

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – Who is the man of Romans 7? – 18-24 November 2017

Christ has delivered us from the condemnation of the law. Paul says, “Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6). The seventh chapter of Romans is really all contained in the sixth. He who understands the sixth chapter will have no difficulty with the seventh. Let us therefore, before beginning with the seventh chapter, recall briefly the points brought out in the last few lessons. By Christ’s obedience we are made righteous. This is because His life is now given to us, and He lives in us. The obedience of Christ which saves us is His present obedience in us. And the obedience is to the law. This union with Christ we get by being crucified with Him. In that death the body of sin is destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, or, in other words, that we should no more transgress the law. So closely are we identified with sin, it being our very life, that it cannot be destroyed without our dying. But in Christ there is no sin, so that while we have a resurrection with Him, sin remains dead. So, being raised with Him, we live with Him, a thing that was formerly impossible on account of sin; sin cannot dwell with Him. The seventh chapter present 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. It closes with a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who alone can set us free from the body of death.

Romans 7:1-7 is illustration of the law of marriage, which is simple to understand. The law says of married man and woman, “they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). It is adultery for either one to be married to another while the other is living. The law will not sanction such a union. For some reasons, Paul illustrates by citing only the case of a woman leaving her husband. The law unites them. That law holds the woman to the man as long as he lives. If while her husband lives she shall be united to another man, she will find herself under the condemnation of the law. But if her husband dies, she may be united to another, and be perfectly free from any condemnation. She is then “free from that law,” although the law has not changed in one particular. Least of all has it been abolished; for the same law that bound her to the first husband and which condemned her for uniting with another in his lifetime, now unites her to another and binds her to him as closely as it did to the first. If we hold to this simple illustration, we shall have no difficulty with what follows.

As in the illustration there are four subjects, the law, the woman, the first husband, and the second husband so also in the application. We are represented as the woman. This is clear from the statement that we are “married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead,” which is Christ. He is the second husband. The first husband is indicated in verse 5: “When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” Death is the fruit of sin. The first husband, therefore, was the flesh, or ‘the body of sin.’

The law of marriage is that the two parties to it “shall be one flesh.” How is it in this case? The first husband is the flesh, the body of sin. Well, we were truly one flesh with that. We were by nature perfectly united to sin. It was our life. It controlled us. Whatever sin devised, that we did. We might have done it unwillingly at times, but we did it nevertheless. Sin reigned in our mortal bodies, so that we obeyed it in the lusts thereof. Whatever sin wished, was law to us. We were one flesh.

There comes a time in our experience when we wish to be free from sin. It is when we see something of the beauty of holiness of Christ. With some people the desire is only occasional; with others it is more constant. Whether they recognise the fact or not, it is Christ appealing to them to forsake sin, and to be joined to Him, to live with Him. And so they endeavor to effect a separation. But sin will not consent. In spite of all that we can do, it still clings to us. We are “one flesh,” and it is a union for life since it is a union of our life to sin. There is no divorce in that marriage with sin.

There is no hope of separation from sin except by death. No matter how much we may desire to be united to Christ, it cannot be done while we are joined to sin; for the law will not sanction such a union, and Christ will not enter into any union that is not lawful. If we could only get sin to die, we should be free, but it will not die. There is only one way for us to be freed from the hateful union, and that is for us to die. If we wish freedom so much that we are willing to be crucified, then it may be done. In death separation is effected; it is by the body of Christ that “we” become dead. We are crucified with Him. The body of sin is also crucified. While the body of sin is destroyed, we have a resurrection in Christ. The same law that frees us from the first husband, unites us to the second.

Now we see how it is that we are dead to the law. We died in Christ, and were raised in Him. But “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). Now we may be united to Christ, and the law will witness to the union, and sanction it. For not only is the first husband dead, but we also died, so that, although alive, we are not the same creature that we were before. “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). We are

one. The same law that formerly declared us to be sinners now binds us to Christ. Now that the marriage with Christ has been effected, we “serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6). In marriage, the woman is to be subject to the husband. So when we were united to sin, we were in all things subject to sin. For a time it was willing service; but when we saw the Lord, and were drawn to Him, the service to sin became irksome. We tried to keep the Lord’s law, but were bound, and could not. But now we are set free. Sin no longer restrains us, and our service is freedom. We gladly render to Christ all the service that the law requires of us. We render this service because of the perfect union between us. His life is ours, since we were raised only by the power of His life. Therefore our obedience is simply His loyalty and faithfulness in us.

In Romans 7:1-7 we have had the relation which we by nature sustain to sin, and which by grace we afterwards sustain to Christ, represented under the 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 and so we summarize.

“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.” 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.” That is, of course, 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).