

All Mixed Up

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- [0 : 0 0] Bow your heads. Our God, this is such an important passage of scripture, and in many ways seemingly totally incomprehensible.
- And yet, perhaps it could be for us, by your grace and by the inner working of your Holy Spirit, a great moment, and even a kind of window on the whole of scripture.
- So we ask that as we apply our minds and our hearts to it, that you will indeed open your word to our hearts, and open our hearts to your word.
- In Christ's name, amen. Amen. I want to deal particularly with that part of Romans chapter 7, which begins in verse 14.
- We know that the law is spiritual, and you can have a little contest if you want with me on this subject. I have decided that there are 43 references to I, my, and me in the following 11 verses.
- [1 : 2 1] So if you want to work on that while I'm preaching this sermon, that will keep you distracted. But it's, in terms of a personal testimony, it would be hard to imagine a personal testimony which contained more eyes than this.
- And Paul gives this testimony, and it's a very self-centered testimony, but it refers primarily to Paul's understanding of sin.
- And he understood it not just as something out there, but as something which was part of the reality of his own daily experience, that he was a sinner, that he had what is called original sin.
- Do you want to know what original sin is? Just look in your prayer book, which is the maroon book in your pew. And the wonderful, yeah.
- Just look at it, because it's an amazing statement. And you may not understand very much of it when we read it over the first time, but it's on page 702, and it talks about original sin.
- [2 : 5 0] This talks about it in theological terms or doctrinal terms, while Paul talks about it in Romans 7 in highly personal terms. And it reads as follows, You understand that?
- Neither do I, so we'll move on. But I get to understand it better as it moves on, too, and I hope you will. It is the fault and corruption of the nature of everyone that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, of which we are all the offspring of Adam.
- And in this, we are very far gone from original righteousness that's almost been totally defaced. And that's who man is, or woman, and is very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always, contrary to the spirit.
- It's a war that never ends. And that war is going on in your heart and mine right now. And therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserves God's wrath and damnation.
- This condition deserves God's damnation. This infection of nature doth remain in them that are regenerated, that is, those who call themselves Christians, as having been born again by the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 49] This infection of nature remains in them, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek phronema sarkos, which some do expound the wisdom of the flesh, some sensuality, some the affections of the flesh, some the desire of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God.

That this reality is not subject to the law of God. It can't come under the law of God. The law of God can't control it. Romans 7 explains how that works.

And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.

So that sin is a continuing reality for Christians. It's something that continues to happen. Now, I want to tell you that you are a mess.

And the reason I know that is because Paul tells us that he is, and therefore I can rightly conclude that none of you being, in a sense, better than St. Paul, you must be too.

[6 : 15] And so I want just to draw this illustration of who you are. Here it is. There is your right ear and there is your left ear and there is your eye and there is your eye and there is your nose and you're not very long and you're short and you're taken out of here.

So that's how it is. Spiritually, that's who you are. That's the picture. Now, in terms of our society, if you were the father of that, you might seriously consider abortion.

You don't want that. I mean, that's spiritually who we are. And God sees that. And if he was to say, abort, you would understand what he meant.

But he doesn't. He confers his love upon that. Now, this is an inner and kind of spiritual picture.

I haven't figured out how to flip this. So it says that what happens to us is this.

[7 : 36] And this is what happens in Romans 7. That's how we like to think of ourselves.

You know, that that's what we think Christians are. When I first became a Christian, one of the most depressing facts in my life was the number of people who I met who thought of themselves this way.

They didn't drink, dance, smoke, or go to the movies. And they were there. And they were perfect. When I was 18 at the time, and you may never be able to imagine this, but when you were 18, at the time that I was 18, if you didn't smoke like a furnace, you were considered out of it.

I gather that's not going the same way. You know, but I, there is, there was a, somebody told me that as soon as he became a Christian, he threw away his cigarettes and never touched them again.

So as soon as I became a Christian, I threw away my cigarettes and touched them again. So that, this didn't work for me.

[9 : 13] This idea of being this kind of a Christian simply didn't work. It was very admirable. It was something that you might hope for.

It's something that people might expect of you. And they certainly do it of ministers generally. And this helps to create this image when you have a collar on.

