

Married to Christ

2 March 2008

Ps. 89: 3, 7

Ps. 101: 1, 2

Baptism Ps. 100: 2, 4

Hymn 21: 1, 7

Hymn 14: 1, 4

Ps. 118: 1, 4, 5

Scripture reading: Rom.6: 1 - 7:25

Text: Rom.7: 1 - 6

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What does it mean that we are dead to the law? And what does it mean that we have been delivered from the law?

The right understanding of this text is pure gospel. The doctrine contained in this text is life and joy. But to those who misinterpret this text, heresy and death is bound to follow. It is a matter of life and death to have a clear understanding of this doctrine.

We turn to our text this morning with careful discernment.

Our theme this morning is that...

We are married to Christ

We will note...

1. That we died to the law
2. The inability of law to cure our sinfulness
3. The newness of the Spirit

In the first place we note that...

We died to the law

In the previous chapter the apostle Paul made a remarkable statement. He said:

“...sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace”.

And now he says:

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?”

The words “Or do you not know, brethren...” refers back to chapter 6: 14 where he said that we are not under law. He is now returning to that statement, in order to explain it further.

When he said in chapter 6 that we are not “under law” he was saying that it is not law that deliver us from sin and death, but grace. If you are under law, if you are dependent on law to save you, then you are still dead in your sins and helplessly under the dominion of sin. And so he used the expression “under law” in such a way that it meant: without grace dead in sins.

To be “under grace”, on the other hand, means that you are under the powerful working of God’s saving grace in Christ.

It is not a contrast between old and new covenant, as if the Old Testament was a covenant of law and the New Testament a covenant of grace. Not at all! No believer is “under law” in the sense which Paul used the term in chapter 6. Moses was not under law, but under grace. With the term “under law” Paul did not refer to the Old Testament, but to the helpless and damnable state of man outside of God’s grace.

But there in chapter 6:14 the apostle did not give any further explanation or reason for his statement that we are not under law. Immediately after he said that we are not “under law” he asked the question:

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”

He first had to guard this statement against any misunderstanding. He immediately makes clear that the law is not abolished, and that we are not now free to break the law. Lawlessness still deserves death (6: 16 - 23).

Brothers and sisters, the norm for holiness and righteousness has not changed. Love for God still means obedience to His law. There is no *other* or *higher* norm for righteousness or for Christian ethics than the perfect and divine righteousness which God has revealed to us in His law. God’s law is the reflection and revelation of His own righteousness and holiness. Christ, in His obedience to the law, did not put on a foreign righteousness, but lived His own image as the Son of God. The holiness and the righteousness of Christ is the same holiness and righteousness that is demanded by the law. No one may add anything to God’s law, and no one may retract anything from it. All religion that deviates from God’s law is nothing but unrighteousness.

God’s holy and perfect law can never change, for God Himself cannot change.

We cannot separate God from His law. If anyone has a negative view of the law, he has a negative view of God Himself. If anyone criticises the law, he criticises the righteousness of God Himself. Christ has not come to bring another law, for there is no other.

Shall we transgress the law, because we are not saved by the law? That was the question in chapter 6. And Paul answered it with a definite “Certainly not!”

So concerned was he to remove any such twisting of the gospel that he spent the rest of chapter 6 fencing off the gospel against any such lawlessness.

And it is only now, in chapter 7, that he returns to the statement that we are not under law.

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?”

In order to prove the point that we are not under law he takes an example from the law itself. Because God’s law is well known to the believers in Rome, therefore they will also know what the law says about marriage. A husband and wife are united in marriage as long as they live. If the husband would die, then the wife would no longer be bound to her husband. The marriage law binds her to her husband only as long as he lives.

He states this in verses 2 and 3:

“...the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man”.

You, brothers in Rome, you know the law, and therefore you will also know that the marriage law binds a woman only as long as her husband lives, and that death releases her from that law.

The example itself is clear and it needs no further explanation.

But now the apostle applies this same law to spiritual marriage. He says:

“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another - to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God”.

We who believe in Christ, we have been put to death by the death of Christ. And because our old man has been put to death, sin no longer rules over us. Through our marriage with Christ, that is: through our union with Him, we are now alive to bear fruit to God.

Yes, we are dead to sin and alive in Christ to bear fruit to God.

Have you noted the way in which the apostle applies his illustration? He does not say that we were married to the law and that the law died. No, we were married to sin, and in Christ we died to sin, so that we may now live in a new life of obedience thorough our union with Christ.

The *law* did not die. *We* died. That is: our old sinful man has been put to death.

Let us therefore look at the apostle’s application with careful discernment.

