

Chapter Twelve

The Laws as a Demanding Husband

Do you remember the incident in Scripture where a wife married her second husband on the very same day her first husband died? Well, there is the record of a woman who did just that, and surprisingly enough the account is found in the New Testament. Paul, the Apostle, relates it in Romans 7. Here is the interesting account:

“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 an 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”

(Romans 7:1-3).

Note that nothing is said in this passage about any interval between the death of the first husband and her remarriage to her second husband. We, of course, today would frown on people who marry too soon after burying their first mate. We take it as a sign that she had little love or respect for him. And even though custom and decency set a certain indefinite period of time that should elapse before remarriage, however, nowhere in the Bible is a time limit set. The moment the woman becomes a widow she is free from the law of her first husband and may legally be married to another.

This Serves As An Illustration

However, this passage – of Romans 7:1-3 – is merely used as an illustration of another important truth. Paul has been speaking of the relationship of the believer to the Law of God and the grace of God. The case of the remarried widow is only introduced to clarify Paul’s teaching on Law and grace. It is not intended to be a doctrinal treatise on the evil of remarriage while the first mate is alive – although this truth may be implied in the illustration. The foremost purpose of this illustration is to set forth the great truth of the believer’s freedom from the Law. And so after giving the illustration, Paul proceeds immediately to the application, and says in verse 4:

“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” (Romans 7:4).

Paul now compares the believer in Christ to a wife who became a widow by the death of her first husband, and then *immediately* was married to her second husband, on the very day her first husband died. In Paul’s illustration (given to us by the Holy Spirit), the first husband was the Law, and her second husband was the Lord Jesus Christ. We should remember that this, by interpretation, applies first to the religious

Israelite, a member of the nation who had been under the Law for over 1500 years, but remained fruitless. But although by primary interpretation it applies to Israel, it is equally true of all, and serves as an example of the hopelessness of bringing forth spiritual fruit by the Law. Let's look more closely at these two husbands, the law and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Husband

Paul is of course addressing his fellow Jews in particular. This is evident from the opening verse:

"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) (Romans 7:1).

Paul had been preaching free grace to both Jew and Gentile alike, and then, as now, it stirred up a great deal of opposition among the Judaistic Sabbatarian legalists of that day, who insisted that Gentles believers be placed under the Law and become Jews (proselytes). Paul had furthermore been accused of preaching a message of license. He answers these legalists in the previous chapter (Romans 6) and says,

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

To this declaration, "Ye are not under the Law, but under grace," the legalists had strenuously objected; and Paul, anticipating the charge, continues:

"What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Romans 6:15).

Paul then declares once more his freedom from the Law, and concludes the chapter with the well-known and striking contrast of the ministry of Law and grace:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Here Law and grace are sharply contrasted. The penalty of the law for sin is death – the gift of grace is eternal life. It is only then that Paul introduces us to the widow of Romans 7. Husband number one, says Paul, is the Law. Israel was married to this law at Sinai soon after their deliverance from the bandage of Egypt. There are a number of things to observe about this first husband, the Law:

We are told that he was a hard and severe master. His demands were absolute, and the poor wife was unable to fulfill all its requirements. If she failed in one point, she was guilty of all. This husband, the Law, demanded perfect, unbroken, complete obedience, and failing this, she came under condemnation. Try as she might, she could not please her husband, because remember that the Law was not only holy, but it was also *just*. But the wife was commanded to obey her husband, the law, even though she found it impossible to keep its requirements. As a result she was constantly under threat of punishment for disobedience. Unless deliverance comes, this poor wife must ultimately perish, for the penalty of the law was death. She must somehow be delivered from the judgment of her first husband, or die.

The Barren Husband

One more thing is revealed about this “*Law husband*.” The union of this wife and the law remained childless; there was no fruit – no children! This was not the fault of the Law, but of the wife. The wife is sterile and unable to bring forth the fruit of righteousness as long as she is dead spiritually. The Law cannot produce the fruit of righteousness in the sinner. The Law is powerful indeed – powerful enough to put to death the sinner, but it has no power to give life. The poor, weak wife must constantly sweat and labor and toil, only to be driven by greater threatenings of her exacting husband. What she really needs is *another husband!* She needs someone to deliver her from bondage. But she cannot have two husbands at the same time. This would make her an adulteress. Before she could be married to Christ, she must be free from her first husband – the Law. But all its demands must first be met.

