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Romans

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Romans 7:21

A few points to consider about this verse. The first is that this is speaking of a war which can and does rage within believers. The second is that the war can be won; victory can be obtained in the battle and the way for it to happen is coming in just a few verses. Third, this war rages in all people, but the victory in the war is only available to those who follow the path which is given in those verses. And fourth, these verses do not speak of every person in every sense. In other words, though this premise is true and it exists in the unregenerate soul, it is not all-encompassing in its effect. Too often Christians, particularly those in Calvinist circles, look at these verses and use them in the absolute sense -

Evil is present in humans;

The remedy is only available to Christians;

Therefore, non-Christians are absolutely evil.

This is not right thinking, nor does it take into consideration the obvious truth that people all around the world do good stuff all the time. The problem isn't in their good deeds, but rather the problem is in them. Good deeds don't lead to a right relationship with God. However, a lack of a relationship with God doesn't mean someone is entirely evil. It does mean that the evil in them is a barrier between them and God so that the good deeds they do are temporary and ultimately futile - they are as rags before His infinite holiness.

The "law" that Paul speaks of here is not a written law. He is stating that this is a force within us, which he is calling a law because it is as true as if it were written (just as gravity is a law even if it isn't written down; it simply is what it is). This law is that evil is present with "me." The "me" like the "I" and "me" earlier is a truth which is applicable to humanity in general, not just Paul specifically. This evil is in fact present even though our will is to do good.

This is the war which is raging in us and the battle lines move as we yield ourselves to God. In other words, when we run the show, the lines move in one direction and when we allow God to do so, the battle lines quickly move in the other, but as long as we are in this body of flesh, we are subject to this evil which is present in us.

In his ever-consistent manner, Paul speaks this same truth in Galatians 5:16-18, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Life application: It is one or the other - fulfill the lusts of the flesh or walk in the Spirit. The lines move in one direction or another as we yield to the Spirit. Stay in constant contact with the Lord; speak to Him continuously; and read His word frequently. Live in a way which allows His presence full control of you always.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. Romans 7:22

Paul speaks here of the "law of God." In this verse and in the ensuing verses, he will speak of five separate laws -

- 1) The law of God (7:22)
- 2) The law of sin. (7:23) (...and death (8:2))
- 3) The law "in my members" (7:23)

- 4) The law "of my mind" (7:23)
- 5) The law of the Spirit of life in Christ (8:2)

Without any comment, it should be obvious that there are conflicts between these. There are those which are earthly and those which are spiritual. They war with each other and often bring us into testing, conflict, and confusion.

Paul says he has "delight in the law of God..." The term "delight" is the Greek word *sunedomai* and this is its only occurrence in the New Testament. It is indicating a pleasure deep inside, as if in the heart. The law of God is the inward man's desire of the heart. But who is the "inward man" that he is speaking of? It is actually revealed in the 1st Psalm -

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

The inward man is the man who has already set his thoughts, conduct, and manner of life on the more noble things; the person that "sees the good" which God has laid out before him and who reaches for it. He rejects the wrong path and instead pursues God. This is what the psalmist is telling us and it translates into the person Paul calls "the inward man."

Life application: There is a proper path to pursue in life and it is given in the pages of the Bible. In order to follow this path, the wise soul will delight in this beautiful word and will meditate on it day and night. Be wise - pursue the knowledge of God as displayed in the pages of the Bible.

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Romans 7:23

Verses 21-23 are to be taken as a unit. Verse 22 and 23 explain 21 - "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

21 - Paul (and thus us) will to do good, but evil is there present with him.

22 - The "will to do good" is that he delights in the law of God. This is his "inward man."

23 - "But" - this is the contrast and will be the explanation of the fact that "evil is there present with him." There is the law of God, but contrasting that is the "law in my members." The members of the body are the flesh which bring about our weakened state. When we get hungry, maybe we will sin by stealing food (Proverbs 6:30). When we allow ourselves to be tempted through sexual enticement, we will sin through adultery (Proverbs 6:32). And so on...

In 1 Corinthians 6:15, we see it noted that as believers, our members need to be used for a higher purpose because they are positionally now members in Christ - "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!" This is the war that we are engaged in; the war which exists in our members.

It is "warring against the mind." Paul introduces a word for "warring against" which is found nowhere else in the New Testament - *antistrateuomenon*. This war sets our flesh against our will to do good and it is a conflict which can bring the greatest preacher or the most noble Christian woman into difficult straights.

Jesus noted this war on the night before His crucifixion. When he asked Peter, James, and John to stay near and watch with him, they fell asleep. Jesus' words to them show how difficult this battle is, even for those who walked with Him - "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Peter had a similar failure which is noted in Galatians 2:11-21. When we allow ourselves to be distracted by our weaknesses, it brings us "into captivity to the law of sin which is in" our members. There is a cure for our difficult battle and there is victory which can be had in this war. In just a couple of verses, the good news is given. For those who rely on Christ, there is deliverance from this body of death.

