

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? *Understanding the War Within*

Romans Series
PBC 2026

Text: Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-25

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

¹⁸ *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.* For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

As we wrap up our study of this stunning chapter, I want to make several important observations:

1. This chapter is notoriously difficult – of all the chapters in Romans, this is perhaps the one for which commentators offer the most differing viewpoints and devote the most time and attention.
2. The struggle centers on the spiritual identity of the person Paul describes in this chapter: a) is that person a lost man seeking salvation through the Law, or b) a Christian seeking sanctification through the Law? Or c) is Paul someone describing his life before salvation, living

under the Law (7:7-13) and after salvation with a surprising internal conflict and inability to obey the Law he now prizes (7:14-25)?

So – here is where I land this morning with regard to the identity and spiritual condition of the person Paul describes in our text (7:15-25) this morning – I think he is writing about the experience of a genuine believer who has come face to face with this powerful hostile force that dwells in him that wages ongoing daily war against him and that adamantly opposes every righteous desire and intention he has to discern and do the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (12:2).

And the reason this should be important to us is that what Paul describes in these verses is what you and I experience daily – and like Paul, often we find ourselves worn down, discouraged, and defeated spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and even physically. And like Paul, we cry out desperately for help – “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?”

The best way to get to the bottom of what is going on here is to let Paul talk us through the diagnosis the Holy Spirit helped him discover about himself and then inspired him to record for the rest of us.

In essence, Paul is going to ask and answer the question, ***“Why am I so miserable? What is wrong in me that wears me out, depletes my soul, and so disheartens me?”***

I. Our Disturbing Condition (vs. 14-17)

*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.*¹⁵ *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*¹⁶ *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.*¹⁷ *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

A. What we know and experience (v. 14)

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

1. That the Law is spiritual (sourced in God; functions as His righteous representative; speaks as His holy voice) – so the problem is not the Law
2. That I am of the flesh (sarkinos –something in me that is not spiritual, but comprised of what is worldly and of the old realm ruled by sin and dominated by death) – and that part of me is sold under sin (it is still willingly subject to the old realm).
3. And this results in an immense struggle and a titanic war between this part of me and my new man (represented here by my mind and my will – all renewed by Christ).

B. What we affirm and proclaim (v. 15-16)

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

1. I don't "understand" (I don't acknowledge or want) my actions – they are neither what I will to do nor what I want to do. In fact, when I do them, they are the very things my new man and my renewed mind hate (reject).

Note: Paul is not expressing confusion here but rather frustration. He is not saying, "I am confused, I just can't figure this out. . ." What he means by this expression (and how it was used elsewhere in Paul's day) is this – "I don't understand why on earth I keep doing things like this! I hate this. I know better. I want to do better and am committed to doing so. But here I am again – I just don't understand why I keep doing this!" It isn't a knowledge problem.

2. And this brings up an important observation that will help me come to a right diagnosis of my condition – since I hate the sinful things that I am continually doing (present tense verb) – I actually agree (am in full alignment) with the Law (something I never did as a lost person in 1:28-32)!

C. What we conclude and understand (v. 17)

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

1. I agree that the Law is good and holy and righteous (vs. 16) – so the problem is not with the Law.
2. And I know that it is not my new man and my renewed mind that is prompting and doing these things that I hate (vs. 17a).
3. **And this leads us to Paul's first important conclusion** – if it isn't me and my mind doing these sinful things, then where are they coming from, because obviously they are happening and I am sinning with my body?!
 - **Answer** – they are coming from sin that dwells (has made a home) in me. And for the first time in Romans, we get a clear picture of something Paul spoke of in earlier books like Galatians – though the Old Man died and our New Man took its place – with a renewed heart and restored mind – there is still a part of the Old Man and the Old Realm that dwells in us, and it is what Paul calls “sin,” functioning almost like a nature – in fact, many theologians call it that – our indwelling sin nature that remains even after we are converted.
 - “Sin” here is not merely sinful actions but the force or nature that incites and produces those actions in my members – Paul described it as the “flesh” (*sarkinos*) in 7:14 when he said he was of the flesh, and that part of him remains deeply entrenched in serving its old master, sin.

