



Text: Romans 7:14-25¹

Series: Right Living – God’s Righteousness Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 9 – Battling the Enemy Within

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Terrorism is a fact of life for many people in our world today.

Political leaders are always targets for attack.

Cf. Toronto G7 Summit when we lived in Toronto a number of years ago: key world leaders were there -- PM Mulroney, US president Bush, British PM Thatcher, the German Chancellor, the French president, the Italian PM and the Japanese PM -- major terrorist targets.

The main meeting was in downtown Toronto but they had a planned dinner in Scarborough in eastern Toronto. We lived just off the main route to the place where they went for dinner.

The security forces secured the route: kept the final destination secret, barricaded and cleared the road, checked manholes and welded them shut, stationed police at all bridges and intersections.

The motorcades flew past: each leader had a separate convoy, driving at 60+ miles/hr., 3 or 4 stretch limos with darkened windows, preceded by a police car and followed by another cruiser and an ambulance.

All this security, just to go for dinner!

- Successful, no incidents, everybody got home safely.

In 1987, shortly after the tragic bombing by Sikh terrorists of the Air India jet that crashed in the Irish Sea, Vancouver hosted the Commonwealth Conference.

- Over 1/2 of the \$18 million dollar budget of the conference was spent on security - esp. to defend Indian PM, Indira Gandhi
- The Air India terrorists had operated out of Vancouver
- Security was successful -- no attacks.

A few months later, Mrs. Gandhi was gunned down in India in her own home -- not by terrorists who scaled the walls of her compound, but by Sikh members of her own trusted bodyguard who had been secretly plotting her death for some time.

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The enemy within -- the most dangerous and insidious kind of enemy!

- You can't screen them out at the airport -- they live in your home!
- They know your every move
- They watch and wait for the most vulnerable moment to strike!

Our soul has an enemy within!

- Our enemy does not come from the outside - we can't shut it out of our lives.
- It knows our every move
- It watches and waits for the most vulnerable moment to strike:

The believer in Jesus Christ is the special target of this terrorist.

When we're angry at cruel attacks -- it urges us to strike back with explosive words or crashing fists.

When we're lonely and away from home -- it offers comfort in illicit relationships or pain-numbing substances.

When we're frustrated with our responsibilities at home or work -- it prompts us to throw in the towel and walk away from it all.

When we're afraid we won't be able to cover our bills -- it tempts us to deny our confidence in God's care for us.

When we're confused about the difficult and painful circumstances of our lives -- it urges us, like it did to Job, to "curse God and die!"

When we're lying awake at night -- it rehearses all our faults and failures of the day, over and over again, until sleep is driven from our minds.

Have you ever experienced the attacks of this terrorist?

In Romans 7, verses 14 to 25, Paul gives us a bit of his own spiritual autobiography. He opens up his own heart and tells us about his own struggle with the enemy within. And as he does so, he gives us some valuable insights on how to battle the enemy within our own hearts.

There are many who suggest that Paul is not describing his own Christian experience in this passage and so I want to begin by sharing with my reasons for referring to Paul's comments as "autobiography."

The passage has generated a lot of debate within the Christian world over the years. After all, Paul refers to himself as "of the flesh, sold under sin" (v.14) and in his flesh serving "the law of sin." (v.25b). He speaks of himself as "captive to



the law of sin that dwells in his members.” (v.23) People legitimately ask, “How can this be the testimony of a Christian?” In the verses just prior to these paragraphs, Paul speaks of being “killed” because of the effect of sin in his life. (v.11) How can this be Paul’s description of those who are alive in Christ?

In a moment, I want to point you to some Biblical arguments that will support my belief that Paul is describing his own Christian experience in vv.14-25, but first, I want to appeal to my own Christian experience as an argument.

In my own life, I have had times when this passage has been a tremendous encouragement in my own battle with sin. Paul seems to be speaking my language and I rejoice that I have a fellow traveler on the road of discipleship who shares my struggle. As I read these words, there is something in me that immediately hears the voice of a brother walking the same road and dealing with the same issues I face.

When I read Paul’s lament, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” I hear my own cry!

Perhaps as you read these words this morning, you found a fellow traveler -- someone you believe who could understand the frustrations you feel at not living the kind of victorious, triumphant Christian life you want to live.

More than simply appealing to our common Christian experience let me give you some solid foundations to place under our feeling of kinship with Paul. I want us to take a good, close look at this text.

Paul’s present experience

First, it’s true that in verses 7 to 13 Paul is describing the deadness of pre-Christian spiritual experience. In verse 9 he wrote...

