

June 6, 2021 - Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. I hope everyone is doing well.

David mentioned this, but we are in June. And most, if not all, the kids are out of school. The temperature is getting a little warm. I think we touched, I don't know if we touched 90 yesterday, but it felt warm.

The day springs in a couple weeks. I know summer doesn't officially start until I think towards the end of June. But for all intents and purposes, it feels like we're here. It feels like the summer is here. And so, again, I'll just say welcome this morning. I'm honestly, truthfully excited about this message this morning. I was looking forward to it. I'm excited to be here this morning.

And I want to start with just a quick dialogue from a famous but old Disney movie. And at the end of the short dialogue, I want you to guess what movie this is from.

[1 : 09] I bet everyone in here gets it. But it starts with this evil queen. And the queen says to the other character, she says, Magic mirror on the wall.

Who is the fairest one of all? And the mirror replies, Fame is thine beauty, majesty. But behold, a lovely maid I see.

Alas, she is more fair than thee. Lips red as a rose, hair black as ebony, and skin white as snow. What movie is this? Of course, it is a famous scene from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, where the evil queen is talking to this mirror.

And I thought Mary Ellen had seen my notes when she requested 88 in the hymnal, Fairest Lord Jesus. And I thought, wow, this is just meant to be.

[2 : 15] So now some of you may be wondering, what is the connection between this clip and this movie and our passage this morning? And to be very honest with you, it's a very loose connection.

But there is a connection. And that has to do with the prop that I brought with me this morning. And that is my daughter Mariah's mirror.

All right? So we have a mirror here. And I want to start by making kind of an assumption. And that is that at some point this morning, every single person in this room looked at a mirror.

Everybody looked at a mirror. Maybe it was right when you woke up. Maybe you took a shower before you did it. Maybe you just glanced in this mirror for a minute.

Maybe you stared at it for a long time, looking at every angle of yourself. Maybe doing the double mirror to kind of get the view behind you. Maybe you looked at it and you liked what you saw.

[3 : 27] You said, I'm looking pretty good today. Maybe you looked at it and you're like, ooh, this is a little scary. I got some work to do this morning. But regardless of the detail, you woke up this morning and you used a mirror to get ready for church this morning.

And for this message, I brought this mirror. It will be an object lesson that I'm sure many of you know. But in a very helpful way, this mirror will help us, I believe, clarify some confusion around our main topic this morning, which is the law.

The law. And so the passage we're going to be looking at is Romans 7. So if you want to turn to Romans 7, specifically we're looking at verses 7 through 13. But when you hear the analogy of the mirror, most of you probably go to James and you start to think of James 1.

And as a quick refresher, James 1.22 says, Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But whoever intently, or whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

[5 : 02] There's other passages, I believe in Hebrews, that talk about the reflection of the law. And there's a lot we could talk about in this James passage that we're not going to. But there's this key comparison between the word and the mirror.

And specifically this morning I'm going to kind of focus on the law as part of the word in the mirror. So let's open in prayer. Father, we just thank you for this passage in Romans 7 and for the letter that you directed through Paul to this church and addressing just a variety of topics, Lord, things that were pertinent then, that are pertinent now.

Lord, I just pray that truth is delivered and communicated this morning and all of us, including myself, it is received with a softened heart and one that we can take forward in our lives.

So Lord, we thank you for, again, your word this morning and the edification that it would bring. In your son's name, amen. Okay, so again, when you got up this morning, how did you use this mirror?

Let me get my mirror. How did you use this mirror? Did you get out your toothpaste and put toothpaste on it and start to brush your teeth with it? Did you use the mirror to brush your hair?

[6 : 29] Mike, I'm not looking at you, but everyone else, how did you, did you use the mirror for that purpose? Ed, did you trim the beard with the mirror? Okay, Ed's the one guy that hasn't looked into the mirror.

To the ladies out there, did you apply any makeup with this mirror or with your mirror? No, of course not. These are all questions that I know the answer to.

But what I'm getting to is that when you looked into the mirror, two things happened. One is you saw how bad you looked.

You're like, wow, that does not look good. And then second, the mirror specifically pointed out what was wrong. You know, I looked in the mirror when I got up and I was like, the hair is definitely bad, okay?

