

# Defeating the monster

## Mental health and mental illness from God's point of view (pt 3)

Paul admits to a monster in his head messing up his mind. But he'd also made an amazing discovery in **Romans 8:2**, that "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

He discovered there are two laws operating in the human brain. The first one, the 'law of sin and death', helped explain the cause of his mental problems, but the second law, the 'law of the Spirit of life', actually offered him a solution. And this was a revelation for Paul, because it's clear from his candid comments in Romans 7 that Paul is talking as a man who'd been struggling with some serious mental issues, and he was desperate, because he had no idea how to deal with them.

Fortunately, for anyone else who wonders what on earth is going on inside his or her head, Paul explains in **verse 5** what was doing his mind in. It was this 'law of sin and death', or "living according to the sinful nature" - or, to be more precise - having his mind fixated "on what the sinful nature desires."

Inside his head, then, Paul discovered there was this hugely powerful force bending his mind into one way of thinking. And it was always toward evil thoughts, or the opposite of what he knew to be good and right. It was totally crazy, because every time he wanted to do something good, this other law in his head automatically kicked in to make him want to do the opposite. It would send Paul into another suicidal tailspin of guilt and self-loathing, until he was crying out for the pain in his head to end (Romans 7:24).

And isn't that the cry of anyone with mental illness, that awful, crazy things are going round and round in his (or her) head, and they won't stop? And it takes so little to trigger them, like the toddler reaching out to the hot saucepan he's just been told not to touch, because he can't resist touching it. All it took was telling him not to touch it, and the monster in his head gleefully released its evil juices in response without a moment's concern for the damage, or even possible lifelong disfigurement, that it might cause the child. And Paul experienced this horror too; and it drove him nuts.

But such is the law of sin and death. It has enormous power over the mind, and it doesn't care a hoot about the human it inhabits. It will take a beautiful innocent child and scar him or her for life, give reason to a teenager to hate herself so much she'll inflict even more pain on herself by cutting herself with a knife, and it will twist an adult mind into committing a stupid crime or say something in the heat of the moment that ruins a relationship and a reputation.

So why does such a power exist? No reason really. It just does. But **because** it does we're all stuck with having to learn from personal experience what it takes to deal with it - AND come to realize it's so powerful it even twisted the mind of Lucifer, the most beautiful creature God ever created, into marshaling a host of hate-filled, eyes-blazing angels into a head-on attack against God to kick and pummel the one who created them and loved them. It was total madness, but somehow, awfully and crazily, it happened.

And what made things even worse for Lucifer was the monster releasing its evil juices inside his head actually **justifying** his insanity, and making it seem right, just like millions of soldiers felt it was right and justified going to war to kill and maim and hate their neighbours, including their fellow Christians.

What we are learning from personal experience, therefore, and from the tragedy of wrecked human lives all around us, including members of our own family, is that we are dealing with powers well outside our ability to control.

At what point in our lives, then, do we finally acknowledge that what Paul said in **Romans 8:6** was spot on, that "The mind of sinful man is death"? Without the counteracting antidote of God's mind, the natural human mind is dedicated to one gigantic '**selfie**' from cradle to grave. Self is the centre of the universe around which all else revolves. But that spells disaster and death, because what happens if self is denied or thwarted in any way? It spits and fumes, blames God, blames the government, goes to war, and like teenagers it kicks those who can best help them. But guess who gets hurt the most? SELF does. It always backfires on self. But in a suicidal leap over the cliff edge like lemmings, we don't care. When the law of sin and death is the dominant force in our lives we are numb, we are sick, and we are mad. And Paul readily admits he was all of those too.

He even got it in his head to hound Christians and have them put to death, but fortunately for all of us, Jesus soon had enough of that and confronted Paul with - guess what - **what Paul was doing to himself**.

