

The Christian, the Old and New Man, and the Law

Romans 7:4-25 , Trinity Sunday XV

September 16, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....Picture, if you will, two men standing next to each other about three feet apart. A rope joins them together. One man is a cave man with a club, the other man appears quite simple, but he is holding a bat. They are on a straight and narrow highway, and as they go down that road they struggle and fight. They even swing their bat and club at each other, constantly trying to destroy one another. At times the cave man is able to beat and pull the simple man off the road, but then the simple man beats and pulls and struggles back onto the straight and narrow road. Were it not for the rope that holds them together, they would long ago have parted company. In this picture it is very apparent, they want different things. The simple man wants only to follow the straight and narrow road, while the cave man wants the freedom to roam wherever he wants.

Dear beloved, this picture of two men who violently struggle against one other, is a picture of you, the Christian. The cave man is your own sinful flesh, your Old Man or Old Adam. The simple man is the new man, the spirit, that new creature that God has created within by the faith of Jesus Christ. While we are born with the old man, that sinful flesh, the new man arises and exists within us once we are converted to the faith of Jesus Christ. The old man seeks only to serve sin and gratify the flesh, while the new man seeks only to serve Christ and neighbor. And so they struggle, the one against the other, and they each wish the other dead. And so Paul in our lesson today writes, "For the good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do." Our flesh then is that wicked caveman that seeks to tear us away from Christ, and the highway of salvation which leads to heaven. Our spirit, the new man, is that simple man which seeks only to remain on that straight and narrow road. In the Christian, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit is intense, and this battle continues until death. But thanks be to God, that upon death, the cord the rope that holds the old man and the new man together will be cut. God will release our soul from this body, and life everlasting will be ours! "But thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. The law is good and holy. While we see this great struggle between the old man and the new, in the words of Paul today, we also see the necessity of God's law in the Christian life. For though Christ Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, and though the new man automatically wills and desires to serve God alone, the problem is in all Christians there yet lives that cave man, the old man, the sinful flesh within. And that cave man, our flesh, always seeks to pull us away from the path Christ would have us walk. The law then in

our Christian life serves as that bat which the simple man uses to beat down and rebuke his own flesh. The law beats down our pride and self-righteousness. And the law of the club is the only language the cave man understands.

One common error concerning the law which enters our mind is this: the law must be a bad thing, because it only depresses me and makes me feel bad about myself. In our hearts we often say, "God, my sin is your fault. You gave me a law I could not keep!" The truth is man would rather call God a liar than admit his own sin. But God is perfect. And God's law is likewise perfect and holy because it comes from God's holy mouth. Paul writes, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Let's be honest, the problem is not God's law which reveals our sin, the problem is sin, and the men who commit sin. The man who blames his sin on God's holy law, is much like a prostitute who tries to blame her sins on the virgin who condemns her life as wicked. God's law is pure and holy, and we are the prostitutes, inventing any possible excuse to pin our sins on God.

But God is, and always will be holy. His righteousness is higher than the heavens, while our sins lead only to death and hell. Truly, we ought to be thankful, extremely thankful for God's law. For God's law is a mirror, which reveals and shows our true colors, our true nature. The problem is not God's law. Paul writes, "Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." God's law helped Paul to realize his own lustful nature. Because before the law, Paul didn't have a clue. Paul writes, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Before conversion, the knowledge of a person's sin is rather small. But when the unconverted hear the law, sin, and the knowledge of sin greatly increases. For example, if you tell a cave man that his whole life is evil and he must change his ways, what will happen? The very words that he needs to change will make him grow angry and violent. But that is a picture of how the natural man receives God's law. He hates to hear it, and it only makes him sin more. But sooner or later the condemned sinner will realize his upcoming penalty for sin, which is death and hellfire. In Paul's case, when the thunderbolts of the law struck him, he died. God's anger against his sin made him tremble, and the upcoming punishments of hell rose up before his eyes. Paul died....not physically but spiritually. In this condition, in this state, being dead, God could now convert Paul. And so the law does have its purpose, but the law cannot convert. The Bible teaches, "The law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ."

