



Romans 7:15-25a - ¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Find your rest in Christ



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

In 1886 when Robert Louis Stevenson published his novella, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, I assume he intended to publish fiction. The novella tells the story of Dr. Henry Jekyll, a man who had a lot going for him. He was a respected professional in his community. He had status in society, he had money, he had those silver-fox good looks of a man in his fifties. On the surface, Dr. Henry Jekyll was a man who had it all figured out, but on the inside, there was some deeper, darker stuff going on. Dr. Jekyll had spent the majority of his life trying to suppress evil, sinister urges that certainly weren't fitting for a man of his stature in the community. We're not told what those vices were specifically, and maybe that's just as well. Dr. Henry Jekyll wrestled with temptation – powerful urges to do things that would make you blush if they were spoken out loud. So, he concocted a potion that, when he drank it, would transform him into someone else; into the part of him that wanted to do those awful, twisted things; transform him into a brute of a man called Mr. Edward Hyde. Mr. Hyde was the exact opposite of Dr. Jekyll. He's wild, he's driven by the most carnal desires, he's a violent man, he's a murderer, he thinks only of himself. When the mild-mannered Dr. Jekyll transformed into the wild Mr. Hyde, he could indulge in his every sick and twisted desire with complete impunity and never have to worry about getting caught. Talk about a crazy story, right? Two completely different people inhabiting one body! I'd like to be able to call this an absurd piece of fiction – if it didn't ring so true. Robert Louis Stevenson had his finger on the pulse of the human condition in a way that few ever have.

As much as we like to think that we have it all together and as much as we like to showcase that “togetherness” to the world around us, if we take even a moment for self-examination, what do we find? Do we find a squeaky clean person whose every thought and desire could be put in the “good and Godly” category? Or do we gaze in horror on an almost unrecognizable beast who is driven by the most carnal, devilish desires and wants to serve nobody but self? As a Christian, do you find yourself locked in battle with desires that you'd never think to verbalize in the presence of another human being? Are you ever bombarded by thoughts that are so utterly unspeakable that you can only try to push them out of your mind and hope they never slip across your lips? Robert Louis Stevenson intended to publish a work of fiction, but as we look at ourselves, we see a Mr. Hyde in each of us.

Occasionally, you'll run into some one who will make the claim, “People are basically good.” But realistically, that claim falls flat the second you open a history book or turn on the news or take a good, hard look in the mirror. Yet the droves still chant, “People are basically good,” perhaps in an attempt to silence the voice of conscience or flat out deny what lives inside each human being by nature. But, the more you think about it, the more it sounds like it makes sense. “*Hey, nobody's perfect – at least I'm no Hitler, Stalin, Saddam, or Osama!*” But comparative righteousness is no righteousness at all. Do I get a pass for not being one of the “bad guys” in the history books? People like to think so.



But really, the capability for jaw-dropping evil exists in every human. And in my honest moments, I come to the awful realization that I've never committed some of those dastardly deeds simply because I never had the chance to, or maybe I'm too cowardly, or not talented enough. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson, in a work of fiction, presented the reality of the human condition and the potential for evil inside each person.

About 1800 years before Stevenson had his finger on the pulse of the human condition, the Apostle Paul made the same startling observation and admission. **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.** Can you hear how conflicted the Apostle is? As a child of God, he delights in the law of God as a good thing. In his new self, given by the Holy Spirit, he wants to follow the will of God...BUT...he doesn't always do it. And he hates himself for it. The Apostle is speaking from personal, intimate experience. He doesn't tell us what the sin is with which he struggles, and maybe that's just as well, because this struggle applies equally to all of us.

As baptized children of God, you have been given a "new person" who daily arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. You have that new person living in you – empowered by God's Holy Spirit to desire and do what God wants. You have that new person who loves the law of God and wants nothing more to serve and obey him all day every day. But does that happen? Why not? Do you see the horrifying reality of what else lives inside of each of us? A part of us that wants nothing to do with God or living for him; a part of us that is murderous, adulterous, uncharitable; a part of us that is diametrically opposed to God and everything he stands for. That part of us is our sinful nature, inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Paul says, **I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.** The sinful nature inside of you is not something that can be repaired. It wants to control you, define you, and guide your every word and action to march you straight away from the God who saved you.

In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, eventually the evil Mr. Hyde started to come out to play even when Jekyll didn't want him to. In the same way, the sinful nature loves to jump out and take center stage – pushing us, urging us, dying for us to give into that particular sin. What is it for you? When is it that your sinful nature leaps into the driver seat? Maybe it's when that scantily clad woman struts across the screen. Maybe it's when that first little drink crosses your lips. Maybe it's when you finally get the chance to squash that person at school or work who's all too ready to tear you down behind your back. Our sinful nature wants nothing more than to drag us down into the depths of sin, death, and hell. Within you, dear child of God, exists the new person given to you by God as well as a sinful nature that wants nothing to do with God. Do you see the inevitable conflict? Paul describes it this way, **"So I find this law (principle) at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being (new self) I delight in God's law; but I see another law (principle) at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and**



making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. Constant struggle. Terrible warfare. Feeling like you're being dragged off as a prisoner.

That's how Paul felt and I'm guessing on those dark days of doing battle with your own sinful nature, you've been there, too. Finally, it's as if Paul throws up his hands and exclaims, **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"** Who will rescue me? Who will drag me away from this incessant warfare? Hopeless, helpless, alone. But then Jesus showed up. The One who knew the true depths of human sin and depravity – God himself – didn't shy away in disgust. He saw the constant barrage of the devil's temptations, so he faced down each of them and defeated them. He saw the damnable guilt for every one of our sins, and he took it upon himself. Jesus saw in stunning array the horror of human nature and a world full of people who deny it, and he sacrificed himself to save it. Listen to him gasp out words like **"Father, forgive them"** as sinful humans drove nails into his hands and feet. Jesus saw the punishment that the worst of sinners, you and me, deserved and he suffered the wrath of God so that you and I would never have to. Humankind didn't need a hand up or a nudge in the right direction. Humankind needed complete and total salvation – rescue. So that's what Jesus came to do. **Who will rescue me from this body of death? thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Martin Luther once said, "Sin boldly." Sounds odd, right? Sometimes people like to rip that out of context and use it as a way to say, "Go ahead – if you're going to make a mistake, do it with some gusto!" But that's not what he meant. Listen to the whole quote: *"If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace, if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world."* Do you see what he's saying? Far from condoning sin, he echoes what Paul says in Romans 7. Admit who you are as a sinner. Trust and rejoice in who Christ is for you – your perfect substitute. When the battle against the sinful nature drags on and you seem to be admitting defeat more than claiming victory, where can you turn? Turn away from sin and find your rest in Christ – the One who gives you strength to live for him; the One who promises you rest. He refreshes you with his forgiveness. He restores you with his promises. He gives you his word that the ultimate rest of heaven is your personal possession because of him.

If you're anything like me, the Romans 7 pages in your Bible are well worn. If they aren't, I'd encourage you to read this section again. In the probably hundreds of times I've poured over those words, they never lose relevance; they never get old. I'm forced to see who I am by nature. I'm blessed to see who my Savior is. I'm strengthened to live for God. I get to shout in the face of devil and his accusations, **"Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** Amen.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)