II. Our persistent Symptoms (vs. 18-20)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

A. A Nuanced Observation (vs. 18a)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh

Note the personal redirection – first person noun – “I” versus “we.”

- Paul is saying along these lines: *“I have experienced something and have come to know it for a fact – that nothing good dwells in me – and I mean the part of me that is the flesh.”*
- Paul is not saying that all of him is like this – obviously, there are many good things dwelling in him now that he is a believer!
 - ◇ *A totally new heart and a renewed mind!*
 - ◇ *A restored will that agrees with God and wants to do His will*
 - ◇ *The implanted Word*
 - ◇ *The indwelling Holy Spirit*
- But there is one specific part of his life that Paul has in view – and in this part, nothing good dwells. It is totally depraved and thoroughly evil. Paul names this part of himself in two descriptive ways: *“the flesh” (vs 14) and “sin dwelling in me” (vs 20)*. These two terms describe a fallen nature (principle or force) operating in him that is the final remnant of the Old Man that was crucified with Christ.
- The NT teaches us four things about our flesh:
 - a. There is no good in it at all (7:18)
 - b. It is the slave of sin (7:25)
 - c. It cannot be subject to the Law of God (8:7)
 - d. It is implacably hostile toward God, His Spirit, and His righteous demands – this is what it means to be at enmity with God! (8:7)

B. The Undeniable Confirmation (vss. 18b-19)

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

- The evidence that the flesh is powerful and active in me is: *I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out!*

- In other words, the problem is not my will – my will is doing exactly what it should be doing – it is aligned with God’s righteous demands and wants to obey and do God’s will.
- BUT my will is no match for the flesh! No matter how many times I try to muster up more willpower, to do better, or to make better promises, my will is no match for the flesh!
- And the proof of that is in the next statement – *“I am not doing the good I want, but instead, the evil I don’t want to do is what I continually and repeatedly do!”* (vs 19 – note present tense)

C. The Inevitable Conclusion (vs. 20)

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

All of us know what Paul is describing to be true in our own lives and experiences. This is why Paul repeats what he said in vs 17 again here, *“If I do what my new man and my mind and will do not want to do, then it is not my new man doing it but rather sin (my flesh) that dwells in me.”*

So how does this awful, deadly disease progress? How does the flesh actually gain such an advantage in my life as a believer?

III. The Internal Diagnosis (vs. 21-23)

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

- ***I find a “law”*** – something I discover by experience, and what I discover is a “law” or an operating principle (like a law of nature).
- The law/operating principle I find is that when I want to do right, evil is close at hand – it is right there at that moment.
- Illustration to prove his point (note present tense verbs): When my mind delights in the Law of God – right then there is another

law (principle like gravity) in me that wages war (strategizes) against what my mind has delighted in and desires to do! And that law (sinful nature or force) that is in my members (my body that I should be presenting to God as an instrument for doing righteousness) is waging a war (strategizing) against my mind and taking me (the new me) captive (term means point of a spear) to do the will of the law of sin that dwells in my members!

- So, what does this look like? When the flesh wins the battle and takes you captive, you will know it because of the works (actions) that you end up yielding your members to do (Rom 6:13-14).
- If your flesh wins that battle, here is what shows up: *“The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissension, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these!” (Gal 5:19-21)*
- Wait just a minute – these are the works that Paul says unbelievers do! Can a believer really go back and be taken captive by these kinds of sins? Answer: Yes! This is what Peter warns will happen if we don’t diligently add certain spiritual virtues to our faith – *“For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins!” (2 Peter 1:3-11)*
- You might say, “Good! I am in good shape because these things are not present much in my life.” But there is more! Here is what is should be present in your life if you are defeating the flesh and winning the battle – *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control!”*
- And beyond all of this – *“Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another!” (Gal 5:22-26)*

And this is why even Paul cries out the way he does in vs. 24!

