

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – The Road to Faith – 5-11 August 2017

Christ purchased us with His blood and gives us His faith to overcome sin. “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Galatians 3:22). He who knows that he is a sinner is in the way to acknowledge it; and “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). No one hates the man who has saved his life by pointing out to him an unknown peril; on the contrary, such an one is regarded as a friend, and is always remembered with gratitude. Even so will the law be regarded by the one who has been prompted by its warning voice to flee from the wrath to come – and he will ever say, “I hate vain thoughts, but Thy law do I love” (Psalm 119:113). The law is our friend.

All Shut Up in Prison – Note the similarity between verses 8 and 22 of the third chapter of Galatians. “The Scripture hath concluded [that is, shut up] all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” We see that the Gospel is preached by the same thing – the Scripture – that shuts men up under sin. The word “conclude” means literally “shut up,” just as is given in verse 23. Of course, a person who is shut up by the law is in prison. In governments of men, a criminal is shut up as soon as the law can get hold of him; God’s law is everywhere present, and always active, and, therefore, the instant a man sins he is shut up. This is the condition of all the world, “for all have sinned,” and “there is none righteous, no, not one.”

Under the Law – Before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed (Galatians 3:23). We know that whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23); therefore, to be under the law is identical with being under sin. We are under the law solely because we are under sin. What for? – “That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Galatians 3:22). “Before faith came, we were kept under the law.” Thus we see that those who are shut up under sin are those who are not of faith. But until faith comes, we are kept shut up under the law. Now since we are under the law until faith comes, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin, it is evident that to be under the law means to be under sin. Those who are under the law, therefore, are those who are transgressing the law.

The Law a Jailer – “Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). This same verse in the English Revised Version is rendered as: “So that the law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24 ERV). Notice the word used in the ERV is “tutor” in the place of “schoolmaster.” This is better, but the sense is still better conveyed by the word that is used in some European languages translations, which signifies “master of a house of correction.” The single word in English language corresponding to it would be jailer. The Greek word is the word which transliterated is “pedagog.” The word has come to be used as meaning “schoolmaster” in the KJV, although the Greek word has not at all the idea of a schoolmaster. “Taskmaster” would be better. The idea here is rather that of a guard who accompanies a prisoner who is allowed to walk about outside the prison walls. The prisoner, although nominally at large, is really deprived of his liberty just the same as though he were actually in a prison cell. But without stopping longer over words, we have the fact stated that all who do not believe are “under sin,” “shut up” “under the law,” and that, therefore, the law acts as their jailer. It is that that shuts them in, and will not let them off; the guilty cannot escape in their guilt. God is merciful and gracious, but He will not clear the guilty (Exodus 34:6-7) – that is, God will not lie, by calling evil good.

Only One Door – Christ says, “I am the door” (John 10:7-9). He is also the sheepfold and the Shepherd. Men fancy that when they are outside the fold they are free, and that to come into the fold would mean a curtailing of their liberty; but it is exactly the reverse. Outside of Christ is bondage; in Him alone is there freedom. Outside of Christ, the man is in prison, “holden with the cords of his sins” (Proverbs 5:22). “The strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). It is the law that declares him to be a sinner, and makes him conscious of his condition. “By the law is the knowledge of sin;” and “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Romans 3:20; 5:13). The law really forms the sinner’s prison walls. They close in on him, making him feel uncomfortable, oppressing him with a sense of sin, as though they would press his life out. In vain he makes frantic efforts to escape his prison. Those commandments stand as firm as the everlasting hills.

Whichever way he turns he finds a commandment which says to him, 'You can find no freedom by me, for you have sinned.' If he seeks to make friends with the law, and promises to keep it, he is no better off, for his sin still remains. The law goads him and drives him to the only way of escape – "the promise by faith of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:22). If he accepts the preaching of the law, in Christ he is made "free indeed," for in Christ he is made the righteousness of God.

The Law Preaches the Gospel – 'But,' says one, 'the law says nothing of Christ.' No; but all creation does speak of Christ, proclaiming the power of His salvation. We have seen that the cross of Christ, "Christ and Him crucified," is to be seen in every leaf of the forest, and, indeed, in everything that exists. Not only so, but every fiber of man's being cries out for Christ. Men do not realise it, but Christ is "the Desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7). It is He alone that "satisfies the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16). Only in Him can relief be found for the world's unrest and longing. Now since Christ, in whom is peace, "for He is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14), is seeking the weary and heavy-laden, and calling them to Himself, and every man has longings that nothing else in the world can satisfy, it is evident that if the man is awakened by the law to keener consciousness of his condition, and the law continues goading him, giving him no rest, and shutting up every other way of escape, the man must at last find the Door of Safety, for it always stands open. In Christ alone will the sinner find release from the lash of the law, for in Christ the righteousness of the law is fulfilled, and by Him it is fulfilled in us (Romans 8:4).

When faith comes we are no longer under the jailor, no longer in prison. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). No longer slaves in chains, to be cast out, but sons, to be received into the Father's presence as rightful members of the family, and heirs of all that He possesses. Faith is freedom, for the Spirit is given to all that believe (John 7:39); Ephesians 1:13), and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

When Does Faith Come? – Strangely enough, many have supposed that there was a definite time fixed for faith to come. This passage has been 'interpreted' to mean that men were under the law until a certain time in the history of the world, and that at that time faith came, and then they were henceforth free from the law. The coming of faith they make synonymous with the manifestation of Christ on earth. We cannot say that anybody ever thought so, for such an 'interpretation' indicates utter absence of thought about the matter. It would make men to be saved in bulk, regardless of any concurrence on their part. It would have it that up to a certain time all were in bondage under the law, and that from that time henceforth all were free from sin. A man's salvation would, therefore, depend simply on the accident of birth. If he lived before a certain time, he would be lost; if after, he would be saved. Such an absurdity need not take more of our time than the statement of it. No one can seriously *think* of the idea that the apostle is here speaking of a fixed, definite point of time in the history of the world, dividing between two so-called 'dispensations,' without at once abandoning it. When, then, does faith come? – "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). It comes "now," today." Whenever a man receives the Word of God, which brings with it the fullness of the law, and no longer fights against it, but yields to it, then faith comes to him. Read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and you will see that faith came from the beginning. Since the days of Abel, men have found freedom by faith. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7, 15).

How Great Is This Freedom? – What is freedom that comes by faith? That is easily settled by a few texts of Scripture. Christ dwells in the heart by faith, and makes one comprehend "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18-19). This is the 'large place' in which Christ causes the believer to walk at liberty. The whole universe is His. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Samuel 2:8). "For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary, from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death" (Psalm 102:19-20). "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Ephesians 2:4-7; 1:20-21). This is "the glorious liberty of the children of God," liberty to which the law shuts us up, and towards which it drives us. So emphatically is it true that the law is not against the promise.