

Romans
The Dark Guest (Part 2)
Romans 7:14-25
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I recently read an article that was, honestly, shocking. Last year, Roland Hawkins, a resident of Colorado Springs, returned home from a long bike trip out of state to discover that there were several homeless people living in his house. Now, under Colorado law at the time, if someone entered your home while it was unoccupied and moved their belongings in, they actually had a legal right to be in your home. And the only way to get them out was a lengthy legal process. Now, we have other ways than that here in Texas, but that's the way that they do it in Colorado, or at least did.

The problem with this legal loophole in the system was there were actually professional squatters who would use the maximum amount of time in one home and then when they finally saw that legal process unfold, they would simply move to another. In fact, the Sheriff's Department reported that people will cruise neighborhoods, find houses that are empty, and basically case the house. They will break in and change the locks. And in fact, when the police were called, legally, there was nothing they could do. The homeowner first had to follow this legal process.

One of the news articles about this particular man's situation writes this, "For Hawkins, that process began officially on August 10 of last year when he filed eviction paperwork in court. Two weeks later, he had to spend two hours in court waiting for a judge to approve the eviction. Hawkins then had to go back to the courthouse to get what's called a "Writ of Restitution" which essentially finalizes the eviction. Three days later (now we're almost 3 to 4 weeks after he arrived home and found these people living in his house) deputies showed up to move the squatters out." Now fortunately, for all of the residents of Colorado, this brought to light this problem, and they have since changed the law.

But as I read that article, I was reminded of the fact that there is here a point of spiritual similarity for us and in what we're learning in Romans 7; because in Romans 7, Paul explains that there is, in the soul of every Christian, a professional squatter, a dark guest who doesn't really belong there, but who will continue to occupy a place there until our lives are over here and we are glorified. Paul calls this squatter in our souls, this dark guest, the flesh. That's what we're learning here in Romans 7.

Let's read the paragraph together; it's been a couple of weeks, so let's just walk through it. Both, let me read it, and then I'll give you a brief reminder of what we've discovered so far, Romans 7, beginning in verse 14:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Now, as we've learned, Paul is describing in this section the struggle that all believers have with sin. Although we are regenerated, although we are growing in holiness, although there is a decreasing pattern of sin in our lives if we're Christians, we are still unable to obey God's moral law to the extent that we desire. And the reason for that is our flesh as Paul calls it. And there will be a battle. You have to get this into your mind, Christian. There will be a battle with indwelling sin, not for just a few weeks until we can get some sort of legal eviction notice, but rather for the rest of our entire lives. This squatter in our souls will be there and will be a constant source of war.

Now it is this struggle between the new person that you are in Christ and what Paul here calls your flesh that he describes and explains in the second half of Romans 7. Again, just to remind you and to sort of review what we have covered so far and to bring us up to speed, this section begins with our struggle with sin described in verses 14 - 20. Paul describes his ongoing struggle with sin and ours as well, and he does so in two very similar laments.

The first lament is in verses 14 - 17; the second is in verses 18 - 20. Although these are similar, they're not identical. The focus of the first lament is primarily on what I do; so, we could say this, lament number one in verses 14 - 17 is "I do the things I hate," I do the things I hate. Now in this first lament and in the second one that we'll look at in a moment, Paul follows the same basic pattern. Notice, first of all, the nature of our condition in verse 14, "but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin." He is "of flesh" and so are we. That means characterized at times by spiritual weakness and even sinfulness; and therefore, a slave to sin. He doesn't mean completely, totally, all the time a slave to sin; he means a slave to sin in one sense only which he goes on to explain in the next verses.

That brings us to the second part of this lament and that is the proof of our condition. The nature of our condition, we're of flesh sold into bondage to sin. The proof of that condition comes in verses 15 and 16. Verse 15 begins, "For," he says the reason I say I am sold under sin is this, "what I am doing, I do not understand."

You see when we sin as believers, we do what our minds don't approve of, what we've determined not to do, and we simply don't understand why we did it. Verse 15 goes on to say, "For," [here's what I don't understand] "I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." As a Christian, I know God's moral law; if you're a Christian, this is you; I know God's moral law, and I approve of it as good and right and desirable. More than that, I love it. And I don't just love it, I will to do it. That's what I want in my life, and I'm going to pursue that; I'm going to do that. We make a decision to obey it, but sometimes, instead, we end up doing the very thing that we hate: what God's law forbids, and what I had determined I would not do.

