Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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There are three laws revealed in Romans seven. Verses 22 and 23 read: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inner man, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me a captive in the law of sin which is in my members." Verse 22 mentions the law of God in which Paul delights according to the inner man. We may label this as law number one. In verse 23 Paul refers to the law of the mind, which we may label law number two. Since this law is the law of the mind and the mind is a part of our soul, it means that there is a law in our soul. Verse 23 also mentions what Paul calls "a different law in my members." Since this law is in our members and our members are a part of our flesh, our fallen body, it means that in our flesh is another law. This law, law number three, wars against the law of our mind. In 7:23 we find two laws fighting against one another, warring against one another. Paul says that this "different law" in our members makes us captive to the law of

sin. This "law of sin which is in my members" is equivalent to the "different law in my members" mentioned earlier in the verse. This law is the third law. In this one verse we find two laws: one is a good law in our mind, and the other is an evil law in our members.

THE LAW OF GOD

The law of God is just, good, holy, and spiritual (vv. 12, 14, 16). This law is outside of us, or we may say that it is above us. This law of God makes many demands and requirements of the fallen man that he might be exposed (vv. 7-11).

THE LAW OF GOOD

While the law of God is above us and outside of us, making demands upon us, the law of good is in the mind of man's soul (vv. 23, 22). We may say that the law of good in our mind corresponds to the law of God and responds to its demands, trying to keep it (vv. 18, 21, 22). Whenever the law of God places a demand upon us, the good law in our soul responds to it. If the law of God says, "Honor your parents," the good law in our mind immediately replies, "Amen! I will do it. I will honor my parents." This has been our experience throughout life. Each time the law of

God made a demand the law of good in our soul responded and promised to fulfill it.

THE LAW OF SIN

However, in our members is a third law, the law of sin, which wars against the law of good. As we have seen, the law of sin is in the members of our fallen body, the flesh (vv. 17, 18, 20, 23). It constantly wars against the law of good and makes man a captive (v. 23). Whenever the law of good responds to the law of God and attempts to fulfill the requirements of the law of God, the evil law in our flesh is aroused. If the good law should fail to respond, the evil law would perhaps remain dormant, as if it were sleeping. However, when the evil law learns that the good law is responding, the evil law seems to say, "Are you going to practice good according to the law of God? I will not allow this!" The evil law wars against the law of good and invariably captures us. Thus, we become a captive in the law of sin which is in our members. This is not a doctrine; this is our life history.

The command "Husbands, love your wives" sounds so good and easy to fulfill. When this command is given, the law of good in a man's mind immediately responds, "Yes, I will do it."

However, the evil law in his flesh learns of this and answers, "Are you going to fulfill this law? Don't you know that I am here?" The result is defeat. Instead of loving his wife, he may slap her face or throw his knife and fork in anger. Wives have a similar experience when they try in themselves to keep the law which tells them to submit to their own husbands. The good law in the wife's mind is fond of this demand and says, "I will obey. As a good wife, I must surely submit myself to my husband. I will do this." If a woman says this, she will find that another law is waiting for an opportunity to attack. The evil law will say, "Do you believe that you can do this? I am here to show you that you cannot." Once again, the result is failure. Instead of submitting to her husband, she becomes angry at him. A few minutes later, she weeps because of her pitiful situation. This is the experience of Romans 7.

In Romans 7 we see three laws: the first law, the law of God, demands and makes requirements; the second law, the law of good in our mind, is quick to respond; the third law, the law of sin in our members, is always on the alert to war against the law of good in our minds and to defeat us, capture us, and imprison us. Each law

has its own aspect. Romans 7 describes the experience of each one of us. Perhaps even today you continue to repeat Romans 7. Do not think that you are different. According to God's economy, however, Romans 7 is not necessary. Actually, Romans 8 continues Romans 6. Nevertheless, due to our poor situation we need Romans 7 to expose us and to help us.

