

## Conflict Resolution

*Romans 7:15-25a; from the series, "A Summer in Rome"*

*Message from the Master broadcast July 27, 2008 by Pastor Jeremy Mattek*

Near the beginning of the summer, Miller Genuine Draft released a new line of commercials. They start each commercial by saying, "We're on the search for genuine people." I've seen two different commercials for this campaign. The first one shows a cell phone ringing on the floor of the backseat in a taxi. The passenger picks it up, says, "Hello," and the person on the phone says they left their phone in the taxi and was wondering if they would bring it to them. The first three or four guys they show make some sort of excuse as to why they can't, until, finally, one nice person asks the taxi driver to turn around and go to the bar where the person is so they can drop the phone off. When they arrive at the bar, everyone inside, who knows exactly what's going on, cheers and gives the nice man a cold beer to celebrate his kindness.

The other commercial starts out in a bar. The Miller beer people ask the bartender to give random customers too much change. From what I see in the commercial, the bartender seems to slip them an extra \$20 bill. Again, the first couple customers take the money and run until, finally, a nice gentleman points out the bartender's "mistake," and is rewarded with some cheers, high-fives, and, it seems, another cold beer.

Have you seen these? If so, did you take the time to ask yourself what you would do? Did you come to the conclusion that you would do the right thing?

I feel a little bit sorry for the guys on the commercial who didn't return the cell phone and the ones who ran off with the money. The commercial didn't hide their faces, and now everyone who knows them, and plenty of people who now meet them will identify and treat them as those immoral guys who just wouldn't do what's right. But I don't feel sorry for them because they'll be embarrassed. I feel sorry for them because they'll be treated as if they are somehow different and worse than any one of us.

I'm hoping those guys, looking back on the situation, asked themselves why they did that. And, if so, they ask themselves the same question you do when you blow up at your kid, put off finishing the project until the last minute, or act so cranky and sour to your spouse, or let tiny little things get you down, or you bounce a check ... again, or you get a speeding ticket, or you spice someone's ears with some filthy language, when you do anything that makes you later on ask yourself, with a sobbing kid in the background or a \$200 speeding ticket in your hand, "Why in the world did I even think of doing that?"

There is an answer. And there is a remedy. The Apostle Paul shares the facts about who we are and why we are so susceptible to the actions and attitudes that make our lives more difficult than they need to be.

**<sup>15</sup> I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> I 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.**

Have you ever heard of Sean McGrath? Sean McGrath tried to sue Dollar Rent-A-Car in Orlando Florida. Dollar Rent-A-Car rented a car to Mr. McGrath who then got drunk and crashed his car. Sadly, his girlfriend died in the accident. Sean tried to sue the car rental place. Why? Because,

according to his lawyer, Mr. McGrath is Irish, and everyone knows how the Irish love to drink. Therefore, the rental car company should never have rented him the car. He blamed the car rental company for killing his girlfriend.

Did you notice who Paul blamed for his problems? Not his parents, his heredity, his environment, his government, or his 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. He blames himself. Paul (whose parents, by the way, taught him lies, whose environment taught him hate, whose government taught him to kill) understood that his attention needed to be focused within, on his own mind and his own heart.

I know that none of you would think of pulling a Sean McGrath, but we do buy into the same mentality of blaming everything else around us for what's ailing us. We say, "I can't mow the lawn because my boss just wore me down today. I can't do my homework because my friends are stressing me out. I can't scrub the floor because I'm just exhausted. But then the man who's too tired to mow the lawn, as soon as his buddy calls and says he has an extra ticket to the game, is up on his feet, ready to go. The teenager too tired to do homework is going to be out until midnight with his friends. The woman too exhausted to scrub the kitchen floor later on that night has plenty of energy to call her friends and tell them everything that's wrong with her husband. The problem's not them, it's you. You will not begin to fix the biggest problems in your life until you recognize, like Paul, that your biggest problem lives inside of you – your constant desire to do the things you're not supposed to and ignore the things you should do, and, it is constant.

I know of people who refuse to use public restrooms. They're so disgusted by the amount of bacteria in public restrooms that they simply decide to stay away. Did you know that your office desktop has 400 times more bacteria than the average public toilet seat? Your phone is even worse. Your office phone has 500 times more bacteria than the average public toilet seat. We try to pretend that we can free ourselves of bacteria by squirting our hands with the disinfectant soap and laying the awkward paper covering over the public toilet seat, or just staying away, but we can't.

