

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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FROM SIN,
THE LAW,
AND
THE FLESH

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Living Stream Ministry

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The central thought of the book of Romans is that God is transforming sinners into sons to form the Body of Christ. This—not justification by faith—is the basic concept of this book. If we do not have this view, we shall have a very superficial understanding of Romans. Ultimately, this book is not merely for our personal salvation; it is for the formation of the Body of Christ.

FOUR STATIONS

In the book of Romans there are four stations: justification, sanctification, the Body, and the churches. All Christians may be classified according to these four stations. Many real Christians have stopped at the station of justification. They have been redeemed, justified, reconciled, and saved, but they have stopped their journey at justification. It seems that they are satisfied and do not want to hear anything further. In the past I have talked to many Christians about seeking the Lord and going on with Him. But some have said, “Isn’t it good enough to be saved? I have

been saved, the blood of Jesus has redeemed me, I have been regenerated, and I am now a child of God. One day I shall go to heaven. Please don't bother me with anything else." A great part of genuine Christians go no farther than this station.

By the Lord's grace, other Christians seek for what is called the deeper life or the inner life. They are not satisfied merely with justification, but pursue something further, higher, richer, and deeper. These Christians eventually reach the station of sanctification in [Romans 8](#).

After the end of World War II, some of the saints in the second station began to talk very much about the Body. According to the book of Romans, [chapter twelve](#) is the station of the proper Body life. But according to the experience of many Christians today, it is not actually the station of the Body, but the station of Body-talk. Thus, we may call these Christians the Body-talkers. When I came to this country, I was surprised at all the talk about the Body ministry. Later I learned that what was meant by Body ministry was several preaching one by one instead of only one preaching. Although Christians talk so much about the Body, where is the Body? The more they talk about the Body,

the more divisions they cause. Before 1945 there were not so many divisions in the United States as there are today. But from that time, hundreds of little groups began to form, nearly all of which were talking about the Body.

We do not have the Body simply by talking about the Body. The Body can be realized only in the local churches. If you do not have the church life, how can you have the Body? Thus, along with the third category of Christians, the Body-talkers, there is the fourth category: those who practice the church life. This is the fourth station in Romans.

Where are you in relation to these four stations? I have the full assurance that I am in station four. God has been and still is working to transform sinners into sons of God. These sons of God are the members forming the Body of Christ to express Christ. God is in Christ, Christ is in His Body, and His Body is in the local churches. This is the basic concept and central thought of Romans. If we do not see this, we are short-sighted.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE AND WHAT WE ARE

In order to accomplish the task of making

sons out of sinners to form the Body of Christ, God firstly had to take care of our past deeds. Do you still remember the things you did before you were saved? If you think that your past deeds were not bad, let me ask if you have ever stolen anything. When people tell me how good they are, I check with them about stealing. None of us can boast of our past. Since God cannot accept us as His sons with such an evil history, He had to take care of it.

God has dealt with not only what we have done, but also with what we are. Even after being saved, we are still not so good. We are all a problem to others. The wives are a problem to the husbands, and the husbands are a problem to the wives. The children are a problem to the parents, and the parents are a problem to the children. I am a problem to my neighbors, to my in-laws, and to my dear wife and children. Thank God that He takes care of what we are!

Christ's death on the cross deals with what we have done, and the resurrected Christ living in us deals with what we are. Through His death we have obtained righteousness, and we are therefore justified in the presence of God. By this, the problem of our past has been solved. Now Christ is living in us, working God's holiness into our

being to accomplish for us a subjective sanctification. His death brought the righteousness of God to us, but His dwelling in us works God's holiness into our very being. In this way He takes care of what we are. By taking care of our past through His death and by taking care of what we are by His living in us, He is transforming sinners into God's very sons.

As wonderful as this is, it is still not the end of the process. At His coming, the Lord will glorify us. He will bring our mortal body into the glory of God, transfiguring our deadened body into a body of glory. At that time we shall be brought into full sonship. His death has gained the righteousness of God for us, His living is working the holiness of God into our being, and His coming back will bring us into the divine glory so that we may have the full sonship.

IN ADAM AND IN CHRIST

In [Romans 5](#) we are in Adam, in [Romans 6](#) we are in Christ, in [Romans 7](#) we are in the flesh, and in [Romans 8](#) we are in the spirit. If we are in the flesh, we experience Adam, and if we are in the spirit, we experience Christ. The Adam in [chapter five](#) can be experienced only in the flesh in [chapter seven](#), and the Christ in [chapter six](#)

can be experienced only in the spirit in [chapter eight](#). Without [chapter seven](#) we do not have the experience of being in Adam. A newborn child certainly is in Adam. But with that little child you do not see the experience of being in Adam. However, the older we are, the more we have the experience of being in the flesh. Whatever we have inherited in Adam is experienced by us in a practical way in the flesh. When we live in the flesh, we experience all the riches of Adam. Mothers, although you love your little baby, that infant is a great storehouse of the riches of Adam. If you do not believe this, I ask you to wait for twenty years. During these years, the stored-up riches of Adam will be gradually shown to you. Then you will say, “Brother Lee was right. Twenty years ago he said that this little one was a storehouse of the riches of Adam. At that time I did not believe him, but now, after twenty years of experience, I am convinced. All the riches of Adam were in fact stored in that little child.” What we have in Adam is experienced by being in the flesh.