The teeth are looking yellow. Got very little sleep, so the bags under the eyes. Definitely need to trim the beard. So the mirror did two things. It revealed my general state of just being messed up.

[7 : 36] And then it specifically called out what was wrong. The mirror did not fix me, but instead it revealed and identified my imperfections.

And so the same applies to the law, this Mosaic law, these ten commandments that are given. And so Paul is presenting this amazing story to the Roman church.

He starts by saying, hey, you guys are all sinners. Metaphorically speaking, every one of you woke up and did not look good. I don't care if you're a Jew, a Gentile, every single one of you guys woke up and it was not a pretty sight.

We all look at ourselves in the mirror of the law, this perfect list of what to do and what not to do, and we all fail to meet this standard.

We all look in this mirror and say, we have sin. But then Paul goes on and he tells this great part of the story, and that is that in God's perfection and his righteousness, he sent his son to die on the cross to pay for these sins.

[8 : 48] To what? To fulfill the law, to satisfy the law, not to take this law and to throw it out, but to fulfill it. A relationship with God here on this earth and eternity then with him in heaven requires this perfect reflection.

And so how do we get this perfect reflection? Again, the perfect reflection comes from putting our faith in what Jesus has done on the cross.

And so the mirror, again, was not thrown into the trash, but the image, the person looking into this mirror, the believer, the identity of that person who puts their faith in the gospel is made perfect.

All right? I'm going to come back to that here in a second. And so this is a beautiful story, right? We know the story. The story of the gospel, the story of everybody's a sinner, here's the perfect gift, you put your trust in this, you are saved.

But it becomes almost comical how we respond. You know, sometimes things become, they almost seem too good to be true, that you start to get skeptical.

[10 : 12] You start to overcomplicate this simplicity of the gospel. You start to throw questions out. And we go to extremes, and we like to make up rules, and we just can't just take it for the simplicity of what it is.

And so the Lord uses Paul in this letter, and especially up until this point, in chapter 7, to ask these rhetorical questions. Like, if you go back and you just look at all these questions that Paul brings up,

and then he answers, it is impressive.

Questions like, well, if the law is fulfilled, you know, is there any benefit to being a Jew? There's a question asked. Were our Jews better off? Should we just overthrow the law?

Is there a blessing to those that are circumcised? Or how is Abraham counted? Should, and this is, these last two are my favorite. This is from chapter 6.

Should we continue to sin so that grace may abound? Some twisted logic there, but I can kind of see where that's coming from. Or have, you know, we've been given this, or I'm sorry, should we continue sinning because now we are not under the law, but under grace?

[11:27] You know, again, the last two questions come from chapter 6, and I talked about the extremes that we often go to. And so Paul is addressing these questions, and he's directing the church to become slaves of God, bearing fruit that leads to sanctification, sanctification, to grow in our walk with the Lord.

I think David mentioned this just in announcements, but the gospel is a free gift and a gift of freedom from this bondage of sin.

So it's a free gift, but it's also a gift of freedom, like we no longer are under this bondage and these shackles of sin. Warren Weersbe is quoted saying, there is something in human nature that makes us want to go to extremes.

And this is a weakness from which Christians are not wholly free. And think about this just even in our physical life. If someone wants to go on a diet, or if someone wants to like change their kind of, their routine and physical fitness, like rarely do I come across someone that's like, you know what, I'm going to try to just cut out like, you know, a small number of calories or I'm going to just make this slight adjustment to my diet or I'm just going to add in, you know, five, ten more minutes of walking a day.

It's typically to an extreme where it's like, hey, I'm going to cut out this entirely or I'm going to totally change the way I do this over here. There is something in our nature that wants to go to these extremes.

[13:04] And on one end of this spectrum, you have those that Paul is addressing that want to take this newfound salvation they have and they want to say, this is a license to live however I want.

Again, not affecting the state of their salvation, but saying, hey, we should do this because grace will abound even more. That is on one end of the spectrum.

That was addressed in chapter six. But on the other end of the spectrum, you have believers that are saying, there's only, I will only have satisfaction in the strict obedience of every single ounce of the law.

And in fact, I'm going to add some things to this thing to really make me feel good. And we have to obey every single commandment and the ones we made up to please God. And what is this group called?

