

Chapter Thirteen

The Law as an Executioner

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:19-21).

The Christian is a paradox – an apparent contradiction, because he is said to be both dead and alive – not “half-dead” or “half-alive,” but completely dead and completely alive. The true believer is dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness; dead to self and alive unto Christ; and, as Paul states it, “dead to the Law but alive unto God.” This fact Paul declares without apology. He said:

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

Dead to the Law! What a startling, amazing statement Paul makes, “*dead to the Law!*” Paul does not say the Law is dead. Far be it from Paul to claim the law is dead. He knew full well its power over him before his conversion. The Law is very much alive today in cursing and condemning sin and threatening judgment to the transgressor. The Law is still the ministry of wrath upon the sinner. All-conclusive are the words of Ephesians 5:6,

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6).

No the Law is not dead, but Paul said, “*I am dead to the Law.*” The Law does not recognize me as even existing any more. The Law cannot touch me, for I am dead and the Law cannot touch dead men. To understand what Paul meant by this startling statement, we must see the occasion in which it was said. In the verses preceding Paul’s statement, he tells how Peter had come to Antioch and had entered fully into the fellowship of Gentile Christians, by eating with them, that was strictly forbidden by the Law for a Jew. But when certain legalistic Law teachers from Jerusalem came up, Peter withdrew himself from the Gentiles Christians and placed himself back unto the Law. This so incensed Paul that he severely rebuked Peter for his double standard, so now he concludes with the statement, “*For I through the Law am dead to the Law.*” Paul says as far as I am concerned, my relationship to the Law is ended. Just what is Paul saying? An illustration will serve to show what Paul meant.

Imagine a man who has committed murder. According to the Law, if found guilty he must be put to death. He is arrested, charged with murder, and brought to trial. The court is in session and the judge is on the bench. The accused man hears the accusation and charge read to him. But before the trial is concluded, the accused man

suffers a heart attack and drops dead in the courtroom. A doctor declares him dead, and signs his death certificate. Now what does the judge do? After the commotion is over, does he call the court to order, and say, “*Let us proceed with the trial of this dead man?*” Of course not! You cannot try a dead man, or condemn him to death, because he is already dead. So the judge dismisses the case. It is closed forever, and he proceeds to the next case. In the case of the criminal in our illustration, he cheated the Law; he circumvented the law. It was the prerogative of the Law to execute the man, but he died before the Law could put him to death.

Not So With Paul

But, says Paul, it was not thus in my case. I did not cheat or beat the Law, but the Law itself put me to death. Notice, therefore, three important words in this text:

“I through the Law and dead to the Law”

Paul says, “*Through – or by – the Law I put to death!*” The Law itself found me guilty, and executed me. The Law slew me. Let return to our illustration, but, this time, imagine the criminal before the bar of justice. The witnesses are called and all testify to the guilt of the murderer. The judge declares him guilty and sets the day for sentencing. When that day comes, the judge reads from the Law the penalty for murder. It is death for the criminal, and the judge orders the man to be hanged by the neck until he is dead, and sets the date for execution. The sentence is carried out, and on the appointed day the man is led to the gallows and hanged. The physician declares the man dead, and the case is closed. Now this man is not only dead to the Law, but dead through the Law. The Law put him to death. It can do no more. The Law is satisfied. This (in the words of our text), Paul says, is what happened to me – “*I through the Law am dead to the Law.*”

However, this is not the end of the story. Three days after this guilty man was executed, you meet this same man one early morning, walking down the street. At first you can hardly believe your eyes. You look more closely, but there is no doubt about it. The criminal is alive. You rush to the home of the judge, rouse him from his bed, and excitedly exclaim, “*Judge, judge, remember the man who was executed three days ago? Well, he is alive! I saw him with my own eyes! Call the police, call the sheriff, call out the National Guard, and pick up this dangerous criminal! Hurry, judge!*”