Many people explain this text, Rom.7:4, as if the apostle has said that we were married to the law and that the law died and that we are therefore freed from the law. By explaining it in that way they come to the conclusion then that the law has been abolished. By marrying Christ we turn our backs on a dead law. But the apostle is not saying anything like that.

He says:

“...*you* also have become dead to the law...”.

There are people who say that although Paul did not expressly *say* that the law is put to death, that he in fact does *imply* it. Thus, they say, we must see the law as dead; the law has been put to death by the body of Christ. But, dear brothers and sisters, such a thought is contrary to all of Scripture. Nowhere does Paul in

any of his letters write that the *law* has been put to death, and neither does he say it here in our text. He clearly states that *we* have been put to death to the law - verse 4. And that *we* died - verse 6. Not the law.

In the same way he says in Gal.2:19:

“...I through the law died to the law that I might live to God”.

It is therefore a twisting of the apostle’s teaching to say that the law has been put to death.

He is not saying that we were married to the law; neither does he say that the law has died. No, our old man was married to sin, but our old man has been put to death in Christ. Therefore we are freed from the law that kept us in bondage to sin. We have no marriage with sin anymore. Our death in Christ has put an end to that marriage. And so we were lawfully delivered from our marriage bond with sin, and were set free to marry Christ in all holiness.

Now what does this expression mean when he says that we have become “dead to the law”? We are dead with respect to that law which kept us bound to sin. In the eyes of the law our old man is dead, and our new man is free to marry another.

That we are dead to the law means that our old man is considered dead by the law.

And how did our old man die? He was put to death when we were crucified with Christ.

It means that **according to the law we have no marriage with sin anymore.** To be dead to the law means to be lawfully delivered from sin. We were set free to marry Christ, because our marriage to sin was ended by our death in the death of Christ.

In *that* sense we were delivered from the law that confirmed our marriage with sin. There is no law that binds us to sin anymore, for in Christ our old sinful man has been put to death. We are delivered from the law of our old husband, and lawfully bound to our new husband.

Our marriage with Christ is valid and lawful. It is no adulteress marriage. For death has lawfully ended our previous marriage to sin.

There is no law that makes us the wife of sin anymore. With respect to *that* law, **we have been put to death.** From *that* law we have been delivered!

That is the context, and that is what the apostle is saying.

You see then how far are those removed from the truth who think that the law has been abolished or that it became outdated. They think that when we marry Christ we leave an old and dead law behind. And so, they do not consider their new life in Christ as a life in obedience to the law. And they use these verses of our text to proclaim another gospel; a false gospel without law.

But what the apostle is saying in our text is very far remote from that.

We have to follow the logic of his argument. He is not speaking of our deliverance from the law in general; he is speaking of our lawful deliverance from sin. He started this same line of thought already in chapter 6: 2 saying that we died to sin.

Sin was our lord and master. We were bound in slavery to sin, rendering service to sin. But through our death in Christ we were delivered from the dominion of sin - that was chapter 6.

But now, through our death in the death of Christ, sin is no longer our lord and master. We are married to another. Through our union with Christ we now live a new life of obedience to God.

His argument was not that we were delivered by the death of the law, but by death to sin. That is what we are delivered from.

And when we look at the immediate context here in chapter 7 then it is clear that he is still following the same line of thought. We became dead to the law, he says, so that we may bear fruit to God in Christ - verse 4. He is still speaking of our deliverance from sin and its dominion in order to glorify God in a new life of obedience.

Our new man is fully alive through Christ in order to bear holy and righteous fruit to God. The fruit of our marriage with Christ is the fruit of holiness and righteousness; it is fruit according to God's law.

When we were married to sin, when we had sin as our lord and master and lived under its dominion, the law confirmed our bondage to sin. In this bondage to sin, no relationship with Christ was lawful. But when we died to sin, we were lawfully set free to marry another. And our new marriage to Christ bears fruit to God.

The law itself is satisfied with our new marriage.

God saved us, not by removing the *law*, but by removing our *sin*.

In the second place we note...

The inability of law to cure our sinfulness

If you think that the apostle Paul has a negative view of the law, then you will never be able to understand his letters. Then you will constantly be twisting his letters because of your own negative view of the law.

Paul is never negative about the law. What he is negative about is legalism. But legalism has nothing to do with God's law. Legalism is a man made religion. Legalism is a twisting of the law. God has given His covenant law in the context of the gospel. We receive the law from the hand of our Redeemer. His covenant law contains all the promises of salvation. He has never given His law to Israel with the command that they have to redeem themselves. The law does indeed contain the promise of life for those who obey, but that promise was given in a context where God has delivered His people and where He revealed Himself to them as their only Saviour.

Legalism has therefore nothing to do with God's law. Legalism is a twisting of God's covenant law into a means by which man tries to save himself. Legalism is a man made religion. And of *that* the apostle Paul is very negative. Yes, he curses it.

