

Romans 7:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

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

Heuriskō ara ton nomon (εὕρισκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, "I find therefore the principle/law") uses nomos (νόμος) not of Mosaic law but as "principle" or "fixed pattern"—the predictable reality of sanctification's warfare. Parakeitai moi (παράκειται μοι, "is present with/beside me") depicts evil as a constant companion, not occasional visitor.

When I would do good, evil is present—thelonti emoi poiein to kalon (θέλοντί μοι ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, "to me willing to do good"). The temporal construction emphasizes simultaneity: precisely when believers resolve to obey, opposition arises. This isn't pessimism but realism. Understanding this 'law' (pattern) prevents shock and discouragement when spiritual resolve meets resistance. The Christian life isn't automatic virtue but Spirit-enabled warfare.

Historical Context

Paul distills his personal experience into universal principle: sanctification means battle, not effortless progress. This prepares believers for realistic expectations. Medieval monastics fled temptation through seclusion; Puritans emphasized 'mortification of sin' through vigorous, grace-dependent warfare. Paul sides with warfare, not escape or passivity.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing this as a predictable 'law' (pattern) help you not be surprised or discouraged by temptation's presence?
2. Where do you most frequently experience evil's 'presence' precisely when you're resolved to do good?
3. How might understanding this principle change your expectations for Christian growth from 'eventual ease' to 'empowered warfare'?

Interlinear Text

Εὕρισκω	ἄρα	τὸν	νόμον	τῷ	θέλοντι	ἐμοὶ	ποιεῖν	τὸ
I find G2147	then G686	G3588	a law G3551	G3588	would G2309	when I G1698	do G4160	G3588
καλὸν ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται·								
good G2570	that G3754	when I G1698	G3588	evil G2556	is present G3873			

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 2:17 (Parallel theme): Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

Psalms 119:133 (Word): Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

Romans 8:2 (Word): For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 6:12 (Parallel theme): Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Romans 6:14 (Word): For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 7:23 (Word): 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.

Hebrews 4:15 (Parallel theme): For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Psalms 119:37 (Parallel theme): Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

2 Peter 2:19 (Parallel theme): While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

John 8:34 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.