Some Christians insist that Romans 7 is necessary, that, experientially speaking, it must come between Romans 6 and Romans 8. Some good Christians hold this concept. Do you still cling to the thought that Romans 7 is necessary between Romans 6 and 8? There is no doubt that Romans 7 describes Paul's personal experience. The argument among the teachers of the Bible concerns the time when this experience occurred—before or after Paul's salvation. Although some believe that Romans 7 is a continuation in experience of Romans 6, if we read Romans 6 through 8 carefully, we will discover that Romans 7 related Paul's experience before he was saved. In 7:24 Paul said, "Wretched man that I am!" In 8:1 he said, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1 proves that the experience narrated in Romans 7 occurred before Paul was saved. It is

not his present experience, because he said that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Therefore, the experience of Romans 7 occurred before Paul was in Christ; it was his experience before he was saved.

Why then did Paul find it necessary, after Romans 6, to describe his experience before he was saved? He included it to prove that we are no longer under law. Romans 7 was written to explain a short clause in 6:14 which says that we "are not under law but under grace." Romans 7 tells us that when we were under law we were the old man. While our old man was still alive, we were under the law. However, as regenerated, new men we are no longer under the law, because our old husband, the old man under the law, has been crucified. Then Paul continues to relate how pitiful and wretched it is for anyone to be under the law. Paul describes the complete story of his experience before he was saved. He says that the law of God made demands upon him, that the good law in his mind responded to the law of God, but that the law of sin in the members of his fallen body warred against the law of his mind, defeating that law and bringing him into captivity. Paul's conclusion was, "Wretched man that I am. My body is the body of this death. I

cannot escape." Thus, Romans 7 is a record of Paul's experience before he was saved, a record which proves that we cannot keep the law and that encourages us not to try. Whenever we attempt to keep the law, the third law, the law of sin, captures us. Keeping the law is an impossibility for fallen man.

God did not give us the law with the intention of helping us. Its purpose is to stir up Satan to trouble us. God's intention in giving us the law was to expose the sinful law within us. If we think that we must keep the law, we are absolutely wrong. We are not strong enough to fulfill the requirements of the law. Do you not know that the evil law within you is actually the powerful person of Satan? Can you, as a fallen man, defeat Satan? It is impossible. He is a giant and compared to him you are a weakling. You are weak, and the good law within you is impotent. You have a good will and a positive desire, but you cannot fulfill it. You, as the old man, are only good to be crucified and buried with Christ, as you were already in 6:6. You should not pull out the old man who was buried in a tomb and expect him to keep God's commandment. The good law in your mind represents your strength, and the evil law in your flesh represents Satan's power.

Since Satan is more powerful than your strength, you can never defeat him, but are always captured by him whenever you attempt to keep the law of God. This is the correct meaning and understanding of Romans 7.

Although Romans 7 describes Paul's experience before he was saved, it depicts the experience of most Christians after they are saved. I doubt that there is a single exception to this. After we were saved, we all made a total response to God's law. Consider as an example a young man who has recently been saved. He has repented and made a thorough confession of his sins to the Lord. On the night he was saved he made a decision, saying to himself, "I should not behave that way any longer. I should not do the evil things that I once did. Tonight I will make up my mind to never do them again." Then this new convert prays to the Lord, "Lord, I am sorry for the way I have lived. From now on I want to be a good Christian. I don't want to do those things anymore." This young man is a typical representative of all genuine Christians. As a young Christian I did this numerous times. We all have done the same thing before the Lord. But we all can testify that we cannot do what we made up our minds to do. We simply are what

we are—persons with a good law within us. After we were saved, this good law in our mind responded to the law of God outside of us, and we made up our mind to be a better person.