This was Jesus' starting point. He doesn't beat about the bush, he goes right for the jugular: You're an idiot, Paul. And why is Paul an idiot? Well, let's hear it from Jesus in **Acts 26:14** - "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." In other words, why on earth are you turning your guns on me, Paul, when **the only one getting hurt here is you**? It must be a hellishly hard life for you stamping your feet in blazing rage against me and banging your tender ankles like some dumb ox kicking against its owner's iron-tipped prod. So, come on Paul, wake up, I've come to rescue you from all that self-destructive nonsense (17) - SO THAT, **verse 18**, you can write a Manual for humanity on how others with your mental illness can be rescued.

So that's what Paul did, he wrote a Manual - and what makes it so real is that he wrote it from personal experience. "I was completely bonkers," he writes in Romans 7, and then in Romans 8 he explains why, and what changed him.

And Paul doesn't beat about the bush either. All humans are bonkers, he says, because of the power of "the sinful nature," **Romans 8:3**. And it's so powerful that even God's perfect law, enforced with penalties of death, banishment, captivity, slavery, disease, invasion by vicious maniacs, and a time-consuming, in-your-face every morning and evening gory sacrificial system, didn't make the slightest dent in the Israelites' mental state. They complained, they blamed, they thumbed their noses at God by chasing after other idols, made alliances with pagan nations instead of trusting God, made a mockery of God's name, and made God so furious he wanted to eradicate them forever. Even Jesus was ready to chop the Jews into little pieces because of their stinking, uncaring, unremorseful, obstinate, hypocritical, totally self-oriented, rebellious attitude (Matthew 24:51).

Adam and Eve were just the same. They somehow got it in their heads that the world existed for them. So if a tree looked good to them, that's all that counted. And when God faced them with their downright disobedience, they fought back: It wasn't *their* fault. *They* didn't do anything wrong. You can't blame *us*. And look at Cain's attitude too, just after he'd killed his brother in a jealous rage. When God punished him for it, Cain's only response was, "My punishment is more than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). He'd just committed cold-blooded murder and he thinks God's overdoing the punishment a bit. In Cain's mind, in other words, God was the one with the mental problems, not him.

"Get the picture?" says Paul in Romans 8. We are dealing with a monster in our heads that is truly insane, and it is impossible to tame.

Forget about taming it, then; the only way of dealing with the monster is to destroy it. Which is exactly what God did, but it took the most drastic action possible on God's part. He sent his Son, **Romans 8:3**, "in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." In other words, he would allow Evil with a capital 'E' to unleash all its power and cunning on his own Son. He was, in effect, handing his Son over to the monster to release every bit of evil juice it had into Jesus' head to destroy him. It was a battle to the death, with only one winner.

And much to Evil's surprise, I imagine, it won the battle. It twisted the minds of the Jews against Jesus, and they handed him over to the Romans, who killed him. Imagine Evil, like a cackling hyena, savouring its victory, and slobbering foam and spit in its blood-curdling screams of triumph.

What Evil had blissfully ignored, however, was the outcome of the battle that had **already** been predicted in the Old Testament, pictured by, of all things, the death of a tiny lamb. Well, frankly, evil (with a small 'e' from now on) should have known better, especially after Abel had sacrificed some little lambs from his flock and "The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering" (Genesis 4:4).

Evil didn't get the hint at all in that verse, that the sacrifice of a lamb was the first thing humans ever did that really pleased God. And where did Abel get the idea of sacrificing a lamb in the first place, unless God had explained what a lamb pictured? And do you think evil didn't know that too?

Evil may have been cunning, then, but it wasn't very bright. A little Bible study on its part would have saved it a lot of embarrassment. But embarrassed it would be when it gambled all its eternal power and influence over humans in its battle with Jesus, because, horror of horrors, **Jesus** turned out to be that tiny lamb.

And what happened when tiny lambs were sacrificed in Israel? The law of sin and death was annulled. How? By Israel's sins being transferred onto the lamb, so when the lamb was killed so were Israel's sins. And evil didn't see the significance of that? Well, it certainly found out the significance, because the sacrificial lamb in the Old Testament was, in fact, picturing Jesus all along, and the sacrifice he would make that would destroy the law of sin and death forever.

It was all there in the Old Testament, and evil missed it. It missed the fact that a lamb's death putting sin to death actually pictured the day when Jesus' death "condemned sin in sinful man" (Romans 8:3).

