

Warfare Within

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[0 : 00] If you've just joined us, we are working our way through the New Testament book of Romans. Romans, as I said right at the beginning, is one of the most powerful and influential pieces of literature ever written.

It has been the force behind some of the most significant transformations in society, in all of history, in fact. And it's my hope as we journey through this book that we would experience something of that deep and radical change in our own lives as we journey through it.

The story of Romans so far, as we have been going through over these number of weeks, is that though we deserve God's judgment, we can in fact be right with our creator God because Jesus Christ himself, God the Son, bore God's right anger for our sin in our place.

True faith is trusting in God's promises in Jesus Christ and all that Jesus has achieved on our behalf. Being made right with God, just justified by Jesus Christ means that therefore that we enjoy peace with God, peace with God, access to God and even in the midst of hardship and suffering in this world, a real sense of contentment and joy.

This is all because of Jesus Christ, our representative, that he himself has obeyed God's requirements on our behalf.

[1 : 36] He's done and achieved what we could not achieve. And crucially, we don't obey God to be made right with God. That's not how we get right with God.

Religion does not help you. But because of who we are, it's because of who we are in Jesus and what he's achieved for us. That's really the first five chapters of Romans in a very short summary. Chapters six and seven are a hinge in the book of Romans. We started in chapter six last week. There are hinge. Paul zooms in here in these chapters to show us how God's grace to us in Jesus not only justifies us, makes us right with God, but also transforms us.

It changes us. If you like, they answer the question, in view of Romans one to five, what happens now?

What's next? That's what chapters six and seven do. That is, these chapters are a theology of change. God's grace is not just powerful enough to save us from sin, but also to save us to obedience.

[3 : 00] In chapter six, last week, Paul says that we are united with Jesus in the most intimate relationship possible. And we are now set free to serve God for our joy and his glory.

Why would we not want to obey God after all that he's achieved for us in Jesus? Why would we not want to treasure him in all of life? Well, that brings us to chapter seven.

That's where we're in now. Now, this is a chapter that you can spend five minutes on and give you a brief overview, or you can spend weeks on it.

For your joy, I will be closer to the five minutes than the weeks this morning, but it is a deep, deep chapter. What this chapter tells us, in summary, is that all of life is a battle between two selves.

All of life. We all have a war going on inside of us between the good and the bad in our hearts.

[4 : 13] All of us. What it's telling us is that before Jesus, we think we're winning that war. With Jesus, it feels like we're losing the war.

And this is Paul bringing perspective to us here. When you become a Christian, the point is, when you become a Christian, you don't move from warfare to peace. With God you do, but not with the battle within.

You don't move from warfare to peace. We move from one battle to a new battle. That's what happens. We move from a war that we cannot win to a war that we cannot lose.

That's what Romans 7 is laying out for us. So the three points today, if you've got St. Paul's app, the battle before Christ, the battle in Christ, and the battle with Christ. That's how we're going to move

through this text.

So verses 7 to 13 is the battle that every human being has got going on inside of them. It's the battle that we have before Christ.

[5 : 21] Verse 7, Paul introduces another question on the back of his argument of the previous six verses, and in particular, verse 6 of chapter 7.

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

And so the question in verse 7 is, what shall we say then? Is the law sinful? Is the Old Testament law. God's word, is it sinful?

If we need to be released from the law, which is now referred to here as the old way, doesn't it mean that the law is sinful?

It's evil. And of course, the short answer is, certainly not. And then the long answer comes from verses 7 to 13. The summary version is, is it sin in us that makes the law ineffective?

[6 : 31] It's not that the law is evil, but it's the sin in us that makes the law ineffective. So the question is, well, what therefore is the law for?

And that's what Paul does here in these verses. What therefore does the law do? The main purpose of the law is it shows us the character of sin.

Verse 7. Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. The law does that by, firstly, it defines sin for us.

Verse 7 again. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had said, you shall not covet. That is, this means the very concept of coveting is outlined by the law.

That is, without that standard of the law, you shall not covet, Paul would not have known that coveting was a sin. That's what he's saying.

