

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12

VOLUME 12.

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, FIFTH-DAY, JUNE 17, 1886.

NUMBER 23.

"BRIEF COMMENTS ON ROMANS 7 - No. 1." (Page 359)

BY E.J.WAGGONER

(Faithfully copied from the original article by <https://www.end-times-prophecy.org>)

THE seventh chapter of Romans may be said to be Rom.6:14 expanded. It is a masterly argument for the holiness and perpetuity of the law, and is all the stronger because the nature or the perpetuity of the law is not the subject under discussion. The apostle is showing, in the sixth and seventh chapters, what true Christian life is, and how one is brought to be a Christian. The references to the law are, we may say, incidental, and show how impossible it is to ignore the law when speaking of Christian experience. We shall give this chapter a brief exposition, dwelling only on the portions that are often misunderstood by the casual reader.

We have already shown from Rom.6:14; Gal.5:18-23; 4:4,5; and 4:21-31, that "under the law" indicates a condition of condemnation on account of sin; and that persons are freed from the law, or redeemed from under the law, only through faith in Christ, by which they are thenceforth enabled to comply with its just demands. In this chapter the apostle carries out the figure of life and death, introduced in the sixth chapter, representing the one still under the condemnation of the law as alive, and the justified one as being dead. The relations of the man to his sins, to the law, and to Christ, are first indicated, by an illustration, which we quote:—

"Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath a husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." Rom.7:1-3.

In this illustration we have four terms, namely, a woman, her first husband, her second husband, and the law. The law says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and thus defines marriage as the union of one woman and one man. Such a union the law sanctions. Not only does the law sanction such a union, but it binds the parties during life. While her husband lives, the law binds the woman to him; but when the husband dies, then of course the union is at an end. Now, says the apostle, she may be married to another man, and she will be no adulteress, because she is freed from the law that bound her to her first husband. How was she freed from that law? By the death of her husband, which rendered further union impossible. But did the law itself change in any particular? Not in the least; it performs the same office that it did before. The law binds the woman to the second husband just the same as it did to the first; and if while her second husband lives she should be married to a third, the law will condemn her as an adulteress just the same as it would if she had married her second husband while her first husband was living. Thus we see that the law is the one thing that remains unchanged. Now read the application:—

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For 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. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead [or, "being dead to that"] wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Rom. 7:4-6.

Here, as in the illustration, we have four parties, namely, the man, his sins, Christ, and the law. In the first place, the man is united to his sins. That is when he is "in the flesh," under the law (Gal. 5:17,18), and unable to please God. Rom.8:7. Here is a union in which the law holds him fast. "For 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." The apostle says that the sins were "by the law." This is the same as "where no law is there is no transgression." If no law existed, there could be no such thing as sin, and therefore Paul says the motions of sins were by the law. "The strength of sin is the law." Now we say that the law holds the man fast in this union with sin. That does not mean that the law delights to have the man a sinner; nothing of the kind. The law has no choice in the matter. By his own voluntary action the man has transgressed the law and thereby become a sinner, and now the law can do nothing else than declare him to be such. If the man, through fear of the consequences of his sins, or for any other reason, wishes to escape from this union, he cannot. The law still reiterates, "You are a sinner." If the law could die, or could be made void, then the man would at once be free; but that cannot be.

There is, however, a way by which the man may be freed from the galling bondage to sin, if he feels it to be a galling bondage, and that is through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. He may be "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Rom.3:24, 25. When "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ," has been imputed to the man, the law no longer calls him a sinner. He is justified, freed from the body of sin.

But this freedom from sin, and consequent deliverance from the condemnation of the law, has been accomplished only through Christ. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new. And all things are of God." 2 Cor. 5:17,18. Now the man is united to Christ, and by the same law which before held him to be a sinner. While he was in the flesh, the law would not for a moment allow that he was righteous; now that he is in Christ, the same law witnesses to his righteousness. The law remains the same; the man only has changed.

Notice the parallel between the illustration and the application. The law binds the woman to her husband. She cannot escape from that union, even though it be disagreeable to her. But the husband dies, and she is a free woman, and may legally be married to another man. So a man is united to sin, and the law, true to itself, holds him to that account. But by Christ the body of sin is destroyed; and now the man, being free from sin, is united to Christ, and the law sanctions the union. As the woman cannot legally be united to two husbands at the same time, so no person can be united at the same time both to his sins and to Christ. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Matt. 6:24. Union with Christ while we are in sin is impossible; and if, while professing Christianity, a person still clings to sin, he is guilty of spiritual adultery. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" James 4:4. The law sanctions no such union as that.

The reader may, however, think that he detects a flaw in our reasoning, because in the application the apostle tells us that we have to die in order to become united to Christ. This, he will say, is not an exact parallel to the case of the woman whose husband dies that she may be joined to another. The difficulty is only apparent, not real. The parallel is as close as it is possible for any parallel to be. In the illustration the husband dies, and thus the woman may be united to another. Now if you should suppose a case in which the woman died with her first husband, and then had a resurrection, and was thus united to another, we have an exact parallel to the case of the sinner being freed from sin and united to Christ. The case is of sufficient importance to warrant a more detailed investigation. The following verses contain the whole argument:—

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into, death; that like as Christ was raised

up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." Rom.6:1-7.

"The wages of sin is death." Rom. 6:23. The law demands the death of every sinner. But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3 :16. Christ "bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." 1 Peter 2:24. By baptism we show our belief in the death and resurrection of Christ, and our acceptance of him as a propitiation for our sins. Indeed, by baptism we are joined to Christ: "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Gal. 3:27. But we are baptized into Christ, by being "baptized into his death." "We are buried with him by baptism into death." And thus it is that we receive the penalty of the law; not in person, but in figure. Christ has suffered for sin; and if we are "in him," we also are accounted as having received the penalty. And since it is by baptism that we become united to him, we become dead to the law and united to Christ at the same time.

"Dead to the law." What does the apostle mean by that expression? Simply that we have (in Christ) received the penalty of the law, and that it now regards us as dead. To illustrate: A man guilty of stealing is by the law sentenced to a term of years in the penitentiary. He serves his sentence, and then is set at liberty. Now he has no fear of the law. He may go boldly into the court-room, and even into the prison; for he knows that, having received the penalty for his crime, the law will not molest him. Now carry the illustration a little further: A man commits murder and is sentenced to death. When he has been executed, the law is satisfied. Suppose now that it were possible for the man to come to life again. Having received the full penalty of the law, he is, so far as his past offense is concerned, thenceforth considered by the law as a dead man. So with the sinner's relation to the law of God. It condemned him to death. In Christ he received the death penalty, and now that he is raised to walk in newness of life, the law considers him to be a dead man. He is now a new man; the man who sinned is dead, and the man who takes his place shuns those things which the former man did, and therefore the law declares him to be righteous. In harmony with the above quotation and explanation are the following words:—

"If ye then be risen with Christ; seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Col. 3:1-3.

Read also the following statement by the same apostle: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

Now why was it necessary for us to go through this process of dying and being raised to new life? Because we had upon us a burden of sin from which we could not otherwise be free. Did we get rid of this body of sin by that means? Yes; hear the apostle: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." The body of sin was the first husband. We became disgusted with that union, and desired to become united to Christ, but could not as long as the first husband was living; and in order for that husband to die, we ourselves had to die. For the moment, both are dead; then we are raised to be henceforth joined to Christ in a new life, because the first husband, the old man, the body of sin, remains dead. So long as that body of sin remains dead, we, although alive in Christ, are dead in the eyes of the law. But if at any time the old man should come to life by our going back to our old sins, that moment the law would condemn us as adulterers.