It must have been a huge shock for evil, because instead of a triumphant victory over God and wrecking God's plan for humans, it found itself flat on its back with a spear in its chest. But again, it should have known better and bowed out of the battle a lot sooner, because it had thrown everything it had at Jesus during Jesus' lifetime, and pummeled every nook and cranny in Jesus' brain - which in any other human being would have reduced him to a weepy mush of self-flagellating guilt and self-hatred - but Jesus had stood firm.

Evil couldn't get a foothold in Jesus' brain. It was like chucking wooden sticks at a knight in armour, or bottles at a tank. They did a lot of banging and clanging and a great deal of bruising in Jesus' head, but never, even once, did Jesus succumb to evil's influence.

Evil was a fool, then, not backing out sooner, rather than stumbling ahead in its stupidity and having Jesus killed as well. Surely, it realized after Jesus resisted the devil's cleverest temptations in Matthew 4, that Jesus was impervious to evil. And how shocking that must have been, that evil had been nullified, neutralized, and torpedoed at the water line by a mere human being. And that same human being had then, in the most humiliating and triumphant gesture, taken evil's top weapon in its arsenal - the law of sin and death that had messed up every human mind up to that point - and nailed it to his cross for the entire angelic realm to see. The worst possible thing for evil had happened: The Lamb had taken the sins of the world into himself and killed them.

And that's when there was a 'Great Pause', as the entire heavenly realm, including evil's first recruit and top henchman, Satan the devil, came to terms with what had just happened. The law of sin and death had just been wiped out and eradicated forever, and there it was thrashing around in its death throes, making awful gurgling sounds, and evil juice soaking the ground under its writhing body. So now evil had nothing left to fight with. It had gambled all and lost.

For three days The Great Pause lasted, as the heavenly realm hovered in anticipation of Jesus' promise being fulfilled. And then in triumph Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to his Father, taking evil's power over humans with him, and on arrival in heaven he takes everything that evil has done to humans and like a dangly piece of rotting cabbage he dumps it in the trash. At which point, a new era begins, **Romans 8:4**, in which human beings would no longer have to "live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit."

With evil defeated the obstruction messing up the human mind had been removed, and the healing of damaged minds by the Spirit could now begin. It's not surprising, therefore, that it only took a few years for the Spirit to come up with a Manual on mental health and illness, the first of its kind, in which not only was the cause of mental illness identified, but also, at last, its solution.

The Manual was put together by Paul, and it now exists for any human who comes to the same startling realization Paul did (that got him started on writing the Manual in the first place) - that we are all, in truth, quite bonkers.

But that shouldn't be the case, surely, because didn't Jesus chop the head off the law of sin and death? Why, then, do we still have a massive problem with people being mentally unstable, and in many cases completely mad? Shouldn't there be increasing evidence of minds being healed and people becoming more balanced and sensible?

Yes, there should be, but Satan the devil is still "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), and he very cleverly blinds people to what Jesus accomplished. He promotes himself as an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), by recruiting people from among "those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2), who sound very wise and spiritual, but they're "masquerading as apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4), "preaching a Jesus other than the Jesus" Paul preached (11:4).

Paul preached Jesus as the only solution to human ills, but we still live in a world with its own 'angels of light' and god-like apostles, that churn out all sorts of impressive and authoritative ways of defining and treating mental illness offering relief for damaged minds, and people look to them instead.

But it's the blind leading the blind: People who are completely blind to Jesus having already dealt with the cause of damaged human minds, are trying to treat people who are completely blind too. No wonder mental illness continues. It's like a laboratory discovering the remedy for malaria, but when people find out about it they resist it, and insist that everyone stick to their old, traditional treatments, even though they don't work. It's total madness, because it means millions of people will continue to die from malaria, even though the solution has been found.

And likewise, the solution to the monstrous law of sin and death has been found too, in Jesus' death - but who's interested, or even knows about it?

But that's the whole point of the gospel. It's belting out the message that mental illness has been solved, but what if people don't believe they are sick in their heads in the first place, and they are deeply offended that anyone - and especially Christians - would dare to imply that they are? It means, then, that mental illness and madness, just like malaria, will continue, until things get so bad in the world, or in a person's own life, that some people may at last cry out to God - just as Paul did - for relief.

