

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

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“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lust thereof.” Rom. 6:12.

TWO things are set forth in the Scriptures by the term “sin.” It is said in one place to be “the transgression of the law” (2 John 3:4), while in the text first quoted it is spoken of as a power that rules in us; for to reign is to rule, or control. Are the two the same, and, if not, what relation do they bear to each other?

This ruling power is said in Rom. 7:20 to be “indwelling sin.” “Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” The same expression is also used in verse 17. The apostle calls it the law of evil in verse 21, where he says, “I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.” He speaks of it under other names, as we shall find in carefully studying this and the following chapter.

As the *acts* of transgression cannot be said to be that *indwelling sin*, but simply the result of it, bearing the same relation to it as that of the fruit to the tree, we are firm in the faith that by the declarations concerning reigning sin, law of evil, “sin that dwelleth in me,” etc., Paul signified the carnal nature,—the innate depravity received as a lamentable inheritance by every soul born upon this earth from our common father Adam. He could not transmit to his posterity that which he did not himself possess; and therefore we ask, with anxious concern, How came the father of the race by this deep-seated principle of rebellion against God and insubordination to his holy law, which he has bequeathed as a sad and wretched legacy to all the human family? Did the Creator put it in him when he came from his molding hand? We cannot believe it; for we read “that God hath made man upright” (Eccl. 7:29); and “so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Gen. 1:27.

This language, beyond a doubt, conveys the idea that man was made in the moral as well as the physical image of his Creator. He came from that creating hand a pure and holy being, with the law of God in his heart; he was in perfect union with his Maker, and rejoiced to do his will; he communed with the Lord as friend with friend, and was not afraid.

Had our first parents continued in this estate, their children and their children's children would, like them, have been pure and holy; and earth, filled with such people, would have been a happy place, like heaven; man would have walked with God, and gloried in his smiles and favor. But the tempter came, and man sinned against his Creator, and became the servant of the evil one. By his disobedience Adam sold himself and all his posterity bond-servants to Satan; and as he yielded himself servant to the tempter (for "to whom ye yield yourselves to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey" (Rom. 6:16), his new master planted in him that carnal nature which is a counterpart and copy of his own. Our Heavenly Father never planted it in man. Matt. 15:13. It was the work of the Devil himself, thus fastening on all the human family his yoke of bondage. "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." 2 Peter 2:19.

We can now see the force of the apostle's words. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Rom. 5:19. "But I am carnal, sold under sin." Rom. 7:14. This yoke of carnality, this bondage of sin, was brought upon us by Satan, through the disobedience of Adam; and under it we are captives in unwilling servitude, utterly incapable of accomplishing the right, even when we know and desire to do it. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in men." Rom. 7:18-20. Language could no more thrillingly describe the helpless condition—the abject slavery—to which all the human race are reduced.

Our minds may be enlightened upon the law of God; but be our convictions what they may, be our determinations what they will, we are powerless to do the good, and please God. "For 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." Gal. 5:17. "So then they that are in the flesh *cannot please God*." Rom. 8:8. "*In the flesh*" is but another term by which the natural, sinful state entailed upon us is made known; and in Rom. 8:3, it is called "*sin in the flesh*."

The same is brought to view as the "old man" (Rom. 6:6), and is spoken of as "the old man with his deeds." Col. 8:9. In the latter text a

plain distinction is made between the principle of sin in the flesh and the personal transgressions which it causes its possessor to commit. Let us search carefully to find other names by which this evil in man is called.

The word “law” is used twenty-three times in Romans 7. Beyond all question, the law of God is mentioned eleven times out of the number. But it is equally evident that something else is also brought to view by that word; and it is manifestly an error to apply it in every case, as some have done, to the law of ten commandments. Two things, at least, are meant by it; both are brought close together in the chapter, and once in the same verse. Its meaning in all cases where it is not beyond doubt, must and can be gained by keeping in mind the principles to which it is applied in those instances where there is no room for doubt. “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” Verse 22. No uncertainty can possibly exist as to its meaning here. It is immediately added: “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.” Verse 23. By the “law of my mind” he doubtless means the law of God; and by the “law of sin which is in my members,” no question can reasonably arise but that he brings to view that inherent enmity of the carnal heart against God which compels us to violate his holy law.

