,14-25 in your Bible and look for what Paul said about the believer's struggle with sin. What do these verses reveal about our dependence on Christ? (PSG, p. 56)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans) and **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Prepare copies of **Pack Item 12** (Handout: To Do or Not to Do). Write the following words on the board or a large sheet of paper: *inhaler, life preserver, firefighter, GPS maps, and CPR.*

ASK:

What’s your favorite “rescue” story? Who comes to mind when you’re asked to name the first person who ever rescued you? (PSG, p. 55)

READ:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 55 of the PSG. Talk about other ways people might use the term “rescue.”

DISCUSS:

Direct the group’s attention to the words on the board or paper. Lead a brief discussion on how each one might relate to the idea of being rescued. Share that Paul understood the importance of our spiritual rescue from sin:

Everyone is a servant—either to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. Believers, freed from sin through Christ, now serve God, resulting in holiness and eternal life. Paul concluded that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus” (6:16-23). . . . However, just because believers are set free from sin’s power and are dead to sin, it doesn’t mean that they no longer struggle with sin. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul described the inner struggle of desiring to do good but being pulled by sin. This tension shows human weakness and dependence on Christ. (PSG, p. 56)

EXPLAIN:

Direct the group to the fourth point on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans), “New Life in Christ.” Share that this study focuses on how even though sin remains a powerful force, Christ gives us the power to overcome.



Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute hymnals and direct adults to “Rescue the Perishing” (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 357). Read aloud the verses and sing the chorus together. Remind the group that through Jesus we are set free from sin. Share that this study from Romans 7 also reminds us that our struggle with sin continues as we try to follow Christ faithfully.

Freed (Rom. 7:4-6)

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. **5** For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death. **6** But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.

(v. 4) Paul used the analogy of marriage to unpack his illustration in verses 1-3. The subject shifted in this verse from death to sin to death to the law. The terminology **put to death** did not mean to die from natural causes. Rather, it suggests an execution. The passive voice indicated that this was done by God, not by one's own merit.

Also, Paul never said that the law died but that believers died **to the law**. For believers, the law is put to death when we exchange loyalties from the monarchy of sin to the lordship of Christ (Rom. 6:2-7). Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13-14) and released us from the debts we had accumulated as lawbreakers (Col. 2:14). Through the **body of Christ**, we no longer live under the authority of sin or the law. We walk in the freedom provided by Jesus on the cross.

But moving away from one leader means moving toward a different leader. Paul agreed. Using the imagery of a marital bond, he noted that we now **belong to another**. According to God's plan, married couples are united until death; however, death frees a surviving spouse to pursue new relationships. Our death to sin frees us to begin a new relationship with Jesus.

Our new life with Christ should make a difference for God's kingdom. Christ was not raised from the dead so we could keep producing works of the flesh. To the contrary, His resurrection (which makes our resurrection possible) should lead us to **bear fruit for God**. That is what Jesus desires for us. Our obligation to sin and the law ended, so now we belong to Christ.

(v. 5) To remind believers what they had been rescued from, Paul described life in **the flesh**. Though the Bible contains many usages for this word, the context refers to the life of a person prior to conversion to Christ. This life before Christ involved **sinful passions** that had been **aroused through the law**. Paul outlined this

arousal further in Romans 7:7-13. The law was not sin, but it created a desire in us to rebel against God because we were dominated by an old nature of sin. For example, the law said not to covet, but sin produced all kinds of coveting because of our old fleshly nature (Rom. 7:7-8).

The law, meant to show us the righteous commandments of God, instead became an instrument that led to sin. And since the wages of sin is death (6:23), the law produced **fruit for death** in our lives. The law provoked our old nature to sin, which led to death. What a wretched existence before Christ—sin, law, and death!

(v. 6) But coming to Christ changed everything. Our death to sin and the law through Jesus opened a new way of living and freed us to serve a new master. Along with being rescued from sin, believers also have been **released from the law**.

