

Body of Death

10.27.24

Message 21

Romans Series

Romans 7:14–25 (CSB)

Introduction

A. It is no secret that I'm not a fan of Halloween.

1. To me, the world is a scary enough place without adding my participation.

2. I see enough pain, death, and sickness throughout my normal day-to-day, I don't want to add more if I can help it.

B. The Apostle Paul saw enough death too.

1. Surely in his travels, he saw the natural processes of suffering and death in the cities and villages he walked through.

2. And it would not have been out of the question that on many of his travels, he would see the occasional rebel being crucified along the Roman roads.

3. The Romans, living in the congested city, saw death regularly.

a. Before hospitals and funeral homes, death was public.

b. And during times of war, death was overtly graphic.

C. The Apostle Paul uses an image of war to drive home his final point in Romans 7:

1. In verse 24, Paul seemingly shouts, "What a wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?"

2. What does Paul have pictured here?

3. Most likely, Paul and his Roman audience new the words of the Roman poet Virgil (70-19b.c)

4. *In Book Eight of the Æneid, Virgil's epic poem that chronicles the wanderings of Aeneas after the fall of Troy, the horrific cruelty of the Etruscan (ancient Italian civilization) king Mezentius is told. To punish and torture his living captives, Mezentius tied them face to face with decomposing corpses of those killed in battle, leaving them bound together until the living captive died. Virgil wrote:*

*The living and the dead at his command
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand,
Till, chok'd with stench, in loath'd embraces tied,
The ling'ring wretches pin'd away and died.*

—Virgil's Æneid, Book Eight.¹

That brings us to our passage:

Romans 7:14–25

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. ²¹So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. ²²For in my inner self I delight in God's law, ²³but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. ²⁴What a wretched man I

¹ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 232–233.

am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.

1. Who is the Romans 7 person?

A. Today's passage is one of the most complicated and debated passages in all of Scripture because it leaves a big question:

1. WHO is the Apostle Paul referring to?
2. Is this a new believer?
 - a. A mature-believer?
 - b. Is this even a believer?
 - c. Is it a Jew, or the way Paul used to be?
3. Right up front I want to say that there are many strong opinions among pastors and scholars about exactly who Paul is referring to here and I'm always happy to have a conversation with you about them.
4. I want to be clear who I think Paul is talking about:
 - a. I believe the text best describes an unbeliever, not a mature Christian.
 - b. Paul uses "I" as a figure of speech, showing a progression of his argument.
 - c. In Romans 7-8, Paul moves the pronoun and focus from, "we", to "I", to "you".
 - d. Furthermore, the person Paul describes in Romans 7:14-25 does not align with the hope and victory he says believers have in Romans 8.

B. The beauty and trouble of this passage is that we all can relate to the person Paul is describing.

1. Both believers and unbelievers recognize that a battle wages within us: we want to do right and do the opposite.

2. Not only are we born into sin, we are influenced and tempted to sin throughout our entire life.

3. Especially by the time we are adults, we are so familiar and accustomed to sin we forget that this was not how God originally created us.

C. We cannot picture a world without sin, suffering, war, pain, and strife.

1. The Apostle Paul is aware of this tension between the pain of today and the hope of a better future.

a. A hope, he says, that does not disappoint.

b. A day when Jesus rules and reigns.

c. A future that the Apostle John says that Jesus wipes away every tear from our eye, where there is no more sorrow, pain, or death.

2. But the world we are all born into is a world of conflict and strife.

3. A world that in Romans 8, Paul says groans in anticipation of that future glory and day that the sons of God are revealed.

4. Here in the middle, we relate well to the person Paul describes in Romans 7.

5. Who is this person?

2. The Romans 7 person is someone in personal conflict.

A. Notice the confused condition this person is in:

¹⁵For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. (Conflicted and Confused)

¹⁷So now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me. (This person is not in charge or control.)

¹⁸For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. (Inhabited by something wrong and evil)

¹⁹For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. (A practitioner of evil and inhabited by sin).