The same is clearly revealed in verse 25, where it is said: “So then with the mind the *law of sin*.” Yes, *I myself*, can do something! I can have my mind enlightened by the law of God; can see by its light my personal guilt, and be made sensible of the presence and power of reigning sin within; can form resolutions to live a life of obedience to the commandments of the Lord, and struggle to break the bands of the law of sin in my members, and its yoke from off my neck,—yes, struggle in vain, till I cry in agony, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Rom. 7:24.

The body of death is but another name for the carnal nature born in us. We are bound to it by bands we can of ourselves never dissolve. Under it, we are in wretched captivity, and unmercifully bruised. Is our case hopeless? Is there no way of escape? Will no ray of light spring up to us who sit in darkness and in this shadow of death? The apostle gives thanks to God that he will deliver him through Christ; and the Saviour himself said that the Lord had sent him “to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Luke 4:18. “The law of sin” which he

served with his flesh, refers to the same principle of inwrought rebellion toward God.

These texts show that by the word “law” in this chapter, the apostle does not always mean the *law of ten commandments*. In the first six verses it is found eight times; and it is very important, and cannot but be of the deepest interest, to determine the sense in which it is used. It must be constantly borne in mind that the individual and his condition are represented by two persons; while the person himself is sometimes taken for his condition. In verse 1, the term “law” is used twice, and in such a way that it may apply to any law under which a man may live. But what law the apostle had in mind must be determined from texts immediately following: “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.” Verses 2, 3.

It is here called “*the law of her husband*,” and “that law.” If it can be definitely determined what is represented by the first husband, then it will be readily seen to what he refers. The new husband is Christ. “That ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.” Verse 4. If God the Father is the first husband, and our union with him must be dissolved by his dying before we can be married to Christ, then the “law of her husband” is the law of God, and we are free from “that law.” Did our union with the Father bring forth fruit unto death? such fruit as is named in Gal. 5:19-21?—Never. The idea is revolting. And it is outraging both the illustration and the language of Paul to call it the law of God. But who is the first husband, that must die before we can be married to the second? We answer, The carnal nature, the sin in the flesh, called the old man. “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 free from sin.” Rom. 6:6, 7.

Take these words in connection with Rom. 7:2, 3, and language could scarcely be plainer as to what constitutes the first husband; and the law of the husband is the *law of sin* in our members. And this is confirmed by verse 5. “For when we were in the flesh, the motions [margin *passions*] of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” The very existence of the

sinful passions in us are by the law,—not the law of God, for that never created them there,—but the law of sin, which is the very fountain-source of them all, and the corrupt tree which cannot bring forth good fruit. Matt. 7:18. It is the sin that reigns in our mortal bodies, and compels us to yield our members to it to do iniquity. Rom. 6:19.

Our text exhorts us not to let sin reign in us that we should obey it. But the apostle who wrote the words soon tells us that, in his experience which is true of every man's, he could not in himself do otherwise. And while we are made to feel the helplessness of our own powers, the words of exhortation or command contain the assurance that there is some way, some means, by which we may be delivered from the cruel rule of this inbred tyrant, sin. The apostle gives thanksgiving to God for deliverance through Christ. Rom. 7:25. And the angel of the Lord said unto Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matt. 1:21.

Christ is the power of salvation raised up for us in the house of David, that God may perform unto us the oath of his mercy spoken of by all the holy prophets: "That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us;" and "that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." Luke 1:71, 74, 75. "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling." 2 Tim. 1:9. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Col. 1:13. This deliverance is none other than the death of the first husband, that we may be united to Christ. It is the crucifixion of the old man, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no more serve sin; for he that is dead is freed from sin." Rom. 6:7.

"But now we are delivered from the law [of sin in the flesh] that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Rom. 7:6. This text is exactly parallel to Rom. 8:2, 4. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. . . . That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

The law from which we have deliverance (Rom. 7:6), is not the law of God, but the law of sin and death; and no person can acceptably serve God, and keep his holy law in the spirit of it, till he has been

thus delivered. Let no man call the law in Rom. 7:6 the *law of God*; and then in that bondage of carnality, glorying in its violation, cry, “We are *delivered* to do all these abominations?” Jer. 7:10.