In the same principle, the fact of being in Christ can be experienced only by being in the spirit. When we walk according to the spirit, we experience all the riches of Christ. The riches of

Christ are far greater than those of Adam. But to experience them we must walk according to the spirit.

PUT INTO CHRIST

Romans 5:19 says, “Through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners.” You may think that because you are saved, you are no longer a sinner. In a sense, I agree with you. Nevertheless, we still have the sinful element of our old constitution. We are sinners constituted with sin. We are not sinners because we have sinned. No, we are sinners because we have been constituted with sin. Even before you were born, you were already a sinner. Whether we are good or evil, we have all been constituted sinners.

Romans 6:3 says that we “have been baptized into Christ Jesus.” This means that we have been put into Christ. We were born in Adam, but we have been put into Christ. We were born in the realm, sphere, and element of Adam, but we have been transferred into the realm, the sphere, and element of Christ. This is a fact, and it does not depend upon our feelings. When I say that you were born in Adam, you may reply, “I don’t feel like I was born in Adam.” Whether you feel it or not, it is a fact nonetheless. For example, it is a

fact that I am in the United States, although I may feel like I am in Taiwan. By this we can see that our feeling may be a lie. I may feel like I am a king, but I am actually a small man. I may feel that I am very good, but actually I may be very poor. Regarding the spiritual facts, we should not depend on our feelings.

In [Romans 6](#) there is the fact that we have all been put into Christ. Are you now in Christ? Some may answer, “It may be that I am in Christ, but I don’t feel that I am in Christ. How can I say that I am in Christ when I lost my temper just an hour ago? If my behavior was that poor an hour ago, how can I be in Christ now?” But based upon the fact in [Romans 6](#), we must declare, “Amen, I am in Christ!” In [Romans 6](#) we have the fact that we have been put into Christ. Whether we like it or not and whether we feel it or not does not matter. The fact remains the fact. We are in Christ.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

[Romans 6:6](#) says, “Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him that the body of sin might be made of none effect, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves.” Through the death of Christ, our old man has been terminated. He has even had a funeral. Do you know

that our old man was crucified with Christ and buried? If we believe that we are in Christ, then we must also believe that our old man has been crucified with Him. Whether or not we feel that this is so, it is a fact that our old man is dead and buried. Therefore, Paul says, “Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him.” In Christ, our old man has been put away.

THE BODY OF SIN

Since our old man has been crucified and buried, “the body of sin” has been “made of none effect” (6:6). Because of the fall, our body is a body of sin. As such a fallen body, it is good only for committing sins. In this body there is nothing but sin. Therefore, in [Romans 7:19 and 20](#) Paul says, “For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil I do not will, this I practice. But if what I do not will, this I do, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells in me.” The sin dwelling in our body makes it “the body of sin.” However tired we may be, our body is very active when there is opportunity for sinning. For example, some people may gamble for three days and nights without sleeping or eating properly. But not one employee could work for seventy-two

hours without sleeping. On the contrary, an employee would complain if he were compelled to do this. But no one at a gambling table complains of tiredness, for everyone is full of energy because the body is a body of sin. I have never heard a gambler say that he was tired and wanted to go home. Even if a man's wife would plead for him to come home, he would stay at the gambling table for several more hours. This indicates that the body is never tired of sinning, although it may easily tire of other things. When parents charge their children to do their homework, the children often say, "Oh, I'm too tired. Besides, I am not feeling well." But when it comes to doing something sinful, the body is full of energy.

Because our old man has been buried with Christ, the body of sin has lost its job. It has become of none effect because the sinning person, the old man, has been crucified. The body is not the sinning person; it is the sinning instrument, the means by which a person does sinful things. But now that the person has been buried, the body of sin is unemployed. This means that we are freed from sin. Since our old man has been crucified and buried with Christ, we are freed from sin. This is the main point of [Romans 6](#).

THE PROBLEM OF THE LAW

At the time of the fall, sin came into man. However, man did not realize how sinful he was. This made it necessary for God to give man the law that man's sinfulness might be exposed. Although the law should not have been a problem, it nevertheless became a problem. God's intention in giving man the law was to expose him and to convince him of his sinfulness. But even though man was exposed by the requirements of the law, he still refused to admit that he was sinful. Instead, he used the law in an improper way, as if to say, "The law is excellent. I'll fulfill all its requirements." God's intention was to use the law to expose man, but man thought that he could keep the law. Nevertheless, God's purpose in giving the law has been fulfilled. The more man tried to keep the law, the more he broke it; and the more he broke the law, the more he was exposed. Therefore, we have not only the problem of sin, but also the problem of the law.

