

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Romans 7:1–25 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: In the autumn of 1885, in a seaside house in Bournemouth (Born-Muth), England, a frail Scottish writer woke screaming from a nightmare. His wife shook him awake, and **Robert Louis Stevenson** complained that she had interrupted “a fine bogey tale.” In three days of furious writing, he produced a draft of the story that had come to him in his sleep. His wife read it and told him he had missed his own point — he had written a mere thriller when the dream had handed him an allegory. He threw the manuscript into the fire and wrote it all again. The result was *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Two moments in that book, I want to draw your attention to.

- The first is Jekyll’s confession: **“Man is not truly one, but truly two.”**
- The second comes the first time the doctor stands before the mirror and sees the hideous face of Hyde staring back — and feels, he admits, not horror but a leap of welcome — and says the most honest sentence in Victorian literature: **“This, too, was myself.”**

Stevenson did not invent the divided man. He grew up in Presbyterian Edinburgh, and he had read the seventh chapter of Romans. In many ways, his book was an allegory of **Romans 7**.

CONTEXT: In **Chapters 1-5**, Paul made it explicitly clear that our Justification was accomplished entirely through the person and work of Jesus Christ, apart from the words of the Law, so that no man may boast.

Last week, in **Chapter 6**, Paul began to introduce us to the concept of Sanctification, which we said is a cooperation with the Spirit, through which we are to present the members of our bodies no longer as slaves to sin, but as slaves to Christ.

Paul strongly refuted the charge of **Antinomianism** - or no lawness. Grace is not to be turned into a license to sin, but rather liberty to serve a true and better Master.

We said in **chapter 6** that Paul moved from the doctrine of **Justification** to that of **Sanctification**.

- **Justification** = how we are saved.
- **Sanctification** = how we act like we are saved.

Also, remember that the church in Rome is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. We said early in this study that Paul seems to be moving back and forth, addressing the concerns of each group in turn. Here in Chapter 7, Paul answers the concern that Chapter 6 would have produced in the hearts of the Jewish brethren. These are those who were trained up UNDER the law of Moses. It was common for the Jews to accuse the Christ followers of trying to eradicate the Law. **Well, is that what Paul is arguing for here? Is he suggesting that the Law is bad?**

Chapter 7 is one long vindication of the law of God. It’s also the pathway to true freedom.

Remember the **Principle of Repetition**? Here in chapter 7, Paul uses the word “**law**” 30 times in 25 verses.

Paul will prove that two things are simultaneously true: **the law is holy** — and **the law is helpless**. It can **diagnose** sin; it cannot **deliver** from sin.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way: “*Sanctification by the law is as impossible as justification by the law.*” The law was never given to save us or to sanctify us — and until we learn that, we will fight a war we cannot win with a weapon that was never issued for the purpose. With that in mind, let’s begin...

TEXT: Romans 7:1–25 (ESV)

1. Our Relationshift (vrs. 1-13)

a. Christ is our New Lord

¹ Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? ² For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.

We talked about that last week - almost every legal claim is nullified at death. You cannot subpoena a dead man. Thus, we say in the Christian wedding ceremony, “till death do you part”.

Now, verse three is not saying anything about divorce; Paul is assuming there is no legal divorce. Some people will use verse three to develop the concept that divorce doesn’t actually occur spiritually - Jesus made it clear that while it is a heartbreaking thing and a thing God hates, it is a real thing. So keep that in mind; don’t force this illustration beyond what Paul intends. He is presuming that a husband and wife are legally married and living.

³ Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

So, if a married woman moves in with another man while she is married to her husband, she is committing adultery; that is what Paul is saying. Very straightforward point.

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, **you also have died to the law through the body of Christ,**

Now, carry the illustration into our relationship with the Law. We were once married to the Law, but when we (Our old self) died through our union with Christ, that marriage to the Law ended, you see?

4b. so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Now, the Law is not your husband, your authority, your head, but Christ.

⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Verse 6 is VERY IMPORTANT - it is a preview of coming attractions. For the first time in this chapter, Paul mentions the **Holy Spirit**. NOW - underline, highlight, remember that reference. He is giving you the answer, then moving on under the presumption that you don’t fully

understand it. He will not mention the Holy Spirit again in chapter 7. Then he will mention the Holy Spirit 20 times in chapter 8. That's incredibly important.