Verse 16, "But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good." My disapproval of my sin and my determination not to do it proves that I fully agree with God's moral law. In other words, I'm not blaming God for my sin. It's my fault. Like Paul, "I am of flesh, sold [under] sin."

Where does this condition come from? In verse 17, Paul finishes his first lament by identifying the source of our condition. "So now, [in light of the fact that I agree that the Law is good,] no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Now as we learned here, Paul is not denying personal responsibility for his sin. Instead, he is differentiating between his new redeemed self and the sin that continues to dwell in him. You see, Christian, when you sin, it is not the new person that you have become in Christ; it's sin; it's the dark guest; it's the squatter in

your soul; it's the sin who dwells in us. The sin that we commit, it cannot be an expression of the new creation we have become in Jesus Christ. Instead, our sin comes out of that part of us that remains yet unredeemed, what Paul calls here our flesh, or he describes as the sin which dwells in me. That's the source.

Now, that brings us, today, that catches us up where we left off last time; that brings us today to lament number two. Lament number two: "I don't do the things I love." We see this in verses 18 - 20. Here again, Paul, from a slightly different vantage point, reminds us of the reality of and the nature of this inner struggle that we all have with sin. The focus of the first lament was primarily, although not exclusively, on what I do, "I do at times the very things I hate." The focus of the second lament is primarily on what I don't do. Notice verse 18, I don't do the good I will to do. Verse 19, "the good that I want [to do], I do not do." You see, because of indwelling sin, I fail at times to do what God's moral law demands. More than that, I fail to do what I love, what I fully agree with, what I have committed myself to do.

As with the first lament, Paul follows here the same pattern. Notice he begins in the second lament by identifying the nature of our condition. Look back at the end of verse 17. He has just said that sin lives in him; it dwells in him; and it does in us as well. But now in verse 18, Paul takes it even further. Notice what he says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me." That is an amazingly comprehensive statement, "nothing good dwells in me."

Now, if Paul had stopped there, then this person, in the second half of Romans 7, could not be a Christian because that doesn't describe the reality of a Christian. But Paul doesn't stop there. Notice, he quickly adds, "that is, in my flesh." Paul says, when I say that nothing good dwells in me, I'm not saying that generally of me as a whole person because I've been redeemed; I've been regenerated; I have the Holy Spirit; I have a love for God and a love for His truth. So, I'm not saying that nothing good dwells anywhere in me; instead I'm speaking specifically of my flesh. When it comes to that part of me that remains unredeemed, there is nothing morally good. Let that settle into your mind for a moment, Christian. That part of you that has not yet been redeemed, when God looks at it, there is not one shred of anything that is morally good and acceptable in His sight. The only good God sees in you is what He has produced in you through the work of the Spirit and through regeneration, through sanctification.

Let me just stop and say: if you're here this morning, and you're not a Christian, then this is true of the entirety of your person. When God looks at you, He sees nothing morally good, not one

thing. And, in fact, your only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ, nothing good. If you're a Christian, there's nothing good about your flesh.

Now, let's move on then to the proof. As he continues to build his case in the second lament, he wants to prove this statement that he has just made, that in my flesh "nothing good dwells." So, notice the middle of verse 18, "for the willing is present in me." He says in my new person, this person that I am because of the work of Jesus Christ, because of regeneration, I have the desire to do good, but the doing of the good is not present in me. Paul says there is my flesh stealing from me my resolve; it's hindering my resolution; it's preventing the full completion of what I long and desire in my new person in Jesus Christ. I never completely do what I want to do; that's what Paul is saying.

You understand that. I mean, Paul didn't live a life of continual sin as an apostle; that's not what he's saying. He's saying, "I never measure up to what I want to do." Think of it this way. Did Paul want to love God with his whole heart all of the time? Did he? Well yeah, of course he did. Did he ever do that? No, he had the flesh just like you do. He never completely lived up to what he willed and desired and wanted to do. The new person that we are in Christ wills to do the good, that is to obey God's moral law, and yet, there are times when we fail to carry out at all what we have determined to do. You understand that. We sin; we confess it to God; our hearts are broken, and we determine by God's grace, I'm never by your grace, God, ever going to commit that sin against You again. And sometimes as we grow, that becomes a reality, but all too often what happens? We do it, again. It is also true; in fact, it is always true as Calvin pointed out, that what we do as Christians never perfectly conforms to our wills. It never really measures up to what we want. You understand this at a very practical level.

