

The Law Of The Spirit Of Life

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Does it surprise you to know that Jesus was the first Man to be born spiritually alive on this planet in four thousand years? There was a law operating in Jesus while He walked on this earth—the same law that set us free from the law of sin and death that used to operate in us. The apostle Paul talks about this law in Romans 8:1,2:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 1:2)

The spirit of the first Man to be born spiritually alive since Adam was different than the spirit of every other person ever born on this planet. Why? Because the law that emanated from His nature was THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE.

That law is now operating in our spirits as believers, setting us free from a nature that was integrally connected to a law that emanated sin. How did the new law overpower the old one? The law of the spirit of life moved in and replaced the law of sin and death with God's nature, and it was that new nature that set us free from sin.

Now we don't have to sin, nor can the devil make us sin. Are we ever tempted to sin? Yes. But because we have a new nature, the devil can never tempt us beyond what we can resist. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that resides in our new nature has set us free from the law of sin and death that we were born with.

You see, the Law that God gave to the Jews couldn't change their nature. Therefore, what the Law couldn't do, being weak through the flesh, God sent His only Son to do. Coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, Jesus condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

What does the Bible mean when it says Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh"? Well, the law was "weak through the flesh" because it couldn't bring anyone to a state of righteousness. In fact, the reason the Levitical priest- hood was instituted when Israel became a nation was to slaughter animals and make atonement for the people, for they were unable to keep the heart of the Law—Ten Commandments.

In Romans 7, Paul described the dilemma of the Jew who had received the Law and couldn't keep it. Paul asked, "Is the Law sin?" Then he answered, "God forbid! “How would we have ever known sin if the Law hadn't said, ‘Thou shall not covet’?" (Romans 7:7).

The truth is, we wouldn't have even known what sin is without the Law because we were born with the sin nature. How could we know anything outside of the nature we were born with? We also can't rid ourselves of sin by the strength of that old nature. For instance, some people say, "I'm just an old sinner, but I'm going to try to do better. I'll even go to church."

But those people can forget even trying to become better, because they don't have what it takes in themselves to do it. People who think they can change in their own strength have fallen in a big, fat religious trap of the devil. We can never become good enough in ourselves to please

God. That's the whole reason we need to come to Him. We're hopeless without Him—but thank God, we're not *graceless*!

John 8:36 says that the person whom the Son sets free is free indeed. The question we must ask ourselves is this: *Am I living as if I am truly free?* Someone once said to me, "Well, you just don't understand my problem, Brother Dave."

I replied, "I understand that you could do something about your problem to change it, but you don't because you don't want to."

"But you just don't understand. I have this situation and that situation going on."

"No, what I don't understand is why you don't start daily acting on what you know will change your problem into victory."

"Well, I need the help I get from others."

"But there is a problem with that attitude. After all, when you stand before the Great White Throne and the Father opens the book to look for names of those deserving rewards, who do you suppose will be holding your hand. God doesn't have a group plan. The way He saved you is just the way you will stand before Him on that day. You won't be able to blame your spiritual condition on anyone else."

"Well, you just don't understand what they did to me. I've been under a bad influence. They were mean to me; they never encouraged me to serve God; and they refused to serve God along with me."

This person was doing what a lot of people do: blame others for their lack of spiritual growth. But I like what God said when He changed covenants. He said, "I'll write my laws in their hearts and in their minds. They'll be my people, and I'll be their God. No longer will they teach every man to know God through precepts, concepts, sacrifices, and ordinances. They all shall know Me individually, from the least to the greatest (*see* Jeremiah 31:33,34)."

No man can teach you to know God because no man can give you a new nature. The only way you can know God is to receive Jesus as your Savior by faith. Then the Holy Spirit will come into your spirit by an act of grace and cause you to be born again.

On the other hand, no man can keep you from God or from what God has for you; I don't care if he's Mr. Universe in a devil's suit! Someone might act ugly toward you, but he can't stop you from pursuing God.

And here's something else you need to understand: Did you know that even your emotions are your servants? Since that is true, why do you even let your negative emotions in the room?

"Do you mean I always can stop myself from feeling negative emotions?" Yes, it's a matter of deciding whom do you serve—your emotions or Jesus.

I remember a time when I was feeling very badly for someone whose life was absolutely chaotic. This person seemed to be experiencing one serious problem after another. His emotions were in a mess; in fact, his entire life was Being cut short. And yet this person knew the truth! He knew what the Word says about how to come out of every problem victoriously.

I told this person, "Look, I have a lot of compassion for you. I have more capacity to love you now than I ever have. But, my friend, *you're going to stay that way until you decide to do what you need to do to change your situation.*

Since you know the truth and could start the process of change anytime you wanted to, why would you want me to join you for a cup of 'pity party tea'? If you didn't know the answer, that would be a different story. But you do know. Therefore, I have to believe that you want to stay exactly where you're at."

