

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – The “Change” of the Law – 5-11 May 2018

Christ would have us know that the divine laws are still binding even though the man of sin has sought to change times and laws. “And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hands until a time and times and the dividing of time” (Daniel 7:25).

Sunday: The Promise – Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). This is the highest point of the epistle to the Romans. To appreciate this promise, we look into the seventh chapter that presents to us the deplorable condition of the man who has been awakened by the law to a sense of his condition, bound to sin by cords that can be loosened only by death. Chapter seven closes with a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who alone can set us free from the body of death, which brings us to chapter eight on the state of no condemnation. “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; 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” (Romans 7:21-23). All this is written to them that know the law. It is not addressed to the heathen who have not the law, but to those who profess to know God. While knowing the law, we are united in marriage to sin. This sin is in our flesh, since they who are married are one flesh. It is the law that witnesses to the fact that we are sinners, and that will not grant us any escape from it. But we are slaves. Whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin (John 8:34). Therefore it is that the law that will not let us be anything but what we are, it is really holding us in bondage. While we are in that condition, it is not to us a law of liberty.

We are joined in marriage to sin. But sin has in it death; for “the sting of death is sin.” Sin is that with which death kills us. Therefore the body of sin, to which we are joined when in the flesh, is but a body of death. What a terrible condition! Joined in such close union that we are one flesh with that which is in itself death. A living death! And “the strength of sin is the law.” The law witnesses to our union, and thus holds us in that bondage of death. If there were no hope of escape, we might curse the law for not allowing us to die in ignorance. But although the law seems to be pitiless, it is nevertheless our best friend. It holds us to a sense of the dreadfulness of our bondage until in anguish we cry out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” We must be delivered or perish. A pagan proverb says: ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ The truth is that God helps those who cannot help themselves: “I was brought low, and He helped me” (Psalm 116:6). “When ye were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). His “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). He makes men strong out of their weakness (Hebrews 11:34). “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength” (Isaiah 40:29). He multiplies force to them that are powerless. When Paul says, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”, he quickly adds, “for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12, 13). No one ever cries in vain for help. When the sinner’s cry goes up for help, the Deliverer is at hand. As sin works death in us by all power of the law, we may exclaim, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). “There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Romans 11:26). “Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

“So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25). That is while in the condition described in the preceding verses. In purpose he serves the law of God, but in actual practice he serves the law of sin. As described in another place, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17). It is not a state of actual service to God, because Paul later says, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). It is a state from which one should well pray to be delivered, so that he can serve the Lord not merely with the mind, but with his whole being. “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Monday: The Law and Sin – In Romans 7:1-7 we have the relation which we by nature sustain to sin, and which by grace we afterwards sustain to Christ, represented under a figure of marriage to a first and second husband. The union with the second husband cannot take place while the first husband is living; and in this case the marriage is so perfect, the two parties being literally one flesh and blood, that one cannot die without the other; therefore we must needs die with sin, before

we can be separated from it. But we die in Christ, and as He lives, although He was dead, we also live with Him. But in His life there is no sin, and so the body of sin is destroyed, while we are raised. Thus in death we are separated from the first husband, sin, and united to the second husband, Christ. In Romans 7:8-25 the apostle Paul has pictured the struggle with the sin that has become distasteful. It is really an enlargement of that which has been presented in the first part.

The law without Christ is death. The law in Christ is life. His life is the law of God; for out of the heart are the issues of life, and the law of life is in His heart. The law of sin and death works in our members. But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ gives us freedom from this. It is the life in Christ that does this. It does not give us freedom from obedience to the law, for we had that before, and it was bondage, and not freedom. What He gives us freedom from is the transgression of the law.

This is made very plain in Romans 8:3-4. God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin," "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." There is no fault to be found with it but with us, because we have transgressed it. Christ is not to change the law in any particular, but to change us in every particular. It is to put the law into our hearts in perfection, in place of the marred and broken copy.

The law is strong enough to condemn, but it is weak, even powerless, with respect to what man needs namely, salvation. It was and is "weak through the flesh." The law is good, and holy, and just, but man has no strength to perform it. Just as an axe may be of good steel, and very sharp, yet unable to cut down a tree because the arm that has hold of it has no strength, so the law of God could not perform itself. It set forth man's duty; it remained for him to do it. But he could not, and therefore Christ came to do it in him. What the law could not do, God did for us by His Son.

Tuesday: From Sabbath to Sunday? – Christ never changed the Sabbath to Sunday; none of the commonly quoted texts (John 20:19-23; Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4) change the Sabbath!

Wednesday: The Seventh Day in the New Testament – Throughout the New Testament, we find that the Jews kept the seventh day Sabbath, Christ and His disciples kept the Sabbath, and the Sabbath was kept by the apostles after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:12-13).

Thursday: The Attempted Change of the Sabbath – "And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws" (Daniel 7:25). As is well known, this language has unmistakable reference to the papacy, which put to death millions of martyrs during the Dark Ages, of which the chief representative is the pope.

The greatness of the Lord is shown by the power of His word. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth ... For He spake, and it was; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalms 33:6, 9). "Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name" (Psalms 138:2). But the papacy assumes the authority to change the word of the Lord. That law which He spake with His own voice from the flaming, quaking summit of Mt Sinai, while the whole earth shook, and the Israelites removed in terror afar off, the papacy has thought to change, according to the prediction of Daniel 7:25. She has stricken out the second commandment, which forbids the worship of images, and made the fourth commandment to apply to the first day of the week instead of the seventh. The papacy boasts of having changed the Sabbath to Sunday, as a mark of her authority. Of course no power can make any real change in the law of God, but this power has made people think she has changed it; and by claiming the authority to change the word of the Lord, which is magnified above all His name, she has magnified herself above God.

The papacy is rapidly extending her influence throughout the world. Soon, the forces of the world and of the worldly churches will be arrayed against the saints. The Lord will rise to save His people more wonderfully than times of ancient Israel from Egypt: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither He had driven them" (Jeremiah 16:14-15). The second gathering of the true Israel will be with a greater manifestation of Lord's power than was the first. The Psalmist speaks of this, saying, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad" (Psalms 126:1-3). The heathen are all those who know not the Lord; and when the Lord with His omnipotent power delivers His people from all their enemies, the heathen will know and say that the Lord hath done great things for them. Those who honour God He will honour. Those who honour God are those who trust in Him and observe His Sabbath and keep His commandments by having Christ in their hearts by faith. And when the Lord arises to vindicate His name these will say, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever ... To Him who alone doeth great wonders; for His mercy endureth for ever" (Psalms 136:1-4).