

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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BATTLE —
LIFE VERSUS
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In Romans 5 through 8, which we may call the kernel of the Bible, two key words are used repeatedly. These words are *life* and *death*. In Genesis 2 life is represented by the tree of life, and death, by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 9). The issue of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is actually death, not knowledge. Therefore, we may call these trees the tree of life and the tree of death.

KNOWLEDGE, GOOD, AND EVIL

The tree of death is very subtle. Although it brings forth death, it is not called the tree of death; instead, it is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There are three related things concerning this tree—knowledge, good, and evil. Although we all appreciate knowledge and good, we do not like evil. We consider good and evil to be in two distinct categories. The concept of good and evil in the Bible, however, is different; the Bible puts both good and evil in the same category. This indicates that we should be for life, not for good or evil. According to Genesis 2, knowledge and good are put together with evil. Belonging to one family, they are three “sisters” who work together to bring forth death, which is, of course, the opposite of life.

THE LINE OF LIFE AND THE LINE OF DEATH

Some Christians say that we should no longer be concerned about the tree of life and the tree of knowledge spoken of in Genesis 2. But most of the items found in Genesis are seeds of spiritual truths developed elsewhere in the Bible, and we should not neglect them. In Genesis 2 we have the seed of life and the seed of death. But at the end of the book of Revelation we see the consummation of these seeds. Death, the last enemy, is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Life abounds in the New Jerusalem, for there we see the river of water of life with the tree of life growing in it (22:1-2). From center to circumference, the New Jerusalem is a city of life. The seed of life sown in the beginning of the Bible consummates in the harvest of life, and the seed of death consummates in the harvest of death. Because the seeds of life and of death grow throughout the Bible, we can trace in the Bible both the line of life and the line of death. In this booklet we will consider these two lines as they appear in Romans 5 through 8.

In Genesis 2 there is a triangular situation involving God, man, and Satan. In this chapter man faces two sources: God as the source of life and Satan as the source of death. In Romans 5 through 8 there is the continuation of this triangular situation. Eventually, this triangular situation will result in a twofold consummation. The negative things will, along with death, be swept into the lake of fire,

but the positive things will, with those who have been redeemed, flow into the city of living water. Today we are all heading toward this ultimate consummation, the believers to the New Jerusalem and the unbelievers to the lake of fire. In their everyday experience many Christians have one foot on the line of life and the other on the line of death. Other Christians vacillate between the two. Perhaps yesterday you were on the line of death, but today, by the Lord's mercy and grace, you are once again on the line of life.

THE REIGN OF LIFE AND THE REIGN OF DEATH

Let us now trace these two lines through Romans 5 through 8. Romans 5:12 says, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and thus death passed on to all men because all have sinned." Here we see the entering in of sin and death. Verse 14 says, "Death reigned from Adam until Moses." In these two verses we see the line of death. In verse 17 we find the line of life: "If, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." In verse 21 Paul declares, "Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin has brought in death, but grace through righteousness brings in life. Therefore, in chapter 5 we

see both the reign of death and the reign of life with grace.

NEWNESS OF LIFE

Romans 6:4 says, “So also we might walk in newness of life.” Instead of remaining under the reign of death, we should walk in newness of life and stay on the line of life. The next verse says, “For if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” As we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, that is, in the baptism mentioned in verse 4, so we will also grow together with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, that is, in the newness of life as mentioned in verse 4. To grow together in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection is to be in newness of life. Then verse 11 tells us to reckon ourselves dead to sin but living to God in Christ Jesus. These verses indicate that in chapter 6 also there are both the line of life and the line of death.

“THIS DEATH”

Now we come to chapter 7, a chapter that many Christians do not like very much. Here, instead of life, we find killing and death. Verse 11 says, “Sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” Sin is a murderer that uses the law as its weapon to kill us. This should warn us not to turn to the law. If we do, sin will rise up, as if to say, “How good that

you have turned to the law! You have just given me an excellent opportunity to use the law to kill you.” As one who had been killed in this way, Paul cried out in verse 24, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?” “This death” refers to the death caused by sin through the weapon of the law.

A FOURFOLD LIFE

As we go on from chapter 7 to chapter 8, we find that in this chapter life is primary, not death. Romans 8:2 says, “The law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.” Hallelujah for the law of the Spirit of life! Verse 10 continues, “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.” According to verse 6, if our mind is set on the Spirit, our mind also will be life. Furthermore, if the life-giving Spirit dwells in us, that is, makes His home in us, He will even impart the divine life into our mortal bodies (v. 11). Therefore, not only our spirit and mind are life, but even our mortal bodies can be enlivened. According to Romans 8, all three parts of our being—our spirit, soul, and body—can receive life. Our spirit is life because Jesus Christ has entered into our spirit. Our mind can be life because the indwelling Christ is spreading from our spirit into our mind. Furthermore, this spreading of the divine life will even reach our mortal body and enliven it. Praise the Lord for the life in Romans 8!

In this chapter there is a fourfold life: life in the divine Spirit, life in our human spirit, life in our mind, and life in our mortal body. But although there is such a fourfold life in Romans 8, death is still present. Not until we come to Revelation 20 will there be only life and no death. At that time, death, the last enemy, will be cast out of humanity and into the lake of fire. Therefore, in the New Jerusalem there will be only the element of life, not the element of death. However, within us today we have both the element of life and the element of death.

CARING FOR LIFE

All married brothers and sisters know that the husbands should love their wives and that the wives should submit to their husbands. However, in Genesis 2 we read nothing about husbands loving wives or wives submitting to husbands. Nevertheless, such things are included in the word *good* in verse 17. For a husband to love his wife or for a wife to submit to her husband is to do good. On the contrary, for a husband to hate his wife or for a wife to rebel against her husband is to do evil. At the end of the Bible we again find the words *life* and *death* but not the words *love* and *submission*. Therefore, both in the beginning of the Bible and at the end, both in Genesis and in Revelation, we have life and death. It is the same in Romans 5 through 8. In these chapters Paul says nothing about husbands loving wives or wives submitting to husbands. He speaks elsewhere about these

matters but not here. Instead, in these chapters he lays great emphasis on life and death and seems not to care about love or hate, submission or rebellion.

It is possible to be very loving or submissive and yet be dead. In His economy God does not care mainly whether we are good or evil, submissive or rebellious; He cares only whether we are living or dead. Every wife who is dead and buried in a cemetery is submissive; she never expresses her opinion. But God does not want a dead submission. He desires that we all be living. This is the reason that in Romans 5 through 8 Paul does not speak about submission or rebellion but about life and death. Romans 8:6 does not say that the mind set upon the spirit is submission and that the mind set upon the flesh is rebellion. When Paul wrote this portion of the Word, he was fully in the Spirit of God and in God's economy; he did not care for either good or evil but only for life and death.

Good and evil belong to the tree of knowledge, which is the tree of death. Right and wrong also belong to this tree. Thus, we should not be concerned about right and wrong but about life and death. In God's economy it is not sufficient merely to be good. We may be good and yet still be dead. God's economy requires that we be in life. It is possible to be dead right and livingly wrong. A kindergarten is filled with noisy boys and girls, but these children are very living. Although kindergarten children may be noisy and sometimes naughty, I prefer their situation over the quietness

and orderliness of a cemetery. All those buried in a cemetery are lawful and well regulated, but they are dead. Do you prefer to be livingly wrong or dead right? I prefer to be living.

LIFE IN OUR SPIRIT AND DEATH IN OUR FLESH

It is easy to move from death to life or from life to death. In other words, it is difficult not to move from one realm to another. For example, we can just as easily switch on an electric light as we can switch it off. It is the same with death and life. We can switch on to the spirit and be in life, or we can switch off and be in death.

Electricity is an excellent illustration of the Spirit of life. Electricity is invisible and cannot be thoroughly understood. The Spirit of life is the same. In order for us to apply electricity, it must first be installed in our home, and then we need to use a switch. Thank the Lord that the divine Spirit as the heavenly electricity has been installed in our spirit. No matter how we feel, both the Spirit, that is, the divine electricity, and the switch are in our spirit.

Life is in our spirit, and death is in our flesh. When Adam was in the garden, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge were both outside of him. But today these two trees are within us, the tree of life in our spirit and the tree of death in our flesh. In the Bible the term *flesh* denotes not only our corrupted body but also our entire fallen being.

For this reason, the Bible calls a fallen person flesh (Rom. 3:20).

SETTING OUR MIND ON THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:6 says, “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.” To set our mind on what we are is to set it on the flesh. To set our mind on the flesh does not mean merely to set it on our body; it means to set it on our being, our self. For example, someone may feel that in the past he was evil, and now he may endeavor to be good. This is to set the mind on the flesh, on the hopeless self. Some Christians think that if they set their mind on worldly entertainments, they are minding the flesh. Certainly to set the mind on such things is to set it on the flesh. But this is not the only way to mind the flesh. Even in making up your mind to love your wife, you are setting your mind on the flesh in a subtle way. When we are tempted to make up our mind to do good, we need to pray, “Lord Jesus, be merciful to me. I can do nothing apart from You.” By praying in this way, we set our mind on the spirit, not on our poor self.

Furthermore, we should not set our mind on what might happen in the future. Let us leave the future with the Lord. Suppose, after he had been called by God, Abraham had asked the Lord to tell him where he should go the next day. The Lord might have said, “Abraham, be at peace and enjoy Me. Leave tomorrow with Me.” To rest in

the Lord today and leave tomorrow with Him is to set the mind on the spirit.

Because many Christians do not see this, they often admonish others or advise them as to what they should do. This encourages people to set their mind on the flesh, and the result is death. In my early ministry I not only advised others but also admonished myself. As a result, I was killed and so were the others.

DEVELOPING A NEW HABIT

Praise the Lord that the God of life is in our spirit! Although we may know this, we still need to learn how to live by the indwelling life-giving Spirit. The important thing is not how much knowledge we have but how much we live by Christ.

Let me tell you a story that helps to illustrate this. When I was young, most people in my home-town still used oil lamps; they did not have electricity. As a child, I used to clean the lamps, fill them with oil, and light them. Even after electricity had been installed in our home, I was still in the habit of using an oil lamp. Sometimes the others laughed at me when I began to light a lamp and then reminded me to simply use the light switch. Although something new, electricity, had been installed, I was not yet in the habit of using it.

The principle is the same in the Christian life. We have been raised and trained to live by ourselves. This is our habit. Even after the Lord Jesus has been installed in us, we continue the habit

of living by ourselves. However, we need to develop a new habit, the habit of living by Christ. Because many saved ones do not have this new habit, Romans 7 is necessary. We need to see a vision that Christ as life is living in our spirit. Because He lives in us, we must drop not only the sinful things but also our old way of living. We need to turn from living by ourselves to living by Christ. This requires that we stay in the spirit and walk according to the spirit (8:4).

As soon as we lose touch with the spirit, we are cut off from life and are immediately in death. There is no need for death to enter in. For example, as soon as we turn off the lights in a room, we are in darkness. There is no need for darkness to come in. Just as switching off the lights puts us in darkness, so being separated from the spirit brings us into death. Even a thin strip of insulation can cut off the flow of electricity. In like manner, even something small can cut us off from the life in our spirit. Because we are in a triangular situation involving God as life in our spirit and Satan as death in our flesh, we need to develop the habit of staying in the spirit. Instead of making up our mind to do good, we should simply turn to our spirit and stay there with the living One. This habit is not easily developed, but it can be done.

DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD

Romans 6:11 tells us to reckon ourselves dead to sin and living to God. However, the experience

of this is in the spirit in Romans 8. When we are in our spirit with the Lord, we are automatically dead to sin and alive to God. If you try this reckoning without being in the spirit, you will find that the more you reckon, the more you are in death.

We have seen that to be cut off from the spirit is to be in death. For example, the reason you lose your temper is that there is already some insulation between you and your spirit. It is not that you lose your temper and then are cut off from the spirit; it is that you are cut off from the spirit and therefore lose your temper. If there is no insulation around your spirit, no negative thing will be able to overcome you. On the contrary, the divine life in your spirit will swallow up all death. Our experience confirms this. When we are in the spirit, the divine life within swallows up every negative thing. But when we are insulated and thereby cut off from the spirit, we are in death and cannot handle even the smallest problem.

A UNIVERSAL BATTLE

God's economy is not a matter of good or evil, right or wrong. Moreover, it is not a matter of ethics. According to ethical standards, we should do good and not evil. God's economy, however, is altogether a matter of life or death. To be in life is to live out God, and to be in death is to live out Satan. We are a battlefield, and the universal battle between God and Satan is raging within us. The outcome of this battle is determined by where we

set our mind. If we set our mind on the self and thereby are cut off from the spirit, Satan gains ground. But if we stay in the spirit and set our mind on the spirit, God gains the victory.

This is precisely what is portrayed in 8:13, where Paul says, “If you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live.” By the indwelling Spirit we must put to death the deeds of the old person. To do this is to live. Let us pray about this, practice it, and develop the habit of staying in the spirit. The more we develop this habit, the more living we will be, and the further we will be from death.

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