

A Different Law

Romans 7:23a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 7:23, "But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members." So "members" is limbs of our body, that's what Paul means by members. "I see another law in my members," he means in the limbs or in his body. Then, do you see that law is mentioned three times in the verse?

"I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin." Now, there are only two laws really. Another law is the law of sin, which dwells in my members. Do you see that? So Paul is saying, "I see in my body, another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to this law and this other law is the law of sin which dwells in my members." So he is just talking about two laws even though he mentions it twice and you can see that by analyzing the sentence properly.

Then it might be good just to see that "another" is not the best translation, the Greek word really means a different law, different law entirely. So really Paul is saying, "I see in my members, a different law absolutely to the law of God that is in my mind. There's another law at work in my whole body and it's different entirely. It's not just another law; it's a different one, absolutely."

What does he mean by law? I know some of us are very clear on the answer to that but some of us are here for the first time and it's important to clarify it. He doesn't mean a moral standard which we're obligated to live up to. When he says, "I see in my own personality two laws, one at war with the other", he doesn't mean a set of moral standards which we are obligated to keep, like the 55 speed limit. He doesn't mean a law like that.

He means a law in the sense of a scientific law or a natural law, like Newton's law of gravity or Kepler's law or Gresham's law. He means a description of the way things normally happen, a sequence of events that seem to follow one another repeatedly in life. I see two series or two sequences of events occurring inside my own being, again and again. That's really what he means.

Same deal as the law of gravity -- you choose to do something and a series of events will follow whether you like it or not. Choose to drop it; it'll fall. Choose to drop it, it'll fall. Eventually I catch up with Newton and say, "Yeah, there's some force that attracts an object towards the center of the earth and I designate that a law of gravity because I am describing a sequence of events that keeps on happening again and again." Now that's what Paul means when he says, "I see at work inside myself two laws, and they're at war with one another", two sequence of events which keep happening all the time and I can't stop them.

Once you've made the initial choice, the chain reaction leads you irrevocably to the same conclusion again and again except that there are two of them at work in me. Now, you saw really one of them in David's life. In the part of it that we read in the Old Testament, that was one law at work, that was the law at work in his members.

You remember, he was out one afternoon on a rooftop, saw a lovely woman on another rooftop bathing

and he yielded to the old law and his members. He found a tremendous desire coming up in his members and his body making her desirable to him and making him want to be close to her and perhaps part of her body and once he made that choice, all the rest followed and he ended up yielding to that law of lust in his members and it resulted in his destruction of a good man, Uriah, and really the destruction of a good woman that she was. Now that was one law at work in his life.

But, loved ones, the other law worked also in his life. It might be good to see that to be fair at least to David. I Samuel 17, away at the beginning of David's life the other law of God in his mind operated, not that law of sin in his body but the law of God in his mind.

I Samuel 17:41, "And the Philistine came on and too near to David, with a shield bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked, and saw David, he disdained him; for he was that of youth, ruddy and comely in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?" Because you remember Goliath was a massive man with armor on and old David had the sling and the stones.

"And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.' Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day, the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will stack you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beast of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hand.' When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead, the stone sank into his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground." That's the other law.

Old David just disregarded the fear that was in his body and instead of working from what his body dictated would be a wise thing to do, which would be to get out of there as fast as possible, he operated by the other law of God in his mind that, "My Father loves me and is in charge and he told me to do this and he is going to back me." The result was entirely different.

He destroyed an evil man and saved lots of helpless men. So you can see one man and two laws that work inside him and depending on which one he operates by, he enters into certain results in his life. That's what Paul is saying, "I see in my members, another law at war with the law of God in my mind and it is constantly making me captive to this law of sin in my members."

It seems to me, all of us have experienced it. I think many of us have had feelings of real inferiority. We really do have difficulty at times knowing exactly where we fit in. We just have problems seeing where our place in the sun is. At times this can become so heavy in our lives that it really turns into an anxiety and often many of us are burdened with this anxiety and other people describe it as an identity crisis and we don't quite know how to describe it. But we do know that we have a problem feeling that we fit in somewhere in the world and in society.

Often we look at others and we think, "Well, they really fit in but well, we don't." It can turn into a feeling of not being wanted and then it can become feelings of rejection where we feel other people are really rejecting us. Now there are two responses we can take to that. One is the law of

God in the mind and the other is the law of sin in the members.

We can decide, "Well, there's nobody more powerful than ourselves that is interested in our well-being more than we are and so we'll have to somehow deal with these feelings of inferiority", and so we resolve to work to make ourselves indispensable in some situations.

At work or at home or in school or with our friends or socially, we start working to make ourselves indispensable in some situations. So that, at least there's some place where they have to want us because they can't do without us. Often as we make that choice, loved ones, to operate that way, a sequence of events begins to take place that you cannot stop.

It's a chain reaction that you cannot stop. Because the next step is that you begin to teach or to nurse or you begin to be an engineer, not to do a good job but to prove how indispensable you are to your employers or to your wife or to your children or to your friends. That ulterior motive begins to govern all of your life.