Some Christians have wrongly told people that there is nothing good at all in them. As some preachers were talking this way some professors argued with them saying, "I don't believe this. I can testify that I do have something good within me. I honor my mother and have a real heart to love her. Isn't that something good within me? And I did make up my mind not to treat my students unfairly. Doesn't that mean that I have something good in me? How can you say that there is nothing good in people?" We must be careful about this, as Paul was in composing Romans 7. Paul said, "In me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells" (v. 18). If he did not make this modification, he would contradict himself, for in the following verse he mentions his will to do good. Man has three parts: a spirit, a soul with the mind, and a body with its many members. In the members of our fallen body nothing good dwells. However, we must remember that man was created by God as good and some amount of goodness remains in all men. For example, if you take a piece of metal and cast it into the dirt,

it may be defiled, but its nature is still metal. You cannot claim that the metal is no longer metal. Man was created by God, and God never created anything bad. Everything God created was good, including man as God's creature. Regardless of how fallen man has become, the goodness of God's creation remains in him. Even bank robbers still have an element of good in them, an element which was created by God.

Although man was created good, the evil nature of Satan was injected into his body when he partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The tree of knowledge denoted Satan, the evil one, who has the power of death. Thus, when man ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Satan came into his body. Satan's principle, the factor of every evil thing, is the law of sin. In our mind we have a principle created by God, the law of good. Hence, if we understand Romans 7 adequately, we will know where we are and what we have within us. We have a good law in our mind and an evil law in our flesh, two laws which are incompatible. The good law represents the good principle created by God, and the evil law is Satan's principle in our flesh. Satan in our flesh hates God, deceives man, and tries his best to damage and ruin humanity. Thus, whenever man's

mind by the good law thinks to do good, the evil law immediately rises up to fight, defeat, and capture the pitiful, wretched man. This was Paul's experience before he was saved when he was an enthusiastic Judaizer and lover of the law. Day and night he attempted to keep the law of God. Eventually, he realized that the law of God was outside of him, the law of good, corresponding to God's law, was in his mind, and that whenever he willed to do good another law in his members fought against the law of good in his mind, capturing him and making him wretched. Paul discovered that his body was the body of death. In keeping God's law, in doing good to please God, this body of death is just like a corpse. Paul came to realize that he was a hopeless case due to the powerful element of sin dwelling in his fallen body. This is the clear picture portrayed in Romans 7. Once we see this picture we will praise the Lord that He has no intention for us to keep His law.

Romans 7 describes Paul's experience before he was saved. Before he was saved he was very enthusiastic about God's law, attempting to keep it and to do good in order to please God. According to Romans 2, man by creation has three positive things in his make-up. First is man's good

nature, for the Gentiles by nature do the things of the law (2:14), showing that the function of the law is written in their hearts (2:15). Second, man has a conscience (2:15). Third, he has the reasonings which accuse, excuse, condemn, and justify (2:15). Every human being has these three elements within him. You need not be a believer in Christ in order to possess them. Every person has the good nature, a conscience, and the reasonings. Due to the presence of these three elements in man there is a war between the good law and the evil law.

Romans 7 refers to this war. Why do so many Christians experience such a conflict after they are saved? Because they were careless about their conduct before they were saved. Unlike Paul, they were not desirous to do good and to please God. However, many good people desire to overcome their lusts. Certainly such people experience Romans 7. They experience the antagonism between the good law and the evil law. Thus, Romans 7 does not describe the war between the Spirit and the flesh that is revealed in Galatians 5. The war in Galatians 5 is the typical experience of Christians; the war in Romans 7 is the experience of people who try to do good, regardless of whether they are Christians or not.

Many Christians have the experience of Romans 7 after they are saved because it is only after they are saved that they decide to be careful about their behavior and try their best to be good. Therefore, they experienced after they were saved what Paul knew before he was saved. However, the struggle recorded in Romans 7, regardless of whether it is encountered before or after salvation, is not a typical Christian experience. It is an experience of our natural being. People who try to do good before they are saved have this experience prior to their salvation. Many others experience it only after they are saved, after they determine to do good and to please God.