The idea of *released* could be translated overpowered, subdued, or conquered. The law presented a case against unbelievers, but Christ gave us victory by taking on the law's penalty (8:3-4). The law held us captive because we could not meet its demands. The **old letter of the law** told us what to do, but it did not equip us to find true spirituality. What we needed was to **serve in the newness of the Spirit**.

Praying Scripture

Romans 7:4

Spend time praying Scripture using Romans 7:4. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Thank God for freeing you from the bondage of sin and to the law. Ask Him to help you bear fruit that reflects your newness of life.

**REVIEW:**

APPLICATION POINT: Believers bear fruit for God when they live in the Spirit of God.

Direct attention to **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Words in Romans) and encourage adults to share words that the group has considered in earlier sessions of the study of Romans. Highlight terms like *faith*, *gospel*, *justification*, *grace*, *righteousness*, *sanctification*, and *sin*.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 7:4-6 as the group listens for another word that appears on **Pack Item 4** (Poster: Key Words in Romans). Point out the word *law* and its definition.

ASK:

What did Paul say about the law in these verses?

REVIEW:

Point out that the law and sin are two sides of the same coin. Share that while law is not sinful, it reveals our sin and stirs up a desire to sin—yet it can't do anything to free us from sin. Summarize this content from pages 57-58 of the PSG:

“Paul identified believers as his ‘brothers and sisters.’ He wanted his spiritual siblings to know that they shared with him a new relationship with God that began when they died to the law. Now they belonged to Christ. When Christ died for them, they died to the law. . . . The law, meant to show us the righteous commandments of God, instead became an instrument that led to sin. The law provoked our old nature to sin, which led to death. . . . The law held us captive because we could not meet its demands. The old letter of the law told us what to do but did not create true spirituality. What we needed was to serve in the newness of the Spirit.”

ASK:

What practical difference should it make that a believer belongs to Christ? In what ways does it change your identity and purpose? (PSG, p. 58)

PRAY:

Emphasize that our new life in Christ should be evident for the world to see. Encourage adults to take a few minutes to pray Romans 7:4 back to God as noted on page 68 of the Leader Guide. Close with a sentence prayer of your own, thanking God for the new life believers enjoy. As time allows, walk through the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG.



Conflicted (Rom. 7:14-23)

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin. **15** For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. **16** Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. **17** So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. **18** For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. **19** For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. **21** So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. **22** For in my inner self I delight in God's law, **23** but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

(vv. 14-15) This section has divided interpreters through the years. Some think the phrase *slave under sin* (in contrast to “dead to sin”) means Paul was describing his pre-conversion experience. However, the whole passage appears in the present tense, not the past tense. Also, Paul revealed that his inner being delighted in the law (Rom. 7:22) and that he had a desire to do what was good (7:18), desires which don't describe an unregenerate person. This context suggests that Paul was talking about a post-conversion struggle with sin.

Paul acknowledged that the *law is spiritual*, but he was *of the flesh*. His old nature struggled with the demands of the law and the lure *of the flesh*. He understood the struggle between carnal desires and godly desires (see Gal. 5:17). His failure to consider himself dead to sin created a personal conflict marked by service to sin. He did not *understand* why he continued to be enslaved to sin when he had trusted Christ to die to sin. He would *practice* what he knew was wrong and would do *what I hate*.

(vv. 16-17) Paul recognized that the law was *good*, and his own misbehavior proved it. However, the *sin living* in him was the problem. The one who had died to sin found himself battling sin constantly. Christians still battle the power of sin and the demands of the law, even though Christ has set us free from both. This battle will not be settled until Jesus returns (1 John 3:2-3).

(vv. 18-20) As a believer, Paul had the *desire to do what is good*. The Holy Spirit put that desire in him. However, he had no *ability* to stand against sin on his own. Yielding his body to unrighteousness was a choice he made.