As sure as you set out on that path, that law of sin in your members, of trying to deal with that problem of rejection by your own methods, will lead you into the same miserable experiences that it led David into. Or, you can take the other approach and you can operate by the law of God in your mind and you can examine Jesus' life and decide as many of us have that he really does present the true explanation of reality and you can accept his explanation.

His explanation is very straight. He says, "My Father made you to live independent from him for everything. You have resolved to live independent of him and to make your own way in life by your own efforts and by your manipulation of the world and others. My Father is committed therefore to eliminating you at the end of this life from his further plans for the universe. It's your subconscious sense of his rejection that is causing these problems of inferiority in you. But I tell you, My Father worked out on me the alienation that you're experiencing and if you believe this statement of reality that I have given you then My Father is prepared to regard my alienation from him as yours and he no longer rejects you. In fact he accepts you."

Now loved ones, if you operate by that law you find yourself justified by the blood of Jesus and it just brings an absolutely different result. One is dealing with feelings of rejection by the old law in the members of sin and the other is dealing with that rejection by the law of God in the mind.

I think here's what many of us find. We come into a group like this and we know in our minds that God is our Father and that he has worked out on Jesus the alienation that he felt towards us and we can see that when Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," He cried that cry so that none of us would ever have to cry it. And we come into a group and we know that and we know God accepts me, I know that, and he is pleased with me. We know that that's in our mind and that's the law of God in our mind and we want to operate like that but somebody comes up here and plays the guitar reasonably well or somebody comes up here and sings quite well.

We sing too but they sang very well, or somebody comes up here and speaks and we speak too but they spoke very well. Or after the service we get involved with somebody who is talking about their plans for their career or, we meet somebody who really looks very well, in fact they could possibly look better than us, so that's difficult.

But we meet somebody who makes us feel just that little bit of sense of inferiority again. Now we're

not quite as good as they and instead of working by the law of the mind and saying, "Lord God, you accept us. You think we're the most beautiful people in the world, that's why you gave your Son to die for us. That's all that matters, Lord. Whether they think that of us or not, whether we compare well or ill with them, that's what's important."

Instead of doing that, we follow the old law of sin that comes from the outside through our bodies and we let our eyes go out to them and, "Yeah they do look well", and, "Yeah, they do sound good", and we begin to move by the law of sin in the members. We begin to fall into our old series of events and methods by which we have always dealt with these problems for rejection and they are very simple.

We simply begin to pick holes and we look at this guy or girl and we say, "Yeah, yeah, well that's okay, but they're a bunch of fanatics anyway", or, "Well, maybe they're another bunch of fanatics but they're of course different from me. No, this isn't my bag." Or, we look at the other person and we begin to try to find some flaw in them, some flaw in their character to convince us what brilliant analysts of human nature we ourselves are. We begin in some way to take them down to build ourselves up. Loved ones, you know where that ends up, just in misery.

If you move by the law of God in your mind you concentrate on the fact that he has accepted you. "So what does it matter what all the rest think?" Then there comes out from your heart a real joy when somebody else plays a guitar well. You suddenly feel glad that God is coming through them so beautifully and it makes you happy when somebody else does something well and you're really glad for them and in fact you find your whole being flowing out to them in attention and love. You really add to their being built up because of your love for them and your attention to them.

The other way, if you go by the law of sin in your members and you try to deal with the old problems of rejection by your own methods, you know you turn in on yourself. You become unhappier the better they are and more and more you bring a sense of gloom to even one person that you're talking to because you're so anxious to draw attention to yourself.

Loved ones, there's a series of events that takes place, once you make that initial choice, that you cannot hold back. There's a chain reaction that you cannot stop. The real heart of the business is, which law do you decide to operate by? Because that law will carry on irrevocably and inevitably to a conclusion that you cannot prevent.

I think, of course, the problem with many of us this morning is it's very plain to us all that it's one thing to know that God has accepted you in your mind but it's another thing entirely to change the habits and the thought patterns of a lifetime to actually operate by that in everyday occurrences and experiences. It just is.

I think there are many of us here this morning who would say, "Pastor, I accept what you say. I know my Father has accepted me. I know I am justified by the blood of Jesus. I know I don't have to be afraid that my Father doesn't like me or that he's going to eliminate me from his plans for the universe at the end of this life, I know that. But it seems that at times we're driven into old Paul's experience, "I found in my members another law at war with this law of God in my mind and it makes me captive to this law of sin. I don't really know what to do about it."

So it is, isn't it, every time we find somebody monopolizing a conversation on some subject that we actually know more about ourselves? Or, every time we hear of somebody that is telling a lie about

us and spreading a rumor that's destroying our reputation? Or, every time we come into the situation in the office or work where somebody is promoted above our heads, when we should have been promoted, every time we come into a situation like that, we find a whole set of attitudes and feelings of jealousy and envy and pride that rise up inside us. We try for all we're worth to hold those things back and God is tapping us on the shoulder and saying, "Yeah, but I accept you. I accept you," and we're saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah but THEY don't, yeah, yeah but THEY don't." He is tapping us, "Yeah, but I accept you. I love you." "Yeah, I know but...", and we're up against a whole thought pattern and series of habit reactions that we've practiced for years.

