

Doesn't it Sometimes Feel Right to do the Wrong Thing?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 February 2019

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] and that's on page 1133 of the Church Bibles. That's Romans chapter 7 on page 1133.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him.

So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ that you might belong to another to him, who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God.

For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

[1 : 22] What shall we say then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not. Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was and had it not been for the law, for I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, You shall not covet.

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting, for apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive, apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. Did that which was good then become death to me? By no means.

Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful.

[2 : 32] We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do, for what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do.

And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me, for I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do. This I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work, although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind. And making me a prisoner of the law, of sin at work in me.

[3 : 40] What a wretched man I am, who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death. Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, I myself, in my mind, am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature, a slave to the law of the sin.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Morag, thanks for reading.

And if you could keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 7, that would be a great help to me as we look at that together. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet as well if you want to follow the points as we go through them.

But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Amen. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word.

Please, in this time together, shape and fashion us. Help us to know you better and love you more. In Jesus' name. Amen. So we're thinking this morning about how we change.

[4 : 50] And of course, that's not just an issue that Christians think about. So if you're here as a guest, wouldn't call yourself a Christian, this is a great week to be listening in on what God says to us in the Bible about how we change.

There's a song by One Republic, Counting Stars. Let's just listen to how he describes the dilemma of knowing deep down what you should be doing but wanting to do something else. We'll just hear a clip of that.

I see this life like a swinging vine Swing my heart across the line and my face is flashing signs Seek it out and ye shall find the hole But I'm not that old Young But I'm not that bold And I don't think the world is sold I'm just doing what we're told I feel something so wrong I'm doing the wrong thing I feel something so wrong I'm doing the right thing I could lie, could lie, could lie Everything that kills me makes me feel alive There we go Two and a half billion views on YouTube That song is I mean it's a great record But you hear the dilemma that he's got He says I feel something so wrong doing the right thing I feel something so right doing the wrong thing He says later The things that drown me make me want to fly And it's that kind of dilemma I mean the first time

I ever heard that song I thought that's Romans 7 If you have a look at Romans 7 verse 15 The Apostle Paul says this Verse 15 I do not understand what I do For what I want to do I do not do But what I hate I do So this section is a key part of an argument that Paul started in chapter 6 and runs through to chapter 8 in the coming weeks where it really culminates And it's changed the way that God does it Let's look at it together We're going to see the root of the problem the fruit of the problem so how we see it played out and then thirdly the beginnings of change So first of all the root of the problem and the root of the problem is a divided nature Paul describes a battle going on inside of him in verses 14 to 20 If you just have a look halfway through verse 18 For I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out

For I do not do the good I want to do but the evil I do not want to do this I keep on doing What's going on? Well for the next few minutes folks we've got to do a little bit of hard work before we actually bring out some conclusions from Romans 7 because this is a strongly debated passage in terms of what it quite means Christians kind of struggle with well what is Paul really describing here so we're just going to do a bit of work on that Here's the problem when Paul describes that kind of internal battle going on is he speaking about himself as a Christian or is he looking back to what it was like for him before he became a Christian and the reason that's difficult is just think about this on one level it looks like normal Christian experience because it's in the present tense there isn't it Paul says if you have a look at verse 22 In my inner being I delight in God's law but I see another law at work in the members of my body waging war against the law of my mind so he's writing as though it's happening right now to him and he's also describing a delight that he finds in God's law would you feel that delight if you were not a Christian and the chapter ends with the problem apparently unresolved so if you have a look at the end of verse 25 he sort of seems to suggest that dilemma is still going on for him so maybe it's normal

[8 : 53] Christian experience but on the other hand Paul says things here that don't fit well with other things that he said in Romans so if you look at verse 14 he says we know that the law is spiritual but I am unspiritual sold as a slave to sin in verse 23 he says that there's a law within him making him a prisoner of the law of sin the problem is we've heard Paul very clearly say in recent weeks that he is not a slave to sin anymore as a Christian so if you just look back over the page at chapter 6 verse 6 he said this is for Christians our old self was crucified with Jesus so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin and then in verse 18 of chapter 6 he says he says you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness then in chapter 8 verse 2 that we'll look at next week he says through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death so Paul is describing the freedom that a Christian enjoys and a power to change how on earth does this passage fit with that if it's talking about his present everyday life it's also very strange that in this section of Romans 7 that Morag read for us the Holy Spirit is not mentioned when he's describing the life that he experiences and yet the very next chapter is this magnificent description of the gift of the Holy Spirit and spiritual transformation for the Christian but there's another reason why lots of us perhaps think or are reminded to think this is