In every human being, whether or not he has been saved, there is a good element in his mind and an evil element in his body, the flesh. Paul uses at least three terms to describe the evil element—sin, evil, and the law of sin. Paul terms the good element in his mind "the law of my mind." This law of the mind is the law of good. Thus we have two laws, one in our mind and another in our fallen body. We have these two laws because we have at least two lives. With every life there is a law. Why do we have the law of good? Because we have a good life. Why do

we have a law of sin? Because we have a sinful life. Every person has these two lives—the God-created life which is good, and the satanic life which came into man's body as a result of the fall.

Some people insist that man's nature is evil; others claim that it is good. One day when I was reading Romans 7 I found the answer to this argument. Both schools are right; however, they are only partially right. Both schools are right because man is not simple. Man is very complicated. For example, in the morning a man may be quite nice, behaving himself as a gentleman. He has a human life and conducts himself as a man according to the law of his human life. However, that evening he attends a gambling casino and acts like a devil. Is he a devil or a man? The correct answer is that he is both.

During their journey in the wilderness, the children of Israel spoke against God and Moses, and they were bitten by fiery serpents, which caused many of them to die (Num. 21:4-9). When the people prayed to God, God told Moses to lift up a brass serpent on a pole. Were those children of Israel serpents or men? They were men, because they had the actual appearance and life of men. They were also serpents because the serpentine poison entered into them and

permeated them. Thus, a brass serpent was lifted up as their representative and substitute. The children of Israel were both men and serpents. Likewise, the Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees saying, "Serpents, brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33). On one hand, the Pharisees were the generation of men; on the other hand, they were the generation of poisonous serpents. We all have two natures: one nature is good, for it was created by God; the other nature is evil, for it is the nature of Satan injected into our body at the time of the fall. The good nature is in our mind, and the evil nature is in our flesh, which is our fallen body. With each nature there is a law, and the two laws fight against one another. If you try to do good, whether or not you are saved, you will discover the warfare between these two laws. However, if you are a careless person you may not realize them. But, whenever you try to be good you will discover these two laws within you. Before you were saved you tried your best to be good, but eventually you were defeated. You discovered that within you are two things fighting each other. This is the reason some people try to develop a strong will to control and suppress the lust in their body. Regardless of their attempts, eventually none of them can succeed fully.

THE BODY OF THIS DEATH

In Romans 6:6 our fallen body is called "the body of sin," but in 7:24 it is called "the body of this death." The "body of sin" means that the body is indwelt, occupied, possessed, and utilized by sin to do sinful things. Thus, in sinning the body is active, capable, and full of strength. The "body of death" means that the body is poisoned, weakened, paralyzed, and deadened, unable to keep the law and to do good to please God. Thus, in keeping the law of God and in doing good to please God the body is weak and impotent; it is like a corpse. We all have experienced that in doing sinful things our body is capable and strong; it can never be tired. But in keeping the law of God or in doing good to please God the body is weak to the uttermost, as if it were dead. Therefore, if we try to keep the law or please God by ourselves, it will be like dragging a corpse with us. The more we attempt to do good, the more death our body brings us. So, the Apostle Paul calls our body "the body of this death," that is, the death of trying to keep the law and please God.

Regarding the body of sin, which is active and powerful with its lust in sinning, we do not need to try to suppress it by a strong will or by any

other means. Romans 6:6 tells us that since our old man has been crucified with Christ, our "body of sin" has been "made of none effect," meaning that it is now jobless. Since the sinning person, the old man, has been crucified, his body has nothing to do and is unemployed.

Regarding the body of death, we do not need to drag it with us any longer. Since we are a regenerated, new man and are freed from the law of the old man, we do not need to strive to keep the law, for such striving only causes more death through the fallen body, which is the flesh. As long as we live by the new man with our new husband, the living Christ, we are freed from the law and delivered from the flesh and from the law of sin within it.

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