In some sort. Let's say. But this is the kind of image. The other image that you have of people is this.

And this is his girlfriend over here. This is his pot belly here because he drinks too much beer. And that's the way he lives.

Completely and utterly for himself. Now this is a fairly congenial kind of fellow. You know, they're likable people. They drink too much and they behave badly. But basically they're likable people.

[10 : 17] The kind of sinners that are steeped in pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency are much less likable than this one. So that what you end up doing is you decide that even though there's lots in you that would like to, you know, that could conform to this pattern over here.

And then there's this thing over here which is the expectation you may have of yourself and others may have of you. Yet you soon discover that you're not this person.

And you're not altogether this person either. The title that you're given for this talk tonight is that you're all mixed up.

Well, I would say you were all messed up. And the reason you're messed up is because as a Christian somewhere in between here where you stand this is what's happening to you.

And I'm simply telling you what Paul says and all I've done is taken the contradictions that Paul senses in his life between this kind of picture and this kind of picture.

[11 : 43] And this is what he says. And you can follow it through in these verses 7-14 following. He says, I act but I don't understand why I act the way I do.

He says what I want I don't do. You know, I want this but I don't do it.

You know, that's the thing I experience on a daily basis. I want it I want to do it but I don't. What I want to do I don't do.

And what I hate I do it over and over and over again. This contradiction is somewhere in me that I we behave this way.

Paul says I agree with the law yes it's perfect but then I consider myself an exception and so I break it. So this contradiction sits in me too.

[12 : 53] He says I know what is good but I know that nothing good dwells within me.

This is strange you see. I mean that's one of the I mean this is our humanity in the raw that Paul is laying out for us here. He says I know what's good but I don't find that goodness in me.

And that's why he's a mess. That's why he's all messed up. That's why we are all messed up. he said I am a good knower because I know lots of good things but when it comes to doing things I don't work from what I know I do what my flesh tells me to do.

I know this is wrong but I do it. And that's how Paul describes himself. He goes on with this catalog of contradictions. He said I can will what is right but I can't do what is right.

Now you know the guys in the white suits should come in for this fellow pretty soon. And the only reason they don't is because they would have to take all of us out.

[14 : 21] And because this is the human dilemma. Paul says I want the good but I don't do it.

The evil I don't want that I do. He said the good I know but the sins I act.

You know the way I behave and what I know are in constant contradiction. You see what a fruitful dialogue this can create between you and yourself if you're honest with yourself.

You know if you pretend to be this you've got very little to say to yourself. If you pretend to be this or if you aspire to be this you've got very little to say to yourself. If you recognize what Paul is telling you about you've got a lot to talk about.

There's a whole lot that could happen in you once you recognize this contradiction. He said as in the matter of time he says when the time comes when the moment comes that I want to do good for instance Sunday morning when I want to do good because this is a special day in my life evil lies close at hand.

[15 : 45] It will take a few minutes to illustrate that from your own life this morning. I'll wait. You know that's the perpetual condition.

The opportunity is there to do good but in fact the evil is easier to get hold of. Easier to do. I mean it could be illustrated by something as homely as the alarm being set for 6 o'clock because you want to get up and do some important things.

The opportunity is there but you're closer to your bed than you are to the opportunity so you stick to it. That's what happens. Then he says I delight in the law of God and you see that's the danger for us coming to church and delighting in the law of God and deceiving ourselves about ourselves because Paul says I delight in the law of God too.

I sing the hymns but he says I recognize the reality that in my members in the members of my body there is another law and that negates my delight in the law of God this other law in my members.

He says the law of my mind the law which I acknowledge to be right and you see that's that's the danger of coming to church tonight is that the law of your mind might take great delight in the things of God but if you don't have any help in the area of the law of your members which has a much shorter reign on you than the law of your mind if you can't deal with that then you're in trouble and Paul says I'm free to see the law of sin it's almost as though he says I'm walking down the road I can see that I'm coming to a clump of trees I know that in that clump of trees there are people waiting to bushwhack me so what do I do

[18:13] I walk right into the clump of trees even though I know what's going to happen I see it I know how sin works I know what will happen but I'm captive I gotta walk I remember when we were in Kenya we sat for an hour almost watching a lion and the lion was as lazy as he could possibly be but about a hundred yards away was a little buck you know a little deer and it was absolutely hypnotized by that lion and the lion appeared to pay no attention to it at all and the little gazelle or what it was it stood and looked and looked and looked and I wanted to scream some kind of warning to what I thought was inevitably going to happen