Now loved ones, that's what needs to be dealt with. That's what Paul is talking about; unless that whole direction in your personality is reversed, you'll keep on behaving the way you used to. Instead of the approval of God coming down to you and inside in your heart and flowing out to others in a real sense of acceptance of them and praise of them, you find your whole personality is working the other way.

You kind of draw acceptance and approval from them and you're trying to get it into your heart somehow. Unless you get that whole direction of your personality reversed, you're always going to be in Paul's situation. "But I find another law at work in my members, at war with the law of God in my mind and making me captive." You're always going to be saying that. So what's God's answer?

Well dear ones, it's this, "I regard you as having died with my Son Jesus. You do the same. I regard you as having died with my Son Jesus. That's why I've let you continue to live in my world, that's why I accept you as my own children -- because I regard you as having died with my Son Jesus. You do the same. You regard yourself as having died with Jesus."

What does that mean for Jesus? Oh, his mother looking up at him and seeing an apparent failure, that's part of one. Loved ones, it means dying to the approval or rejection of your mom or your dad. It means saying, "Lord Jesus, you died that way and I died with you. All right, I accept that. I am really dead. I don't have to keep up some kind of reputation so that my mother can talk to all the neighbors and tell how brilliant I am. I really have been crucified with you. There is no need to defend myself or no need for my mom or dad to boast about me. All right, Lord. When Jesus died, I died to all the possibility to have a brilliant future, a famous career and that's what it is with me."

As far as God's concerned, you died with him but you still keep trying to wiggle out of Jesus and pretend, "Oh no, I have a career that I have to guard and protect and I have a future that I have to ensure." God is saying, "Treat yourself as having died with my Son Jesus. Die to your right to a successful future. Die to your right to a successful career." Don't come back to me and say, "You mean God wants me to be a failure." He never wants you to be. He probably doesn't, but he may want you to be.

Anyway, he is not arguing with you about that. He is just saying, "Would you be willing, if I decide that you're going to go the same way as my Son? If I decide that somewhere in China you're going to die in ignominy and be unknown, would you be willing?" That's part of what it means to die.

You know as he walked down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, certainly he had to give up wondering what his peers thought of him. It didn't look like too much at that moment; there was blood trickling down his face with a mocking crown of thorns on his head. Jesus couldn't afford to be concerned about what his peers thought of him or even his followers, otherwise he'd never have got himself

into that situation that was so degrading.

Loved ones, that's what it means. God is saying, "I regard you as having died with my Son. Now would you accept that? Would you die to the opinion of your peers? Would you die to what all your friends think of you? Would you die to whether they approve of you or whether they recognize you or whether they acknowledge you?"

In other words, loved ones, the way out of that law that makes you captive all the time is to be satisfied with God's approval alone and to die to everybody else's opinion. That's what it means to be crucified with Jesus. That's why God says that that's a freeing experience because after you've said, "All right Lord, I am willing for that", then God fills you with the Holy Spirit of Jesus and you begin to find it going out from you to others, a spirit of love and acceptance and a spirit of continual up-building and encouragement to them. Instead of becoming a miserable creature that is kind of a weight on the fellowship, you become a delight and just a source of fragrance to the family, to the roommate, to the fellowship here, just a miracle that God works.

He simply fills you with the Spirit of his Son when you are willing to take your place with his Son. That's it. That really works. You can see what a beauty it brings in that fellowship. No more tearing each other down to make ourselves feel comfortable but a group of integrated people who care more about their Creator's approval of them than anybody else. It's God's plan for you.

The other way is just sickness and at the end we don't often talk about it but at the end, hell, you know. At the end, it is hell. Hell on this earth and hell after this, really. I don't know if you have ever read Jean-Paul Sartre's play "No Exit". It describes hell. It has just three people in a room with an electric light bulb that never goes out and they just have to pick each other to pieces for eternity. That's what it will be like. Do you see loved ones that it's either one way or the other? It really is -- you can't have a little bit of hell and a little bit of heaven.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we really do see that you meant what you said when you promised to regard Jesus' death as our death. You meant what you said when you promised that you would regard us as having died with him. Oh, Father, we see more and more the need for that in our own lives. Father we are so proud. We're so offended when somebody else is set up above us and we're not so great anyway that we have to be set up above everybody else. There's something inside us Father that just wriggles and wants to make us concerned about ourselves as if we were the only great person in the whole world.

Father we know we aren't but there's something inside us that we can't deal with. You have promised that you'll deal with that, you will deal with that power of sin inside if we are only willing to drink of the same cup as Jesus did, to die to all the recognition to which he died, to die to all the approvals of everybody else, to which He died.

Father, will you help us by your Holy Spirit to tie this down in detail in our own lives so that we can really be freed from this law at war in our members with the law of our minds? Father, we ask you. Trust you Father to make it real for someone this very moment. That someone this very moment would just stop and would turn away from all this slavish desire for other people's approval and would just be satisfied to have your approval and trust you to fill them with your Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus we would trust you.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us tonight and throughout this week. Amen.