"Well, what must I do?" this person asked.

"We have several teaching tapes for you to listen to."

"But it's just too hard - in fact, it's impossible! You just don't know."

"No, I don't know what it's like to stand in your shoes, but God does. In fact, this is where He shines!"

"What does He need from me?"

"How about believing in a God who can't lie about what He has said?"

"Well, I guess I can't do that."

"I can teach you how not to stay the same so you can get to the place where you *can* do it."

"What if I don't want to do it?"

"Then stay where you are, and I'll see you somewhere in eternity."

Don't make the mistake that person did. I strongly recommend that you conquer the world that is IN you so you can then conquer the one that is around you. Just keep going and going and going for the ultimate—to find out what it feels like when Jesus takes a moment to be alone with you in eternity and says to you, "I'd like to thank you for laying your life down for Me."

Do you actually think that anything God has created on this earth won't be surpassed when you get to Heaven? You don't know what true joy is until the One by whom and through whom everything exists lets you feel His appreciation for your obedience.

But if you never do what you need to do to change, a day will come when you'll look off in the distance at mother earth, the cradle of humanity, as she undergoes a major renovation. And as

you feel a little tremor go all the way through you, you'll ask the Lord, "Excuse me, are you sure redemption is over?"

Yes, Child, it's over."

"Is there any way you can give me ten more years? Can I go back and take care of the dark areas I never dealt with?"

"I said it's over. There is nothing more you can do about your time on earth."

"I guess I didn't take my walk with You seriously enough, Lord. Is it true that praying in tongues would have effected all the change I ever needed?"

"Yes it is, Child. I told you that praying in tongues would edify you and build you up on the holiest kind of faith—the kind of faith that doesn't misappropriate or serve greed. Instead, this faith appropriates everything you need to devastate anything that has exalted itself against the knowledge of Me in your life. The language I gave you came from Heaven for the purpose of representing your personal life on this earth. And, yes, it would have done for your life all that I told you it would do if you had taken advantage of this gift before your time on earth was done.

"Nevertheless, for the ages to come I am still Life, and it doesn't end here. So for that which you were faithful to do during your life on earth when all hell was against you, I have a place for you."

I personally remember the years of my ministry when the hours of prayer seemed long and hard and I was losing everything that everyone around me counted as success. I went through a time of mortification because I had given God permission to strip me of everything that wasn't of Him— anything in my life that I hadn't received from Him.

How did I give Him that permission? I simply yielded myself to the Holy Spirit. All the faith it took for me to yield was enough to let that heavenly language roll through me—past the moments I felt tired or I didn't feel like continuing in prayer, past the limits of my understanding as to what that supernatural language was doing for me.

What I'm talking about is a place in God that is neither based on whether or not people are obedient to the Lord in their giving nor on the economy. It is a place in God where I can live uninterrupted, no matter what the devil or anyone else does. Why? Because I discovered how to trust in the One who cannot fail or lie.

Paul certainly found that place in God where nothing mattered in life except trusting in Him. That's why Paul was able to say, "Look, if it causes my weak brother to fall, I won't eat in those restaurants anymore where meat offered to idols is served" (see 1 Corinthians 8: 13)

Sadly, not all ministers today live by that attitude; instead, some have allowed their sin nature to dominate their lives. As a result, the private lives of these preachers are actually destructive to

other people. In fact, there is a whole list of people who have been destroyed because of the strongholds in certain ministers' personal lives.

For instance, I know some preachers who have atrocious personalities. Simply put, these ministers are just plain mean in the way they act toward people. Nevertheless, when the anointing of the Holy Spirit comes on these same ministers, people are healed, miracles take place, and altars fill up. This leads some people to conclude, *Well, the way this minister acts must be okay because God is using him. So I guess I can act like he does!*

I also know preachers who live in some degree of sin and God still uses them. For instance, I hear of ministers who justify drinking a glass of wine because Paul told Timothy, "Drink a little for your stomach." Or maybe they have read that it is good to drink a glass of wine every day because there is an ingredient in wine that is good for one's blood.

But there is a problem with this reasoning: Ever since the Carrie Nation crusades, drinking has been connected with a variety of vices. In the early revivals, those who drank were marked with sin and the destruction of families. Never was it the last drink a man took that made him an alcoholic or destroyed his family—it was always the *first*.

A "good Samaritan" told me that he would try to win my sons over by becoming a good friend to them. But then this man took out one of my sons and had a beer with him. Later I told him, "Listen, Mr. Good Samaritan, you just lost them. They're not going to listen to what you say because you compromised your testimony."

Someone might say, "Well, then, I'll just drink a beer at home." That person might get by with it. But if someone finds out about what he's doing, he'll still be slated as a hypocrite.