Truthfully, Paul consistently failed to *do the good* that he wanted, instead choosing to *practice the evil* he despised. His dilemma underscored the enslaving power of *sin* (v. 20). Paul was not shirking responsibility for his sin. He was acknowledging that sin was still a formidable enemy, even after salvation.

(vv. 21-23) Paul's conflict with sin led him to discover a new *law*, in the sense of a controlling principle in his life. Despite his good intentions, *evil* was still *present* within him. Death to sin does not remove its allure. Rather, it creates an uncomfortable tension in a believer's life. While the inner self might *delight in God's law*, Christians experience a *different law*. As Paul discovered, this new law constantly is *waging war* against God's way and works to make a believer *prisoner to the law of sin*. Though sin may not rule over believers any longer, we still can yield the *parts of my body* to evil, including our minds, hands, mouths, ears, and eyes—just to name a few.

Key Doctrine

Sanctification

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. (See Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.)

**READ:**

APPLICATION POINT: Believers need to recognize that the struggle with sin is real, and they need help.

Lead the group to read silently Romans 7:14-23, noting how Paul described his struggle with sin.

GUIDE:

Share about the spiritual tension Paul experienced between sin and righteousness:

Paul had the desire to do what is good. This desire comes from the Holy Spirit. However, there was no ability to do good. He struggled to do the good he wanted to do, doing instead the evil he did not want to do. In these verses, Paul was acknowledging that sin is still a formidable enemy, even after salvation. Death to sin as a power did not remove sin's allurements, hence, the conflict in the believer's life. (PSG, p. 60)

ILLUSTRATE:

On a whiteboard draw a line representing a rope used for a tug-of-war. On one end write *Holy Spirit* and on the other end *Sin Nature*. Discuss how the tension between obeying Christ and giving in to temptation is ongoing even in the life of the believer.

ASK:

How does recognizing sin's presence in you change the way you depend on God? (PSG, p. 61)

EXPLAIN:

Affirm that our struggle with sin is real. Remind adults that temptation in itself is not a sin. Point out that our response to temptation and sin is what matters. Note that while the struggle is difficult, the tension should encourage us to make the right choices and to rely on God to help us overcome sin.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Alarm Clock

Ask: ***What time did you get up this morning? Did you use an alarm or did you just wake up on your own?*** Allow volunteers to share their responses. Display an alarm clock. Point out the "snooze" button and find out how often adults use that feature to get a little more sleep. Ask: ***What kinds of problems can the snooze button cause?*** Note that, in some ways, the snooze button represents a battle between getting up and staying in bed. Talk about other situations where adults experience a tension between two options. Discuss how knowing what is right and doing what is right is often a struggle. Direct the group to read Romans 7:14-23 silently and to develop a summary of how Paul described this struggle between right and wrong.

Hope (Rom. 7:24-25)

24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? **25** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.

(v. 24) Like many of us who have trusted in Jesus, the apostle Paul lamented his struggle with sin. He longed for the day when he could live in complete freedom from the temptation to sin.

After describing the tension between doing what he hated and not having the strength to do what he really wanted to do, Paul cried out in anguish. He was caught up in spiritual warfare. On the one hand, he had died to sin as the ruling power in his life; but, on the other hand, he continued to allow the members of his body to engage in sinful activities.

The military imagery of this passage emphasized that every believer plays a role in this spiritual war. The idea of seizing an opportunity (Rom. 7:8,11) suggested the actions of a soldier in the heat of battle. The word pictures of waging a war and being held a prisoner (7:23) also reminded his readers that this was an ongoing conflict between darkness and light.

When he failed to stand strong as a soldier of God, Paul saw himself as a **wretched man**. This might seem like an unusual way for a Christian—especially a Christian like Paul—to describe himself, but it reflects a proper response to sin in our lives. The Greek word indicates sorrow, distress or grief. It described a miserable person, and misery seems like an apt description of one who fails to embrace the victory that Jesus had died to provide.

