

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

Romans Series
PBC 2026

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

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: is that person a lost man seeking salvation through the Law or a Christian seeking sanctification through the Law? Here is where I land:

Paul describes what it was like to live under the Law as a self-righteous lost person in 7:7-14 condemned under a Law he had no hope of fulfilling (seen in the preponderance of past tense verbs) AND then in 7:15-25 he moves forward to describe his experience as a saved man who now agrees with the Law of God but has discovered that he now has a massive ongoing internal conflict between his new heart where God has written His law (Jer 31:31-34) and the ongoing sin nature that remains in him.

And what is both surprising and frustrating to Paul is that he does not seem able to win this battle (vs 18b), even as a new man with a new heart and a renewed mind that fully aligns with God and delights in His righteous expectations – no matter how hard he tries! ***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.***

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.

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.

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.

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

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

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

- 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.

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. *“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” (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.

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!” –

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.”