But for the time being, recognize that your legal relationship to the law ended at the death of Christ; now you are married to a better husband, and you are called to as verse 6b says, "serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code".

Our Relationship Shifted - from the Law to Christ...Now - remember, this almost sounds like heresy to the Jewish brethren... we are no longer under the law? Are you saying the law is bad? Paul's answer is in verse 7.

b. The Law is our Old Friend

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The law did something stranger than reveal Saul's sin. It stirred it.

ILLUSTRATION: I love sitting by the fire pit at night, especially in the cooler weather. There is an art to building a fire and to keeping it going. Several years ago, a metal worker in our church gave me an iron rod that had been shaped and painted for the purpose of stoking the fire. Stoking the fire redistributes hot spots and allows the air to feed the flame, making it stronger. Paul says that it is similar to what the law does to sin in our hearts.

ILLUSTRATION: Augustine remembered that, as a teenager, he and his friends stripped a neighbor's pear tree — and he could never get over the fact that he wasn't hungry. The pears were not beautiful; he had better fruit at home. They flung most of them to the pigs. Writing his Confessions decades later, he said ***he did not steal the pears in spite of their being forbidden, but because they were forbidden*** — the theft was sweet precisely because it was theft.

We've all seen it with our kids - you tell them not to touch something; well, it had never occurred to them to touch it until you said not to. Now, it's all they can think about.

ILLUSTRATION: Tom Nelson visited the Panhandle of Florida, where a condo sat right up against the beach. After the condo had been in operation for a few years, it had an insurance man come through and do an audit. He noticed that the upper floors were high enough that if a man wanted to, he could fish from his balcony, which would cause danger to the floors below. So he recommended they put up signs that said, "No fishing from the balcony". Well, in ten years, no one had ever thought about fishing from the balcony, but after those signs went up, guess what happened? That's how the law works. It produces the desire to sin.

¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

GREEK NOTE: "Seizing an opportunity" (vv. 8, 11) is *aphormē* (ἀφορμή) — a military term: a base of operations, a beachhead from which a campaign is launched. Sin is an occupying power that captures God's good commandment and turns it into a staging ground for military operations.

¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Ok, so follow his logic - ***the law, a good thing, agitated indwelling sin, a bad thing, for a good purpose*** - to show me just how truly sinful I really am.

1. ***Our Relationship to the Law has Shifted - from the Law to Christ...***

NOW - At verse 14, something changes that you can feel even in English: the tense. ***Every verb from verse 7 through 13 is past — I was, sin came, I died. From verse 14 to the end, every verb is present — I am, I do, I find, I see.***

Now, for 2,000 years, the church has debated whether Paul was talking about the experience of a Christian or a non-Christian. I hold that Paul is describing the experience of a Christian who is attempting to conquer sin in his or her own power. This is the reality of that experience. This is Paul's reality, and this is OUR reality.

2. **Our Reality Shaped**

a. **A Deluted Path**

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Have you ever felt that way? Knowing something was wrong, agreeing it was wrong, even feeling it was wrong - but still you did it? If you are a Christian, you understand what Paul is describing.

Apart from reliance on the Holy Spirit, the Christian life is an extremely confusing path. And, letter b, it produces...

b. **A Divided Person**

¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

This is Stephenson's "This Too Was Me, " both Jekyll and Hyde. We've all been there.

c. **A Discernible Principle**

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Here is the lab report of every honest saint: a law, a fixed principle, reliable as gravity — never is the enemy closer than when you kneel to pray, never more inventive than on Sunday morning.

And here is the paradox that confuses every young believer: the war gets louder, not quieter, as you grow; ***the closer we get to God, the more we see our sin.***

ILLUSTRATION: John Gerstner told of checking himself in the dim mirror of his office before a dinner party — hair combed, face clean, presentable. Then he walked into the brightly lit

dining room, caught his reflection again, and was appalled: his forehead was smudged all over with newsprint. Same face, same smudges, in both mirrors. What changed? The light. If you see more sin in yourself at fifty than you did at twenty-five, that is not necessarily backsliding. It may be nothing more than better lighting.

Doesn't sound like Paul is miserable here?