Neither can we free ourselves from our desire to do everything God hates. We try to pretend that the problem's not really there by finding someone else whose life looks worse than ours, someone whose family is more dysfunctional, or you keep repeating the nice compliment someone gave you last month and pretend that that's the only thing that's true about you. But you're just pretending. We are full of sin like a Big Mac is full of fat. It is why you can identify things to improve upon in every area of your life. I can always be a better spouse, parent, child, friend, pastor, parishioner, citizen, and person. Your sin is such an intimate and regular participant in all of your decisions and actions that Paul calls it a law.

**<sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.**

Just as you can always go to the Ten Commandments and find guidance for you, you can always look to your life and see where you are making mistakes that hurt you.

And the sad thing is, that because we don't like to admit where many of our problems truly lie or how serious this really is, we actually make the problem worse.

A pastor was telling me about his daughter, Soren. One morning when Soren was about 18-months old, they found her happily playing with open bottles of pills. Somehow she had created a climbing wall for herself that allowed her to reach a basket of pills on a high shelf. Many of the bottles were not childproofed, and, because of that, were open with pills scattered all over the floor. Soren just smiled at her parents, completely unable to tell her parents whether or not she'd eaten anything. They called Poison Control, who calmly told them to get her to the

ER, where she was poked and prodded by a number of doctors until they determined that she probably sucked on an Aspirin or two before spitting them out.

That's got to be close to a parent's worst nightmare, seeing their child play with such poison. Yet God sees his children do it every day with just as much of a smile on their faces. He sees the violence in our movies, the hate in our politics, the sex on our TVs, the petty arguing in our families; and he sees his children not staying away from these, not locking these poisons up, but voluntarily, and often happily, feeding them to our sinful hearts through our eyes, mind, and ears, which is like fighting a war and giving your enemy all of your ammunition, supplies, and plans for winning. In fact, Paul describes this battle with your sinful nature as a war.

**<sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**

We hate war, don't we? We hate war because people die. You probably know that over 4000 American soldiers have died in Iraq since the beginning of the current war. In the Korean War, over 50,000 died. In Vietnam, it was over 90,000. World War I killed almost 120,000. In World War II, over 400,000 American soldiers died. Since the beginning of our country almost 1.2 million Americans have died during our wars. We hate war because people die.

So then why don't we hate that Miller commercial? Why don't we hate ourselves for laughing at it, for chuckling about how, honestly, we might also keep the money and the phone? Why don't we despise every little battle our sinful nature wins; every lazy moment, lustful thought, arrogant smile, or boastful taunt? Why don't we loath our stupidity in this war; how often we feed the enemy, and let them walk right in while we just laugh and smile because we're so drunk on sin. If we hate war because people die, why don't we spend all of our energy fighting the internal and eternal war that's killing you and I?

Maybe it's because you think you can't win. That's what Paul thought. He asked himself here, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" I imagine that he first asked himself a similar question, "Who *can* rescue me from this body of death?"

It certainly wasn't him. As he stood there on the road with Jesus Christ in front of him, he had to be told that it was wrong to persecute and kill Christians. And every day after that, the more he read God's Word and learned his will, the more he realized how good he was at doing all sorts of things that belong in hell; so good that, decades after this revelation, during which he fought and clawed and struggled against every temptation, he could still only come to one conclusion, "What a wretched man I am."

And if he couldn't rely on himself to rescue him, or his friends, who tempt him, his enemies, who hate him, his parents, who misguided him, his government, who misled him, then the only one left to trust was the one standing in front of him; the only person to go toe-to-toe with the same grave, devil, sin and win.

But who *will* rescue me from this body of death? It couldn't be him, Paul thought, because he's the God against whom I sin, whose judgment brings this condemnation. And yet, the Bible assures us that he's also the Savior who forgives our sins and gives even wretched sinners like Paul full and free salvation.

**<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!** One cool thing about being the parent of young children is that your kids trust you. Every one of my kids so far has gone through this stage of standing at the top of the stairs and wanting me to carry them down.

Although, instead of waiting for me to pick them up, they keep their feet planted on the top step and fall toward me, trusting that I won't let them do a face plant on the third stair down.

It reminds me of why Jesus so often commends the faith of children instead of adults. Children know something about themselves that adults tend either to forget or do not want to admit. Children know they need help, and they're not afraid to ask for it.

We like to believe that God loves us because we're these smart, grown-up mature Christians who have life all figured out; that we are special to God because we are so good at following his laws. But we are not. We are special to God even though we aren't, which is why he takes that burden off of us and simply asks that we fall confidently every day into the strong, empowering, and forgiving arms of Jesus Christ our Lord.