Christian experience being described and that's that if you're a Christian we can relate to what's going on can't we the experience of wanting to change and failing to see progress as a Christian I can certainly relate to that for my money when I first became a Christian in the first two or three years I think it's fair to say that there was lots of change lots of visible change people would have noticed things changing in me but my progress in living for God seems to have slowed down really badly since then so Romans 7 has been a real encouragement to many of us if we feel that we've become disheartened by our slowness to change and we see Paul describing apparently that kind of experience himself and we think oh thank goodness I'm not the only one and yet it comes in a section a bigger section of Romans where there is great assurance that we can change so what is going on I think what Paul is describing here is the experience that anybody can have if we see that God's commands are good commands but we try to keep them in our own strength trying to change by looking within ourselves for the power so we get caught in this internal war between our desire to please God because we know that would be good for us or we know it would please him and our desire to satisfy selfish desires that still lurk in us and that's the divided nature that's being described here by Paul in fact we're so strongly divided inside us that Paul even describes it as though there's another person living in him so if you look at verse 20 he says if I do what I do not want to do it is no longer

I who do it but it is sin living in me that does it as though sin's a person inside him Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the book *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Dr. Jekyll is this kind respectable man but he realises that he's got a bad side as all of us do and so he decides that he'll take a portion every night and it'll separate out his good self from his bad self so that the bad self Mr. Hyde only comes out at night and Mr. Hyde is hiding away and then at night he can be given the freedom and also Mr. Hyde is hideous and hidden away so it's the parts of Dr. Jekyll that people don't see behind the thin veneer of respectability and in the novel he's able to sort of pull them away and let them free at night and then the shocking reality of the book is that Dr. Jekyll comes to realise that his bad self is far worse than he could ever have imagined so he realises that Mr. Hyde is going around killing people at night there's a part of Jekyll's nature that's worse than he'd ever feared and Stevenson said this about the book

I've called the book *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* but I might equally have called it *Robert Louis Stevenson* I've learnt to realise a thorough and primitive duality in man the curse of mankind is that these two figures are bound together from the womb these twins are continuously struggling see what he was saying for some of us some people Mr. Hyde is kind of quite obvious Mr. Hyde is there on the surface on the outside others of us were very good at hiding it away so we appear to be good people and we get self-righteous and we look down on others where Mr. Hyde is perhaps a bit more obvious but deep down we're all the same we've got a heart problem and it's a big problem we don't change because deep inside of us we don't want to change so that's our first point the root of the problem a divided nature secondly we're going to see the fruit of that problem how it presents itself and that the fruit of the problem is our sin exploits the law now when Paul talks about the law here he's talking about the law that was given by God to Moses the ten commandments that we have in the Old Testament and the other case law around that that's what governs the people's relationship with God before Jesus came that's what we've got in the Old Testament you can see the ten commandments behind me you might just be able to make them out behind the screen there they're full of godly wisdom about how we are to live to please God they are a wise set of commands rooted in God's good moral character what could possibly be wrong with the law of God well the problem was the way the law was being understood at that time at the time Jesus was teaching and Paul after him people essentially thought you had to obey the law of Moses to be right with God and to stay right with God so the problem for the early church was that there were believers from that kind of Jewish background who would become believers in Jesus but they want to bring that same teaching with them into the church they say you need to keep the law the Old Testament law if you want to stay right with God and Paul has shown already in Romans this letter to the early church in Rome that you can't get right with God by keeping his commands so that nothing of our own obedience could count towards being right with God because we're not good enough and then in chapter 3 verse 20 verse 21 he said but now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known verse 22 this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe so simply by having faith in Jesus you can be counted right with God you can stay right with God as long as you keep your faith in him now when the law loving believers hear that they say hang on a minute Paul you can't say that if you say that it's going to be anarchy it'll be carnage because people will realize

I can do whatever I want if they're not afraid anymore that God will condemn them for breaking his commands they're going to go off the rails we need a bit of law around here to keep people in check so here's Paul's point in Romans 7 he's saying not just that the law couldn't save us actually the law can't change us because of our divided nature because Mr. Hyde lives inside us if you bring a set of external commands of rules about morality to us it's powerless to change us so if you have a look with me at verse 7 he brings that out verse 7 what shall we say then is the law sinful certainly not it's not the law that's the problem he goes on nevertheless I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law so the law exposes sin it brings to light what sin really is he goes on for I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said you shall not covet but sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of coveting and then he tells us his life story from verse 9 he says once I was alive apart from the law but when the commandment came sin sprang to life and I died what happened

