

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

THE FLESH
AND
THE SPIRIT

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Living Stream Ministry

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As believers, we need to reign in life over sin, death, and Satan, our three main enemies. As the gospel of God, the book of Romans deals with these three negative things. In [chapters five through eight](#) sin and death are covered in a full way. Where there is sin, there is death, because sin brings in death. In [16:20](#) Paul speaks of Satan; he says that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet. The reason Paul did not mention Satan by name before the end of the book is that dealing with Satan is a Body matter, not an individual matter. If you try on your own to subdue Satan, you will be defeated. Satan, the enemy of the Body, can be defeated only by the Body. Therefore, it is through the local churches as the practical expression of the Body of Christ that Satan is dealt with. Only after Paul has covered the church in a very practical way in [chapters fifteen and sixteen](#), does he speak of the crushing of Satan; he indicates thereby that Satan is crushed under the feet of local churches.

SATAN, SIN, AND DEATH

The three main enemies of man—sin, death, and Satan—are centered in man's flesh. Sin, death, and Satan meet together in the “meeting place” of our flesh. Sin, death, and Satan are always together. There is a place in our constitution where these three enemies can meet, and that place is the flesh. From the time of man's fall, they have been holding a continuous meeting in the flesh of man.

Throughout my Christian life, nothing has troubled me more than the flesh. We should not condemn sin, death, and Satan without realizing that the very center of our problem is the flesh. We simply cannot get away from the flesh; we are unable to walk away from it in the way we can walk out of a building. The reason we cannot get away from the flesh is that it has become part of our being. A number of times I have said to the Lord, “Lord, You are wonderful, and You have done so much for us. Lord, why don't You take the flesh away from us?” According to my economy, it would be much better for the flesh to be gone.

Perhaps you are bothered by your temper. But the source of temper is the flesh. All our

problems originate with the flesh. If it were not for the flesh, we would not have a troublesome temper. Therefore, we may want the Lord to get rid of our flesh. We may think that if the flesh were taken away, we would immediately become very spiritual.

OUR FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

But the Lord's way is not our way. Consider Adam's situation in the garden before the fall. At that time, there was no flesh, for sin had not yet entered into Adam's body to transmute it into the flesh. One day the Lord showed me that it would not be adequate to be like Adam in the garden without the problem of the flesh. I saw that my main problem was not with the flesh; it was with the shortage of the Spirit. Yes, in the garden of Eden Adam did not have the flesh, but neither did he have the Spirit of God in him. He was innocent, but he was also empty. This emptiness gave opportunity for the enemy to come in. If the Lord were to take away our flesh and leave us empty, we would not be able to keep ourselves pure very long. Satan, the subtle one, would eventually creep in. Therefore, we need to realize that our fundamental problem is the lack of

the Spirit on the positive side, not the presence of the flesh on the negative side.

THE FLESH

In Romans the flesh is exposed in a full way. Using the word “flesh” with a meaning different from that found in [chapters five through eight](#), [3:20](#) says, “By the works of law no flesh shall be justified before Him.” Here, “flesh” refers to a person, a human being. In the eyes of God every fallen person is flesh. Hence, in [3:20](#) “flesh” denotes the totality of man’s fallen being. In [Romans 7](#), on the contrary, “flesh” refers only to a part of man’s being, not to the whole person. In [chapter seven](#) “flesh” denotes the sinful, wicked part of us, the part indwelt by sin. Our concern in this booklet is not with the flesh as revealed in [3:20](#), but with the flesh as covered in [chapters seven and eight](#).

[Romans 7:18](#) says, “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells.” Our flesh is the place where evil things make their abode. No matter how good a person may seem to be, at least one part of him, the flesh, is evil. Do not be deceived by a person who is seemingly gentle, kind, honest, humble, and sympathetic.

It is still true of him, as it is of everyone else, that in his flesh nothing good dwells.