“I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” Romans 7:9

But there is a significant change in his language when we get to verse 14. In verses 7 to 13, Paul was using past tense verbs to describe his condition before he found Christ. But in verses 14 to 25 his language shifts to the present tense.

For example, in verse 14 Paul wrote...

“I am of the flesh, sold under sin.” Romans 7:14

And in verse 24, he declared...



“Wretched man that I am!” Romans 7:24

Paul’s use of the present tense in verses 14 to 25 seems to indicate that he is describing his present condition.

Paul’s inner battle

Secondly, Paul describes a war-condition inside himself that can only exist in the life of a person who has come to know Christ. Over and over again, Paul says that he wills to do what is good and hates what is evil (v.15-16). He wrote...

“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being” Romans 7:22

There is a contest for control going on between the good and the evil inside him. Listen to the sound of battle...

“So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.” Romans 7:25

Part of him is yearning for God’s purposes, while another part seems to be fighting against the Lord.

The condition Paul is describing would not occur in the life of those who don’t know Christ. In Romans chapter 3, verses 11 and 17 he told us that among those who don’t know Christ...

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God ... and the way of peace they have not known.” Romans 3:11, 17

In chapter 6, verse 20 he told us that before we came to know Christ we were...

“slaves of sin, [and] free in regard to righteousness.” Romans 6:20

In other words, we had no interest in or ability to be righteous.

In Galatians 5:16-17 Paul describes again this same war condition when he wrote to his "brothers," the members of the churches in Galatia...

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” Galatians 5:16-17

There is a battle between the Spirit and the flesh that exists only in the lives of true believers in Jesus.

Paul’s confident hope



Finally, although Paul says in v.14 that he is "sold under sin," what he is referring to is his "flesh," his sinful nature. Paul freely declares, "I am of the flesh" – in other words, the sin nature that I was born with and that lives in my body is still alive and it still connects me with the power of sin.

When Paul cries out...

**“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
Romans 7:24**

...he is not being melodramatic -- the flesh he was born with **is** a body of death -- it does contain the seeds of his own destruction and it will until it dies and is raised again and transformed by the power of God into a new spiritual body in the resurrection.

Although sin is still a power in his life, because the life of God is also coursing through his veins he is able to lift his mind and voice and with the same breath that expressed his repulsion at his sin he declares his confidence in God...

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:25

Only a man, living in the hope of salvation can do that!

In my opinion, Paul is describing a condition that many of us here this morning will recognize in our own spiritual lives. We are at war with an enemy within!
What can Paul teach us about dealing with our own spiritual terrorist?

First, he show us that...

We can remove the element of surprise from our enemy’s arsenal by affirming sin’s existence...

“sin...dwells within me.” Romans 7:17, 20

Sometimes when we lie awake at night, our enemy sneaks up on us and begins to run back the tape of our day, especially highlighting all our failures. Our enemy whispers into our spirit destructive doubts. The attack plan usually goes something like this:

“The Bible says ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’ (John 1:29) Hum, looks like He left some behind in your case! Are you sure the Lamb has been here?

The Bible says Christians have “died to sin.” (Romans 6:2) Sin sure seems pretty much alive in you! Are you sure you're one of them”



Paul reminds us twice in this passage that sin is alive and living in you and me! In verse 17 and verse 20 Paul declares that his sinful actions are the product of “sin that dwells within me.” (Romans 7:17, 20)

That word “dwell” has given rise to a doctrine that we’re talking about this morning. It’s called the problem of **“indwelling sin in believers.”** I have that problem; you have that problem; every believer throughout history has had that problem. One of the greatest examinations of this problem was written by an English theologian almost 350 years ago. His name was John Owen and the title of his book was “The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin.”

But what about these declarations about being “dead to sin” and about sin being “taken away”? We need to understand that the Bible speaks of sin in three distinct ways:

First, “sin” can refer to **our sin nature** - we’re born with it and it is the source of our problem (Rom.7:17) It “dwells” in us!

Second, “sin” can refer to **our sin actions** - these are the things we choose to do (John 3:4 ‘acts of commission’) or the things we fail to do (Jas 4:17 ‘acts of omission’). Paul refers here to doing “the very thing I hate.” (Rom 7:15) These sin actions are the result of our sin nature gaining control of our will.

And **thirdly**, “sin” can refer to **our sin guilt** - the penalty that God assesses to us because of our sin nature and our sin actions. (cf. Rom 3:9-10 “under sin”) In chapter 3, verse 9, Paul told us that the entire world was “under sin.” We stand guilty under the charge of being sinners by nature and by action and our just punishment is death.