Paul gives a summary statement:

²¹So I discover this law: When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. ²²For in my inner self I delight in God's law, ²³but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

B. A description of the person in Romans 7 is someone who:

1. Conflicted.
2. Confused.
3. Not in charge or control.
4. Inhabited and influenced by evil and that which is not good.
5. A practitioner of sin.
6. At war in the mind and prisoner in the body.
7. No wonder Paul calls this person wretched, and cries out for rescue from this body of death.

C. At this point you, the reader, have to answer the question:

1. Does this person sound like a spirit filled and spirit led believer?
2. Does the person who is described here sound like a mature Christian?
3. To me, this sounds exactly like the person Paul describes in Romans 5,6,7.

- a. Someone bound to either the Law and Torah, which has a capital L, and the Gentile who is bound to the law of sin and death, lowercase L.
- b. This sounds like the person who has tried to do it all on their own.
- c. The one who knows what God's standard is, but cannot accomplish it.

4. But it doesn't sound like the person Paul will describe in Romans 8.

a. If you are a regular attender I sure hope you have read Romans 8.

b. Because if have not read Romans 8, and you stop here in Romans 7, or you miss the next few weeks, you could read this passage and think:

1. If the Apostle Paul struggled, then I'm doomed to struggle.

2. If Paul sinned by doing what he didn't want to do, and he was an Apostle, then I'm doomed to a life that never overcomes sin.

c. I'm doomed to sin a little everyday:

1. I'm doomed to be a wretch until the day I die.

2. And I just hope Jesus forgives me.

f. **What ends up happening is we have church full of people whose lives look more like a Country Song than a Hymn of Praise.**

1. We end up living a life that gives more glory (doxa) to the power of sin than to the One who overcame Sin.

2. Our testimony ends up telling a story of a Jesus who COULDN'T change my life, who COULDN'T help me overcome, and who COULDN'T give me freedom.

3. The Romans 7 person hasn't participated fully in Jesus' ministry.

A. But Pastor, I can relate to the guy in Romans 7.

1. Of course you can.
2. That's why Paul shifts to the "I" in this text:
 - a. By moving to "I" he's making it personal and relatable.
 - b. We all understand the battle he's talking about.
 - c. Jew or Gentile, Roman or American.
 - d. Slave or free, male or female, young and old.

B. Just because it's is relatable, that doesn't mean it's ideal.

1. Normal is not always the standard.
2. Typical is not always the goal.
3. Paul is clearly describing an experience we are all familiar with, but he is not declaring this is the way it has to be.
4. This may be the way it is but not the way it has to be.

C. Romans 7 cannot be used to justify your ongoing, willful sin.

1. I've heard too many use this passage to justify their sin
2. A clear misuse of this scripture is to justify sin or stagnation in the Christian life.²
3. If you view yourself as a regular victim or slave to sin, you will always live like a slave to sin.
4. But a reading of Romans does not permit this.
 - a. Apart from Jesus, every person is a slave to sin.
 - b. Jesus changes that for all who believe.

Romans 8:1-4 (CSB)

² Ibid.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, ²because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, ⁴in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

4. The Romans 7 person is relatable.

A. Most of us relate better to Romans 7 than to Romans 8.

1. Romans 8 seems impossible and out of reach.
2. If you try to do it on your own, it is absolutely impossible.
3. If you continue to give in to the powerful, but resistible, forces of sin, then it's impossible.

B. **If you only add Jesus to the mix of life, a God among other gods, then you cannot be the Romans 8 person.**

1. If you aren't fully surrendered to Jesus, God's vision for your life is impossible.
2. But, when we go all in with Jesus, He sends the Spirit to help us in our weakness.
3. The Spirit of God makes all the difference in our lives.
4. **When we submit to death of another kind, crucifying the flesh and drowning the old person in the waters of Baptism, we find a life that was never possible before.**
 - a. What is impossible for us is just another day for Jesus.
 - b. What we cannot, Jesus does.