Let me use myself as an illustration. I want to be humble. I want to be a humble person because I know that is a reflection of the character of Christ. I know that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. I know as we talked about even in the summer pride is one of the deadly sins. I want to be humble like Christ is humble. But pride always finds a way, even if subtly, to resurface, even if it's being proud for being humble. I want to be unselfish; that is my heart's desire. I want to live the kind of life Jesus lived where I love other people rather than caring always for myself and my own needs first. I want to be unselfish. That is my desire and my prayer. I want to serve my wife and my daughters. But even if I offer to serve them, let's talk very practically. If I offer to get dessert for them, I'm walking back to the den weighing the bowls of ice cream to decide which of them has more so I can keep it. There's an uncomfortable

laughter here because the rest of you have had this experience. I'm not alone here, I know. This is our heart. This is because of our flesh, but it gets even worse.

Notice verse 19, "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want." It's bad enough that I don't do what I approve and what I love and what I've determined to do; but at times, I end up doing the very evil I hate and reject.

Now listen carefully, when I do that, as a Christian, it is both my responsibility, and at the same time it is not my responsibility. This is hard to balance. Martin Luther tries to explain this sort of tension using the illustration of horseback riding. Listen to Luther, "It is as with a rider, when his horse does not trot exactly as he wishes, it is he, and yet not he, that causes it to trot as it does. For the horse is not without him, nor he without the horse." It's actually a pretty good illustration isn't it? It lets you see that I am responsible for my sinful choices, for my failures; and at the same time, I'm not entirely responsible because it is that squatter in my soul; it is that part of me that remains unredeemed.

Now Paul finishes this second lament by again reminding us of the source of this condition. Verse 20, "I am doing the very thing I do not want." He's saying, at times, this isn't all the time, he saying at times, I end up doing the very thing I do not approve of, the thing I hate, and I've decided never to do again. And when that happens, verse 20 says, "I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Here Paul arrives at exactly the same conclusion as he did in verse 17. In fact, it's worded identically. Look at the words "no longer". Those are important words. Those two words imply that things are different once you're a Christian. Before Christ, Paul says all of me, and you would have to say, all of me with my whole heart was engaged in sin.

But that's no longer true because of this radical change called regeneration that happens at the moment of salvation when I'm made new in Jesus Christ. I'm raised from the spiritual death. I'm born again in the language of John 3. When that happens, something radically changes. The new me, the real me, no longer is completely responsible. What's really responsible is the sin which dwells in me. Yes, I am still ultimately responsible. This isn't dodging my responsibility. It's helping me understand where that's coming from. He doesn't mean that when you sin, you're not really sinning, nor does he mean that you're not really responsible. In fact, a couple of statements, Paul loves these kinds of statements with this tension in them. Let me give you a couple examples that will make this clearer, I think.

One of them is 1 Corinthians 15:10. Listen to Paul, “I labored even more than all of them.” Who labored? Who? I, Paul! He says, “I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” You see that same sort of tension. He likes that. In Galatians 2:20, he says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ [who] lives in me,” that tension. But we understand what he means here. Paul didn’t mean in 1 Corinthians 15 that he didn’t labor at ministry. He labored hard at ministry. He did. Paul didn’t mean, in Galatians 2, that he didn’t live his Christian life. Of course he lived his Christian life. What’s he doing? He’s pointing out primary causes. In 1 Corinthians 15 he was pointing out that the primary cause behind his ministry was not him, but the grace of God. In Galatians 2 he was pointing out that the primary cause behind his Christian life was not him, but Christ.

That’s exactly what he’s doing here in Romans 7. He’s not denying that we sin when we sin; of course we sin. He’s pointing out that the primary cause behind our sinful acts is not our new self; it’s indwelling sin; it’s the flesh that remains. Charles Hodge, in his excellent commentary on Romans, puts it this way; he says, “It is not my real and lasting self, but this intrusive tyrant dwelling within me that disobeys God’s law.” It’s a great way to put it.