The judge is not impressed at all, and says, “*Now just calm down, and we will look at the record.*” He takes down the record of the trial, the verdict of guilty, the account of the execution, the doctor’s death certificate, and finally the words, “*Case closed.*” He looks at you and says, “*That man is dead.*” But you say to him, “*He is alive! I saw him!*” The judge answers, “*I’m sorry but according to the law this man died three days ago. According to the law the man is dead. He has paid the extreme penalty.*”

The man is legally dead, for the law cannot punish a man twice for the same crime. If the man is alive again, it is of no concern to the law. The law did not anticipate a resurrection. There is no provision in the law as to what to do in such a case. According to the law this man is dead, and since the law cannot punish twice for the same crime, he is free – dead to the law – through the law – and in the eyes of the law.

Paul says that is what happened to me. I was executed by the Law, but we raised again.

We ask, “Paul, will you please tell us when this happened to you, where this took place, and how were you put to death?” Paul has the answer ready. It is found in the very next verse – Galatians 2:20:

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”

Paul says, “You want to know where I died – it was at Calvary. When did I die – it was when Christ died. How did I die? – it was by crucifixion.” That is the meaning of Paul’s words, “*crucified with Christ.*” Now to understand this strange statement of Paul, we must turn to the Word of God concerning the members of the Body of Christ. When Christ hung on the cross, people saw only a physical human body, nailed to the cross by hands and feet. But when God looked down upon Jesus on the cross, He saw *another body* – a spiritual body united to its head. God saw in Him the mystical body of believers, who are members of Christ and called His Body. God saw the head, Christ, and He saw the Body of Christ, consisting of individual members, who make up the Church, this is His Body. What happened to the Head of the Church that day on Calvary, God reckons as having happened to all His members, for the church is a spiritual body.

“For by one Spirit are we baptized into one body...”

(1 Corinthians 12:13)

God foreknew everyone of His chosen ones from eternity as members of the Body of Christ.

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

“For we are members of his body [Christ], of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ephesians 5:30).

As the body of Jesus hung upon the cross, God looked down from Heaven and saw the spiritual Body of Christ – the Church – hanging there “*in Christ.*” This is Paul’s meaning when he says, “*I was crucified with Christ.*” As a member of the Body of Christ in the mind of God I was nailed with Jesus to the Tree. But this was not all. When they took Jesus down from the Cross, they buried Him, the head with the body, and since we are members of His Body.

“...we are buried with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:4).

But that is not all, for that same body *arose!* After three days and nights, the tomb was found empty, not one member was left behind. Since we are members of His Body, we too arose with Him, and Paul says,

“If [since] ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above” (Colossians 3:1)

But there is still more. Forty days later Jesus ascended into Heaven, and took that Body along. In Christ, therefore, in the mind of God every believer is already seated in Heaven. In our physical bodies we are still here on earth, but positionally and spiritually in Christ, God reckons us in the Heavens. Read Paul's testimony:

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Remember then that *"we are members of the spiritual body of Christ,"* and what happened to Him happened to every member of His Body. With Paul, every believer can say,

*"**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" (Galatians 2:20).*

The Law has been satisfied by the Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, as members of Him, God reckons it as though we ourselves had paid the penalty. We, indeed, are *"dead to the Law, through the Law."*

Does That Mean That We Are Lawless?

Let's again consider the charge of some who say this freedom from the Law is a dangerous doctrine, and will result in looseness of living and practicing sin without restraint. Anyone who makes this charge does not understand the grace of God. He has never understood the text:

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

Free from the Law – but under law to Christ. Deliverance from the law gives liberty – not liberty to sin, but *liberty to serve Christ* without fear. I will deal in later chapter on the false accusation that *grace* gives an excuse for careless living. It does just the opposite. Paul says:

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12).

The Law demanded holiness – the grace of God produces it. If you are looking to the Law to improve you, it is time you turned your eyes to the grace of God and remember,

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).