At one point, I had several Bible school students and preachers coming to me and asking, "What about those ministers who have great ministries that we admire, and then later we find out they have allowed some sin to get ahold of them? Why does God mightily use someone like that in miracles when he has sin in his life that brings reproach to the name of Jesus?"

One person suggested, "Maybe it has something to do with the prayers of others in the meeting."

I replied, "If that's the case, why didn't God bypass the hypocritical minister standing before the crowd and instead use the person in the audience who is praying for the minister?"

The person said, "All right, then—can you tell me why God uses ministers who are allowing sin in their lives?"

At the time, I wasn't sure I knew the answer to that question, but I did know the deceptive nature of sin. I had certainly prayed myself out of enough of it!

Here's one thing I've found out about sin: No matter what kind of mess you crawled out of yesterday, you'll find yourself wasting today as well if you don't spend an hour or so praying with God.

As you are crawling out of that same old weakness once again, the devil will jump on you and try to tell you that you'll never have victory over that area of your life. He'll try to condemn you until you start thinking, *God won't hear me after what I've done, so what's the use of praying anymore?*

Finally, you'll get so convicted about the mess that you throw yourself down in a weeping mass of tears and say, "I'm sorry, Lord!" Then you'll make the same determination you've made countless times before to do better from now on. But if you fail to spend time with God and pray, you will still be walking out into the world with no more strength than you had before. So even though you may try again to do right, most of the time you will also fall again.

You may not feel like praying the day after you yield to a certain temptation to sin. You may tell yourself, *How is God going to hear you, you ugly, hiding sin thing?* But don't waste a new day with that old way of thinking. No matter how bad it was yesterday, it's vital that you tell God you're sorry and spend that hour of praying in tongues with Him.

Why do you think God bypassed your lightning-quick brain and your damaged emotional makeup to baptize your power plant, your new nature, with His Spirit? He knew He had to get past all your problems and start building you up above them from the inside out!

If you won't stop praying, you'll ultimately experience victory. Just don't let the devil talk you out of praying tomorrow because of what you did today. If he does, you're just going to repeat your same old vicious cycle.

But what about that specific question people had been asking me? Why does God sometimes use ministers who have hidden sin in their lives? I went to the Lord and asked Him that question point blank.

The Lord answered, "Well, I'll tell you why I use them. First of all, I extend a grace period to them like you wouldn't believe! During that time, I provide a voice of grace in their lives by sending people to them to talk to them and try to recover them right to the very end."

I said, "But, Lord, You use these ministers while they are secretly sinning. How do you hold them accountable? Do you just love people so much that You heal them even when someone who is harboring sin in his life prays for them?"

"That's right."

"But what do You do about the minister's sin, Lord?" I asked. "Because when people find out about it, that often causes them to conclude that they can get by with sin too."

If people see that God is using someone who smokes, they often think, *I'm not so bad. God uses that person. I should be able to smoke too.* So this is how God handles the situation: He uses the

minister to heal the people; then He holds the minister totally accountable not only for the sin he's committing in his private life, but for the effect his sin has on the people to whom he is ministering.

And what if a person tells you that he wants to be free but won't do what he needs to do to get set free? He isn't telling you the truth. He only wants to be free if it doesn't cost him anything and he can keep on doing what he's doing.

But I can testify to you that mortification is really not difficult. On the other hand, "will worship"—which is the attempt to make changes in your own strength and will power—is difficult.

There are a lot of admirable feats that result from will worship. It is amazing to see all that some people have accomplished by sheer will power. The most difficult thing about will power, however, is having to continually resist temptation rather than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25).

God called sin pleasurable because even though sin is a perversion of good things, it is still a temporary form of enjoyment. Will power works well, especially in areas of physical self-discipline, when the reward is muscles that no shirt will fit over or the chance to break a world record. But when your only reward is to know you're living a righteous life before God, you have to use every ounce of discipline you have on a daily basis in order to maintain that righteous lifestyle.

However, there is a huge difference between will worship and mortification. Mortification of your flesh occurs when you let the Holy Spirit loose on the inside of you by praying much in other tongues. Eventually your fellowship with God will become so intimate that He will begin to destroy the hold of those sinful strongholds. He will also give you such peace, joy, and excitement in your fellowship with Him that those strongholds won't be able to sneak back into your life. I can tell you from personal experience that there is no greater excitement or anything that is more worth dying for than your walk with God!

You know, we have so little idea of all that God did when He sent the third Person of the Godhead with a heavenly language for our edification. If we will turn Him loose in our lives through hours of praying in tongues, He will begin to work out God's plan for our future; then He will lovingly pull us into that plan. And anything negative that happens to be in the way of God's plan, the Holy Spirit will destroy!

Blessings from Tom and Linda Stephens
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