By the way, this sin dwelling within me reminds us that sin isn’t just voluntary actions; that’s how some people define sin; it’s just that. No, he’s talking about sin dwelling in me. Again, listen to Hodge,

“Sin is presented as an abiding state of the mind, a disposition or principle that manifests itself in actions. We have some power over our acts; but over our imminent principles, we have no direct control. They master us and not we them. Herein consists our bondage to sin.” [Now listen to this,] “And as the power of an indwelling principal is increased by exercise, so the strength of sin, [Listen to this.] the strength of sin is increased by every voluntary act.”

We don’t think like that, do we? We tend to downplay, you know, it’s just one sin; it’s just one time; we think it’s not really important. Listen to Hodge, he goes on to say,

“Nothing is more dangerous than the erroneous opinion that an evil act can stand alone, or that a man can commit one sin and then stop.” [And here’s the punch line, listen to this,] “Every sin increases the power of the indwelling corruption.” [Every sin matters; every sin matters.]

So, the source of our condition then is indwelling sin, our flesh or our remaining fallenness, all of those terms are synonymous for the same thing.

Now, if you're a Christian, you look at those two laments, and you realize that they perfectly describe your own struggle with sin, your own experience when you sin. That's why we find ourselves loving that God put the second half of Romans 7 in the Bible, because it resonates with our souls. There our struggle with sin is described. Your struggle with sin is described; mine is described; this is us. It's not good grammar, but you get the idea.

But having described the struggle that we all face, Paul takes us further because in verses 21 – 25, he moves on beyond describing the struggle, and we learn of our struggle with sin explained in verses 21 - 25, our struggle with sin explained. He has described it perfectly; this is what we experience; this is how we feel when we sin. But now Paul is going to go further, and I love this; he's going to explain to us why, what's really happening?

Now, he begins his explanation of our struggle with sin by identifying our core problem. This is as far as we're going to get in the rest of our time today: our core problem. What is that problem? Two opposing principles within us! We see this in verses 21 - 23. Look at verse 21, "I find then the principle." Notice that little word "then". This is one of Paul's favorite words, and it's a word of logical transition. This word "then" shows that this paragraph we're about to study, that begins in verse 21, is Paul's logical deduction from the description of the struggle in verses 14 to 20. In light of the struggle that we all have with sin, Paul concludes that there are two opposing principles in all of us. Let me show you how those two principles are here in the text.

The first principle is in verse 21, "I find then the principle." Now the word "principle" there is the Greek word for law, "*nomos*". It's the same word as we've seen throughout this passage for law. "I find then the law" or the "principle". That's number one: principle. The second principle is down in verse 23, "but I see a different law", a different principle. So, there are these two opposing principles. What's Paul talking about here?

There are a few commentators who believe that when Paul uses the word "law" both in verse 21 in verse 23, he's still talking about God's moral law just as he has through the rest of this passage. But most commentators think, and I'm convinced of it, that he's using here in verses 21 and 23 the same Greek word but in a different more general sense. That's why the NAS translates it in verse 21 "principle". I think this can be proven, by the way, from what Paul says

in verse 22. In verse 22, having already talked about a law in verse 21, he says in verse 22, I'm talking now about "the law of God." Why would he say it that way? That implies that what he was talking about in verse 21 wasn't the law of God, it's something different; and I think that will become obvious as we work our way through.

So, what is this principle or law in verse 21 and the different one in verse 23? The leading Greek lexicon defines the word "law", in the sense that it's used in these two verses this way, "It is a practice that has taken hold, a custom or a principle. It is an established principal or system." Specifically, Paul says that there are within you, if you're a Christian, there are within you two principles or systems that have taken hold and are at work in us.

Principle number one, we learn about in verses 21 and 22. Now let me summarize principle number one, and then we'll look at the text. Here's the summary, principle number one: your redeemed soul, the new person that you are in Christ, agrees with and desires to obey God's Law. Notice verse 21. "I find," Paul says, this is the normal Greek work for "find", but here it's used in the sense of a discovery. This is a conclusion from Paul's study of the facts. He says this is what I've discovered; this is what I have found as I've considered the evidence. "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good."

Now the primary thrust of this statement in verse 21 is not the evil. The primary thrust is that Christians genuinely desire to obey God. Why do I say that? Because, verse 22 is going to make that clear; he talks about his love for God's Law. This is what characterizes a true Christian. He, notice verse 21, he "wants to do good." That's not talking about in some generic sense; he's talking about obeying God, obeying God's Law, obeying God's Word. This is what marks a true Christian. And yet, although we desire to obey God, he gives us this little statement in verse 21, "evil is present in me."