Or that God, as he did with Paul, directly intervenes. And that's encouraging because Paul was a real mental case. He was "blasphemous, and a persecutor, and a violent man," **1 Timothy 1:13**, until, that is, Jesus said "Enough," knocked Paul off his high horse, and made an example of him.

Made Paul an example of what, though? In **verse 16**, Paul was an example of God's "unlimited patience." From Paul's life we learn that God can wait while we thrash around in our blindness and obstinacy, but one day he intervenes, and when the time is right, as it was in Paul's case, God very gently, or quite forcefully, says, "That's enough of your nonsense, it's time you saw what you are really like, and what it took to rescue you from it." And he introduces, through the preaching of the gospel, the Manual that Paul wrote on mental illness.

And here's where the gospel can be preached in such practical terms. It IS so practical too, because what the whole world is suffering from is a severe case of blindness caused by the devil hiding what Jesus accomplished in his death. The clear and obvious result of that can be seen all over the world, as people struggle with mental problems, and madmen rule entire countries wrecking people's lives. But as things get worse, do people realize, at last, that humanity is a mess and we have no solutions? Is the world gradually having its resistance to God and its snotty, superior, we-are-gods attitude softened?

In other words, are people's eyes being opened to reality, and in some people there's a desperate search for help, too? If so, do we ourselves as Christians understand the Manual Paul wrote that offers these desperate people exactly what they're looking for, and in terms they can easily grasp?

In Chapter One of Paul's Manual, for instance, the title is: "We're all bonkers, but don't panic, Jesus dealt with the monster causing it." It's blunt, but that's what desperate people need. It's what Paul needed when he cried out, "What's happening to me, and why? Tell me, before I go completely mad."

And that's just Chapter One, and yet it's already explained the cause of mental illness - and that it's been dealt with. That's something the entire thumb-their-noses-at-God Mental Health community hasn't discovered yet. They haven't even figured out what makes us mad in the first place. They rattle off a list of possible causes, yes, but not the cause **behind** all those causes. In the meantime, therefore, people struggle on thinking the world has solutions, when it doesn't. It is tragic, and here we are as Christians, with a Manual that explains everything.

And that's just Chapter One. Chapter Two is just as blunt and just as practical. The title is: "You don't use a screwdriver to fix a broken heart." To heal a broken mind, in other words, you need the right tools.

Paul put it this way, in **Romans 8:2**, that it was only by "the law of the Spirit of life" that he, personally, was "set free from the law of sin and death." To free his own mind from evil, there was only one tool for the job - the Spirit. The tools used by the Mental Health establishment, therefore, can never heal mental illness, because the forces affecting and controlling the human mind are made of spirit, not chemicals.

The only way, then, that we are not controlled by the spirit influence of the devil, is by the counteracting spirit influence of the Holy Spirit. It's a spiritual battle in our heads, not a physical or biological one. But the Holy Spirit is amazing, because ever since Jesus' death neutralized the power of evil, the Spirit that "raised Jesus from the dead is living in you," **verse 11**, enabling us to crush evil in our OWN heads. We now have a tool at our disposal we can use at any time to "put to death the misdeeds of the body" (13). With the Spirit of Christ, or Christ's own mind, living in us (9), we can become impervious to the evil that makes us do really stupid things with our bodies, whether in word or action. Chapter Two, then, reveals the key to mental health: It's the Holy Spirit.

In just two chapters of Paul's Manual, therefore, we have the whole story of the monster in our minds that made us all mad in the first place, how that monster was dealt a crushing blow by Jesus' death, how the monster tries to resurrect itself by blinding people to what Jesus accomplished for us, how God intervenes in people's lives to wake them up to the monster that messed their lives up and what Jesus did to deal with it, and how God supplies the Spirit and mind of Christ to counteract the evil monster and make us impervious to it.

This is the Good News we preach, and in terms, hopefully, that make sense to people in our world as they wake up to how bad mental illness really is.