Let us then clearly understand that the apostle Paul is not negative about the law. But he clearly shows us the inability of the law **to save us**. Only in *that* context does he contrast law and grace. Law and grace are only contrasted when he speaks about **the cause of our salvation**. In no other context are law and grace to be contrasted.

In order to demonstrate the glory of God's grace, the apostle once more reminds us of the helpless state in which we would find ourselves if we were without God's grace. Verse 5:

“For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death”.

When we were in the flesh we were controlled and directed by sin. The word “flesh” refers in this context to our natural man as we were born dead in sin. When we were in the flesh, that is, when we were dead in sin, our sinful passions controlled us and bore fruit to death.

But now the apostle says that these sinful passions of our flesh “were aroused by the law”. Paul explains this further in verses 7 - 13 saying that the law revealed his sin to him. And by exposing his sin, it caused death. Thus the law which is holy and good, became death to him, **not because there is anything wrong with the law**, but because the sinfulness of his sin became so much bigger through the revelation of the law. When you know something to be sin, then your sin is so much greater in committing it. And so not only the apostles consciousness of sin grew bigger, but also his actual sin increased. In that sense sin found a helper in

the law, for by the law his sin was increased so that he descended deeper and deeper into death.

And thus he says in verse 8:

“...*sin*, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead”.

Note that it is not the law that produces the evil desire. *Sin* produced in Paul all manner of evil desire. Sin itself produced evil desires in Paul, but his evil desires became all the worse when it was exposed to be sin.

Now, it is in that sense that we have to understand the expression in our text, when verse 5 says that our sinful passions were aroused by the law. As our sinful desires were exposed by the law to be sinful, our sinful desires became all the more alive coveting against God’s law.

And why does the apostle Paul mention this? To prove to us our helplessness without God’s grace! The law is unable to redeem us. While we were in the flesh, while we were dead in sin, the law could only cause our condemnation to become all the bigger.

Far from redeeming us from sin, the law all the more confirmed our condemnation. Something else was needed to make us alive unto God.

We look at that in the third place...

The newness of the Spirit

“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” - verse 6.

How have we been delivered from the law? By dying to sin! We were held captive by sin under its power and dominion. But now that we are dead to sin, we are delivered from that law which confirmed our bondage to sin. By dying to sin we were set free to marry another; that is Christ. And what is the result of our marriage and union to Christ? That we serve God in a new life of obedience through the powerful working of His Spirit!

The example of the woman who was set free from the law of her husband by the death of her husband, with the result that she could lawfully marry another, is still in the apostle’s mind. We are no longer married to sin, but to Christ. We are no longer bondservants of sin, but alive through our union with Christ to bear fruit to God.

This new life in union with Christ he now calls “the newness of the Spirit” and he contrasts it to the oldness of the letter.

The newness of the Spirit refers to the new life which is worked by the Spirit of Christ. The oldness of the letter refers to the law, and the law is called the letter because it was written. The writing may refer to the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written, or to the fact that the law is contained in Scripture.

The oldness of the law refers to that binding of the law which no longer apply to us, namely that law which kept us bound to sin when we were dead in sin. Then the law was active in cursing and condemning us. That is now contrasted to the work of the Spirit who gives us new life in Christ.

When the apostle speaks in this context of “the oldness” of the law, he is not referring to the time of the Old Testament. He is not in this context contrasting the old and the new covenant. He is also not saying that God’s law has passed away. Not at all! He is contrasting our bondage to sin under the law with our deliverance from sin under grace. The oldness of the law stands over against the newness of the Spirit. And this he does not mean as a contrast between Old and New Testaments, but a contrast between our old natural state as married to sin over against our new marriage to Christ. That law which kept us bound to sin, confining us to death, no longer applies to us, for our old man has been put to death in Christ.

In this regard we can also compare 2 Cor. 3:6 where the apostle says:

“...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”.

It means that the law as law can only condemn us in our sin, but that the Spirit of Christ makes us alive to serve God.

The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is also powerfully at work in us to raise us unto a new life of obedience. Through our marriage and union with Christ, His Spirit dwells also in us to renew our lives to the glory of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, our old man was crucified with Christ and put to death, and our new man was raised with Christ, united in marriage to Him. And since our new Husband, Christ, will never die but lives forever, therefore also our marriage bond can never be broken again. There is no death that can separate the believer from Christ. Here is a marriage that will last forever.

Christ being raised from the dead dies no more (6: 9). He lives and His Spirit lives in us to bear fruit to God. Through His Spirit we are renewed from day to day to live unto God. The result of our eternal bond with Christ is that we will serve God in a new life of obedience forevermore. Amen.