The deliverance is not to be delivered from the obligation to obey it, but from the power that compels us to disobey it. Being made free from the law of sin and death, we are thereby prepared to keep the just and holy law as will please God. We have found that *sin* pertains to two things: First, the personal violations of the law of God; and, second, the principle of rebellion, or law of sin, born in every man. Even so conversion is composed of two great parts; is contained in two great steps. First, the forgiveness of all personal transgressions of the law of God;—this is on full and fervent repentance;—and, second, the complete cleansing from the power that compelled us to transgress.

The first places us before the law in the exact condition in which we were born,—with no personal guilt,—and is called justification. The second restores us to the moral image of Christ (see Col. 3:10; Rom. 8:29; 2 Peter 1:4; Heb. 2:11; Eph. 4: 23, 24, etc., etc.), and is called “*being born again*.” 1 Peter 1:23; John 3:3. Both parts of this mighty work are brought to view in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins; he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” To this very thing we believe Christ referred when he said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36),—free from both the guilt and from the power of sin. It is illustrated in the work of John the Baptist and of Christ. John came and preached, saying, “Repent ye.” The people came and confessed their sins. Matt. 3:2, 6. This brought forgiveness, or justification. In doing this, he only laid the axe at the root of the tree, saying that every tree that did not bring forth good fruit must be hewn down; and then, referring to Christ, who was to follow his work, he said, “But he that cometh after me is mightier than I.” Matt. 3:11. By this, he indicated that Christ would cut the tree up by the roots, that it should no more bear fruit unto death. Jesus himself said, “Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” Matt. 15:13.

John’s work only prepared the way of the Lord. Matt. 3:3. Christ’s work was to take away the carnal nature, and implant his own divine nature, that those who received this great work wrought in them might “be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” Isa. 61:3. The reign of sin is now past; grace now

reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. Rom. 5:21. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Rom. 6:22. How much and how wonderfully does this chosen vessel of the Lord dwell upon "being made free from sin," "from the law of sin," from "sin in the flesh," that we might yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness. Rom. 6:19.

What a hope is set before us, and what liberty in Christ for all the children of God! We found ourselves with the evil nature, and were not responsible for it. "The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly." Rom. 8:20. We had no choice in the matter. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Rom. 5:19. "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Rom. 8:21.

This is what it is to be converted. Acts 3:19. This is what it is to be made a new creature in Christ. 2 Cor. 5:17. This is what it is to have the law of God written in the heart. Heb. 8:10. And this is what it is to be made brother of Christ. Heb. 2:11. "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." This is regeneration, and and this it is to be born of the Spirit, and become sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. In this glorious liberty his children will shine as lights in the world, for Christ has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Then in the spiritual house will they be living stones like unto the great living stone which is the head of the corner. 1 Peter 2:1-9. Then will be accomplished the purpose of God toward us in Christ, "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Eph. 1:4.

The Apostle Peter exhorts us by this fact. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." 1 Peter 4:1, 2. He who arms himself with the same mind as Christ, will not, even while remaining in the flesh, live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of the flesh; because although Christ suffered in the flesh, being tempted in all points like as we are, yet it was without sin. He the Son of God, coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, "condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. 8:3.

NATURE OF THE FLESH

WE have here the statement of Scripture that Jesus Christ, the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was and is God, "was made flesh and dwelt among us," *in* us, "full of grace and truth." In being made flesh, He took upon Him the same kind of flesh that we have, the flesh of man, which is sin, for Paul said on Mars Hill (Acts 17:26) that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men." The Revised Version has it that God has made us one, that is, one person, Adam, all persons, thus showing emphatically that all human flesh is the same. The apostle also says that there is "one kind of flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes." 1 Cor. 15:39. So that there is but one flesh of man; so that whether dwelling in Europe, Asia, or Africa, all men are of one flesh.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." Gal. 5:19-21. This is the description of human flesh. Whatever we may know of man and of the wickedness of men in the flesh, we may each one know this, that is the wickedness of our flesh. This is something which should ever keep down pride and self-exaltation in the human heart. The cruelty and abominable deeds that startle us, are the natural works which spring spontaneously out of just such flesh as we all have. When we hear of deeds of savagery, whether among civilized or uncivilized people, all feel the indignation which we must all feel, we are reminded when our indignation begins to boil over into condemnation, that there is but one flesh of man. So we have nothing to boast of over another. Boasting is excluded, and our indignation turns to shame, because such are we by nature.