IV. Our Powerful Deliverance (vs. 24-25)

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

A. The desperate cry – *“Wretched man that I am!”*

B. The hopeful call – *“Who will set me free (“rusetai”) from this body of death (my members that are being taken captive in this war between my sinful flesh and my renewed mind)?”*

C. The amazing answer – *“Thanks be to God!”* –

- He will deliver me! (cf., 1 Thess 5:23 – *“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it!”*)
- How? *Through Jesus Christ Our Lord!* The only one who could save me from the condemnation and penalty of sin is now the one who **will** (future tense) deliver me from the bondage of sin!

1) He is doing it now progressively through Sanctification

2) He will do it fully in the future through Glorification

Conclusion: Our Spiritual Response (vs. 25b)

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Until then, I live in this holy tension that will continue for the rest of my earthly life! And here is how a spiritual believer responds to a diagnosis like this:

A. Renewed determination: *“With my inner man (my new mind and will) I serve God!”*

B. Realistic expectation: *“But my flesh will always serve sin, and it will always strategize how it can wage a war against me to take me captive.”*

This is important because the Scripture warns us against two significant dangers: 1) the danger of unmet expectations or hope deferred (Prov 13:12); or 2) turning to the wrong solutions for help.

Illustration – since we have been talking in medical metaphors:

- Some ailments are seasonal, and we prepare for them, endure them, and do our best to labor through them with over-the-counter meds.
- Some ailments are curable by an antibiotic, medicine, or medical treatment that resolves the issue and restores us to full health.
- But some ailments are permanent and extremely serious in their potential effect on our bodies.
 - a. ***They must be diagnosed correctly*** – this is what Paul has done here. He has helped us analyze the condition within us and diagnose the problem – it isn't that something is wrong with our New Man. It isn't a failure of our renewed mind or our restored will – they are both functioning properly now that the Law of God has been implanted in us! Rather, the problem lies in the ongoing presence of something we didn't expect to have to deal with after our salvation – our flesh (sin nature).
 - b. ***They must be monitored regularly*** – they must never be ignored, or they will get out of control and seriously damage, debilitate, or even kill us! And that is exactly what Paul and the rest of the NT writers warn us about our sin nature!
 - c. ***They must be mitigated properly*** – the cure prescribed must be faithfully applied just as our physician ordered!

The flesh is in this category – it isn't seasonal or even occasional. It is incurable. It isn't easily manageable. It flares up regularly and unexpectedly, yet predictably – and if we don't immediately deal with it severely and with the proper cure – it will destroy us – leading us captive to the very sins we were delivered from by Christ.

And Paul is going to give us the proper cure in chapter 8 – living in the power of the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write a great deal of content, giving us detailed guidance on how we are to walk according to His word and live by His power!

Five Major Life Applications for Modern Believers

1. **Diagnose the real problem accurately** Stop beating yourself up as if your entire self or your new heart is defective. The real enemy is the flesh—the indwelling sin nature that remains even after conversion. Recognizing this brings enormous relief: your renewed mind and will are functioning exactly as they should. You are not a failure; you are in the normal Christian war.
2. **Abandon self-reliant “Law-plus-willpower” sanctification** The sermon rebukes every believer who thinks, “If I just try harder, make better promises, or lean on biblical rules, I’ll finally overcome persistent sin.” Paul proves that approach always fails. Stop looking to Moses (the Law) for sanctification the way you once looked to him for salvation.
3. **Cry out daily for deliverance through Christ** When you feel “wretched”—worn out, discouraged, and captive again—do exactly what Paul did: shout “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?” and immediately answer with “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Make this your regular prayer. Christ is not only your Savior from guilt; He is your Deliverer from the power of sin—right now, progressively.
4. **Live in the realistic holy tension with vigilance** Expect the war to continue every day of your earthly life. Keep your inner man (mind and will) firmly resolved to serve God, but never be surprised or naïve when the flesh rises up. Monitor the “works of the flesh” in your life and actively pursue the “fruit of the Spirit.”
5. **Rely radically on the Holy Spirit as your only effective weapon** The flesh is incurable by any human method—it must be put to death daily by the Spirit

(Romans 8). Walk by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, and let Him produce fruit in you that the flesh can never manufacture. Practically: saturate your mind with Scripture, pray without ceasing for the Spirit's power, and immediately confess and repent when the flesh wins a skirmish. The same God who began the good work in you will complete it—He is faithful.