When Christ, the Lamb of God, died on the cross he took away our sin guilt and its penalty ... he died for us and took our punishment. But the cross did not take away our sin nature and its actions. The sin nature was weakened and its ultimate extinction was announced ... but not until we are completely transformed into the likeness of the resurrected Christ will our sin problem finally be done away with.

Through His death for us on the cross Jesus has provided us with perfect forgiveness. He has also provided us with the resources to overcome our sin actions -- but these are not perfectly applied because of the continuing existence of our sin nature.

God’s perfect forgiveness is continually applied to our imperfect lives. The Apostle John was referring to “indwelling sin in believers” when he wrote...

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to



cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10

We are in constant, daily need of the grace and mercy of God because we continue to sin in many ways. If we're not clear about this, it can literally drive us crazy. If we think there's some special key to Christian living out there that will eradicate sin in our lives, at best we're going to live lives of self-deceptive false piety and at worst, we'll be driven to self-destructive frustration.

Dr. J.I. Packer is one of my own personal giants of the faith. I took as many classes as I could from him when I was studying at Regent College in Vancouver. His testimony is that the discovery of the truth of “indwelling sin” saved his sanity. Packer became a Christian in university and the group with which he was initially involved taught him the practice of “complete consecration.” They used the phrase, “Let go and let God,” to describe their take on holiness. They taught him that a Christian could rise above sin to a spiritual plateau where the warfare against sin would be left behind. The secret to this triumphant life was the complete surrender and consecration of the believer to God. According to this group, by identifying every possible sinful impulse and calling on God to take them over, the believer could rise to a level of Christian experience of “sustained peace and joy, constant inner confidence and regular victory over temptation and sin....” This is Packer’s testimony...

“I scraped my inside, figuratively speaking, to find things to yield to the Lord so as to make consecration complete, and I worked hard to ‘let go and let God’ when temptation made its presence felt. At that time I did not know that Harry Ironside, [former] pastor of Moody Memorial Church, Chicago, [and one of the founders of Dallas Theological Seminary], once drove himself into a full-scale mental breakdown through trying to find the secret that I was trying to find in the way I was trying to find it. Nor did I then conclude, as I have concluded since, that the higher Christian life as I was conceiving it is an unreality, a will-‘o-the-wisp which no one has ever laid hold of at all, and that those who testify to their experience in these terms really, if unwittingly, distort what has happened to them.

All I knew was that the expected experience was not coming, the technique was not working. And since according to the teaching everything depended on consecration being total, the fault must lie in me. So I must scrape my inside yet again to find whatever maggots of unconsecrated selfhood still lurked there. A few months of this left me, as can be imagined, fairly frantic.” (Sin & Temptation: The Challenge to Personal Godliness, Multnomah Press, 1983, p. xxvii)

And then Packer found Owen’s book and the sanity of it’s exposition of Romans 7 restored his mental and spiritual balance. There is no secret key to perfect holiness – holiness is a lifelong battle until we are raised to live a new life!

Secondly, Paul shows us that...



We can disarm our enemy's weapon of shame and fear by acknowledging our defeats -- Paul says, "I do the very thing I hate." (v.15)

Sin likes to keep us under its power by telling us that if people knew us as we really are they would mock us, spit on us, laugh at us and reject us. That is the power of shame and fear!

To break that power, the **first courageous step** we need to take is to...

Take responsibility for our sin.

In order to graduate from the University of Waterloo, I had to write an English Language Proficiency Exam. They sat hundreds of us down in the gym to write an impromptu essay. When I turned the paper over I found this as my subject for my essay: "The cartoon character Pogo said, 'We have seen the enemy and he is us.' Please explain."

My essay was an exposition of Paul's teaching in Romans 7. Well, I passed the exam -- BARELY -- in fact they recommended that I take remedial writing classes. I rationalized that result by thinking that the marker of my essay must have objected to my theology!

The point of Pogo's statement is that we are our own enemy. The sin that I do I hate, but it's still me that does it. It's shameful -- "I hate" it -- I'm not proud of it; it's embarrassing; but yes, I did it. I have to take responsibility for my sin.

Paul took a very courageous step in this letter -- he acknowledged his sin and took responsibility for it. Paul did not pass the buck for his sin to some anonymous "sin nature" -- it was his sin nature that did it.

Notice the way in which he owns up to his sin in verse 25...

"So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." Romans 7:25

"...With my flesh **I** serve the law of sin." (v.25b)

The **second courageous step** we need to take to break the power of shame and fear is to...

Freely admit our sin.

"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." Romans 7:19



Paul stood up and declared his failures for the entire world to see. That takes courage -- especially in front of people you might be tempted to try and impress with your deep spirituality! Paul had never met the Romans -- if it had been me writing this letter, I might have been tempted to pretend to be the great guru who had risen to the plain of sinless perfection so that they would listen with rapt attention.