Or what is this definition? It's legalism. And that's what Paul is addressing here in chapter seven. So much so that he uses the word law 23 times in chapter seven.

[14:16] So let's take a look at what it says. So if you want to turn with me in Romans 7, verses 7 through 13. It says, What then shall we say?

That the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would have not known sin.

That's an interesting statement right there. We'll come back to that.

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, which is another interesting comment we'll come back to. But when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death, proved to death, I'm sorry, proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

[15:28] So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means.

It was sin producing death in me through what is good in order that sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

not a long passage, but just to kind of go off what I'm looking at here, it can be a little confusing. You know, there's a lot of, there's a lot of like descriptive there given that it's just like, okay, how does that connect and, you know, the law brought this but not that and so let me just try to clarify and again using a bit of the object lesson, I want to go back to there are two general purposes that I'm seeing for the law in this passage.

What are the two purposes? To reveal sin and to identify that sin. Paul says that he looked into the mirror of the law and he saw his sin.

It was made known to him. Which is an interesting point considering Paul by the standard of the law like, was doing pretty good.

[16:48] You know, it says in Galatians that he zealously pursued the traditions of his forefathers but it was ultimately God who called him in his mother's womb who by grace saved him.

And so the law states the commandments. You look at them in the mirror and you realize you're a sinner and that is purpose number one of the law. purpose number two is that it identifies or labels that sin.

And Paul gives this example of coveting. Okay, and you're like what does that have to do with it or what is he trying to get at there? Paul said that he would not have known what coveting was apart from the law.

Does that mean coveting did not exist before the law? Does that mean sin in general did not exist before the law? No. Whether you looked, okay, this is going to be a wake-up call, maybe a surprise, but whether you looked at the mirror not this morning, it was not a pretty sight.

It was not a pretty sight. It was messy. The mirror just simply showed you, again, your messiness, your imperfection. Think about the Old Testament history before the law was given for a minute.

[18:15] And think about these examples of just widespread sin. Before, again, the Ten Commandments, think about the people in Noah's time, the Tower of Babel, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel.

Before the Ten Commandments they said, thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not covet, Cain is, or, yeah, Cain is coveting this sacrifice that Abel gave, and then he murders him.

Still, sin existed before the law was given, but the law revealed it, and the law identified or labeled that. There was still coveting before the law.

It simply makes it known. But sadly, the law ultimately leads to death. It doesn't kill itself, but it's the sin that's revealed through the law that pulls that trigger of the law that ultimately leads to death.

And so, sometimes we have this weird relationship with the law. If I individually asked you, describe the law and its role in your life, I bet we would get a bunch of different answers.

[19:45] And that's why I'm trying to use this mere example to clarify some of this, because it is confusing. And again, there are the ends of the spectrum, where some see it as a license to do whatever they want, some see it as, hey, I've got to follow every single rule to please God.

What is the right perspective here? What is the law's role in our life? I brought this up to him before, but again, David Vineyard spoke on the law some time ago, and that message stuck with me, which is impressive, because I will often forget my own messages within days.

And so, in that, he described the law, and Paul gives us a taste or a description of that in this passage. The law reveals sin, but it's not sin itself.

This mirror doesn't make me messy. It is simply revealing who I am. It says in verse 12 that the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

That's kind of interesting. Paul says that the law is perfect. It is set apart. It is not a bad thing in and of itself. And I can guarantee you this.

[21:06] When I compare myself to a perfect standard that is the law, I fall very short. I mess up, I look terrible, my hair is disheveled, the beard can become unwieldy, I look tired, it just, it is not a good thing.

Comparing myself to the perfect law, comparing any of us to the perfect law, we are guaranteed to fall short. This week was no exception to that. There are many things I struggle with.

Typically, anger is not one of them. I had two incidents this week where I was furious. I was livid at other people. For a moment there, I thought, well, this is all justified, but I don't think it was.

And again, it was a reminder as I look into the law and you think about what is said in Matthew 5, that if you hate your brother, it's like committing murder. I murdered two people this week, according to that standard.

we mess up. We compare ourselves to this perfect standard of the law and we fall short. So let me conclude here with the answer that I see in Scripture to this question of the law's role in a believer's life.

