THE QUESTION

How did John Chrysostom explain Paul's inner war (Romans 7:22–24)?

Asked by a THF member on August 15, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 6 early Christian passages we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/how-did-john-chrysostom-explain-pauls-inner-war-romans-7-22-24

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Chrysostom reads Romans 7:22–24 as a real war inside a person. The mind, which holds the law of nature, agrees with God, but sin rules like a tyrant and takes the person captive. He blames sin, not the body or God's Law, and says Christ came to give the strength to obey.

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POINT 1 OF 8

Sin is called law because people obey it

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom says Paul does not call sin a law because it is good or orderly. He calls it a law because sinners obey it so fully and are afraid to leave it, the way Scripture calls money a master and the belly a god.

1

> “Here again he calls sin a law, warring against the other law. He does not mean this because of good order, but because of the strict obedience given to it by those who comply with it.”
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> “In the same way, here he calls sin a law because of those who are so submissive to it, and are afraid to leave it, just as those who have received the Law are afraid to leave the Law.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 8

The law of the mind is nature's law

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

For Chrysostom, the law of my mind is the sense of right and wrong God planted in every person. The battle Paul describes is fought against that inner law, and the Law of Moses came later on top of it.

2

> “This, then, he means, is opposed to the law of nature. For this is what is meant by "the law of my mind." Next he describes a battle line and a war, and he refers the whole struggle to the law of nature.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 3 OF 8

The inner man matches the new man

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Preaching on Ephesians, Chrysostom links Romans 7:23 with Paul's words about the old and new man. He pairs the inner man that delights in God's law with the new man, and the outer man with the old.

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3 “These last two correspond to the first two: the new man to the inner man, and the old man to the outer man.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Ephesians* 13 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Captivity means sin had truly won

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom stresses Paul's strong word. Sin did not just win a round; it took the person captive. In another sermon he explains that captivity means being so overpowered that one cannot rise again.

4 “He does not use only the word "conquering," but "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 “For the word "captivity" carries two ideas: the loss of freedom, and being so completely overpowered that one cannot rise up again.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 21 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

Knowing the good was not enough

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom says the inner law taught what was right and the written Law praised it, yet neither won this battle. Sin's slavery was too strong. Knowing what to do without power to do it only brings greater blame.

6 “Yet still, both the one and the other, the one by teaching, the other by praising what was right, produced no great results in this battle. So great was the slavery of sin, as it overcame and gained the upper hand.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 6 OF 8

Sin is to blame, not body or Law

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom insists Paul is not attacking God's Law or the body itself. Sin twisted a good command, the way a sick man misuses good medicine. The trouble is a fleshly way of thinking, not the flesh as God made it.

7 “It was sin, not the Law, that increased desire, and the opposite of what the Law intended happened. This came from weakness, not from any evil in the Law.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 4, page 6 Read it in the library ›

8 “In this way he clears both the body and the Law of every accusation.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 3, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 7 OF 8

Christ gives the strength to obey

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

A little later in Romans, Chrysostom points to Christ as the answer. The Law showed what to do, but Christ supplied what was missing. The One who saves the soul also makes the flesh easy to bridle.

9 “For what good is it to know what ought to be done, if a man does not carry it out? None. It would only bring greater condemnation. And so, He who has saved the soul is the One who has also made the flesh easy to bridle.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English
Source 3, page 6 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 8 OF 8

A sinner can still be changed

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom warns against despair. Paul does not mean a bad person can never become good. He means a person who stays in wickedness cannot obey God. Anyone who turns can be changed, as Peter, David and the penitent thief were.

10

> "What he says, then, is not that it is impossible for a wicked man to become good, but that it is impossible for a person who continues in wickedness to be subject to God. Yet for a man to be changed, and so become good and subject to Him, is easy."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Romans* (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not include a line-by-line comment from Chrysostom on the cry of verse 24 itself.
- They do not settle whether Paul speaks of his life before or after coming to Christ.
- They come only from Chrysostom, not from other early writers.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 6 early Christian passages we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages (sources 1–6, grouped by writer, earliest first). **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *6 passages from 1 writer*

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 1–6*

1 *Homilies on Romans* **Quotes 1, 2, 4, 6, pages 2, 3** "the other law. He does not mean this because of good order, but because of the strict obedience given to it by those who comply with it. So then, Scripture… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Homilies on Romans* (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** "sin no longer wars against the law of our mind, neither does it lead us away captive as heretofore, for all that state has been ended and broken up, and… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Homilies on Romans* **Quotes 8, 9, page 4** he does seem to be speaking against the Law. But if anyone pays close attention, he actually praises it highly, by showing that it agrees with Christ and prefers the… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Homilies on Romans* **Quote 7, page 4** of all blame? For, he says, sin took its opportunity through the commandment. It was sin, not the Law, that increased desire, and the opposite of what the Law intended… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 21 **Quote 5, page 3** the loss of freedom. Why, then, has he used it? He used it with a particular meaning, in view of another point. For the word "captivity" carries two ideas: the… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Homilies on Ephesians* 13 **Quote 3, page 3** "And in the Epistle to the Romans, he mentions two more, where he says, "But I see a different law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind… [continues online] **read ›**

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked "How did John Chrysostom explain Paul's inner war (Romans 7:22–24)?" on August 15, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY