



The Law of Life

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Two sparrows. Two sets of wings, two sets of legs, two sets of eyes, two hearts, two brains. Yet the difference between the two birds is so vast. It is the difference between life and death.

One sparrow has all the form and features that can make it flutter, sing, and fly high into the skies. Its leg muscles are intact, yet it cannot hop. Every part of its throat is formed to sing, but no song cheers the sunrise. Every feather is in place on its two wings, yet it cannot fly.

The law of death has become ruler over this bird.

The other bird has no body part that the dead one does not have. No extra muscles, no extra vocal chords, not one extra feather. Yet with a flip of the wings it leaves its roost and, chattering happily, flies off into the skies with an agility that marvels us.

The difference between the birds is the difference between life and death. The one operates under the law of death, while the other operates under the law of life.

Law in Romans

To understand Paul's letter to the Romans, one has to understand Paul's use of the word "law." If you are confused about the matter, you need not feel alone! Even the apostle Peter wrote concerning Paul's letters: "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."

The early church also struggled through the difficult passages. Origen, born in the second century, expressed it this way:

We have often said ... that the Apostle mentions many kinds of law in this epistle [Romans] in such a way that when he passes from one kind to another it is scarcely possible for this to be detected except by a reader who is sufficiently attentive.¹

Origen then goes on to explain that the word "law" in Romans can refer to natural law (the moral law that God puts into the conscience of everyone in conjunction with what we might call "common sense"), the Mosaic law, and the unchangeable principles of cause and effect in the spiritual world (similar to the law of gravity in the physical world). In this article, I will refer to this last type of law as a "law of spiritual physics." As Origen explains, sometimes Paul glides from "law" to "law" without any parentheses to explain to what type of law he was referring! In fact, Origen explains, the same verse may refer to different kinds of law, with just one word: "law."

The law of death

Death, darkness, and cold have something in common. Cold is the absence of heat. You cannot create or introduce coldness into heat. You can only take away heat, and the absence of heat leaves coldness. In the same way, you cannot create or introduce darkness into a room full of light. Darkness is the absence of light, and the only way to make darkness is to shut out light. You cannot shine darkness into a lighted room to make a part of a room go dark. No, the only way to make a corner dark is to shut out the light. In the same way, death is not a substance or action. Death is simply the absence of life. The only way to create death is to take away all life. Death, darkness, and cold in themselves are not a force, substance, or object. They are all simply the absence of something.

So how does something die? Simple: the life is taken away. In the case of sparrows, the physical life is taken away, and the body slumps to the ground, unable to do anything. In the case of spiritual death, the Spirit of God is removed from man's spirit, and man's spirit dies. This is called spiritual death.

A man can be alive physically, while spiritually dead. People in such a condition are said to be "under the law of sin and death." Since the spirit is dead, the person's body (the lusts of the flesh) and soul (the pride of life) take con-

¹ Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5* (Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 210.

trol, or, in some cases, an evil spirit moves into the man's spirit and begins to rule the man.

What happens in the conduct of a spiritually dead man?

Suppose he is walking down the street. He sees something. His body craves it. His emotions are moved toward it. He knows it is bad for him. The natural law of his mind tells him that. Yet, he is powerless to stop himself. His mind and conscience scream for him to stop himself, yet his body and emotions won't let him. Yes, on some occasions he can choose to do what he knows is right and do it. But he cannot consistently do so.

The *law of sin and death* (which says that any son of Adam without the Holy Spirit *cannot* consistently overcome sin) has gained the victory over his mind once again.

The law of sin

The law of sin is quite simple. This law can be compared to laws of physics, like the law of gravitation. The simplified version of the law of gravity says that any lifeless solid object will fall to the ground if dropped. That is simply the way things operate. We would be quite foolish to try to live in defiance of that law, say, like jumping off a building and expecting our good looks or intelligence to keep us from hitting the ground below. Or perhaps, thinking that we can overcome the law of gravity by the power of positive thinking. You know, just tell yourself 1001 times that you will not fall to the ground if you jump off the Empire State Building ...

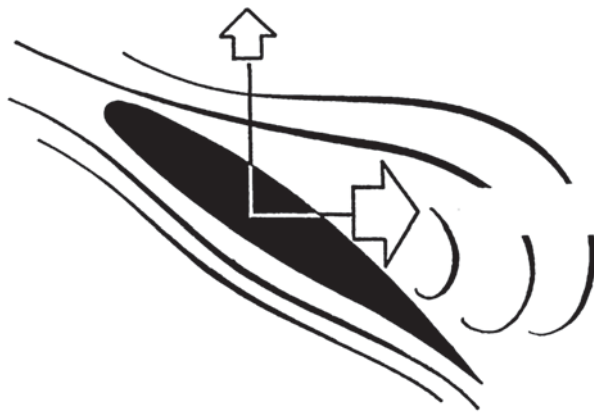
The law of gravity can be overcome, however, by introducing a stronger counteractive law. We will use the law of aerodynamics for an example. This second law says that air rushing over a properly shaped wing will cause lift. When the upward lift overcomes the power of the downward pull of gravity, the object will be lifted up instead of falling. In this way, birds and airplanes overcome the law of gravity with the law of aerodynamics.

The law of sin and death has several parts:

1. Those who willfully sin shall die spiritually. The nature of God is so holy that He cannot dwell with willful sin—He *must* withdraw His Spirit. That is how sin brings spiritual death.

2. Those who are dead spiritually will not have the strength to consistently resist the temptations that their flesh and soul will present to them. The spiritually dead person may know better, and their mind and conscience may scream for them to not sin, but they simply do not have enough moral strength to consistently overcome sin.

3. Because of sin, the human body has a strong natural tendency towards evil and self. No one has to train a child to lie, steal, hate, or lust. For this reason, our present bodies can never be a part of heaven. To save the human race, the Messiah took upon Himself a human body and walked among us. In this way, He could experience all the same temptations and trials as we do, and prove that He could conquer them.



The law of gravity can be overcome by introducing the law of aerodynamics. In the same way, the Spirit of life overcomes spiritual death.

innocent before God until we come to understand His will.

What happens, then, to the child who grows older, and now he meets up with a law that tells him that, for example, lying and stealing are sin? This law may be the teachings of Jesus, the Mosaic law, or simply the natural law of his conscience and common sense. Whatever law it is that informs him of his sin, the man now has a choice to make: to practice sin or not to practice sin.

Most people also have a God-given desire to be righteous and pure. This desire is hidden deep within the spirit of man, but it is present. So, that desire to be upright and virtuous naturally says "Amen!" when it meets with a law that tells it that lying and stealing are sin.

Now, the man finds something deep within him telling him to be virtuous—and he understands now what virtue is—but he finds that his self-centeredness and passions are stronger than his knowledge. In short, such a man then finds himself in ... Romans 7.

Romans 7:9 gives us the time and place of this encounter: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." When

natural law, the Mosaic law, or even the teachings of Christ enter a man, it brings man to a condition of seeing himself for who he really is. While law is holy, pure, and good, if it is by itself, it lacks an essential ingredient: *life!*

Human will vs. law

Following his encounter with law, men often try to live up to it in their own strength. This brings them to Romans 7:14-24. He knows what is right, he wants to do what is right, he tries to do what is right ... but he crashes again and again. This is the battle between the human will and righteousness. While men can sometimes will themselves into doing what they know to be right, they soon find that they cannot do it consistently. If men could by the power of their own will live righteously, humans could save themselves. What men find, though, is that the power of sin within them is stronger than their best intentions.

Paul describes this reality in Romans 7:21-23. What we need to remember is that, as Origen noted, Paul passes from one “law” to another in his writings without stopping to tell us that he is referring to a different form of “law.” Let’s look at the verses:

(21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

(22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

(23) 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.

Verse 21 describes the “law of sin.” This “law” is a “law of spiritual physics” that says, basically, “we can decide with our mind to do good, but the power of sin will not let us actually carry out our good intentions.” Just like the law of gravity is not overcome by positive thinking, the law of sin is not overcome by our will deciding that we are never going to sin again.

In verse 22, Paul uses “law” again, but this time he is not referring to a “law of spiritual physics,” but to the commands of God. In his heart, the man who has met with moral law (but not yet with grace) decides that he will love and obey that law ... but he quickly finds that there is another “law” at work. This is the “law of spiritual physics”

of sin in the body, which is stronger than human efforts. The man who has met with a moral law—be it the law of Moses, the natural law of conscience, or even the teachings of Jesus—will soon come to the crashing reality that he is a slave to his own passions.

O wretched man!

This cry arises from the resulting crash with reality in the man who thought he could live godly by his own efforts and will. For some people, this reality is understood

almost immediately upon encountering the moral and ethical laws of God. For others, they flounder for years in their own efforts before coming to realize that moral law is insufficient in and of itself to save a man. Paul said it like this, in Galatians 3:21: “If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.”

In other words, if all that men needed to become righteous was to know what was right and wrong, the mere giving of a law would have been sufficient to save men. They would hear the law, and decide to obey it. And, zap, they would become righteous.

The problem

The problem with moral law is that moral law in and of itself cannot give a person life. Law can only show a person they have a problem. Does that make moral law evil? No, Moses’ law was not evil. The problem with Moses’ law was that it had no provision for putting the Holy Spirit back into the spirit of man. And without God’s Spirit within him, man did not have the power within his own will to overcome the “law of spiritual physics” that was part and parcel of a human body.

Men without the Spirit of God are carnal, *sold unto sin*. In short, they are slaves to do things they wish they could stop doing.

The cure!

Following the realization that he is “sold under sin,” a man is ready to hear about the cure. The purpose of moral law is to bring a man to Romans 7:24. While the cry, “O wretched man that I am” is a desperate cry, it is also a beautiful place to be. Such a person is now ready to hear about the cure. He has experienced and realized the “law



In the tug of war between right and wrong in the unconverted, the law of sin wins more often than the desire to be upright does.

of spiritual physics” that says that he cannot overcome sin by his own good intentions. The moral law has only aggravated his conscience and made him comprehend that spiritual death was a part of him, a part that he could not change.

Then comes the good news. The law of sin could be overcome by a greater “law of spiritual physics.” This was the law of the Spirit of life. Just like gravity could be overcome by aerodynamics, the downward pull of sin could be conquered by the upward pull of the Holy Ghost! Paul put it this way: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” In other words, the power of the Holy Spirit would set a person free from the power of sin in his body.

Once the Spirit of God was poured back into the human spirit, “the righteousness of the [moral] law could be fulfilled in us.” Ro. 8:4 In other words, we could now actually do what the moral law called us to do.

Life!

Paul gives us the secret of salvation in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

The “secret” is, of course, life! This is the same “secret” that makes the big difference between the two sparrows mentioned at the beginning of this article. They both had everything they needed to fly and sing, but one could and one couldn’t. So it is between two people. Both know what is right, but one can do it and one cannot.

What happens many times, though, is that people go through years of living out a form of godliness, with no power. It is like a dead sparrow dropped out of an airplane at 30,000 feet altitude. Such a bird’s wings may flutter and flop, and one could even optimistically say it was “flying” as it dropped through the clouds and fluttered and flopped toward earth.

But a dead bird dropped from an airplane has only a “form of flying.” And people without the Holy Spirit going through the motions of prayer, praise, and mission work have only a “form of godliness.” Such a person caught on camera at certain moments may well appear to be a real Christian. But a dead sparrow falling 30,000 feet

could also be caught by a camera in actions that resemble a live bird.

The great mystery revealed

For centuries and centuries, God kept the mystery of the gospel hidden in types and shadows. When the day finally came, He revealed it to humanity. This mystery is really pretty simple—at least simple to say. Paul revealed it in Colossians 1:26-27:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

“Christ in you.” A very simple remedy for a terrible situation! Humanity is a slave to the power of sin ... how to overcome it? Simple. Put the Messiah’s life into them! Let Jesus live in a man, and he can conquer sin!

This dramatic salvation was prefigured in one of the Mosaic ceremonies, the Day of Atonement. On that great day, the life (blood) of a goat was drained from it, and the life was transferred to the inner sanctuary of the temple. Once the blood (life) of the goat was sprinkled in the Holy of Holies (our spirit), everything changed. The inner sanctuary was now made alive by the life that was in the blood. In other words, the life that had been in the goat was now in the heart of man. God and man could now be reconciled, now that man’s spirit was alive once again. After all, a living God cannot unite Himself to a dead spirit ...

The Messiah salvaged the human sin situation by coming to earth and sprinkling His blood (which is a type of the Holy Spirit) into the dead person. “Christ in you, the hope of glory!”

Why Christ came

Jesus told us plainly why He came to earth: “I am come that they might **have life**, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Jn. 10:10 In what is probably the most well-known verse of the New Testament (John 3:16), it is stated this way: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in



On the Day of Atonement, a blood transfusion occurred, when the life (blood) of the goat was transferred to the inner sanctuary, “quicken” it.

Through Esther's intervention, the law of death instigated by Haman was annulled by introducing a counteractive law.

This was the basis of the celebration of Purim, which is essentially a celebration of life over death!



him should not perish, but **have everlasting life.**” Again, we see the purpose of the Father in sending His Son was that *life* could be put back into them. And the apostle John sums up why he even wrote down the gospel story, with these words: “But these are written ... that believing ye might **have life** through his name.” These are but a few of the Scriptures that tell us of the glorious mystery of the gospel: Christ living in us.

In short, Jesus was sent to earth to put the Spirit of God back into humans. Not all would accept this undeserved gift, but those who did accept it were called out into a brotherhood of those rescued from the power of sin. These “called out ones” were to live out the life that God had originally intended for Adam’s descendents to live. All who had Christ living and reigning in them would form the kingdom of God.

The gospel according to Esther

Space does not permit a full look at the story of Esther, but this little Old Testament book preaches the gospel. In it, we see an unchangeable law made that sentenced all Jews to death (think, “law of sin and death.”) The Medes and the Persians had decreed that once a law was made, it could never be altered. This was a shadow of the unalterable law of sin and death—try as we might, we humans cannot change that “law of spiritual physics.” You sin, you die spiritually. Then, if you die physically while in a state of spiritual death, you will be eternally separated from God.

However, when the king wanted (through Esther’s mediation) to change his decree, he could not just wipe the law off the records. The Medes and the Persians could not alter their laws once they had been made! In the same

way, the “law of sin and death” cannot be altered by God. It would be against His nature to change the “laws of spiritual physics.” The law of sin and death is a “law of spiritual physics” that cannot be changed without altering the nature of God. If a man willfully sins, God *has* to leave that man. If God would stay in the heart of a willful sinner, His character would be defiled.

So, King Ahasuerus simply made another law that gave the Jews the liberty to kill their enemies, before their enemies killed them. This was a shadow of the “law of the Spirit of life” that would give believers the opportunity to conquer sin, before sin destroyed them forever!

There are other interesting aspects of the story of Esther to explore, but I think you probably get the picture of how God’s people were saved from destruction by the introduction of another law that empowered them to conquer the previous law that had decreed their death.

Life begins with faith

It would seem unfair to tell about this unique rescue operation that Jesus pulled off without also telling the steps to take to be included in it. It all begins with ... faith.

Two common mistakes made today are:

1. **Trying to live up to the moral law by our own strength.** As mentioned above, many people spend years and years trying to do this. They either justify their failings by saying “God doesn’t expect us to overcome,” or by self-righteousness. Self-righteousness happens when men make their own standard up. And, of course, when men make up a standard of right and wrong, they usually make it low enough that they can achieve it. So men lower God’s standard and then pat themselves on the back because they think they are fulfilling God’s will. But it is

really their own standard of righteousness they are fulfilling, not God's standard. When man changes God's standard of righteousness, it is called self-righteousness.

2. The second common mistake is to try to attain to *life* by **performing the ceremonial aspects given along with moral law**. In Paul's day, this was often realized by



Dropping a dead bird from an airplane does not make it fly. In the same way, sending an unregenerated person on a mission trip does not make life in Christ.

were bad in themselves ...), but to those who believed. Indeed, *the Spirit of life* which overcame *the law of sin* was not given to those who went through religious motions, but to those who surrendered in faith. In short, one cannot earn a baptism of the Holy Ghost by merely going through rituals, even though those rituals are biblical. If going through rituals earned a baptism of the Spirit, children playing church might suddenly get baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire!

Does Jesus believe on you?

This is rather a strange question, perhaps. We are used to being asked "Do you believe on Jesus?" However, we need to look at John 2:24 for a definition of faith: "But

practicing circumcision, Sabbaths, new moons, and the dietary regulations of the Mosaic law. Today, the same thing happens with church meetings, baptism, communion, and/or mission work. Whether it is Mosaic ceremonies or Christian duties, *life* cannot be earned by going through motions. That would be like dropping a dead bird out of an airplane at 30,000 feet, with the vain hope that sometime during its freefall it will imitate a living bird's flight close enough that it will magically come to life ...

Paul was emphatic. The undeserved gift of the Holy Ghost (grace) was not given to those who ritualistically performed religious duties (not that the duties

Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men."

Perhaps you are wondering if there was a printing error ... No, John 2:24 is the verse we want, and we want to look at the word "commit" to help us understand what "faith" is.

First, let's look at the preceding verse (23): "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." Here we see "believed in his name," and we think "faith."

Now, the point ... The word "commit" in verse 24 is the same Greek word as "believed" in verse 23. It would seem strange to say "Jesus did not believe on them ...". But that is exactly what happened.

Now, let's look again at verse 23, to our part of faith, and replace "believe" with the synonym "commit": "... many committed themselves to his name ..."

Have you committed yourself to Him?

To experience the liberation that the Holy Spirit brings to sinful humans, we must believe, that is, "commit ourselves" to Jesus. This is more than a mental assent to a historical truth; it is a total letting go of everything about ourselves and a clinging to Jesus, ready to do whatever He asks. The devils give mental assent to the truth of the Bible. They *know* that the Bible is true! But they have not committed themselves to it. To commit to something means to give oneself over to it entirely. To give oneself over entirely to something is ... ***faith!***

The good news is that whoever will commit himself entirely to Christ (believe on Him) will be given an undeserved gift: the Holy Spirit in his spirit. Christ will come and "dwell in our hearts by faith." This is grace, an undeserved gift. A spiritual rebirth will occur, a new life begin. Old things will pass away, and all things will become new. Our mortal bodies will be quickened (brought to life). And we will fulfill the will of God, on earth.

The law of the Spirit of life will make us free from the law of sin and death.

Sounds like good news to me! Time to celebrate Purim! ~

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