Instead, he got down into the trenches of Christian warfare and told it like one foot soldier to another. In today's language, Paul was "vulnerable" -- he declared his weakness, and in the process, weakened the grip that shame and fear had on him AND on the lives of the Roman Christians AND on your life and mine.

People, you need to remember that you are imperfect; you're a sinner and sin is still living in you!

Admit your sin to yourself and to God: 1) name the thing you hate to do; 2) take responsibility for it before God and 3) be confident that God will not reject you when you call on him for mercy and forgiveness. You have perfect forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

But, you also need to remember that others are imperfect, too. We need friends and supporters to whom we can be honest about our failures and who will affirm us and not reject us. You need to find people like that for your own life. Be careful, though. Not everyone can be trusted to be mature enough to be honest about their own sin, let alone be able to hear your confession with grace.

Will we be that kind of supportive fellowship? Can people come for prayer and find people who will pray with them and not reject them? They will if we have made that same courageous admission of responsibility.

Thirdly, Paul shows us that...

We can defuse our enemy's weapon of despair by celebrating our victories -- Paul says, "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (v.22)

When sin gets you believing that God is not working in you anywhere, it's got you defeated. You know that old expression, "Where there's life, there's hope." Well, where there's any remnant of spiritual life, there's always hope for more!

I read a sermon by a Christian preacher in which he referred to a bulletin board he had seen when he was travelling from the LA airport to his home in the city. It carried the simple message, "KEEP HOPE ALIVE." Somebody in that city new the tremendous power of hope, but they were also aware of the tremendous power of despair.



Despair comes from focusing on the problems -- hope comes from focusing on the possibilities. Los Angeles is a city of tremendous problems -- focusing on these would lead any sane person to despair. But in the midst of the problems, choosing to look at the possibilities can give life to hope.

You might have a ton of problems in your Christian life.

Perhaps you're perplexed about maintaining a consistent spiritual discipline of Bible reading and prayer and the problem is leading you to despair – stop despairing!

Celebrate the fact that you in your “inner being” you want a more consistent spiritual life! You have the desire to do what is right! God's Spirit is at work – don't give up hope! You are here this morning listening to God's Word and worshipping with God's people. Celebrate the small victories.

Perhaps you're frustrated about your inability to share Christ with your friends and neighbors and your becoming despairing of your witness – stop despairing!

Celebrate the fact that in your “inner being” you want to fulfill the “Great Commission” of Christ to take the gospel message to the ends of earth.

Perhaps you're becoming concerned about your lack of love for those in need. You know you're not the personification of the “Good Samaritan.”

Celebrate the fact that in your “inner being” you want to fulfill the “Great Commandment” of Christ -- to love God and love your neighbor.

Maybe you're angered by continuing sin in your life.

Celebrate the presence in your “inner being” of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit calling you to holiness.

Don't give in to despair! Celebrate the small victories.

Finally, Paul shows that...

We can counter-attack and defeat our enemy with superior forces.

We are not left on our own in this battle. Paul cries out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v.24b) And his own voice gives him the answer – “God will!”

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:25

Paul's cry is not the cry of utter despair – it's a call for reinforcements!



It is a cry of frustration, but there is confidence that if he calls, God will deliver him and save him from all his troubles. God will fight the battle against sin in us. Paul knew that God was working in him and through him. He wrote to his brothers and sisters in Philippi...

“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

There is a battle to be fought and we are called to fight it – but we do it with the strength God provides!

How will God deliver us?

First of all, the cross reminds us of our victory over the guilt of sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, God's Spirit strengthens us in our battle against the power of sin.

Because our problem is an internal one, we need a rescuer who can enter our hearts and attack sin wherever it hides -- only the Spirit of God can do that!

David knew how much he needed the Spirit's help in defeating his enemy within. In Ps. 139:23-24 he prayed:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24

In the next chapter, Romans chapter 8, Paul teaches us how to live according to the Spirit. His word of encouragement to us is...

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Romans 8:13

Next week: we're going to examine Paul's teaching on life in the Spirit.

From Paul, our fellow traveler on the road of Christian living, we've learned some important lessons in battling the enemy within. We've learned that...

1) We can remove our enemy's element of surprise by affirming its existence -- sin is alive in me.

2) We can disarm its weapon of shame and fear by acknowledging our defeats.



3) We can defuse its weapon of despair by celebrating our small victories

4) We can counter-attack by calling on God's superior forces to fight for us.

**“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:24-25**

- **Prayer**
- **Song:** The Battle Belongs to the Lord.
- **Benediction**