

## FINDING THIS LAW

**“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” (Rom 7:21)**

Many of the great lessons of life are obvious yet often overlooked. The Scripture before us is an interesting case in point. The Greek word translated as “find” is “eurisko”. This is a present tense verb and describes action in progress. Paul was in the process of discovering a law. It was an continuing revelation. Every day reinforced the lesson. Every time he wanted to do good he was presented with additional evidence. No matter where he went, as long as he wanted to do good he could not escape from the presence of evil. Doing nothing did not trigger the problem, doing good did.

We should not be surprised by this. When God created the heavens and the earth everything He made was good. Yet, we are told unequivocally that even in Eden, evil was present. Nor was evil in some obscure location. It was in the middle of the garden right by the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). Every time Adam and Eve drew near to the tree of life they also drew near to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus from the very beginning man has been called upon, not only to believe God, but also to exercise his powers of discernment. Even today we are still called upon to make choices. It will continue to be this way until Jesus comes again.

You can open your Bible at random and discover this truth on virtually every page. Take, for example, the prophecies of Jeremiah regarding the people of Judah. The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah and instructed him to warn God’s people not to flee into Egypt. If they did so, they would perish by the sword and by famine (Jer. 42:16). When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the Lord, Azariah, Johanan, and others said to Jeremiah “You are lying” (Jer. 43:2). They insisted that Jeremiah was telling them to remain in Judah so that they would be handed over to the Babylonians. These two messages were exact opposites and the people were called upon to make a clear cut decision. Jeremiah and Azariah could not both be right. Proverbs 14:12 puts it like this: **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but it the end it leads to death”**. Those who followed Azariah learned by experience that this is true.

Sometimes it is not easy to discern the difference between good and evil. The book of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of “training” in this regard: **“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb 5:14)**. Two Greek words are used here that have made their way into modern English. These two words are more easily found in the King James Version which offers a more literal translation. It states that the mature have their “senses exercised” to discern good and evil. The Bible word for “senses:” is “aistheterion”. From this word we get our English word “esthesia” which refers to our capacity to experience feeling and sensation. A more familiar word is “anesthesia” which means to deaden our senses. The word translated as “exercised” is “gegumnasmena” from which we get our English word “gymnasium”. It means to exercise vigorously like an athlete training for competition. The point of the Scripture is obvious - those who exercise themselves unto godliness develop spiritual maturity and the ability to discern between good and evil.

Even babes in Christ and the spiritually immature, however, have an innate and inborn ability to recognize evil. Jesus said that His sheep would know His voice and follow Him, but would never follow a stranger (John 10:4, 5). When the sheep get lost it usually is the result of a deliberate decision to not listen to the voice of the shepherd. Most of us do not sin out of ignorance, but because we make an intentional choice to disobey Christ. Perhaps this is why we need to pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13).

Please forgive one more reference to Greek words. These are found Paul’s inspired advice: **“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” (1Thes 5:21-22)** There is a play on words that is obvious in the Greek text. The word “echo” means to hold. We are to “katecho” or “hold on” to the good and “apecho” or “hold off” or “avoid” every kind of evil. Perhaps today we need to say with Joshua, “. . . Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).