

**070218 Two Laws in Conflict 22/07 February 18, 2007GG**  
**Two Laws in Conflict**

**Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"**

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*For I delight in the law of God after 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. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 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.* ([Ro 7:22-25](#))

How do you explain the conflict you experience daily as a child of God? On one side you acknowledge a deep passion for God and for living according to His will. On the other side you realize the presence of intense pressures within, even at times an appealing desire, to ignore the will of God in favor of something that you know is not pleasing to God. Paul explains this conflict in the seventh chapter of Romans, first by honestly confronting the emotions on both sides of the conflict and then by reducing the two sides of the conflict to two "laws." Here Paul uses the term "law" as we think of scientific laws, a statement of fact that explains the nature of things. In basic science studies we learn about the laws of thermodynamics, various "laws" that explain the way gravity works, or the precise manner in which two or more chemicals combine to form new compounds (such as hydrogen and oxygen combining to form water).

Occasionally Bible students lose their touch both with the Bible and with their own nature and either deny the presence of such a conflict or they attempt to redefine it so as to depict it in ways wholly different from Paul's description in this chapter. In so doing they deny both the teaching of Scripture and their own personal experience. Ah, self-deception is the worst form of deception.

How intense—how personal—is this conflict of which Paul writes? First he describes it as two laws, the "law of God after the inward man," and "another law in my members." Next he describes it as a war in which the law in his "members" wars against "the law of God after the inward man." The word translated "warring" is a straightforward word that literally means "1 to make a military expedition, or take the field, against anyone. 2 to oppose, war against."<sup>60</sup> The literal idea is that a group of soldiers "take the field" against an opposing army.

Paul further intensifies this idea by stating that the "law in his members" at times "brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Not only is Paul involved in an internal struggle of military proportions, but at times the opposing army gains the upper hand and brings his "higher" or spiritual self into captivity; takes him as a prisoner of war.

The idea that after regeneration a mere splinter of one's old sinful nature or self remains is exposed in its utter falsity by these words from Paul. I am convinced that folks who embrace these ideas of near perfect holiness have redefined sin in such a way as to blind themselves to the depth of sin in their own life. In analogy they spray a fog on the mirror of conscience with the design of intentionally blurring the role of conscience against sin within.

*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* The internal conflict, the war within, forms the basis for this cry of the soul for deliverance. A minor skirmish will not evoke such a cry from a seasoned soldier! A one-sided clash in which only the rag-tag remnants of a defeated army remain, a "clean-up" operation, will not prompt such a confession.

The visual image suggested by the term "the body of this death" is graphic. Several commentaries link the phrase to a first century practice in which a person convicted of killing another person was severely

sentenced for his murder. The dead body of the person he killed was tied to his back and remained there till the murderer himself died. If this analogy was in Paul's mind when he used this phrase, the idea is powerful indeed. The dead body of sins, his old nature, was tied to his spiritual nature and would remain there till Paul died. Only at death would Paul find the full deliverance which he cried out to discover.

While the condition of which Paul writes is desperate and his plea passionate, Paul does not leave us in doubt as to the outcome of this military engagement. Paul sees the end of this conflict and anticipates the final victory. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Paul's perception of victory is not resolved in his self-control, in his own faithful perseverance, or in a one-sided "cleanup operation" in which he ravages the bare remnants of his old nature. He sees the victory in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.* Linger long with this thought. Let it soak deep down into your mind. In no way is Paul excusing an unbridled practice of sin. He does not at any time in this chapter characterize himself as the helpless victim of a sinful nature that in any way rationalizes any act of sin, much less a devoted lifestyle of sin. However, he does confront and acknowledge the reality of his present involvement in moral conflict, a conflict that pits his old nature against his new spiritual nature in an intense conflict that he can only accurately represent as a major military campaign.

The old English hymn writer Joseph Hart (1712-1768) captured the essence of this conflict in his poem/hymn.

How strange is the course that a Christian must steer;

How perplexed is the path he must tread!

The hope of his happiness rises from fear,

And his life he receives from the dead.

His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,

And his best resolutions be crossed;

Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved,

Till he finds himself perfectly lost.

When all this is done, and his heart is assured

Of the total remission of sin,

When his pardon is signed and his peace is procured **From that moment his conflict begins.**

We have seen the intensity of the conflict through Paul's eyes and his personal experience. We have discovered ourselves identifying with his description through our own personal sense of conflict. How does this rather surprising and intense passage relate to Paul's opening analogy in which he depicts a marriage, the death of the husband and the wife's liberty—in this case obligation—to marry another man? It is no surprise that both preachers and commentaries often leave the two lessons somewhat disjointed rather than linking them together as they appear in this chapter. Paul used the marriage analogy to introduce this lesson on the internal conflict of the regenerate child of God.

My wife and I have been married for almost forty five years. We occasionally tease that, whatever happens, we'd prefer to die together than for either of us to be left alone without the other. Given our age it is highly unlikely that we have another forty five years to live. Thus I must reason from Scripture and logic, not from personal experience. In the case of the person Paul depicted in his opening analogy

the husband has died, and the wife is left alone. She is in fact presently in conflict. Part of her wants to preserve the emotions of love and loyalty to her old husband, and part of her knows that he is dead, but life for her must go on. She is in conflict! Can we miss the fact that conflict forms the common ground between the analogy of the dead husband and Paul's description of his inner struggle?

What are the dominant traits that build a marriage? How does a marriage survive for a lifetime? The emotional "buz" of romantic love will not endure for a lifetime! When the giddy flutter settles into a predictable and steady heartbeat, how does a marriage not only survive, but grow stronger and endure the difficulties that life often brings to the couple? Words such as commitment, loyalty, trust, openness, honesty come to the forefront to paint the image of an enduring marriage. Now ask a professional soldier to describe the traits that define a faithful and honorable soldier. The same words will show up!

Rather than give the spiritual "widow" the option of living any way she wishes, Paul specifically tells her that she needs to form a new lifelong marriage commitment to a new husband, and not just any man she happens to discover, but one specific man. Though she may have memories of her life with the "old man," she is now to acknowledge the obvious fact that he is dead. (Can we miss the analogy of the dead body in Paul's "...who shall deliver me from the body of this death?") Further, she is now to immediately enter into a new "marriage" relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our daily struggle with our two natures Paul does not give us the option of holding neutral ground and playing one "army" against the other. Nor does he give us the option of switching loyalties so that at one moment we join one army and the next moment we fight for the opposing army. In military terms such conduct would be called treason, and the soldier would be arrested and tried! Paul specifically instructs us in our internal conflict between our two natures to take a consistent, lifelong, committed stand with Jesus and our new, spiritual nature.

When shall we finally realize the end of war? When shall we finally see the victory? As long as we live in this life, the conflict will continue. As we move through the various seasons of life, the ground of warfare will shift, but the conflict will go on. Only when we reach the moment of death will the battle end, and the victory shall then be clearly seen.

As we live in the heat of battle, how strong is our loyalty to the "Captain of our salvation?" Are we found constantly standing in formation where He has directed us, ready to hear and obey His commands for engaging the enemy? Do we keep our uniform and equipment in top shape, ready to engage the enemy on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ? When we reach the end of our struggle, will we be able to join Paul as we move into military retirement, saying, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"? ([2Ti 4:7](#))

*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ([2Ti 2:3](#))*

Folks, this verse does not describe a divine guarantee; it presents us with a divine commandment! May it be our life's goal to fulfill, to "retire with honor."

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