The apostle begged for someone to **rescue** him from the **body of death**. This is not the usual word for spiritual salvation, but a word for a rescue from physical afflictions. This is the word that Paul used elsewhere to describe the way Christ rescues believers from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13).

Paul's plea for help was a cry for final resurrection and final deliverance. As long as he remained in the physical flesh (*body of death*), he would battle the allure of sin and the frustration of falling short of the law in daily living. Nothing was lacking in his justification, but his sanctification was a work in progress that included falling

short of who he was in Christ on occasion. However, he was confident that God would finish the work that He started in him (see Phil. 1:6).

(v. 25) Paul answered his own cry for deliverance by reminding himself that Jesus had already done everything necessary to rescue him from the power of sin. He would still battle temptation until Jesus returned, but he had hope that rescue was on the way. Even when he felt like he was at his worst, Paul recognized God's authority. He knew the end of the story.

This knowledge sparked gratitude in Paul's heart: **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord**. Though he continued to battle sin, Paul told the Romans that he embraced the hope found only in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This finished work of the cross and the empty tomb gave the apostle the ability to live in the freedom of the Spirit. In Christ, Paul died to sin. In Christ, he had the power to consider himself dead to sin and to stop offering the members of his body to sin.

In Christ, he also had the hope of future resurrection. On that day, he would no longer process things through the sinful nature of his body. Paul later would expound on many of these reasons for thanksgiving in Romans 8.

One final time in chapter 7, Paul focused on the inner conflict between who he was in Christ and who he used to be under sin's dominion. Paul expressed the struggle in his **mind** and in his **flesh**. While he struggled within himself, he also realized that God had not left him to fight the battle on his own. Yes, the **law of sin** tempted him, but his submission to the **law of God** was perfecting him. He was being sanctified.

Paul shared a hope for future victory over sin, both in the short term and, ultimately, at the end of this life. This hope set the stage for the triumphant words of Romans 8 while acknowledging the struggle of believers on the road to becoming more like Jesus.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can express gratitude to God that they do not have to battle sin in their own power, but that Christ provides the victory.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Romans 7:24-25 as the group listens for Paul's conclusion about his own condition. Encourage adults to share how Paul's emotions resonate with their own feelings at times.

ASK:

In light of the difficulty in battling sin, what keeps us from despair and hopelessness? (PSG, p. 62)

HIGHLIGHT:

Highlight Paul's solution for dealing with the tension we face as believers who are still tempted by sin:

Paul's assertion about himself gives us the direction that we need as we face the conflict that goes on inside us. We know from experiences in life that certain conflicts can be resolved sometimes. In those cases, the intense struggle between two opposing forces, ideas, or people can be replaced with peace. However, some conflicts in our lives will never be resolved. Instead, they can be managed, but the struggle involving them will never end. In those cases, life will go on, and the conflict will continue to be a part of it. Like Paul, we trust Christ to help us as we manage the inner conflict with sin. (PSG, p. 62)

PARAPHRASE:

Divide the group into teams of three or four. Give each group an index card and pencil. Direct them to work together to create a paraphrase of Romans 7:24-25. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their work. Affirm our need to lean into Christ to experience victory in our struggles against sin.

ASK:

In what ways can you live more consciously in the freedom Christ provides? (PSG, p. 62)

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Read through the entirety of Romans 6:15–7:25 to summarize the argument Paul made regarding the ongoing effects of sin. First, make an outline of the argument. Second, write a one-sentence summary of this argument. Consider how sin effects a believer's life and the significance of dying to sin. Respond to these questions: ***How does this argument encourage you? Does it discourage you in any way?***

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these bullet points from Apply the Text on page 63 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

- *Believers bear fruit for God when they live in the Spirit of God.*
- *Believers need to recognize that the struggle with sin is real, and they need help.*
- *Believers can express gratitude to God that they do not have to battle sin in their own power, but that Christ provides the victory.*

EVALUATE:

Distribute a copy of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: To Do or Not To Do*). Encourage the group to spend time analyzing their own struggles with sin.