[22 : 36] 1 Corinthians 6.11 is a fantastic passage or verse, and it says that at the moment you were saved, you were washed, you were justified, I'm sorry, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.

And so I take my mirror here and I've written that verse on this piece of paper. Not great handwriting, but trust me, it's 1 Corinthians 6.11.

And under it I've written, just highlighted, washed, sanctified, justified. And I placed that piece of paper on the back of this mirror. And I intentionally put it on white paper with red lettering signifying in red the blood that has been paid by Jesus, the white signifying the perfect state faith that God now sees me because of the faith that I've put in him.

And so at this moment, at the moment we trust in what Jesus has done, we are saved. And this is what our identity looks like. But as believers, we go forward and we don't become robots.

We can choose how we live. We can choose how we live. And we have a choice. Do we focus on the gospel and its saving grace?

[24 : 19] And we just remind ourselves on a constant basis, the sinner that I was, the blood that was spilled, and this perfect state that I now have before God?

Or do we fall into this temptation? We're starting to look back at the mirror to see how we are, to see how we're doing.

Again, looking back at the mirror doesn't change my state of being saved, but it can manifest a very dangerous reaction, two of them actually that I see.

One is we begin to look back and we say, okay, I'm looking all right. I actually look pretty good. And we become prideful and we become, we start to think highly of ourselves, how good we look, how good we're doing.

And this perspective of pride is not only sinful, but it is guaranteed to fail. And you think about the rich young ruler who, he liked what he saw in that mirror.

[25 : 36] He liked it a lot. And he wanted the Lord's affirmation in that, but not knowing that we have all fallen short. Regardless of how good we look in that mirror, we are still imperfect.

And the only way, again, to the Father is through Jesus. Jesus. On the other hand, you look in the mirror and you think, that looks terrible. I am committing the same sin every day, all the time.

I think I've gone too far. I think I'm to the point where I don't know if the Lord can use me, if he can save me. And you become so discouraged, thinking there is no way out.

And we lose sight of our Heavenly Father, who loves us dearly. I think the kids are going through some names of God, and there's one that is somewhat related, Jehovah Rapha, meaning the Lord who heals, and it means not only who heals physically, but who heals emotionally.

And that is really needed in these certain situations where we look at ourselves and we think, I am so bad. I just, I'm useless.

[27 : 00] And there's some healthy perspective to that, but there's also this, we have forgotten that the Lord has paid for our sins, and he sees us as perfect. So my question is, how do you look into the mirror?

Do you focus on what he has done for you, how you have been washed, sanctified, justified? Or are you tempted to look back at the mirror to see how you're doing?

To either feel good about yourself or to put yourself so far down that it seems like all hope is lost? If the musicians want to come up, I'll just close by saying, please remember that the law is not sin.

It is not death, but it reveals sin and calls it for what it is. It calls it for what it is. The law itself, it says, Paul says, is holy, righteous, and good, but the sin it reveals will lead to death for those that do not believe.

As a Christian today, please do not leave the church focused on the law. It will either lead to pride and legalism, or it will lead to a desperation and hopelessness.

[28 : 20] The law has been fulfilled in the gospel. Focus on the good news and walk with the Lord. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for again the sacrifice of your Son.

Lord, we thank you that you didn't change the rules mid-game and say, okay, these ten commandments that I've given don't apply anymore. You satisfied them.

You fulfilled them. You have given us, those that have put their faith in you, this opportunity to be identified not only as an heir to you, Lord, but righteous in your sight.

And so as we go forward and we have these temptations to fall back to the law, to fall back on our own actions, may we be reminded as believers that our status before you is not dependent on these actions.

Our status before you, our eternal state, is based on what your Son has done. He has washed, he has sanctified, he has justified us.

[29 : 34] And Lord, it's a struggle that I have just on a, I wouldn't even say daily basis, on an hour-by-hour basis, to think I'm more highly than myself, or I think I'm better than what I am, or Lord, just being so down on the sin that I commit, just forgetting that your Son has washed that away.

And the perspective that I believe you are showing in your word, Lord, is to focus on you and to focus on the gospel and to remind ourselves constantly of that. In your Son's name, Amen.
Amen.