

THE DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE SYNDROME

Romans 7:15-25

INTRODUCTION:

This section of Romans could be called the “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” syndrome in the Christian life. Most of us are familiar with the book that has been made into several movies “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”, by Robert Louis Stevenson, “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” is a classic novel about “Right and Wrong” “Joy and Despair” “The struggle of Good and Evil” or struggle of the natural man vs. the Spiritual man. Mr. Stevenson was once asked, “Where did you find the model for your character of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” He said, “I found it in my nature.” He was a Christian and had learned that there is indeed inside of every child of God a beast within. This beast is called the old sin nature.

In Romans 7:14-21 we have a passage where Paul talks about this kind of inner struggle in his life. The inner struggle he is talking about is much more serious than bad habits we want to break. He is talking about living according to God’s will and being defeated by sin. He is talking about some powerful principle still dwelling within the Christian, called sin or evil, that keeps him from living a life of righteousness.

Paul is talking about an inner struggle that goes on in the heart of every Christian. Why is it that we cannot consistently do the things that we know God wants us to do and that we ourselves deeply desire to do? Paul will give us the answer, and as he does we will gain important insights into Christian living.

A CHRISTIAN STILL SINS

The first insight is that a Christian still sins! Wow! This is a startling statement for many. Paul finds that he still sins. Even after coming to understand the great truths of chapter 6 about our being dead to sin and alive to God, we find that we still sin, even when we don’t want to. Even after the truths of being dead to the law, we still find ourselves not able to do what we really want to do and doing what we don’t want to do. Paul confesses this in verse 15

(Rom 7:15 NKJV) For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

We are all like the small boy was taken to the barbershop for a haircut. The room was filled with cigar smoke. The lad pinched his nose and exclaimed, “Who’s been smoking in here!” The barber sheepishly confessed, “I have, son.” The tyke responded, “Don’t you know it isn’t good

for you?" "I know," the barber replied. "I've tried to quit a thousand times, but I just can't." The boy thought for a moment and then commented, "I understand, sir. I've tried to stop sucking my thumb, but I can't either!"

We all have our struggles on matching our behavior with our desires and our better wisdom.

This is important to know because it teaches us that we need to be vigilant against stumbling into sin. Some branches of Christianity teach that a Christian can get to the place where they do not sin. I haven't reached that place. Have you

We need to understand that to struggle with sin is part of the Christian experience. We need be vigilant and not let it defeat us. We can have the victory.

A Christian writer (C.I. Schofield) says, "It is a great blessing when a person gets into the seventh of Romans and begins to realize the awful conflict of its struggle and defeat; because the first step toward getting out of the struggle of the seventh chapter and into the victory of the eight, it to get into the seventh. Of all the needy classes of people, the neediest of this earth are not those who are having a heartbreaking, agonizing struggle for victory, but those who are having no struggle at all, and no victory, and who do not know it, and who are satisfied and jogging along in a pitiable absence of almost all the possessions that belong to them in Christ."

The first insight is that we need to be vigilant about sin in our life.

THERE IS NO GOOD THING IN THE FLESH

The second insight is to see that in our flesh dwells no good thing so don't depend on it. This is verse 18:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

What is the flesh in this passage? That is the key to understanding it.

"Flesh" sometimes in the Bible can refer just to our bodies. This is not what Paul is talking about. This is a Greek idea. A common view of Greek philosophy was that the body is the prison of the soul and the body was looked upon as evil. Paul does not give us the Greek view of the body, he give us God's view, which says that the body is good because God created it. God's view of the body is that it is good, although weak. It is the temple of his Holy Spirit. It will be raised one day. You will live in your body for all eternity!

But there is another use of the word "flesh" and it is referring to our inner desires and drives before we became Christians. It also is the spiritual response we developed while we were dead in our trespasses and sins. The flesh is the sum total of our old desires and old response patterns to sin, our coping mechanism in our non-Christian state. This is what our flesh is and we are to hate it.

Paul affirms this again in Galatians 5:24:

(Gal 5:24 NKJV) And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

But we tend to follow our old way of living, our old response patterns to difficult situations. We want to think that we can handle life in our own way. But we must get to the place to turn from trusting in the flesh and learn to trust in God.

Jeremiah 17:5 and 7 beautifully shows this two ways of living:

Thus says the Lord: Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord...Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord

Our flesh is sum total of our old resources for living that we developed while we were separated from God spiritually. In God's sight it is to be loathed, despised and rejected.