[7 : 43] So it defines what sin is. Secondly, the law reveals sin. Verse 8. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting.

For apart from the law, sin was dead. That is, when a commandment of God comes to us, this is what Paul's saying here.

When it comes to us, it aggravates and stirs up sin in our hearts. It doesn't just show us what sin is in general, but how sin resides in us.

The same idea is stated in verse 13. In order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good, that's the law, to bring about my death.

So that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful. What Paul's saying here is the more I tried to avoid coveting, the more coveting grew in me.

[9 : 01] The law made sin in my life utterly sinful. That is, I didn't realize how sinful I was before the law.

The law made sin in his life utterly sinful. That is, much worse. Totally inexcusable. So for the religious person sitting in this room or online, the Old Testament law, or let's summarize that, the Ten Commandments were never meant as a means to salvation.

Never. As if you could obey them and somehow be right with God. Because, and this is Paul's point, it's because it was given to sinners.

Instead, what the law does is exposes our need for salvation. It helps us to see how sinful we are.

Without the law, we will consistently be in denial about the depth and the nature of our sin.

So the law defines sin for us. It reveals sin in us. But thirdly, it provokes sin in us. Sin is aroused by the exposure to the law.

[10 : 35] This points us back to the early chapters of Romans and the bleak condition of every human heart. That is, what Romans 1 to 3 tells us is that there is a perversity about every human heart.

Perversity being a desire to do something for no other reason than because it's wrong. That's what perversity means. It's a joy in wrongdoing for its own sake.

And I had a heap of illustrations, personal illustrations, that I could bring to bear here. But because of my own children in the building, I decided not to go back into history, but instead to go way back into history and use St. Augustine instead.

I think we'll throw him on the dock here rather than me. And the ones that immediately came to mind about my joy in sin. St. Augustine writes about this in his Confessions.

He describes a time when he stole some pears as a boy. And then he draws some amazing insights from that experience. This is, I'll quote him.

[11 : 50] Near our vineyard was a pear tree loaded with fruit, though the fruit was not particularly attractive either in colour or taste. I and some other youths conceived the idea of shaking the pears off this tree and carrying them away.

We set out late at night, stole all the fruit that we could carry, and this was not to feed ourselves. We may have tasted a few. Then we threw the rest to the pigs.

Our real pleasure was simply in doing something that was not allowed. I had plenty of better pears of my own. I only took these ones in order that I might be a thief.

Once I had taken them, I threw them away, and all I tasted in them was my own iniquity, which I enjoyed very much.

That's every human heart. His point is, there is always a much deeper motive for the surface sins, and for every surface sin.

[13 : 06] When we lie or steal or impure or cruel, there is a superficial motive, and it might be greed, it might be anger, it might be loneliness, but there is a much deeper motive driving the superficial one.

An Augustine study of the Bible, and experience with the pear tree, showed him that the ultimate underlying motive for all sin is a desire to be God, to play God.

We have a deep desire to be in charge of our lives, and our world, in fact, to the degree that every person exists for my glory, for your glory.

And when they block my glory, anger is the result. Point out a problem with anger is what you get. We want to be sovereign. That goes right back to Genesis chapter 3. Every law God lays down in His word, Ten Commandments, everything else, every single law that He lays down is an infringement upon my perceived absolute sovereignty in life.

[14 : 33] Every one of them. Every one of them is a reminder that I am not God and prevents me from living life the way that I think life should be lived.

The essence of the very first sin of the Garden of Eden was to be like God, and it's the essence of all sin from that moment. So the more God's word, His law, is exposed exposed in me, the more that that sinful force, that deep desire in me will be aggravated into reaction against it.

And this leads to the fourth thing that sin does. It leads to an overwhelming conviction of sin. That's Paul's point in verses 9 to 11.

This is what he says in verse 9. Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

Now Paul here is not referring to a previous time in his life when the law of God had no bearing on his life. That is just not possible to interpret that verse in that way.