[18:09] Paul's living as a God-fearing Jew he's not yet seen that Jesus is the Messiah who's come he's going through life thinking that he doesn't have a problem with God because he can tick off the commandments he goes down them you shall not steal oh well I've never stolen anything from anyone honour your father and mother well I've done that I always do what they say you shall not murder well I've not done that apart from a few Christians here and there remember Saul was off killing them but they don't count so he thinks he's keeping them and then he gets to commandment number 10 and it says you shall not covet in other words you'll be content with what you have and you won't want what anybody else has and it's the one commandment perhaps more than any of the others that clearly shows that God's moral law is not just about the do's and don'ts on the outside it's actually about what you feel and what you desire on the inside and Paul is struck down as he realises that he's made aware that spiritually he's dead he breaks the commands and worse than that now that he's heard what coveting is he starts doing more and more of it that's what rules do to us thanks to our divided nature it's true of any external set of rules

I don't know whether you can think of an example of that I remember in my school they announced a rule you're not allowed to leave the classrooms at the end of lessons out of the windows well in my form my class 7RG none of us had ever thought of that we weren't inventive enough to think of that but as soon as there was that rule we all wanted to leave through the windows it was like you couldn't concentrate on the lesson anymore because you're thinking could I get out of the window at the end or when you go to the swimming pool and they used to have these pictures of things you couldn't do no petting and this sort of thing and one of them was no bombing and it had a picture of a boy in the air in this circular curled up to make a massive splash well I'd never thought of that before but once you see what it is what a great idea that you're not allowed to do and it doesn't stop but it's more serious isn't it you know I remember being with a few blokes that I meet up with regularly to keep ourselves accountable and pray for each other and we'll ask each other about our internet use you know what are we watching on the internet are we watching inappropriate stuff and I remember one of them saying have you looked at anything inappropriate on your phone you know you're looking at pornography on your phone well it had never occurred to me before to do that but once I'd heard that

I started struggling with the temptation to look at inappropriate stuff on my phone we hear the command and sin springs to life it seizes on it says you could do that and then wherever it is that we feel challenged to live for God whether it's in alcohol or drug abuse or what we do with our money or what we say about people gossip slander sex whatever it is the danger is we end up in this cycle of knowing something displeases God and we're doing it in our lives and we regret it so we resolve to change and we feel determined in the cold light of day I'll never do that again and then we fail again and then we feel terrible about it and then we resolve again I'll never do that again and then we fail again and we feel even worse than we did before am I really a Christian?

God's law can't change us worse than that God's law is like a greenhouse for sin it nurtures it it helps it to thrive do you see how desperate that is?

how desperate we are that because of the way we are good law actually makes you a worse person there's something about the heart that when we know something is forbidden we want to do it even more than before if we go back to the Jekyll and Hyde story Dr. Jekyll realises that Mr. Hyde is killing people so he decides he'll never take the portion again to bring Mr. Hyde out and instead by an act of will he's going to keep his bad side repressed and do loads of good stuff in his life and then he says this Dr. Jekyll I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past and I can say with honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good you know yourself how earnestly in the last months of the last year I laboured to relieve suffering you know that much was done for others and that the days passed quietly almost happily for myself and then he's in Regent's Park one day and he says this after all I reflected I was like my neighbours and then I smiled comparing myself with other men comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect and at the very moment of that of that thought

[22 : 54] I looked down and behold I was once more Edward Hyde and he kills himself because he realises he can't keep the old man down and so he thinks the world will be better off without him the point is we can't by a sheer act of self-will bring about any real lasting heart change in ourselves and yet so often that is how we try and change we make New Year's resolutions we meet up with accountability groups and we tell each other off for breaking rules now the first century problem was bringing the Old Testament law back into the church but today we might be tempted to do something similar with any kind of rules that we decide might help our moral behaviour so as a Christian subculture we might come up with rules you know you mustn't go to a nightclub you mustn't go to a pub you mustn't go to the cinema you mustn't watch TV after a certain time of night you mustn't have a smartphone there's the Mike Pence rule in the news isn't there that's about men not spending time alone with women now don't mishear me a rule like that might be a really good rule for Mike Pence any of these rules might be fine to bring on ourselves as a personal legalism to help us avoid temptation that we're struggling with that might be fine the problem is when we think those rules are actually changing us on the inside or when we impose them on other people culturally so that we judge other people for not keeping our rules that aren't in the Bible or when we think they'll change our hearts but if the law can't change us if good law actually can even make us worse is there any hope for us well Paul's experience of failure in the fight to be good leads him to cry out in verse 24 did you see that verse 24 what a wretched man