5. Who will rescue the wretched Person of Romans 7?

A. Remember the opening image?

ILLUSTRATION TIME: Read while someone ties the hands:

Till curs'd Mezentius, in a fatal hour,
Assum'd the crown, with arbitrary pow'r.
What words can paint those execrable times, 8545
The subjects' suff'rings, and the tyrant's crimes!
That blood, those murders, O ye gods, replace
On his own head, and on his impious race!
The living and the dead at his command
Were coupled, face to face, and hand to hand, 8550
Till, chok'd with stench, in loath'd embraces tied,
The ling'ring wretches pin'd away and died.
Thus plung'd in ills, and meditating more
The people's patience, tir'd, no longer bore
The raging monster; but with arms beset 8555
His house, and vengeance and destruction threat.

1. A living person, taken captive in battle.
2. As means of execution, the living is tied to the dead.
3. Hand to hand and face to face, tied in death's embrace.³
 - a. The living condemned to carry the body of death for his remaining, shortened, days.
 - b. **The living captive is not able to impart life to the corpse.**
 - a. No matter how vibrant, how strong, or how alive, he will never resurrect the dead body now attached to him.
 - b. For the first 40 hours, rigor mortis keeps the living person from moving.
 - c. Then the corpse begins to infect and turn toxic the living.

³Virgil:

[https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/World_Literature/Compact_Anthology_of_World_Literature_\(Getty_and_Kwon\)/04%3A_Rome/4.01%3A_The_Aeneid_Virgil_\(70-19_B.C.E.\)](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Literature_and_Literacy/World_Literature/Compact_Anthology_of_World_Literature_(Getty_and_Kwon)/04%3A_Rome/4.01%3A_The_Aeneid_Virgil_(70-19_B.C.E.)) LINES 8500-8550. Accessed 10/26/2024

c. Eventually the dead becomes one with the living, and both become corpses.

B. Who will rescue me from this attachment that leads us to death!

1. Who can cut the ropes binding us to that which is killing us?
2. Who can reach the knife that plunges us into freedom
3. Who can set us free from what is slowly killing us?
4. Who can undo the lifetime of damage caused by this rotten body that is becoming part of us?
5. The word rescue carries the sense of “dragging out of danger”⁴ and Paul asks “who will carry me away from this body of death?”

C. Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Romans 7:25 ²⁵ **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

1. Romans 8:3 says that God condemned sin in the flesh by sending Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering.
2. My first thoughts went to the story of Abraham and Isaac.
 - a. Right before Abraham plunges the knife into Isaac, the heavenly Father stops him and provides another sacrifice in Isaac’s place.
 - b. Yet, the Heavenly Father did not hold back His only Son, allowing Him to experience death so that He might cut free the ropes that bind us to sin and death.
3. Why should we remain tied to death when Jesus has set us free?

⁴ [4861] ῥύομαι *rhyomai* 17× to drag out of danger,

Apply and Pray.

A. If you have given your life to Jesus but struggle more than you are victorious, don't be worried.

1. Verse 25 and Romans Chapter 8 recognizes that we are not sinless nor are we perfect.

a. Only Jesus is sinless.

b. Only Jesus was perfect.

c. The Apostle Paul understood this well.

2. That is why he says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit does not make us sinless, but he helps us sinless.

4. "Not sinless, but we sin-less."⁵

B. Where do I go from here?

1. **We confess our sin, but never justify it.**

2. Any justification of sin in our lives has to stop.

3. **We have to lean into the Spirit.**

a. Just as the law of sin and death becomes part of us, we must let the Spirit dwell in us, change us, and transform us.

b. Lean into the Spirit through Scripture reading, worship, and prayer.

C. This morning, I'm creating space for us to confess sin to the Lord and to lean into the Spirit.

1. If you are struggling with sinful behavior and thoughts, today is the day to find victory over them.

⁵ Moo, Douglas J. *Romans*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.245-246

2. If your life sounds more like the person of Romans 7, then we are going to respond.

3. If you simply want to have more of the Spirit in your life and to live more fully for Jesus, this morning we are going to respond.