



## **The War, the Wretch, and the Rescue**

Romans 7:14-25 | March 22, 2020

As we wrap up Romans 7, we come to a text that can be both confusing and comforting at the very same time. Paul seems to be contradicting himself as he expresses an internal struggle of a love for the Law of God and the reality of sin in his life. Our passage starts like this with Romans 7:14-15: *“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*

There is some debate and discussion around whether Paul is writing these words reflecting on his life before *or* after his conversion to Christianity. On one side, some argue that Paul is writing this reflecting on when he was a Pharisee. Others might say that this is Paul in his early stages of conversion but that he eventually received a second work of grace that would have cleansed him from the grip of original sin. The way we look at this, however, is that this is actually Paul writing as a normal part of his Christian life. We should take comfort in this because this means that when we experience struggle or an internal battle with our faith, we are in the company of the Apostle Paul – one of the greatest human models of Christianity. If this is Paul’s autobiography, it can also be ours. If this is a normal experience of the Christian, it helps us to break down what this looked like in Paul’s life and can look like in ours.

### **War**

There is an internal war going on in each one of us. When you become a Christian, you receive a new identity in Christ. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you and automatically goes to battle with the sin in your life. We experience this as an internal war. Some of us are feeling this more than ever right now with quarantines, closures, and cancellations. Even if we know the good things we should do, we don’t always do them.

### **Wretch**

This leads Paul, and us, to cry out, “What a wretched man I am” (7:24a)! While we don’t always like to acknowledge pain, defeat, fear, and anxiety, it can be healthy for us to cry out alongside of Paul. There is power in the call of the wretch, because we know that we don’t live there forever. The reason we can cry out and call ourselves a wretch is because we know we have rescue.

### **Rescue**

Paul asks, “Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death” (7:24b)? He gives us a quick answer in 7:25a: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Yes, there is a war and it can lead us to feeling wretched. But thanks be to God for our rescue through Jesus Christ!

## Discussion Guide

1. Read through Romans 7:14-25. Without thinking too much, what's the first word (or few words) that come to mind after reading this text? Why? Take time and read it over again, pretending like it's you speaking these words from your heart and not a letter from Paul. Does anything else stick out to you?
2. Paul is describing an internal battle that is fought inside of him. The reason there is a battle is because of his identity in Christ. If someone doesn't have the Holy Spirit living inside of them, there's a good chance they wouldn't experience this war. How would you describe the internal war in your soul to someone who doesn't know what you're talking about? What words would you use? What images would you point to?
3. Look at Romans 7:14-25 in the Message translation below. Read it out loud. If you could name a battle that you are experiencing in your life right now, what would it be? What does victory look like? How about defeat?
4. Paul eventually cries out, "What a wretched man I am!" in verse 24a. How do you feel about Paul calling himself a wretch? Why? Have you ever considered yourself a wretch? Why or why not? Do you think acknowledging yourself as a wretch is important for your Christian walk? Why or why not?
5. The next part of Paul's cry is, "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" Notice that he doesn't say "What must I do to rescue myself?" When you feel the war within, what are some things that you think you can do on your own to rescue yourself? Are those things typically helpful or do they just numb the pain for a little while?
6. Paul eventually cries out to thank God who delivers him through Jesus. Do you think this is a one-time cry when someone becomes a Christian or a daily prayer that needs spoken daily? Support your answer.
7. Take some time to pray. Acknowledge the war within. Name the battles and give them to Jesus. Acknowledge where you have failed and where you need His rescue. Thank Him for the rescue He provides. Thanks be to God!

## Romans 7:14-23 (the Message Translation)

*I can anticipate the response that is coming: "I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?" Yes. I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.*