[15 : 55] That's because the Apostle Paul was a devout, he was a Jewish boy from a devout family. There was not a single time in his pre-Christian days when he did not know the law or try to obey the law.

Right from birth, that was his life. So I think he's meaning that before he was a Christian, he did not know the demands of the law, the true, the deep demands of the law.

He did not know what the law truly required. He saw a bunch of rules but did not understand the deep thrust of them all.

He did not know what it truly meant to love God supremely. And so when he says I was alive, he's writing about his own self-deception, his own self-perception.

I'm basically a good guy. Look at the rules that I keep. He thought that he was morally good, pleasing God.

[17 : 08] God was in fact satisfied with him. And when he writes the commandment came, he died, he realised he was in fact spiritually dead at that moment.

He thought I'm going along really well spiritually compared to everyone else I'm doing really well. Felt better than most. And then the law came and he had an overwhelming sense of his failure and his condemnation.

That is, if you like, the commandment came home to him. The reality of it struck me.

I came under the conviction of sin. And verse eight tells us that the commandment that came home to him that exposed his sin and his failure was the tenth commandment.

you shall not covet. Why that one? Why that one? What's special about it?

[18 : 22] You see, as a Pharisee, Paul would have thought of sin only in terms of external actions. As I go to say, most people do think of sin only in terms of external actions.

He would have thought that if I didn't commit an evil act, I was therefore not guilty of sin. You know, there's no time I've committed adultery, so tick the box. I've done that one. You know, tick the box. I haven't murdered anyone. Tick the box, tick the box, tick the box.

Woohoo! Gone through the first nine, tick the box, tick the box, tick the box. I'm a good guy. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed us that all the Ten Commandments refer not only to behaviour, but to much deeper level of inward attitudes and motives as well.

And yet, you can interpret the Ten Commandments superficially as behavioural rules relatively easy to keep. as did the rich young ruler when he came to Jesus and asked Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What did Jesus do? What was Jesus' response? He listed off the commandments, except Jesus didn't mention Commandment One, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and he didn't mention number Ten, do not covet.

[19 : 58] Jesus said go away and do that and you live, and he walked away sad. You see, coveting has everything to do with inner motives.

It has everything to do with heart issues. It's the one of these Ten Commandments that you cannot tick the box and say, I've done it practically. coveting includes envy, self-pitying, grumbling, murmuring.

Coveting is not just wanting, it's an idolatrous longing for more beauty, for more wealth, for more approval, for more popularity than you have. And Paul had never understood sin as a matter of inward longings and idolatrous drives and desires.

He had never seen sin as essentially coveting against God, failing to love God enough to be content with God.

He thought of sin only in terms of violating rules. And so when the commandment came home to him, he first in his life saw the depth of his sin right to the core of his being.

[21 : 20] He saw how utterly evil and wicked he was. And so the flaw was not in the law. Verse 12 indicates it's in fact quite the reverse.

The flaw was in Paul and us not the law. Externally we may be very good.

Internally we cannot be anything other than a sinful. The law is good but I am evil. That's his point in the first bit of chapter seven.

He's talking about his pre-Christian days. When you move to verse 14 there's now a shift and he's now referring to his battle in Christ as a Christian.

The first half is Paul looking back before he's a Christian now and how the law calls him to look beyond himself to Jesus for rescue. And this is now Paul writing about his current experience battling sin as a Christian.

[22 : 39] This is his battle and that of every Christian in Jesus in Christ. Now I need to disclose here that this section has been debated for centuries.

These verses here the second half of chapter seven have been debated for centuries. The issue is whether Paul is still writing here about his pre-Christian experience of battling sin or his current Christian experience of battling sin.

And let me just say that there have been plenty, plenty of thoughtful, wise, godly people on both sides of that debate.

Still are on both sides of that debate. For instance, some find it hard to reconcile that a Christian could write as Paul does in verse 14, I am unspiritual sold as a slave to sin.

He also confesses that he sins regularly in verse 15, I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do, but what I hate I do.

[23 : 55] And again in verse 18, I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Now, the reason I think he's writing about his current Christian experience of battle with sin is really four reasons.

