



19.
'Guerilla warfare'
Romans 7.14-25

Background

These final verses in Romans 7 have occasioned considerable debate over the years, centred on the question as to whom it is that Paul is referring. Is he describing the experience of the Christian? Or is this descriptive of Paul's pre-Christian experience? Or is this the experience of a person under conviction of sin? The list goes on!

Without being dogmatic about it, there are strong arguments for concluding that this as a statement of the continuing struggle which believers will still have with sin (that's the line which Professor John Murray, for instance, took). That becomes perhaps the more apparent when this passage is seen in the wider context of this whole section of Paul's letter (6.1-7.25) where he is addressing the issue of sin in the experience of the believer.

In essence what he means his readers to understand is that for those who are in Christ Jesus, first, the *penalty* of sin has been paid in full; secondly, that the *power* of sin has been broken entirely; but that, thirdly, the *presence* of sin is persistent meanwhile.

It's that third reality which Paul, ever the pastor, is addressing in this passage. And it *is* very much a pastoral matter, a reality with which every believer struggles, often with enormous frustration, no small shame, and sometimes resulting in fits of deep depression.

Paul's concern here is to explain what lies behind the frustrations and tensions which believers experience in regard to sin. He does so by drawing a contrast between, on the one hand, our *renewed mind* as believers (whereby we delight in the law of God and desire that which is good), and, on the other hand, the *renegade members* of our bodies (which we recognise are still subject to death, and where the 'pockets of sin' still remain).

There is, therefore, inevitably a real struggle for believers in regard to sin, so intense that we long increasingly for the day when sin and sorrow and pain and death shall be no more. But it's not an equal struggle, because in the battle between our renewed mind and our renegade members a third party has come into play – the delivering power of the Lord Jesus through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Read the whole passage. If you're short of time concentrate on '**days**' (3), (6) and (7).

1) Monday 3rd June – the tension

Read [Romans 7.14](#)

“.. the law is spiritual: but I am unspiritual ..” (Rom.7.14)

There’s a tension to which every believer quickly becomes alert. Paul now addresses that tension by describing it, explaining it, and pointing to how it is resolved. The tension lies in the fact that our new life in Christ is lived out in an old, sin-tainted body.

In what sense can Paul say ‘I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin’?

How have you experienced this ‘tension’ in your life as a believer?

Prayer: *You have brought me out of the slavery of sin, and now I love Your law, O Lord. But taking that ‘slavery’ out of me takes so much longer! How I need Your daily help!*

2) Tuesday 4th June – an inner contradiction

Read [Romans 7.15-16](#)

“.. I agree that the law is good ..” (Rom.7.16)

How come we mess up as believers? Despite our best intentions and endeavours, we still say and do things which we immediately regret. That fact demonstrates two truths about us as believers: (1) at heart we love God’s law, but (2) we’re still infected by sin.

In what areas of your life are you most conscious of this ‘inner contradiction’?

What ways have you found to minimise the degree to which you end up doing what you don’t want to do?

Prayer: *You know me so well, O Lord! You know those areas in which I struggle most, repeatedly doing what I don’t want to do. Help me to live today according to Your law!*

3) Wednesday 5th June – guerilla warfare

Read [Romans 7.17-18](#)

“.. it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me ..” (Rom.7.17)

Just as terrorist cells may still be hidden in a city now under the control of its rightful ruler, so in lives now under the rule of their rightful king, the Lord Jesus, there are still these pockets of rebellion – ‘sin’/‘my sinful nature’. We’re engaged in guerilla warfare!

Since ‘it is no longer I myself who do it’ (v.17) does that make you less culpable?

Many today view themselves as ‘victims’, their conduct being blamed on their background, or experience, etc: how should you present the gospel to such?

As the security services make it their business to locate potential terrorist cells, you too must learn to identify your 'besetting sins': how can you do that?

What strategies can you adopt the better to guard against such besetting sins?

Prayer: *[I want to worship You](#), Lord, with all of my heart: give You my all and not just a part: lift up my hands to the King of kings, praise You in everything.*

4) Thursday 6th June – terrorist cells

Read [Romans 7.19-20](#)

".. if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it .." (Rom.7.20)

Even with good security services, well-drilled terrorist cells can be hard to locate and contain; and the damage they can cause, unwanted by a city's citizens, can be huge. A believer's sinful nature is akin to a network of such 'terrorist cells'. Be on your guard!

When you experience what Paul writes here, how do you avoid becoming depressed and frustrated in your walk with the Lord?

How might making yourself truly *accountable* to someone else help reduce the extent to which what Paul writes here is true of you?

Prayer: *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

5) Friday 7th June – know your enemy

Read [Romans 7.21](#)

".. although I want to do good, evil is right there with me .." (Rom.7.21)

Knowing your enemy is key to winning the victory. The 'law' to which Paul refers here is better understood as this 'pattern'. Although the city of your life has been restored to its rightful ruler, there are still some 'terrorist cells' (the sinful nature) around.

The Christian fights on three fronts – the world, the flesh and the devil: how are we to go about combatting the 'evil' that 'is right there with me'?

Is this 'law' something that invariably and inevitably happens, or something, rather, which happens as a general rule, but not inevitably?

Prayer: *How good and gracious You are, my Lord and God. As You went around doing good in the power of the Spirit, grant me today Your Spirit's help that I may do good.*

6) Saturday 8th June – waging war

Read [Romans 7.22-23](#)

".. I see another law at work within me .." (Rom.7.23)

The 'rebel forces' of the sinful nature are still present in your life as a believer: and it is war that they are intent on waging. The sinful nature challenges your delight in God's law, and seeks at every point to hold you hostage to its rebellious demands.

What part does the mind play in your battle against sin?

Marathon runners develop disciplines to ensure that when their body ('flesh') is screaming for them to stop, their mind overrules and they keep going: how can you similarly strengthen your mind to ensure it overrules the flesh?

Read [Prov.4.20-27](#): what practical guidance do these verses afford in terms of showing you how to 'guard your heart'?

In what sense does that 'other law' at work in you make you 'a prisoner of the law of sin' at work within you?

Prayer: Purify my heart, let me be as gold and precious silver. Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy, set apart from You, Lord, ready to do Your will.

7) Sunday 9th June – final deliverance

Read [Romans 7.24-25](#)

".. Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord .." (Rom.7.25)

The classic 'Now and not yet' of God's salvation in Jesus. the new life we've been given is meanwhile lived out in a body that's still affected, physically and spiritually, by the presence of sin. The best (our being made perfect in body and spirit) is yet to be!

What has been your experience of the 'wretchedness' to which Paul alludes here?

What does Paul mean by describing 'this body' as 'subject to death'?

How would you answer someone who asked you what this deliverance God effects for you in Jesus is like?

What steps have you taken which help ensure that your 'profession' (of faith in the Lord Jesus) is the better and the more consistently matched by your 'practice'?

Prayer: You're my great Rescuer, Lord. How sweet the sound! How grace abounds! I lift to You my praise and thanks again today and offer myself as Your servant again.