Life application: As we struggle with the flesh, we need to continuously remind ourselves that victory can be attained. When the trials and temptations seem overwhelming, remember that Jesus prevailed and now, through Him, there is strength to defeat the desires of the flesh. Keep in the word, pray without ceasing, and be filled with the Spirit. The battle can be won.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:24

It has been since verse 5 of chapter 7 that Paul has written of the conflict that we experience between the flesh and the "inward man." During these verses, he has repeated his thoughts as if to stress them to us. He has made a comparison, using himself as an example of all humanity; he has used personification, such as the presence of sin in us; etc. These tools have been used to highlight the state we are in as humans, and even as believers. We have a war which rages in us and tears at us as we struggle in this battle.

Today he cries out his wretchedness using the Greek word *talaipōros*. It is a word which indicates being beaten down from continued strain. The battle leaves a person as if full of calluses and in a state of deep misery. Such a state includes

immense side effects from the great, ongoing strain and hardship of the battle. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament. In Revelation 3:17, Jesus says this to those in the church at Laodicea in describing their wretched state, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..."

After the exclamatory cry, Paul makes his begging plea to whatever ear will heed him, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" It is the pitiful cry of any person who understands and feels the conflict and who desires relief from it. There are several prominent viewpoints on what the "body of death" means.

The first is that it is the law of sin found in our members which Paul has been describing. Albert Barnes sees the term "body of death" as a Hebraism which denotes the tendency of the body - "the corrupt principles of man, the carnal, evil affections that lead to death or condemnation." If this is correct, then the body of death is tied directly to the "body of sin" mentioned in earlier verses. This body of sin has been done away with as is noted in Romans 6:6. Thus the struggle which remains after salvation is real, but it is defeated. Only we cling to the old self, but in reality the victory is won.

A second option is given by the Jew Philo who says it represents the physical body which is a burden to the soul of man. This body is carried about like a dead carcass. It never rests properly from birth even to death. However, the Bible teaches that man is a soul/body unity and that the soul without a body is "naked." Therefore, if the analysis of Philo is even close to correct, it can only be ascribed to a fallen body, not one as it was originally created for man.

The third option is that it refers to the ancient custom of taking a captive and tying him to a dead body as a type of punishment - face to face, hand to hand, body to body. He would then be compelled to drag this "body of death" with him wherever he went. It's possible that this is actually what Paul was thinking of and he is merely using it as a description of the on-going battle we face. We are alive, but we still carry this "body of death" with us. Will we break the chains? Will we

be free from the corruption which clings to us, infects us, and weighs us down?
"Who? Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Life application: Yes, there is corruption in our earthly, fleshly body. We drag around the consequences of our past sins, and we often add to the corruption through more sins. But there is a way out. There is victory in this battle if we will but yield to Jesus. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Let us endeavor to truly live as if this is true.

I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. Romans 7:25

Chapter 7 has lead us time and time again to the conclusion that we are fallen beings in a real predicament. No matter what we will to do, the flesh overrides that will and we do what we will not to do. The impossible dilemma for fallen man is resolved though in the Person of Jesus. Paul acknowledged his wretched state and then agonizingly asked, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

The cry was made for any person who truly wants to be free of the corrupt nature they were born with. Jesus explained the dilemma to us when speaking to those under the law -

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." John 8:31-36

As Paul has shown in this chapter, the fact that they were under the law only magnified their guilt - a guilt all bear even from birth. His explanation of what Jesus claimed during His earthly ministry has been clear and concise. Conscience could do nothing to resolve the problem, the law could do nothing to resolve it (and in fact only exacerbated the dilemma), and what we in our human weakness could not do - where everything else failed, Jesus prevailed. The release is found in Him.

Another exposition of this is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where the earthly man (Adam - representing all humanity) is contrasted to the heavenly Man (Jesus - to whom we move when we call on Him). Similar concepts are identified and explained and the end result is given with words which confirm the thoughts of Romans 7 -

"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians:15:56, 57

For all of us, there are choices to make. We can stay in Adam and die in him or we can move to Christ Jesus and live with Him. And even in Christ, we must choose how we will conduct ourselves as we await our glorification. Will we serve the law of God and live lives of holiness, or will we serve the flesh and obey the law of sin? The answer should be clear. Now that we know the remedy, let us pursue godliness and holiness through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Life application: How do you serve the law of God with your mind if you don't know the law of God? It is incumbent on you to read and know your Bible. Otherwise, your aspirations for following God are no better than a cup of dust on a hot day. Come to the waters and drink freely from the fountain of God's word.