Firstly, the change of verb tenses. He moves from the past in the tense of the verbs to the present tense in all verbs in. That is, in 7 to 13, the verbs are past tense, 14 onwards, present tense, he's talking about now.

Secondly, there's also a change of situation. Verses 7 to 13 is sin killing him, but from verses 14 onwards, it's him wrestling with sin.

It's a battle that he refuses to surrender to, but he is not dead or dying or losing. Thirdly, Paul delights in God's law in verse 22, for in my inner being I delight in God's law, even though sin is at work in him.

Romans 8, the very next chapter, Romans 8 verse 7 tells us that a sinful mind that is hostile to God cannot delight in God's law, cannot submit to God's law.

[25 : 22] A non-believer cannot delight in God's law. God's law. Fourthly, Paul admits he's a sinner in verse 18, and an unbeliever is unaware that they are so sinful that they cannot save themselves.

They cannot acknowledge the depth of their sin. That is why I think Paul is here in these verses laying out his inner struggle as a Christian.

Christian. It's the experience of every believer in Jesus. That experience is that on the one hand, we now see God's law as spiritual, verse 14, good, verse 16, and have a desire to keep it in verses 15 and 18.

Paul says that in his inner being, he rejoices in the law. in his heart of hearts, in the depths of himself, he loves the law of God.

But on the other hand, his actions are against the law. Sort of like Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr.

[26 : 39] Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. If you've never read it, it's a really helpful little read. It's only really short, like 80 pages or something in the original form. Don't watch a movie or just read the book.

Really, really helpful. The premise of the book is that every single being has a sense of two cells battling. Two sense of cells, a sense of two cells battling.

The principle of the book is which one am I truly? Which one is truly me? me? And you don't want to end up at the, in case you never read it, he kills himself.

Because the evil one became more him. That became his true sense. But that's what we wrestle with. Which one is truly me?

And particularly as a Christian? Am I a sinner or am I a saint? a saint? Before he was a Christian, Paul thought he was a saint. Now that he's a Christian, a saint, right before Jesus Christ, he now wrestles with am I actually a sinner?

[27 : 59] His sense of his sinfulness is much stronger and more disturbing to him now. So which one is he? Which one is he? The deepest desire is hard.

Am I a sinner or am I a saint? And the point of these verses is that for the Christian that question is settled.

It's settled. Even though the battle continues to rage, the question, the issue is settled. Verse 23, the law of God is our utmost delight.

There is still a powerful force of sin and rebellion within me, but those desires are not the deepest sense of who I am. As verse 20 says, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I, my deepest sense who does it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

As we saw last week, a Christian has had a identity transformation. A Christian really seeks God and loves his law and holiness.

[29 : 25] Even while sin remains in us with a whole lot of strength, whole lot of strength, it no longer controls our personality and our life.

That is our weakness, our inner conflict. The strength of the remaining corruption of our lives will still lead us to disobey God.

Even in this, and if this is you right now, and very conscious of your sin, the strength of the remaining corruption in your life, the sin in your life, will still lead you to disobey God even in the same ways you did prior to you being a Christian.

But now, that behaviour, that sin, goes against your deepest identity in Christ.

Many are puzzled, that I think the Paul seems to write here as if he's defeated. He writes in verse 14, I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

[30 : 42] I think he is saying that in ourselves, even as a Christian, we are still incapable of keeping the law in ourselves.

Notice that he uses the word I numerous times in these verses. He seems to be saying that in himself, left to his own devices, he is unable to live as he should.

Even though there is a new identity in Jesus, a new love, a new delight in God's law, a Christian is still incapable in and of themselves of keeping the law in its entirety, keeping the law and all the expectations of the law.

That's the battle of the Christian life. And it's the battle of the Christian life that if you are looking just to yourself and your own actions and not to Christ at the same time, you will feel defeated. You will feel defeated. And this leads the apostle Paul and I believe the Christian to the last point, the battle cry that comes with Christ.