Throughout the years, I have learned that everyone regards himself as better than others. A husband may consider himself superior to his wife, and a wife may view herself as higher than her husband. Because of false humility, we may not say that we are better than others, but inwardly this is the way we often feel. But no matter how good we may be, we still have the flesh. Through the Lord's mercy I have come to see His holy teaching that in my flesh there is nothing good.

A SINFUL COMPOUND

We need to emphasize that there is nothing good in the flesh in order to help seeking Christians who often become disappointed with their spiritual progress. The more they desire to be holy, the less holy they seem to become. They long to be one with the Lord, but end up doing many things that are not of the Lord. They also desire to overcome their besetting sin, but it seems that sin overcomes them. Therefore, they become discouraged with their situation and disgusted with themselves.

It is necessary for Christians to seek the Lord, to aspire to be spiritual, and to overcome all

negative things. Nevertheless, we are hindered and frustrated by a sinful compound: our flesh compounded with sin, death, and Satan. It is extremely difficult to deal with this evil compound. When sin, death, and Satan are added to the human body, the result is the flesh. This compound is not merely in us; it is part of our very being.

DESPERATE TO TURN TO THE SPIRIT

Perhaps you are wondering, as I have in the past, why the Lord would not simply take this sinful compound away from us. The Lord is wise and knows what He is doing. Although the flesh is sinful and ugly, the Lord purposely refuses to take it away. The Lord does not leave the flesh with us in order to constantly disappoint us. He allows the flesh to remain so that we shall be compelled to seek Him for help. If it were not for the flesh, we would not be so desperate to call on the name of the Lord. If it were not for the problem of the flesh, I doubt that we would pray very much.

We all know that it is wrong to lose our temper with our husband or wife or with our children. However, if we love the Lord and seek Him, even losing our temper will work on our behalf, for it will force us to go to the Lord. After we lose

our temper, we may feel ashamed for several hours, unwilling to pray because we are too ashamed to pray. Eventually, however, our intense desire for the Lord will compel us to pray, and we shall pray in a very good way. In this regard we are actually helped by the flesh.

In the early years of my ministry, I used to be troubled when certain saints were not doing well spiritually. Later I learned not to be bothered by this. I realized that if we are always doing well, we shall not get into the spirit very much. If you have no failure, you may spend a great deal of time thinking how good you are. You will not be desperate to turn to the spirit. This was the reason the Lord did not exterminate all the enemies as soon as the children of Israel entered into the good land ([Judg. 2:21—3:4](#)). God deliberately permitted certain enemies to remain for the purpose of strengthening the children of Israel and training them to fight. In the same principle, the flesh is left here for our good. This does not mean that we should do evil that good may come. It means that, in His wisdom and sovereignty, the Lord uses the flesh for a positive purpose.

GOD’S USE OF OUR FAILURES

All seekers of the Lord are troubled by the

flesh. It causes all of us to have many failures. But through our failures something of the Lord is wrought into our being. I can testify that year after year God has been increasing in me, mainly through my failures. I dare not say that the more failures we have, the better off we shall be. However, I can say that God uses our failures to help us grow in the Lord. But this is only true if we love the Lord and seek Him. If we seek the Lord, we may be at peace, whether we experience success or failure.

We all must earnestly seek to reign over sin, death, and Satan. However, although we may try diligently to reign in life over these three enemies, we shall experience more failure than success. Do not be disappointed. As long as you love the Lord and seek Him, He will use even your failures to work more of Himself into you. Many of us can testify that we have gained more of the Lord through our failures than through our successes. Our failures press us to the Lord and make us desperate to get into the spirit. Eventually, by turning to the spirit in such a desperate way, we shall be fully saturated with the Lord. Without the help rendered by the sinful, ugly flesh, we would not be as desperate to gain the Lord or to have Him wrought into us.