As we have seen, the problem of sin is solved in [Romans 6](#). But how can the problem of the law be solved? In [Romans 7](#) we have the way to be freed from the law. The way to be released from the law, like the way to be freed from sin, is

through the death of the old man. In [chapter six](#), our old man is the sinning person, but in [chapter seven](#) our old man is the self-assuming husband. The old man should not have been the husband; rather, he should have been the wife. The old man, however, has not kept his position, but has assumed the position of the husband. Praise the Lord that the old man as the sinning person and as the self-assuming husband has been crucified and buried! Now we are freed from sin and from the law. This covers the first part of [Romans 7](#).

THE PROBLEM OF THE FLESH

In the second part of this chapter we have another problem—the flesh. Sin has caused our body to become a body of sinful flesh. Thus, along with the problem of sin, we have the problem of the fallen body, the sinful flesh. Our fallen body is absolutely no good; it has become the flesh. In [7:18](#) Paul says, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells.” Standing absolutely on the side of the law of God, Paul sincerely wanted to do good and to keep the law, but he found that his flesh, which opposed his desire, was a great frustration. In [7:22 and 23](#) he says, “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.” In [7:25](#) he says, “With the mind I myself serve as a slave the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” We all need to be freed from sin, the law, and the flesh, all of which came as a result of our fall.

WALK ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

As we have seen, [Romans 5](#) says that we were constituted sinners. As such sinners, we have the problems of sin, the law, and the flesh. We are freed from sin by having our old man as the sinning person crucified. We are freed from the law by having our old man as the self-assuming husband crucified. The way to be freed from the flesh is found in [Romans 8](#), where we see that we are freed from the flesh by walking according to the spirit. When we walk according to the spirit, we are spontaneously freed from the flesh. If we do not walk according to the spirit, we are still in the flesh, although we may be free from both sin and the law. The only way to be freed from the flesh is to be in the spirit and to walk according to the spirit.

In [chapters five through eight](#), we have four

main points. The main point in [chapter five](#) is that we were constituted sinners. The main point in [chapter six](#) is that our old man has been crucified and that we have been freed from sin. The main point in [chapter seven](#) is that our old husband has been crucified and that we have been freed from the law. The main point in [chapter eight](#) is that when we are in the spirit and walk according to the spirit, we are freed from the flesh and no longer obligated to it. “We are debtors not to the flesh to live according to flesh” ([8:12](#)).

We need to apply this in our daily living. Suppose I offend a brother as I am working with him. On the one hand, I truly love him; on the other hand, I cannot keep from offending him. After offending him, my conscience is bothered, and I go to the Lord, confess, receive forgiveness, and am cleansed by the blood. Immediately following that, I may make up my mind and say, “I will never do that again. From now on, I will not speak to my brother in such a way.” Then I kneel down and pray, “O Lord, You have forgiven me. Lord, I pray that from now on You will help me never to do that again.” Shortly after praying in this way, I come to work with this brother again. For some reason, working with him this time is

so difficult that I cannot stand it. After a few minutes, I lose my temper and again have a big failure. Again I repent, confess, ask for forgiveness, and apply the blood. But now I am ashamed to make up my mind, because I have begun to feel that this does not work very well. Nevertheless, later in the day I make up my mind to try again and ask the Lord to help me once more.

[Romans 7:18](#) says, “To will is present with me, but to do the good is not.” Willing to do good and to not lose our temper is always with us. However, to do what we will is not present. In [7:19](#) Paul says, “The good which I will, I do not.” My dealing with the brother in the example mentioned above was half spiritual and half unspiritual; it was half of mercy and grace and half of the law. I made a confession, applied the blood, and asked the Lord for forgiveness. All that was of grace. But then I made up my mind to do good and prayed that I might succeed. This was according to the law. In confessing and applying the blood, I went to [Romans 3 and 4](#). That was correct. But when I made up my mind to will, I went to [Romans 7](#). Every Christian makes this mistake, perhaps hundreds and even thousands of times. When I was young, I repeated this mistake more than fifty times a day.

As one who truly sought holiness, I discovered that I often had unholy thoughts. For example, I might speak kindly to a brother outwardly, but inwardly I disliked or even despised him. That was sinful, and I later prayed, “O God, my Father, forgive me for despising my brother in my heart. Cleanse me with the blood. From now on help me not to do this.” Then I spoke with another brother, and the same thing happened again. When I did not pray this way, however, I was not troubled. Even if I tried to despise a brother, I could not do it. But after praying about it, I began to despise the brothers. This situation continued for years. One day I discovered that I had been living in [Romans 7](#). To will was present with me, but to do what I had willed was not.

What then should we do? We should not will any more. However, it is not easy to stop. Nevertheless, whenever you are tempted to will, you must say, “Devil, get away from me. I won’t be cheated by you, and I won’t listen to you.” Instead of willing, we should set our mind upon the spirit. This is the key. We must practice just one thing: setting our mind upon the spirit and walking according to the spirit. Do not think about what will happen if a certain brother irritates you. If you keep on exercising your will, you will

fail. But if your mind and your whole being are set upon the spirit and you act according to the spirit, you will be freed from the flesh in a practical way. What a difference there will be in your daily living! We need to practice this. We do not need to stay in [Romans 5](#), [6](#), or [7](#), but in [Romans 8](#), setting our mind upon the spirit and living, walking, and behaving according to our spirit. Then we shall experience a full release from sin, the law, and the flesh.

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