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

ILLUSTRATION: Is Paul really this miserable all the time? Picture a man of thirty who has everything: film-star looks, an athlete's body, a fortune, a wife he adores, three delightful children. One morning he slams the car door on his finger and breaks it. The doctor scoffs: "You have two hundred and five unbroken bones and a magnificent life — and you carry on about one finger?" The man replies, "I don't deny a word of it. But this finger, at this moment, is very, very sore."

That is Romans 7:24. Paul is not describing a miserable life — the Christian life is mostly victory and joy. He is describing the moment of sin, the broken finger, when a man who loves God fails the God he loves and feels it like a fracture. And feeling it is the sign of health. Dead fingers don't hurt.

1. ***Our Relationship Shifted*** - from the Law to Christ...the Law was not bad, but helpful in revealing our sin.
2. ***Our Reality has Been Shaped*** - Sin is still present in our mortal bodies, making our Christian hearts at times miserable...

3. Our Rejoicing Shared

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

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

What follows will sound familiar to anyone who has battled addiction specifically through 12-step programs like AA.

ILLUSTRATION: Bill Wilson didn't invent AA out of thin air — they were distilled from the **Oxford Group**, an explicitly Christian movement, via Sam Shoemaker's Calvary Church. So some of these things will resonate, and the program works because it's rooted in scripture.

What follows is the three major movements of Christian Freedom:

a. Eliminate Ego

²⁴ Wretched man that I am!

Now, if anyone could boast about having it all together, it was Paul, the Apostle. But Paul describes himself in the harshest of terms - wretched man, chief of sinners. In other words, he has waged war on the idea that he is somehow capable of pulling himself up by his bootstraps and living the Christian life.

The Christian life has only been lived one time - by Jesus, and he relives it again and again through His people. But you are absolutely and totally incapable of living it yourself. There is no place for an ARROGANT SANTIFICATION. Ego is eliminated. Humility is embraced.

b. Search for Who, not What

24b. Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Mark the word **“WHO”**. Not **“WHAT”** will deliver me — not a technique, a program, a resolution. Paul has tried the strongest **WHAT** in the universe, the holy law of God, and it could not lift him an inch.

When a man stops asking WHAT and starts asking WHO, he is closer to deliverance than he has ever been.

c. Focus on Progress not Perfection

24b. Who will deliver me **from this body of death**?

Let me ask you something: When will Christ ultimately remove you from this body of death? At the resurrection. Therefore, there is a sense in which you will never achieve ultimate freedom until then. So the goal, is progressive sanctification. If you are determined to fix every issue today - you will be very disappointed. But if you can look at your progress over weeks, months, years, decades, you will be very encouraged.

d. Battle Temptation with Thanksgiving

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Gratitude, not gritted teeth, is the engine of holiness.

Someone asked this week about doing Christmas in July - I have no problem with that, but I certainly think we should do Thanksgiving in July, August, September, every month, and every day of the calendar year.

The attitude of gratitude is the healthiest emotion you can possess.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Paul ends with this doxology - thanks be to God. Now, here's the deal. If you walk out of here today and say, "Now I've got it!" I can finally be free from sin and walk in freedom. You will find that the tension has not been fully resolved. The key really is the life of the Spirit in chapter 8. But rest well knowing that the chapter begins with **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1).**

The war is real. So is the verdict. And the verdict outranks the war.

Come back with me to the mirror — the respectable doctor staring at the face of Hyde, telling the truth at last: ***"This, too, was myself."*** Have you stood at that mirror? Not Stevenson's — yours. The moment after the outburst, after the click of the website, after the words you cannot unsay — when you looked at what you had done and thought: I hate this. And it is mine. Romans 7 was written for the person at that mirror.

- Remember how Stevenson's story ends. Jekyll swears off the potion and throws himself into charity, and for two months virtue holds. Then one fine January day, on a bench in Regent's Park, he compares himself with other men — his active goodwill against their lazy cruelty — and at the very moment of that self-congratulating thought, without one drop of potion, he becomes Hyde. Trying harder did not defeat the monster; it fed him. The tale closes with the last supply failing and a suicide behind a locked laboratory door - this is the end of all addiction.
- But the gospel tells a different ending. There walked among us one Man who had no Hyde in Him at all — no divided heart, no hidden self, nothing in the mirror but perfect love for His

Father. And the Scripture says: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). At the cross the only undivided Man was treated as the monster — condemned, cast out, crushed under the law’s full sentence — so that divided men and women like us could be declared whole, and then, by His Spirit, actually made whole.

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