

# The Struggle with Sin in the Believer's Life Pt.3

Romans 7:14–25 (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. <sup>16</sup> If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. <sup>17</sup> But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

<sup>21</sup> I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. <sup>23</sup> But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup> O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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

## Introduction

# THE REALITY OF SIN AND DARKENING OF THE HUMAN MIND

**Psalm 14** puts it succinctly:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” (**Ps 14:1**)

The one who removes God from consideration, who is unresponsive to God, is a fool. In the words of John Woodhouse:

People who do not take God seriously find it very difficult to see the seriousness of not taking God seriously. To refuse to take God seriously is the ultimate stupidity but once you have committed it, the *inevitable effect* is to blind you to its idiocy. It does not seem at all stupid not to take God seriously, if you don't... Our sinfulness gets in the way of seeing our sinfulness.<sup>1</sup>

J Woodhouse, 'The Fall', from unpublished *Doctrine 1* lecture notes, Moore Theological College, 2012

“Sin has become a settled feature of human experience, and it shadows the behaviour of every human being.”

Review.

## LAMENT # 1

**The Condition**

**The Consequences**

**The Conclusion**

### The Condition

**Romans 7:14 (NKJV)**

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

**14** Οιδαμεν γαρ οτι ο νομος πνευματικος εστιν εγω δε σαρκικος ειμι πεπραμενος υπο την αμαρτιαν

## The Consequences

**15** For what **I am doing**, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not **practice**; but what I hate, that **I do**.

**15** ο γαρ **κατεργαζομαι** ου γινωσκω ου γαρ ο θελω τουτο πρασσω αλλ ο μισω τουτο **ποιω**

Newberry, T., & Berry, G. R. (2004). *The interlinear literal translation of the Greek New Testament* (Ro 7:15). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

**16** If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good.

## The Conclusion

Romans 7:17 (NKJV)

**17** **But now**, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

**17** **νυνι δε** ουκετι εγω κατεργαζομαι αυτο αλλη οικουσα εν εμοι αμαρτια

Newberry, T., & Berry, G. R. (2004). *The interlinear literal translation of the Greek New Testament* (Ro 7:17). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

# LAMENT # 2

The Condition  
The Consequences  
The Conclusion

## The Condition

<sup>18</sup> For **I know** that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;

**18** **Οιδα** γαρ οτι ουκ οικει εν εμοι τουτεστιν εν τη σαρκι μου αγαθον

Newberry, T., & Berry, G. R. (2004). *The interlinear literal translation of the Greek New Testament* (Ro 7:18). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

nothing good dwells;  
(οὐκ—ἀγαθον [*ouk—agathon*]). “Not absolutely good.

Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ro 7:18). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

## Genesis 6:5 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

## Job 14:4 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup> Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean?  
No one!

## Job 15:14–16 (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> “What *is* man, that he could be pure?  
And *he who is* born of a woman, that he could be righteous?  
<sup>15</sup> If *God* puts no trust in His saints,  
And the heavens are not pure in His sight,  
<sup>16</sup> How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy,  
Who drinks iniquity like water!

## Psalm 51:5 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

## Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> But we are all like an unclean *thing*,  
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;  
We all fade as a leaf,  
And our iniquities, like the wind,

Have taken us away.

Luke 11:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

### **being evil P.A Part**

to be in a state *v.* — to be or exist in a state or condition; often of states that are enduring as opposed to temporary.

Ephesians 2:1–3 (NKJV)

**2** And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Romans 3:10–18 (NKJV)

<sup>10</sup> As it is written:

*“There is none righteous, no, not one;*

<sup>11</sup> *There is none who understands;*

- There is none who seeks after God.*
- <sup>12</sup> *They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good, no, not one.”*
- <sup>13</sup> *“Their throat is an open tomb;  
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;  
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;*
- <sup>14</sup> *“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”*
- <sup>15</sup> *“Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
- <sup>16</sup> *Destruction and misery are in their ways;*
- <sup>17</sup> *And the way of peace they have not known.”*
- <sup>18</sup> *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

<sup>18</sup> For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;

Again he points out (see vv. 5, 14) that the only residence of sin in a believer’s life is his **flesh**, his unredeemed humanness. As noted above, the **flesh** in itself is not sinful, but it is still subject to sin and furnishes sin a beachhead from which to operate in a believer’s life.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, p. 387). Chicago: Moody Press.



## Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

<sup>5</sup> For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

### The Condition

## The Consequences

18b for **to will** is **present** with me, but **how to perform** what is good I do not find.

το γαρ **θελειν παρακειται** μοι το δε **κατεργαζεσθαι** το καλον ουχ ευρισκω

### present

parákeimai (3844 /pará, "close-beside" and 2749 /keímai, "lie down") – properly, lie down side-by-side, like with two moral realities which totally oppose each other (but still exist closely together).

### perform

katergázomai (from 2596 /katá, "down, exactly according to," intensifying 2038 /ergázomai, "work, accomplish") – literally, "work down to the end-point," i.e. to an exact, definite conclusion (note the prefix, 2596 /katá); bring to decisive finality (end-conclusion).

<sup>19</sup> For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; **but** the evil I will not *to do*, that **I practice**.

ου γαρ ο θελω ποιω αγαθον  
**αλλ** ο ου θελω κακον τουτο  
**πρασσω**

### I practice

4238 prássō – properly, the active process in performing (accomplishing) a deed, and implying what is done as a regular practice – i.e. a routine or habit (cf. R. Trench).

The other side of the predicament, Paul says, is that **I practice the very evil that I do not wish**. Again, it is important to understand that this great inner struggle with sin is not experienced by the

undeveloped and childish believer but by the mature man of God.

David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14) and was honored by having the Messiah named the Son of David. Yet no Old Testament saint seems a worse sinner or was more conscious of his own sin. Particularly in the great penitential psalms 32, 38, and 51, but in many other psalms as well, David agonized over and confessed his sin before God. He was so near to the heart of God that the least sin in his life loomed before his eyes as a great offense.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 388). Chicago: Moody Press.

## The Condition

## The Consequences

# The Conclusion

<sup>20</sup> Now if I do what **I will** not *to do*, it is no longer **I who do it**, but **sin that dwells in me**.

ει δε ο ου **θελω** εγω τουτο  
 ποιω ουκετι **εγω**  
**κατεργαζομαι** αυτο **αλλ η**  
**οικουσα εν εμοι αμαρτια**

I who do it, emphatic

that dwells in me.

οικουσα P.A.Pt

Paul repeats what he said in verses 16–17, with only slight variation. **If I am doing the very thing I do not wish**, he argues with simple logic, then it follows that **I am no longer the one doing it**. The apostle again uses the phrase **no longer**, referring to the time before his conversion. Before salvation it was the inner **I** who sinned and agreed with the sin. An unsaved person cannot truthfully say he is not doing it. He has no moral or spiritual “no longer.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 389). Chicago: Moody Press.

## LAMENT # 3

**The Condition**

**The Consequences**

**The Conclusion**

## The Condition

**21** I find then **a law**, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Ευρισκω αρα **τον νομον** τω θελοντι εμοι ποιειν το καλον οτι εμοι το κακον παρακειται

So it follows that, I find the law (absolute, principle) .....the willingness in me to be doing the good, that evil is continually present with me.

The continuing presence of **evil** in a believer's life is so universal that Paul refers to it not as an uncommon thing but as such a common reality as to be called a continually operating spiritual principle. Lingering sin does battle with every **good** thing a believer desires to do, every good thought, every good intention, every good motive, every good word, every good deed.

The Lord warned Cain when he became angry that Abel's sacrifice was accepted but his own was

not: “Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:7). Sin continues to crouch at the door, even of believers, in order to lead people into disobedience.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 389). Chicago: Moody Press.