ASK:

What approach do they take in dealing with it? How does the conflict make them more productive and grateful believers? (PSG, p. 63)

DISCUSS:

Briefly discuss how believers can deal with the tension sin creates and how we can demonstrate gratitude for God's help. Challenge the group to study and respond to the second group of questions on page 63 of the PSG during the week.

PRAY:

Remind adults that Romans 7:4 is the memory verse for this session. Encourage adults to continue praying it back to God as a way to memorize it. Urge them to focus on how God can help them die to sin when they experience temptation. Close in prayer, thanking God for victory in Christ as we battle sin.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send the group an email or text during the week, reminding them to pray for one another. Encourage them to read and reflect again on Paul's practical words about overcoming sin in Romans 7. Let them know that you are praying for them and encourage them to share things that you can pray with them about specifically. Close the message with the text from Romans 7:4, this session's memory verse.

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The Work of the Holy Spirit

John Polhill

In John 16:7, Jesus spoke of sending the “Counselor” after His departure from this earth. The text uses a Greek word (*parakletos*) that is often rendered “Paraclete” in English. Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit (see v. 13). An unusual term, *Paraclete* summarizes some of the main functions of the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

MEANING OF “SPIRIT”

The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *ruach* to refer to God’s Spirit. In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek word is *pneuma*. Both have a similar range of meanings and can mean “wind.” The wind (*ruach*) from God parted the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21). Likewise, Jesus contrasted the free movement of the Spirit with the wind (*pneuma*) that blows (John 3:8). *Ruach* and *pneuma* can also refer to the “breath” of life, as in Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones (Ezek. 37:9-10) and Jesus’s dying breath on the cross (Matt. 27:50).

The main meaning for both terms is “spirit.” This can be the human spirit (see Prov. 16:18; 17:22; 29:23). It also can refer to a “ghost” (Luke 24:37). Most often, however, it describes the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Put simply, the “Spirit of God” refers to the presence and power of God.¹ For example, the Spirit hovered over the watery chaos at creation (Gen. 1:2). The Spirit also is shown to be active upon nature, as when God sent His stormy wind to divert Jonah’s escape (Jonah 1:4).

Of more relevance is when God’s Spirit worked directly on individuals. The Spirit was behind the skill of craftsmen (Ex. 31:1-5), and He endowed judges for leadership (Judg. 6:34; 11:29; 14:6,19). God both gave and removed His Spirit (1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 16:14).

The Spirit of God was particularly associated with prophecy (1 Sam. 19:20; 2 Sam. 23:2). The “double portion” of spirit that Elisha requested likely referred to the Spirit of God resting upon Elijah (2 Kings 2:9). The prophets rarely spoke directly of God’s Spirit inspiring them. More characteristically, they spoke of the “word of the Lord” coming upon them (see Jer. 1:4,11; 2:1,4). The exception is Ezekiel, who often talked of the Spirit coming upon him (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12; 8:3; 11:24).

Isaiah connected the coming of the Spirit with the coming Messiah. He predicted that the Spirit would rest upon the Messianic descendant of Jesse (Isa. 11:1-2) and that the Servant of the Lord would be anointed with the Spirit (42:1). Joel likewise spoke of how God would place His Spirit on people (Joel 2:28-32).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In Jesus, prophecies of the Spirit were fulfilled. In addition, the Spirit would no longer come and go on particular individuals. In the church age, the Spirit comes upon all who call upon the Lord.

The Spirit in Luke—The early chapters of Luke describe how the coming of Jesus was accompanied by the activity of the Spirit. Jesus’s virginal conception was the work of the Spirit (Luke 1:35).