He's going to come back to that and develop that in the second principle in verse 23 in just a moment. But kind of set that aside for now; he's going to explain that. What he's really focusing on here is the end of verse 21, "I am one," (and so is every Christian) "who wants to do good," who wants to obey God, who wants to obey God's Law. Verse 22 makes this clear, "For" [Here's how I know that I want to do good.] "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man."

Now the law of God, he's very explicit here to identify it, as it has been throughout this passage, God's moral law summarized in the 10 Commandments. But by implication, it's larger than

that; it includes all of God's Word. So, when it comes to God's Law, specifically, or when it comes to God's Word as a whole, Paul says, "I [and every other true Christian] joyfully concur(s)." "Joyfully concurs" translates a Greek word that occurs only here in the New Testament. It means "to rejoice" or here's another sense that the leading Greek lexicon gives of it, and I think it's the one that's implied here, "delight". I delight in the law of God. And then he adds, at the end of verse 22, "in the inner man." That expression is a tipoff because that expression is used elsewhere of the inner life of a believer. You can see that in 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Ephesians 3:16. So, in a real sense, this inner man here, in verse 22, is the new man. He says, in the new person that I am, I delight in the law of God.

Now, what is Paul describing here? It's very important you get this. Verse 22 is not describing mere curiosity about the Bible. Nor is this the legalist or the Pharisee's desire to obey God's Law so he can earn his way into God's favor. That's all about what he can get. No, what's described in verse 22 is a genuine love of God's truth born out of a love for the God of truth, a love that longs to please God by obeying His Word from the heart. That's what we're talking about in verse 22, a genuine delight. This is part, by the way, of how we know the person in the second half of Romans 7 here is a believer because the real Christian rejoices in, delights in, the law of God.

That can't be said of unbelievers. Unbelievers sometimes enjoy studying the Bible. Maybe you're here this morning, and you're not a believer; you know that. And you find some curiosity, some interest in sort of working your way through this text because you know you understand its significance and its importance. Unbelievers sometimes read the Bible. Sometimes they research the Bible. They can be fascinated by what it teaches. In fact, I have technical commentaries in my library that were written by apostates, men who eventually rejected the Christian faith and its gospel, men who knew the background and the grammar of Scripture, but not the Lord of Scripture. But, (here's the point) unbelievers never ever joyfully concur with and delight in the law of God in their hearts. That is only the response of genuine believers.

Let me show you this. Turn back to Psalm 1; Psalm 1 is an introductory Psalm to the entire Psalter, and it lays out the two paths: the path of the righteous and the way or path of the wicked. The way of the righteous is described in the first three verses of this Psalm. First of all, in verse 1, he's described from a negative standpoint; the righteous is, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!" There's the negative, but here's the question. If you were going to describe a

righteous person, how would you describe him? What would you say marks a righteous person? Well, the Psalmist here only makes one positive description of a righteous person. Here's how you recognize a righteous person, look at verse 2. "But his" [here's our word,] "delight," "his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night." This, my friends, is the chief mark of a righteous person. Does he delight in the Scripture and does he meditate in it so that he can understand it better and she can do it? That's a righteous person.

You see this developed even more at length in Psalm 119; turn over there, Psalm 119. By the way, let me just briefly comment on Psalm 1 before I leave that. That word "delight" is obviously a different word, it's the Hebrew word for "delight"; but it means "to take pleasure in something, to experience emotional joy or delight." Ten times in the Old Testament, it's translated as "desire". The righteous person desires; he delights in the Bible. Like Job in Job 23:12, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

What is that delight, what does that desire look like? We find it here in Psalm 119. Let me just show you. Psalm 119:14, (and, by the way, there other references; this is just a sampling.) Verse 14, "I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches."

Is that the testimony of your heart? You'd rather have and understand the Scripture than have all the wealth the world offers? Look at verse 24, "Your testimonies also are my delight; They are my counselors." Is the Bible where you go to get counsel and direction for how to think and how to act and how to live and how to speak?

Verse 35, "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it." Verse 47, "I shall delight in Your commandments, Which I love. And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes."

Now, let me just pause and say this is not some special elite group of Christians. He's not talking here about the really advanced. "Well I'm not like that because you know I haven't grown enough yet." No, no, he's talking about normal, everyday Christians. How do I know that? Everyday believers! Well remember in Peter, Peter tells us that God implants within the soul of believers a desire for the Word of God like infants desire their mother's milk. He just makes us have that longing and desire. That's why some of you are here; why some of you drive a long way to be here, because you love the Scripture; you want to learn like the rest of us want to learn.