## The Consequences

**22** For **I delight** in the law of God according to the **inward man**.  
 συνηδομαι γαρ τω νομω του  
 Θεου κατα τον εσω ανθρωπον

### **I delight**

synēdomai (from **4862** /sýn, "closely identify with" and hēdomai, "to experience sensory delight") – properly, experientially delighted from fully identifying with someone – shown by "agreement and having moral sympathy" (M. Vincent).

Job 23:12 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;  
 I have treasured the words of His mouth

More than my necessary *food*.

Psalm 1:1–2 (NKJV)

**1 *Blessed is the man***

Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

**2** But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 19:8 (NKJV)

**8** The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the  
heart;  
The commandment of the Lord *is* pure,  
enlightening the eyes;

Psalm 40:8 (NKJV)

**8** I delight to do Your will, O my God,  
And Your law *is* within my heart.”

Psalm 119:16 (NKJV)

**16** I will delight myself in Your statutes;  
I will not forget Your word.

Psalm 119:24 (NKJV)

<sup>24</sup> Your testimonies also *are* my delight  
And my counselors.

Psalm 119:47 (NKJV)

<sup>47</sup> And I will delight myself in Your commandments,  
Which I love.

inward man.

Ephesians 3:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of  
His glory, to be strengthened with might through His  
Spirit in the inner man,

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our  
outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is  
being renewed day by day.



**23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

και αιχμαλωτιζοντα με τω νομω της αμαρτιας τω οντι εν τοις μελεσιν μου

**23** But I see **another** law in my members

**2087** **héteros** – another (of a different kind). **2087** / **héteros** ("another but distinct in kind") stands in contrast to **243** / **állos** ("another of the same kind").

**antistrateuomai: to make war against**

**Original Word:** ἀντιστρατεύομαι

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** antistrateuomai

**Phonetic Spelling:** (an-tee-strat-yoo'-om-ahee)

1. to make a military expedition, or take the field, against anyone: Xenophon, Cyril 8, 8, 26.

2. to oppose, war against: **τίμι**, **Romans 7:23**.  
(Aristaenet. 2, 1, 13.)

war against.

From **anti** and **strateuomai**; (figuratively) to attack, i.e. (by implication) destroy -- war against.

473 **antí** (a preposition) – properly, opposite, corresponding to, off-setting (over-against); (figuratively) "in place of," i.e. what substitutes (serves as an equivalent, what is proportional).

4754 strateúomai – properly, to contend, fighting like a soldier in war; (figuratively) to engage in spiritual warfare.

### **Galatians 5:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

### **1 Timothy 6:9–14 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts

which drown men in destruction and perdition. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

<sup>11</sup> But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,

**23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind,

## **2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling

down strongholds, <sup>5</sup> casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

### **James 1:8 (NKJV)**

<sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

### **James 1:14–16 (NKJV)**

<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

<sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

### **Ephesians 6:11–12 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

### **Ephesians 6:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

**23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

**aichmalótizó: to take or lead captive**

**Original Word:** αἰχμαλωτίζω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** aichmalótizó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (aheekh-mal-o-tid'-zo)

**Definition:** to take or lead captive

**Usage:** I take captive (in war); I subdue, ensnare.

As Paul has already mentioned in the first part of this verse, the source of his sin is no longer the inner man, which is now redeemed and being sanctified. Like all believers while they are in this earthly life, Paul found himself sometimes to **be a prisoner of the law of sin**, the principle that evil was still present

in him (7:21). But now sin was only in the **members** of his body, in his old self (Eph. 4:22), which was still “dead because of sin” (Rom. 8:10).

It is not that Paul’s salvation was imperfect or in any way deficient. From the moment he receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the believer is completely acceptable by God and ready to meet Him. But as long as he remains in his mortal body, in his old unredeemed humanness, he remains subject to temptation and sin.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). *Romans* (Vol. 1, p. 391). Chicago: Moody Press.