Now let us speak of ourselves. Just as in Paul's case, God uses the law to make us dead or empty, only so that He can then fill us up with His grace. For if we come to Christ with full hands, and we say, "Here Lord, here are

my humble works, my sacrifices, my good works which I lay before your feet!".....God will send us empty away. There is no forgiveness for those who trust in their works. His grace cannot be received if we come to Him with full hands. But if we, by the knowledge of the law, come to see our hands as empty, if we come to Him dead in trespasses and sins, then God can come to us with His grace. We therefore need the law, that we might see our sins. "The law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."

II. We become dead to the law by the body of Christ.

"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." Here then we who have become dead in the knowledge of our own sin, suddenly are brought back to life from the dead! The resurrection of Christ from the dead is also our resurrection from the dead! Though the law brings us death, Christ brings us life! The body of Christ does all this and more. For our sins were in His body. In His body our sins were nailed to the tree. He "took [them] out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Col 2:14 Hence, all our sins are paid for. But Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law in another way as well. Not only did He die for our sake, but He also lived for our sake. While it is the job of the law to convince us of all we have not done, it is the job of the Gospel to convince us of all Christ has done in our place, in our stead. And while we are to despair of our own righteousness, God desires that we instead turn to His righteousness. In Christ all righteousness is fulfilled. All that we are not, He already has been in our stead. That is why He is called "The Lord our Righteousness." Jer. 23:6 Believers know that all the righteousness of Christ is now their own. Faith perceives and faith receives. God creates and gives us faith, and God likewise justifies us through this same faith. "By grace are ye saved, through faith." And faith does not justify because it is something that we do. Rather faith justifies because of what Christ has done. And where there is faith, there is also a beautiful marriage between Christ and the Church. By faith, we are married one to another.....Christ vows Himself to us, and we swear faithful obedience only to Him. We love Him because He lived and died for us. He is our righteousness, when we find we have no righteousness of ourselves.

And since Christ is our righteousness, we become dead to the law, in that we no longer try to save ourselves by our own good works, by the deeds of the law, for it cannot be done. Rather, all we need to do now is look to the Bridegroom of the Church, Christ our Righteousness, who fulfilled the law in our stead. Our body then, the believers body, becomes dead to sin. The new man within us, that simple man, desires it no more. By faith we know that sin only brings us death, while Christ gives us life! If we live in sin, the curse will again come upon us and we

will die. But if we look to Christ our gracious Savior and Redeemer, the gentle Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep, we will live. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly." It is through Christ then, that the believer lives. And through Christ, the believer is no longer a slave to sin, but freed from sin. For our Jesus has said, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!" And with these simple words of freedom, the shackles and chains of our sins drop to the ground, and we stand as free men. We walk in newness of life, and we bring forth good fruit!

But if all this is true, if Christ has redeemed us and fulfilled the law for us, do we then as Christians still need the law? And here the answer is both YES and NO. First, the Christian which God has created, that new man within, he already loves Lord and neighbor perfectly. Paul writes, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Our obedience to the law is automatic, as far as the new man is concerned. "For the Christian according to his new man, the Law is superfluous not merely in part, but in its every use. Without the recorded Law, the new man in him knows both what is sinful and what is good,.....he does not need the Law to keep him in check outwardly by its threats and scourges" (Pieper III, 237). So if it were the case that once we were converted the old man disappeared, there would be no need for the preaching of the law! But this is not the case. For you will never find a Christian who has ceased from sin. And the presence of sin bears evidence that the old man is still there, tied by that rope to new man. And so as long as we live on this earth, we will still have this sinful flesh, the old man, which seeks to overthrow and destroy the new man and faith. Therefore, let it never be said that the Christian no longer needs to hear the law. Christians do need the law, in all its uses.

In closing today, we Christians are much like a ship at sea. The Gospel message of Jesus Christ like the wind, fills our sails with the desire and will and strength to move forward towards that glorious sunset in the west. But because we still have the old man, we need the rudder of the law to guide us, and steer the course lest we lose our direction. And remember also that rope which binds that old man, to the new. As long as we live on earth, that cord that rope will bind the old man and the new together. But thanks be to God, the day will come soon enough, when God Himself will cut that cord, and this body of sin will return to the dust. At the same time our released soul will ascend heavenward, to the bosom of Christ. Praise God dear Christians, that God will release us from this body of death, and by His grace we will receive life everlasting! Amen.