This brings us to the glorious truth of justification by faith. In the fullness of time Christ came, born of a woman, born under the Law, to deliver them that were under the law (Galatians 4:4). He kept the Law perfectly, then went to Calvary and paid the penalty for sin, removed the curse of the Law with which her first husband had threatened her. Through faith we now become members of the Body of Christ, and God now reckons to the believer all that Jesus did in his behalf, and imputes to him the righteousness of Christ. Now the Law cannot condemn us, for the price has been paid. The debt has been fully paid.

This is the thrust of Paul’s application of the illustration of the remarried widow;

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ...” (Romans 7:4).

The believer is dead to the Law! The Law has no power over a dead person. He is beyond its reach forever. The maximum penalty the Law can impose on anyone is the *death* penalty. It can do no more than that. However, the believer has died “*in Christ*,” and the Law cannot touch him. So Paul says,

“I am [have been] crucified with Christ...” (Galatians 2:20).

And because he had been crucified, he could say:

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God” (Galatians 2:19).

Fruit Unto God

There are a couple more things to notice about these two husbands – the Law and Christ. While the first husband produced no children, the second husband is able to produce fruit in the heretofore, sterile wife. Before we are saved, we are infected by the guilt of sin, we are defiled and spiritually diseased from birth, and therefore are spiritually sterile – childless. The disease of sin that caused the sterility must be cured and this is done by the second husband – for all those who believe in Him. Notice how clearly our Scripture states this:

*“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**” (Romans 7:4).*

The point is: while we are dead to the Law by the body of Christ, yet we are not widows, for we are *married* to another, even Jesus Christ our Lord. We have a new and better husband, and are under a higher law, the law of love. But some may ask, “*Since the Christian is dead to the Law and delivered from the Law, has he than no longer an obligation to keep the perfect Law of God?*” To be sure, he has, but it is from an entirely different motive. The believer now seeks to do God’s will and keep His Law, not from fear of punishment, but out of heart of gratitude for his deliverance and his love for the Deliverer. The wife now lives to please her new husband (Christ Jesus) because she loves him, for He has delivered her from bondage. Under Law it was coercion, for fear of punishment, under threat of judgment and death. Now the motive is love, gratitude, and a burning desire to serve Him.

The Christian has a moral obligation to obey God in everything, but it is not just because the Law demands it, or to escape punishment. God expects of us moral obedience to His will just as much and even more under grace, but He also gives us the willingness and power to do His will, and all motivated by *love* for our husband (Christ). Of course, if the first husband is dead, and the widow remains unmarried, she might become a dangerous character, but that is not the case. She is *remarried* to another, even Christ.

The power of *love* is infinitely greater than the power of Law. It is for this reason *love* is the fulfilling of the Law. Read what Paul says in Romans 13:10,

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

The more love, the less Law is needed, and vice versa, the less love, the more Law is needed. Does a mother need a set of laws to tell her to care for her baby? For a servant or baby sitter we need rules, with instructions for feeding, caring, and protecting the child, but for the mother this would be an insult. She needs no commands to fee that baby, to keep it clean, to protect it, to keep it warm and comfortable, away from fire and danger. Her love makes all laws and commandments unnecessary. So, too, the Christian’s service must be one of love for the Lord. If I love Him, I will not have any other gods. I will not worship heathen idols. I will not take His name in vain, or profane His holy day.

This can be summed up by the following incident. A believer who was rejoicing in the liberty of grace and freedom from the Law was asked, “*Now, if you are not any more under Law, then can you do anything you **want to**?*” The Christian replied, “*Yes, I can do whatever I want to, but when I was saved the Lord put a new **want to** in my heart.*” If it is not our desire to serve and please the Lord because we love Him, we need to re-examine our heart. God pity the poor Christian who walks the narrow road because he is afraid he will be punished or chastened if he does not behave. This is an unworthy

motive for serving the Lord. The only service our Lord accepts is that that comes from a heart of gratitude and love.

“We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).