Now look again; keep in mind these are not special, elite, advanced Christians. This is what every Christian looks like. Look at verse 72, “The law of your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.” God what You said is more valuable than anything else to me. Verse 77, “May Your compassion come to me that I may live, For Your law is my delight.” Verse 97, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” That’s what I think about, when I can think about something other than what I’m doing immediately, that’s where my mind goes. Verse 143, “Trouble and anguish have come upon me.” Where do you go when you’re in the middle of trouble and trials? “Your commandments are my delight.” In the middle of that, I turn to Your Word. Look at verse 174, “I long for Your salvation, O Lord, And Your law is my delight.”

Let me just ask you, is that how you think about the Bible? Are you like a newborn babe who longs for the pure milk of the Word so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation? Principle number one: your redeemed soul, the new person you are in Christ, agrees with and loves and desires to obey God’s Law, His Word.

But there’s another principle; there’s another system at work in us who are believers that is diametrically opposed to this first principle. Here’s principle number two, it is found in verse 23. Again, let me give you a summary, and then we’ll look at it: your flesh, that part of you that remains unredeemed, wages war against your new desires and is the ultimate cause of your sin. This is principle number two.

Look at verse 23, “But I see,” it’s as if Paul looks carefully into his own soul, and now he’s going to tell us what he discovers there. He says, “But I see a different law,” that word “different” is the Greek word “*heteros*”, and we use that word sometimes in English, and it means “of a different kind”. He says I see a different kind of law or principal in the members of my body. Notice later in verse 23, he calls this different law or principle, “the law of sin.” It’s the same thing as indwelling sin that he mentioned back in verse 17 and 20. He says there is this different principle, this different law, the law of sin. And notice, it is in the members of my body.

What does Paul mean? Well, he means the same thing that he means when he introduced this expression back in chapter 6. It refers, obviously, (the members of my body refers) to all the parts and components of the human body. Paul uses this word “members”, in reference to the body, throughout the New Testament. He uses it to refer to eyes, to hands, feet, ears, the head, internal organs and even the tongue. But this Greek word, “members,” is broader than that. It

encompasses all the components of the physical body, not just the external limbs and even the organs. It also includes, importantly, the brain: the brain with its reasoning capacity, its thoughts, its patterns of thinking, its attitudes, its emotions, its imaginations. This is where sin finds its power. This is where the law of sin expresses itself in the members of my body.

Now again, Paul makes it clear here, as we learned back in chapter 6, he is not saying, listen very carefully, he is not saying that your physical body is inherently sinful; it's not. God made us to be body and soul. Jesus had a physical body when He was here on the earth, not one marked by sin like ours, but a physical body. He still has a physical body, now a glorified one. And we will dwell in a glorified, physical body forever. So, the body itself is not inherently sinful. Don't buy into some form of Greek dualism. That's not what Paul is teaching, and this is clear here because notice in verse 23. He does not say the law of sin is "of" our members which would have led us to say they're equal. The law of sin is our body. Our body is sinful inherently. That's not what he says. He says the law of sin, or this different law, is "in" our members.

Leon Morris writes, "The body is not evil though the forces of evil work through it." The flesh, our remaining fallenness, uses our unredeemed bodies as its beachhead to launch sin into our lives. And that includes not just our external limbs, not just our internal organs, but the brain, the connection point between our bodies and our souls.

Now, our flesh, this part of us that remains unredeemed, works against us according to verse 23 in two ways. First of all, notice, it wages "war against the law of my mind." That is, it wages war against the law of God that my mind recognizes, loves, and acknowledges. The flesh wages war against our redeemed souls and specifically our renewed minds: minds that love, agree with, and desire to obey God's Word.

But there's a second way our flesh works against us; not only waging war against the law of our mind, but verse 23 goes on to say, "and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." The Greek word that's translated "making a prisoner" literally means "to capture with a spear". This other law, this other principal, the law of sin which is in our members not only wages war against us, but there are times when it actually takes us prisoner; not permanently like was true before Christ, but at the moment that I sin.