I have read a number of books on holiness, spirituality, and the victorious life. I have tried all the ways recommended in these books. None of these ways was altogether successful. Although we know that we must be holy, spiritual, and victorious, we fall short and come into suffering. Our goal is holiness or spirituality or victory. But God's goal is to work Himself into us. As long as God has the opportunity to work Himself into our being, He does not care very much whether our situation is excellent or poor. Often He has a greater opportunity to do what he desires in us when our condition is pitiful. When our situation and condition are excellent, we may be closed to the Lord's inward working. I do not encourage you to be in a poor situation or to be in a low state spiritually. But I can assure you that when you are in such a condition or state, God will be able to work more of Himself into you than when your condition is good. The reason for this is that when we are in a difficult situation, we are more open to the Lord, more willing to turn to Him, and more willing to allow Him to work Himself into us.

Because sin, death, and Satan are conducting a continuous meeting in our flesh, we all eventually become extremely troubled and even disgusted with the flesh. But God is sovereign. If we

seek Him, even the sinful compound of the flesh will become a help to us in gaining the Lord. Because we fail so often, we are pressed into the spirit, and, in this way, we gain more of the Spirit. This is not a matter of victory; it is a matter of gaining the Spirit.

TURNING TO THE SPIRIT

Doctrinally speaking, it is easy to say that we should turn to our spirit, but it is rather difficult to practice this. Some may think that it is difficult to turn to the spirit when their situation is poor, but I do not agree with this. In such a case it may be difficult to turn to the spirit outwardly, before man, but it is easier to have a genuine, inward turn. If our condition is never poor, our turning to the spirit is likely to be quite shallow. But when we have a great failure, we truly turn to our spirit.

In our Christian experience we need the night as well as the day. For this reason, God allows us to fail. We are always happy in the day, but disappointed or discouraged in the night. But we need the night as well as the day. Whether it is during the day or during the night, God is working in us.

Romans 8:4 speaks of walking according to

the spirit and not according to the flesh. It is very easy to talk about this, but not so easy to practice it. In order to get into this verse in reality, we need to be processed through many experiences of failure. Then we shall find ourselves more in the spirit. The only way to deal with the flesh and to be saved from its influence is to get into the spirit.

Unless we turn on a light, there is no way to deal with darkness. No matter how much we deal with the darkness, it will remain until light comes in. In the same principle, we cannot deal with the flesh if we are short of the Spirit. The more we deal with our flesh apart from the Spirit, the stronger and more active the flesh becomes. By our own striving we cannot overcome the flesh. The only way to be rescued from it is to turn to the spirit and to get into the spirit.

Our problem is that we rarely turn to the spirit willingly. Thus, we need failures to make us willing to turn. Once we turn to the spirit, we spontaneously walk according to the spirit. We all need something to force us, to press us, to the spirit. In this matter our own willingness is not adequate.

In His sovereignty, God has a way to use the flesh in the fulfillment of His purpose. He

sovereignly manages everything related to us for the carrying out of His economy. For the sake of His economy, God uses our sinful, ugly flesh to force us to turn to our spirit that we may gain more of the Spirit. How wise and how sovereign He is!

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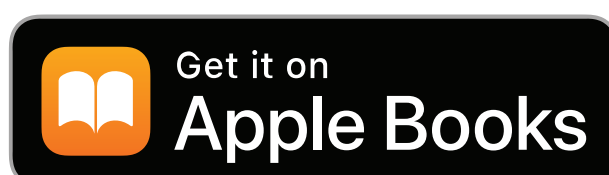
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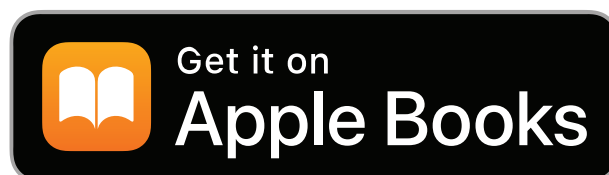
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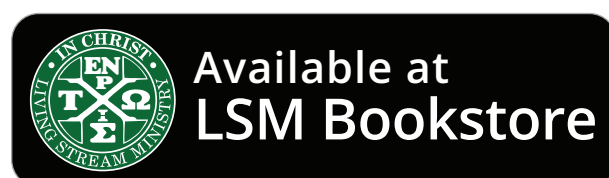
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