I don't know what was going to happen and I didn't say to see what did happen but I sympathize so much with that gazelle you know with the very power which I know can destroy me I'm hypnotized by it I can't break away from it so that's how Paul says I am a mess I am totally mixed up and Paul doesn't say that about them people over there he said about himself this is my situation now what you have to do here in order to let me just conclude with you have to read the last verses of chapter 7 somewhat differently than they appear in the Bible just turn there and I'll show you what I mean now I'm not going to change the words I'm just going to change the order and I think that you'll see why you see he says

I see in my members verse 23 of chapter 7 I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members and then go you see down to the last verse 25 sorry the last phrase so then I of myself serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh I serve the law of sin so that this contradiction which Paul sees in himself and sees at the core of our humanity of the whole of human nature he sees this contradiction at the very heart and sums it up and saying with my mind I serve the law of God with my flesh I serve the law of sin and there's the tension and I can't pretend that I serve the law of God with the whole of my life because I know that I don't and I'm not prepared to submit to the fact that I must serve the law of sin with the whole of my body because that's not what I'm here for and see it's then you see that you come to that verse which which is in our in our

Bible as 724 this contradiction leads you to the conclusion wretched man that I am I am messed up but good because of this contradiction that I have to live with I have to live with it in terms of my Christian life it's the thing that I have to be aware of and you see what Paul says is that this is my impossible predicament this is the wretchedness of my existence this is the condition out of which I cannot do anything to rescue myself I can't escape from it it's there it's part of every conscious moment of the whole of my life and I can pretend and I can delude myself and I can presume that I don't want anything to do with

God then I don't have to delight in the law of God or I can't say I am so holy that sin would never touch me because you know that's a lie you can't escape you're caught between them and that's why we are wretched and desperately in need and why Paul says I can't deliver myself from the law of sin and death I can't do it and he cries out from this point of existential agony and says who will deliver me from this body of death I'm trapped I'm trapped in this body and this body is committed to death and I'm going to be destroyed not from the outside by somebody with a club

[23 : 55] I'm going to be destroyed from the inside by the contradiction which is at the center of my life and which Paul has described in these verses who will deliver me from this body of death and then very simply the answer in verse 25 thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord and you can't stop there you got to go on to chapter 8 which will happen next week but I will just for the purpose of this you see the he says thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord there is therefore now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus when Paul recognizes the extent of his existential dilemma the hopelessness of his personal situation as he looks deeply into his own heart and into his own life when he recognizes it and says wretched man that

I am who will deliver me you see until you can ask that question then the answer is probably not very relevant to you because you're still happy to pretend that you're a you know you're a beer drinking bozo who doesn't worry about those things or you can do that or you can become a saint who's above all those things but for those of you who are neither of those and I suggest that that includes all of you then you need to come to the place where you recognize him and you say wretched man that I am who shall deliver me thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord that's what Christ came to do I don't want to labor the point but do you see why it might be important to invite Christ into your heart do you see what you're inviting him into you're inviting him into this mess which is you and you're inviting him in because he alone can deliver you from this contradiction and he alone can deliver you by taking over your life by saving you from the power and consequence of the disaster that you are and that I am and that

St. Paul was good company he can save you from the power and the consequence of that disaster and he alone in a life of continuing dependence upon him and continue to deliver you from the body of death and so you see it's only when you get to the bottom of that snake pit that you can really from the heart say thanks be to God for Jesus Christ as he alone can meet me in the place of my deepest need and that's the amazing story of Romans chapter 7 let's pray for me our God thank you that in your purposes we can examine the extent of our own sinfulness and only at the point where we have in a sense acknowledged that can we begin to worship you for what you have done for us in Jesus

Christ give each of us grace in the peculiar and personal circumstances of each of our lives grace to say come into my heart Lord Jesus we may invite the only one who can meet us in our wretchedness who can meet us in our enslavement who can rescue us the one whom you have sent to rescue us by his death on the cross give us grace to receive him we ask in his name amen