Addendum on who Paul is describing in 7:7-25

I think that Paul is describing the situation of everyone (unbeliever or believer) who is trying to live up to God's expectations by leaning on the Law.

The flow of Paul's argument has led me to this view – in chapter six, Paul loads the chapter with the biblical terminology for “sin” (approximately 21 references). So clearly, the gist of the chapter is what a believer is to do about sin now that he or she is under grace? *“Since it is true that grace superabounds over sin, is sin really that big a deal? Shall we continue under its dominion, or should we make a clean break with our past life? What about the difficult sins that persist in our lives and that we can't overcome, no matter how hard we try – should we make a quiet peace with them and focus on the areas of our life that are going well?”* Paul's answer is, “May it never be!” (6:2, 15)

So, if I am supposed to fight against the practice of persistent sins that have a hold in my life AND it is clear that I don't seem to be winning that battle consistently (or even at all), ***who do I look to for help?*** And the first person that comes to mind for the Apostle is Moses! *“I know Moses couldn't help me with regard to salvation, but now that I am a Christian, can he help me battle against persistent sins that continue to plague me?”*

And this is the point of chapter 7 – Paul loads up this chapter with terminology associated with the Law (more than 25 references to the Law of God) and his point is this – ***“Moses is of no more help in your sanctification than he was in your salvation!”***

When we were saved, God gave us a renewed heart and wrote His word on it – James describes this as “the implanted word.” But simply having a new heart with the Word of God implanted in it does not mean we will be able to keep that Word and obey its commands (the point of Romans 7) – we need a better power than our renewed will. We need God to do for us what Ezekiel said He would do for His people when He renewed their hearts and implanted His word in them – *“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”* (Ezek 36:26-27). And this is why the focus of chapter 8 is on the Holy Spirit (with more than 22 references to the Spirit).

So – here is where I land this morning with regard to the identity and spiritual condition of the person Paul describes in our text (7:15-25) this morning – I think he is writing about the experience of a genuine believer who has come face to face with this powerful hostile force that dwells in him that wages ongoing daily war against him and that adamantly opposes every righteous desire and intention he has to discern and do the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (12:2).

And the reason this should be important to us is that what Paul describes in these verses is what you and I experience daily – and like Paul, often we find ourselves worn down, discouraged, and defeated spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and even physically.

We find ourselves sitting in a pile of broken promises and shattered intentions to do right – being dragged away captive by our besting sin again – at the end of ourselves, with no answers that seem to work. And from that spot – we cry out with Paul – “I am a wretched man!”

This is where we left Paul – having been forgiven, transferred to a new and eternal kingdom, having received eternal life, and having been betrothed to the Crown Prince of the Universe! You would think Paul

would be on top of the world – but that isn't where we find him. Instead, we see him in one of the worst periods of his recorded life – listen to his description of how he feels – ***“Oh wretched man that I am!”***

This morning, I want us to resist the temptation to downplay Paul's words as spiritual hyperbole – I want us to really hear Paul, and then I want us to try to understand why he feels the way he does in the explanation he gives us in these verses.

The term *“wretched”* (7:24) is our word “miserable.” It speaks of someone who has been beaten down and is totally worn out from the struggle, and who is emotionally discouraged and spiritually depleted with nothing left in the tank!

What has caused this remarkable and alarming turn of events? How did we go from the glorious realities we have been talking about thus far to finding Paul in this alarming condition?

The best way to get to the bottom of what is going on here is to let Paul talk us through the diagnosis the Holy Spirit helped him discover about himself and then inspired him to record for the rest of us.