[32 : 17] verses 24 and 25. These verses here are both a warning and a comfort. The first warning is that no one ever gets so advanced in the Christian life that they no longer have sin in their life.

Get rid of all notions of perfectionism. No, this is the, I mean, it's easy to see that in me, but this is the apostle Paul speaking here. Right?

This is Saint Paul saying, I'm battling with sin in my life. Saint Paul, right? Not me, Saint Paul.

Even he has not advanced in the Christian life that he no longer has to battle with sin. If we ever think that we've conquered our sin and are pretty good Christians, it's the first indication of self-deception.

if you ever think that you are a pretty good Christian, then that is the indication of self-deception.

[33 : 26] The more we grow as a Christian, the more we see our sin. The more we become holy, the less holy we will feel. That's the battle of the Christian life.

Even as we make progress against many bad habits and attitudes, we will grow more aware of the rebellious, sinful, deep roots in our hearts.

The second warning, which is linked to that, is that no one grows to a point where they no longer battle in. It is quite important that the Christian expects life to be an internal battle against two selves.

That's why this talk is called Warfare Within. In fact, if I may draw upon my past experience and past profession, a wounded feral pig is more dangerous than a healthy and a happy one.

More dangerous than a healthy and happy one. And so it is with sin. Our new identity in Jesus Christ has mortally wounded the sinful nature in us.

[34 : 54] Killed it completely but mortally wounded it within us and it is stirred up to fight back. The great comfort of this passage is that the struggle itself, oh and if you're a Christian, you're hanging on to Christ and you're struggling with your sin, you hear this, the struggle itself is testimony to our new identity in Jesus.

Jesus. When we struggle with sin, it is typical to think that we are such terrible Christians and how often people are quick to remind you that you're such a terrible Christian.

It's one thing I think to struggle with it internally, it's very, it's much harder when other people join with you and affirm your internal struggle.

This chapter encourages us that temptation and conflict with sin, even relapses into sin, are not inconsistent with a growing Christian.

The acknowledgement and the awareness of the internal battle is consistent with a growing Christian.

[36 : 28] You see, the Christian heart cries two things at the same time. There is the desperate cry of discouragement as we look at our own efforts and our own failing and our own sin.

It's the cry of the apostle Paul in verse 24, what a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

You see, when we read God's law properly and look at our own hearts honestly, we can only conclude that we are truly wretched.

God's and when we judge ourselves by God's standard rather than our own, what a wretched man I am is the only conclusion.

When we stop comparing ourselves with other people and look instead to a holy God, that's the only conclusion. Without accepting God's devastating critique of human nature, our own hearts, we will never, ever grasp the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ justification by faith alone.

[37 : 45] We will never grasp that. We will never understand it as beautiful and glorious. We will never appreciate the gospel of a received right standing with God only through Jesus Christ, only through him.

It is only when our hearts truly cry out about our wretchedness, that we can know and experience the hope, the liberation of looking away from ourselves to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And so as Paul cries out, not just what a wretched man I am, but who's going to rescue me from this body of death? Verse 25, thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ, our Lord. God's love for us. He said, St. Paul has got no hope in himself.

There is no hope in ourselves for salvation. No hope even in our present obedience. No hope in pursuit of the well-being of others.

[38 : 59] No hope in giving more money. No hope in any form of activity. Everything that we have done, everything that you have done, good and bad, everything that you are, only merits judgment.

Only merits judgment. That's what Romans is telling us. Don't look at your good things and think they're good.

There's a deeper motive that's going on. There's a heart issue going on here. Our only hope is to look to Jesus dying on the cross for us.

Our only hope is to rest in his righteousness, his right standing before God. You see, Jesus on the cross became wretched.

He took my sin, your sin, the sin of this world in the depths of his heart and became wretched so that you and I might receive his righteousness.

[40 : 21] We are wretched, but God is not. God is and he gives us his right standing through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who has rescued us and through the Holy Spirit he is in the process of changing us, but that's a battle that we will always wrestle with and he's changing us so that we can enjoy him forever.

And that's chapter 8 and that's the next couple of weeks. Thank you.