I am who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death and it's a hopeful cry verse 25 thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord Paul knows with sure and certain hope that one day Jesus will transform us he'll transform our bodies and we won't want to sin anymore that day is coming for every Christian until that day we're going to have to live life with ongoing sin in our lives but wonderfully also that future breaks into the present in the Christian life and that's our third point so we've seen the root of the problem a divided nature the fruit of the problem that our sin exploits the law but thirdly the beginning of real change a death and remarriage so Jesus will one day come and bring us new resurrection bodies and the inner battle to live for God will be gone we'll just live the lives we're always meant to live but Paul starts chapter 7 with an illustration he says think with me about marriage and how you can marry again if your spouse dies you're kind of free from the obligation to stay faithful to your spouse once they've died and he says the law given at Mount Sinai you can think of it a bit like a marriage partner if you were a religious person you gave yourself to it you were kind of owned by it you lived with duties that it asked of you and for us today there might be other laws that we judge ourselves by we might have a set of behaviors that we know we need to keep and adhere to if we're going to be approved of by others by a friendship group or a workplace group that's the kind of the secular equivalent of living under the law of having a set of standards we judge ourselves by and think

I can only approve of myself or others will only approve of me or God will only approve of me if I meet these standards but spiritually the Christian is in something very like a new marriage union look at verse 4 with me chapter 7 so my brothers and sisters you also died to the law through the body of Christ that you might belong to another to him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God so this is the key to change the way God does it it's what chapter 8 is going to be about but Paul gives us a trailer of it here in verse 6 if you have a look at verse 6 he says but now by dying to what once bound us we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code so the law was a horrible marriage partner all it did was judge us and tell us how we needed to change the motivation the motivation was fear you change your behaviour because you're afraid of the consequences you're afraid of being rejected by God it was more like slavery than being in a loving marriage but when you become a Christian you are freed from that way of thinking you're in a new union now a union with Christ we belong to Jesus and instead of him setting demands for us that we're doomed to fail he gave his life for us to liberate us so that God the Father can look at us in our union with Christ and always approve of us the righteousness that God required under the law has been met by Jesus our marriage partner and so God can see us and no matter how much sin he sees in us he can overlook it for the righteousness he sees from Jesus and that commitment from God the security that it gives us empowers us to change it liberates us to change how?

because knowing how far we fall short and knowing how much Christ has done for us changes our desires it makes you want to please him because he first loved me and gave himself for me so I want to please him from now on I don't know what you think about that but I think it's an extraordinary example of the wisdom of God that in this life the more that we mature as a Christian the more aware we're going to be of how far we fall short of God's standards the more we're going to feel broken hearted about our sin and wonderfully God uses that broken heartedness to help us small step by small step to make progress for the more we are mourning our sin and aware of our sin the more moved we're going to be by his grace it's going to seem so much more vast to us so the gospel doesn't say you're welcome into God's kingdom and you don't have to change it doesn't say that the gospel doesn't say you're not welcome into God's kingdom unless you change but Jesus Christ says

I welcome you into my kingdom and as a result you will change knowing what I've done for you will change you as we become more aware of our sin we become more aware of how vast the son of God's love for us must be that he sees us at our very worst he knows our Mr. Hyde and he died on the cross for it it's that awareness of God's saving love for us that brings the beginnings of change in our heart as it says in an old hymn nothing either great or small nothing sinner no Jesus died and paid it all long long ago it is finished yes indeed finished every jot sinner this is all you need tell me is it not so lay your deadly doing down down at Jesus feet stand in him in him alone gloriously complete let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word to us gracious God and loving heavenly father we praise you for your moral law we recognize that it is good that it's our sinful nature that's the problem and father God we offer you great thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord that you have rescued us from this body of death and that one day you will fully and finally rescue us that we'll be free not just from the penalty of sin but from the presence of sin forever thank you that today we are united to Christ free to serve you in the new way of the spirit we pray you'll help us to dwell more on what you've done for us so that in the power of your spirit we are motivated to change to please you that we more and more would be transformed into your likeness and that through us the world might be drawn in to know your love and praise your name we ask for Jesus name's sake

[32:12] Amen Amen Amen Amen