BEARING CURSE

AND now we read that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, when He took upon Himself the nature of man; was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, "in all things like unto His brethren" (Heb. 2:17); and more than that, we read that even now He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15), our weaknesses. He has not forgotten the temptation and suffering which He felt when upon the earth; but He knows and feels it still. Seven hundred years before Christ was manifested in the flesh, Isaiah said by the Spirit, "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53:6.

Jesus Christ “was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” 1 Peter 1:20. He is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Rev. 13:8. It is by Him and in Him that we have lived and do “live, and move, and have our being.” Acts 17:28. He is the true light that “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9); and that light is the life of men. Verse 4. It is only by the life which is given to men through the grace of God in Christ, that men have the power to commit the evil deeds which we see and know. It is the breath of life which God breathed into man’s nostrils, and which He still continues to them, that men use in blaspheming the name of God. It is the power which not only comes from God, but is the life of God, which men pervert in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind.

PERVERTING GOD’S LIFE

WHEN God in His mercy gave to sinful man a probation, and permitted him to live on this earth, so that he was not blotted out of existence in the very act of sinning, He simply continued to him for a time a portion of His own life, with which to live that probation. He gave man His own life, so that he might show whether he would live that life to the glory of God, by allowing Christ to direct the life, and live it in him, or whether he would take it and still pervert it to his own base uses. In Him all men live and have their being, and so “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Thus it is that the Lord says, “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins.” Isa. 43:23. That life of Christ is in every man that comes into the world, the life by which he lives and moves, and it is that which every man uses and perverts in the commission of sin. So that every sin committed in the flesh since the fall of Adam is a sin charged up to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is laid on Him.

THE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD

THIS serves to explain the good traits, the generous impulses, and the desires for righteousness, which are manifest to a greater or lesser extent in all men. Even the wickedest men show at times good traits, and have times of yielding to better influences. These good traits and impulses and occasional longings for righteousness, are the result of the Divine light—the life of Christ—which is given to every man. They are the strivings of the Spirit. The flesh itself is totally corrupt, and irreclaimable, so that every good thing must come from God.

Christ has not forgotten, and cannot forget the sufferings of the temptations incident to sinful flesh; because He still lives, and His life

is still given to man, and will continue to be given to all men, even to sinners, as long as probation continues. All men still live by it, and therefore He is now identified with human flesh, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Inasmuch, therefore, as He suffered in the flesh for sin, and yielded up the life which had been perverted by men in sin, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Heb. 7:25.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

WHEN Christ was here on the earth in the flesh, it was God manifest in the flesh. "Believest thou not," He said, "that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" God was in Him in the flesh which He voluntarily took,—the only begotten Son abode in the bosom of the Father, and therefore He knew no sin, although in sinful flesh. This is "the mystery of godliness."

So we have this glorious fact, the confession of which will lift the soul up to God, the fact that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, that all iniquity is laid upon Him and charged up to Him, and that He bears all the weaknesses and sinful tendencies of the flesh of man. He accepts it. And He still bears it, neither will He lay it off until He comes "the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:28.

This being a fact by the word of God, whosoever confesses the fact, whosoever "confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God," and whosoever "confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God." But it is a fact whether it is confessed or not. It is a glorious truth,—one with which one can go to the outcast and tempted,—that although Christ has "gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him," yet He still abides with men. Before the first advent His life was the light of men, and upon Him was laid the iniquity of all. And when He came to earth revealed as a man, it was simply in the line of giving to us a larger manifestation of the fact, and showing to us what God in the flesh, unhindered and not denied, means.