Have you ever seen a dead animal up close? I mean one that has been dead for several days? I recall when I was growing up we have two mules. One of them died in the field behind our house. Its body lay there several days before we found it. When we found it, it was an awful sight. The buzzards had torn some of its flesh away. Its entrails were coming out of its decayed stomach. There were all kinds of sickening juices and stuff oozing from it. The smell was something else.

There it was, decaying, stinking, purifying. And we had to do something with it. Well we took the tractor, tied a chain around its back legs and dragged it to the back of the farm into the wood. But as we did it left a trail of residual stuff on the ground.

Our flesh is worst than that dead mule in God's sight and should be in ours. Let's acknowledge that in our flesh no good dwells. Let's not lean upon the arm of the flesh to make it our strength. Let's lean upon the Lord and realize that He is our strength.

Romans 7 is given to show that in our flesh nothing good dwells. So don't follow it. Don't trust it.

INDWELLING SIN IS STILL WITH US

The third insight on Christian living in this passage is to reality that there is another problem dwelling within us and that problem of indwelling sin. Verses 17, 20 and 21 bring this out.

17] But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

20] Now if I do what I will not to do, it is not longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21] I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Would you believe that you have a sin-principle dwelling within you that is not you? In these verses Paul seems to distinguish between him and something inside of us called sin. "It is not longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." How can this be? Is Paul denying responsibility for his actions? Is he saying something similar to Flip Wilson's joke, "the devil made me do it?" No, I don't believe so.

A professing Christian who tried to explain away his responsibility for breaking the law received double punishment. He said to the judge, "Your Honor, as a believer in Christ I am a 'new man,' but I still have an old nature, and it was the 'old man' that committed the crime." The judge's reply to his plea was: "Since it was the 'old man' that broke the law, we'll sentence him to 30 days in jail. And since the 'new man' was an accomplice in the wrong, we'll give him 30 days also. I therefore sentence you to jail for 60 days!"

To say that there is indwelling sin within me which does things that I do not do is not to deny responsibility for my actions, but it is to acknowledge that as God's new creation I was not created to sin. This is because my new life in Christ is Christ's life within me and Christ does not sin.

Romans 7 teaches us that there is something foreign to our new life in Christ still dwelling in me and that foreign thing is called the "indwelling sin."

It is like the situation of having surgery but the doctor leaving an instrument inside of me. It dwells within me, but is not me. It influences me, but it is not a part of my real identity. Indwelling sin is the same way. It dwells in my body, but it is not me. This is why Paul can say; "Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me (20).

WE ARE TO FIND OUR DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF GOD

Another important insight for Christian living is that we are to find our delight in the law of God. Listen to verses 22 and 25:

(Rom 7:22 NKJV) For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

(Rom 7:25 NKJV) I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

A Christian is to love the law of God. With the mind we continue to serve the law of God, even when we find ourselves being driven by our flesh and by indwelling sin. We are not to become discouraged!

Remember when Christian fell into the Slough of Despond in Pilgrim's Progress? That muddy, miry, filthy swamp which delayed Pilgrim's progress toward the Celestial City was the inward sin that continued to seep out of a person's life who had become aware of the grace of God. But there were stones God placed there to get across that swamp. Those stones were the promises of God or the instructions which God gives us in His Word. These instructions and promises are to be the delight and focus of our heart and we will not be overcome by the remorse of our continual sinful desires.

Paul states it in Romans 7 as "delighting in the law of God according to the inward man." The law of God Paul is speaking of are the instructions God gives us in his Word, His promises and His standard of living. These are what we are to delight ourselves in and become absorbed in when we struggle with our indwelling sin and desires of the flesh.

THE PROMISE AND HOPE OF VICTORY

Finally we have the insight of the promise and hope of victory. In verses 24 and 25 Paul cries out:

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

The struggles and conflict of Romans 7 are real and they are a part of all Christians. But God has provided for us a way of deliverance and a way of victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. From this passage we learn that we are

- Acknowledge the struggle and be vigilant to resist the flesh

- We are not to follow the old desires of the flesh but resist them
- We are to realize the principle of indwelling sin is not your real self.
- We are to delight in God's promises and instructions and not be mired in the swamp of discouragement.
- And we are to be strengthened by the promise and hope of victory and deliverance that is in our Lord Jesus Christ

Do you want to live as a Christian? Yes! Then let's appeal to God for faith and vigilance in living this way day by day.

Amen? Amen!