**The Condition**  
**The Consequences**

## **The Conclusion**

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

ταλαιπωρος εγω ανθρωπος  
τις με ρυσεται εκ του  
σωματος του θανατου τουτου

<sup>25</sup> I thank God—through  
Jesus Christ our Lord!  
So then, with the mind I myself  
serve the law of God, but with  
the flesh the law of sin.  
ευχαριστω τω Θεω δια Ιησου  
Χριστου του Κυριου ημων  
αρα ουν αυτος εγω τω μεν  
νοί δουλευω νομω Θεου τη  
δε σαρκι νομω αμαρτιας

Paul's final lament is even more intense than the others. He cries out in utter anguish and frustration. **Wretched man that I am!** Because this person describes himself in such negative terms, many commentators believe he could not be speaking as a Christian, much less as an apostle. If Paul was speaking of himself, they argue, he must have been speaking about his preconversion condition.

But this is the condition to enter the kingdom

Matthew 5:3–4 (NKJV)

- 3 “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed *are* those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.

### **P.A.Pt.**

/penthéō ("mourn over a death") refers to "manifested grief" (WS, 360) – so severe it takes possession of a person and cannot be hid. (This is the same meaning of [3996](#) /penthéō throughout antiquity, cf. LS, R. Trench, Synonyms.)

Another psalmist expressed distress over his sin in words that only a person who knows and loves God could pray: “Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope” (Ps. 130:1–5).



Paul next asks a question to which he well knows the answer: **Who will set me free from the body of this death?** He again makes clear that the cause of his frustration and torment is **the body of this death**. It is only a believer's **body** that remains subject to sin and **death**.

*Rhuomai* (**set ... free**) has the basic idea of rescuing from danger and was used of a soldier's going to a wounded comrade on the battlefield and carrying him to safety. Paul longed for the day when he would be rescued from the last vestige of his old, sinful, unredeemed flesh.

It is reported that near Tarsus, where Paul was born (Acts 22:3), a certain ancient tribe sentenced convicted murderers to an especially gruesome execution. The corpse of the slain person was lashed tightly to the body of the murderer and remained there until the murderer himself died. In a few days, which doubtless seemed an eternity to the convicted man, the decay of the person he had slain infected and killed him. Perhaps Paul had such torture in mind when he expressed his yearning to be freed from **the body of this death**.

Without hesitation, the apostle testifies to the certainty of his eventual rescue and gives thanks

to his Lord even before he is set free: **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** he exults. Later in the epistle he further testifies, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18). Frustrating and painful as a believer’s present struggle with sin may be, that temporary earthly predicament is nothing compared with the eternal glory that awaits him in heaven.

Because Christians have a taste of God’s righteousness and glory while they are still on earth, their longing for heaven is all the more acute: “We ourselves,” Paul says, “having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23; cf. 2 Cor. 5:4). On that great day, even our corruptible bodies will be redeemed and made incorruptible. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” Paul assures us, “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.... The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be

to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:52–53, 56–57).

Paul’s primary emphasis in the present passage, however, is not on the believer’s eventual deliverance from sin’s presence but on the conflict with sin that torments every spiritually sensitive child of God. He therefore ends by summarizing the two sides of that struggle: **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.**

In the poem *Maud* (x. 5), one of Tennyson’s characters yearns, “Ah for a new man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be!” The Christian can say that a new man has already arisen in him, but he also must confess that the sinful part his old man has not yet ceased to be.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1991). [Romans](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 392–393). Chicago: Moody Press.

Apart from Jesus, not one of us can prevail for a moment. But united to him, we not only can prevail. We will. The Bible promises that “he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Boice, J. M. (1991–). [Romans: The Reign of Grace](#) (Vol. 2, p. 778). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