Again, Hodge is very helpful here, listen to what he writes, "This does not mean that sin always triumphs in our actions," [in fact, if you're a Christian, that isn't true, sin doesn't always triumph in your actions. But he says this,] "but when it says, 'it makes me a prisoner,' it means simply

that it is a power from which the soul cannot free itself.” It’s always there; it’s relentless; it’s a prisoner in the sense that I can’t ultimately extricate myself completely and entirely from it and its influence. Folks, this is the universal experience of every Christian. If you’re a Christian, this describes you.

Now, in these verses, there is also a test. There is a test of whether or not you are a genuine Christian. Notice how a true Christian is described in this text.

Number one: a true Christian continually delights in God’s Law or in God’s Word. Verse 22, I delight in the law of God, in the Word of God, just like we saw in the Old Testament. This marks a true Christian.

Secondly: a true Christian consistently desires to obey it. How many times in these verses does Paul say, “I will to do the good; I will to do the good; I will to do the good?” This is what is true of a genuine Christian. There is a determination from the heart to obey God.

Thirdly: a true Christian daily battles the sin that dwells in him, striving to obey God’s Word. This is why this is called a war; there’s a warring against my soul, and I’m at war with my flesh.

And then number four: a true Christian is constantly aware of these two opposing principles within him. In other words, let me put it oppositely: if you are perfectly comfortable with your sin, if there’s no battle, if you’re okay, you think God’s okay, then understand that you have never experienced the spiritual change that is so radical Jesus calls it a new birth. Because if you experience that, you know this struggle with sin; you hate it; you want it out of your life, and you’re painfully aware of these two opposing principles at work in you.

So, test yourself. Look again at those four descriptions of every genuine Christian. Let me put it as simply as I can: if all four of those don’t describe you, it doesn’t matter what you say or think about yourself. You may think you’re a Christian. It doesn’t matter what you tell others. You may tell everybody around you, “I’m a Christian.” If these things do not describe you, then understand that it doesn’t matter that you prayed some prayer when you were a kid. It doesn’t matter that you walked an aisle, joined a church, threw a stick in the fire at Christian camp. It doesn’t matter that you had some spiritual experience where God showed up and you felt His presence. If these things do not describe you, God has never truly changed your soul. You are not a Christian because what Paul describes in Romans 7 is universally the experience of every true believer in Jesus Christ.

Let me just say to you this morning. If you're here, and you don't pass the test, you look at those and you go, "No, that's not me," then your only hope is Jesus Christ.

In fact, look at Romans 7:24. This is Paul talking about himself as a Christian, but it's just as true for you, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Who can do that? The answer is found in verse 25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Only Jesus Christ can free you from the slavery to your sin.

You may think you're free; but let me tell you, every time you sin, you're adding a new brick and a new bar to your prison. And someday it will reach a point where you will not be able to extricate yourself. If you doubt that, just read the news about this wretched man who abused all those girls. He didn't start out to become that. He built that prison by himself one bar at a time, one brick at a time, one act, one thought at a time, and that's the way sin always works.

Your only hope, my only hope, the only hope of anyone is Jesus Christ. I plead with you today to humble yourself before Him and cry out for forgiveness, for Him to make you a new person that only He can do.

But if those things do describe you, if those four points we see it in the text we've studied together this morning, if that does describe you, then be encouraged. You truly are a Christian, and here's what I want to encourage you with, and this is why I think Paul put this section here under the influence and an inspiration of the Spirit. The presence of these two opposing principles doesn't mean you're not a Christian; instead, it proves that you are because only a genuine believer experiences this kind of conflict in his soul.

Now, the good news is Paul is going to go on to explain how you and I can make progress in the war with our flesh. But, right now, he just wants us to understand it and to be comforted, to be encouraged that it's normal to experience this struggle as a believer. He did and every true genuine Christian does as well.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the comfort of this passage. I pray that you would protect anyone here from using it as an excuse for sin. Help us to take responsibility for our sin.

But Father, at the same time, I pray that for those who are battling, those who are struggling, those who are fighting, those who love your Word and long to obey it, Father, give them comfort; help them to see that it is that very struggle itself that proves that they truly belong to You.

I pray for those here this morning who don't know You, and I know there are some. Lord, humble them. Help them to see that they are building a prison by their own sinful choices from which they can never escape, and that their only hope is to humble themselves and to cry out to You through Your Son, Jesus Christ, who alone can set sinners free. We pray they would do that even today.

In Jesus's name, Amen.