John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit (v. 15). At Jesus's baptism, John contrasted his own water baptism with the Spirit-baptism that Jesus would bring (3:16). And, of course, the Spirit descended at Jesus's baptism, affirming Him as the Son of God (v. 22). Jesus later confirmed His Messianic status by applying Isaiah's prophecy about the Spirit's anointing to Himself (4:18).

The Spirit in Acts—Acts relates the story of Jesus's gift of the Spirit to all His followers. Before leaving earth, He directed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had received the Spirit, who would enable their witness (Acts 1:8). This anointing came upon the entire community at Pentecost (2:1-13). As the Spirit-filled believers witnessed God's works, Peter explained to the crowd that this fulfilled God's outpouring of the Spirit that Joel predicted (vv. 16-21).

Although Acts describes many facets of the Spirit's work, two details are of special importance. First, the Spirit is the possession—the hallmark—of every Christian believer. Second, in Acts the main work of the Spirit is enabling believers to bear witness to the Savior (1:8). In a real sense, no event in the progress of the Christian witness in Acts occurs without the Spirit's enabling power.

The Spirit in Paul—No New Testament writer spoke of the Spirit's work more than Paul, especially in Romans 8.² There Paul stated that the Spirit is the mark of one's belonging to Christ (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit alone enables us to deal effectively with sin and to live according to God's will (vv. 1-4). Paul contrasted the Spirit-lived life directed to God and the flesh-directed life focused on earthly matters. In this sense, the Spirit is the life-bringing ethical basis for all Christian living, while the flesh brings death (vv. 5-8, 12-13). The Spirit is thus our assurance that we will share in the resurrection (v. 11; see also 2 Cor. 5:5).

The Spirit also helps us in our suffering and weakness and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27). Elsewhere, Paul discussed how the Spirit offers the wisdom and knowledge of God (1 Cor. 2:9-16). He sets us right with God and is the source of fruitful Christian living (Gal. 5:16-26).

Paul often contrasted the Spirit with the law. In 2 Corinthians 3:3-18 he spoke of God's two covenants, the old covenant written on stone tablets

and the new Spirit-based covenant written on human hearts. The people of this new community of Christ each possess the Spirit, are gifted by the Spirit, and find their unity through proper application of the Spirit's gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11). The Spirit unifies the body of Christ and enables it for effective work and witness (Eph. 2:18-22; 4:3-13).

The Spirit in John 14-16—The fullest treatment of the Spirit in John's Gospel is in Jesus's teachings at the Last Supper. Some scholars have called this Jesus's "farewell discourses" because He spoke of His coming departure. But He also promised the disciples that He would not leave them as "orphans." He would send them the Paraclete, the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:15-18).

"Paraclete" is a rich term denoting the Spirit's work in the believer. It literally means one who "calls alongside" or who assists another.³ This assistance can take the form of comforting, interceding, helping, or encouraging. John especially associated the Paraclete with reminding the disciples of Jesus's teachings (v. 26). In this sense, He is the "Spirit of truth" (v. 17; 15:26; 16:13).

The Paraclete bears witness to Christ and enables believers in their witnessing work. This echoes the emphasis of the Spirit's work in Acts. The Spirit empowers the Christian message, which convicts the world of its sin and coming judgment and leads individuals toward a right standing with God through Christ (16:8-11).

In many ways this empowerment constitutes the pinnacle of biblical teaching about the Spirit. This is confirmed in John 20:22, where Jesus "breathed" the Spirit upon His disciples in anticipation of the definitive outpouring yet to take place at Pentecost. People find forgiveness through the Spirit-empowered witness of faithful Christian disciples (20:23). So, the Spirit offers both an endowment of power and a mandate to witness for all true followers of Christ.

1. Steve Bond, "Spirit" in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1527.

2. Paul K. Jewett, "Holy Spirit" in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney, rev. ed. Moises Silva, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 196.

3. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 618-19.

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