

Romans 7:2

Loosed From the Law

Gilbert Beebe

This article appeared in the Baptist publication, *Signs of the Times*, on October 15, 1869. Gilbert Beebe (1800 – 1881) was the editor and founder of that publication. With the exception of correcting minor typos, and breaking some paragraphs into two or more shorter ones for the sake of eye appeal, I have not edited the article. –PD

VERY DEAR AND MUCH ESTEEMED BROTHER BEEBE: - Will you please give your views, through the Signs of the Times, on Romans 7:2 and much oblige your brother in tribulation, if a brother at all. William Brickey. Red Bud, Illinois. September 21, 1869.

Reply: The passage proposed for consideration reads thus: "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." The law of marriage which Moses gave to the Hebrews, as well as that law which was from the beginning, to which our Savior referred in his answer to the Pharisees, Matthew 19:3-9, was probably well understood by the saints to whom the apostle was directing his discourse, and his allusion to it was for the purpose of illustrating the redemption of the church from under the law, and her marriage to Christ, which was not so clearly understood. It was frequently the case that Christ and the apostles used subjects which were familiar to the saints to show by analogy the meaning of things which were more obscure to them.

There are but few lessons in the gospel, which the saints have been more slow to learn and fully comprehend, than that of our release from the law, and marriage to Christ. The natural inclination of our carnal mind is to legality, to a system of works, and just so far as we are ignorant of God's righteousness, like the carnal Jews, we go about to establish our own righteousness, in doing which we look to the law for a rule, and to our own strength for ability to meet the requisitions, and vainly suppose that we can in that manner commend ourselves to God. But the declaration of the Scriptures is, By the deeds of the law, no flesh living can be justified in the sight of God; And as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

The force of the apostle's argument will more clearly appear when we consider the nature and dominion of law. Paul was speaking to them who know the law, knew that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth. The law of the land in which we dwell extends its authority over living subjects, but cannot hold dominion over us when

we are dead. So long, therefore, as we are subjects of the law which Paul in this connection calls a ministration of condemnation, and a law of sin and death, we are disqualified to be subjects of the law of Christ. No man can serve two masters. But if the law which we were under has convicted us of sin, and put us to death, it can extend its dominion no farther. If our sins were all laid on Christ, and he died our death, then we became dead to the law, and being quickened in the resurrection life of Christ, we are no more under the law that has slain us, but are under law to him who has raised us up from the dead. "I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."

Still more clearly to illustrate this subject, the law of matrimony is used in the text under consideration. The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth. That is, she is bound by the law of God. No human law can dissolve the relationship. Our legislatures may legalize adultery by granting divorcements, as they are called; but the relationship of husband and wife can only be dissolved by death. So stood the case with us in our relation to the law which held dominion over us, and which poured its curses upon our heads. No power could release us from its dominion, nor abate its severity, or shield us from its cursings. As long as we were under the law we were under its curse; and its dominion was so long as we lived under it. But when the law had exhausted all its wrath and vengeance on us in our Head, and we were buried with him by baptism into death, the relation ceased; the law was no longer our husband; the legal covenant, by its own well defined limitation expired, and left the church in her resurrection life free from Moses, free from the ministration of condemnation, and free to be married to him that is risen from the dead, that she might bring forth fruit unto God.

"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." "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 that is raised from the dead." David loved Bathsheba while she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, but his marriage to her could not be legally consummated so long as Uriah lived. And Christ so loved the church that he gave himself for it. She could not be legally wedded to Christ in the New Covenant relation, until every jot and tittle of the law was fulfilled. The marriage nuptials of the Lamb could not be legalized until the covenant she was under to Moses was lawfully annulled.

"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 the law; so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man." As a woman who has a living husband cannot be married to another man without involving the guilt of adultery, so neither can we be married to Christ until we first become fully dead to the law, and the law dead to us. Such a union would be unlawful and adulterous.

The church under the legal covenant was in bondage, and the bond woman, in Paul's allegory, was mount Sinai, in Arabia, answering to Jerusalem, under the Sinai covenant, in bondage with her children. Galatians 4:25. But whom the Son maketh free, are free indeed. He has redeemed his people from the dominion, as well as from the curse, of that covenant; and having removed the legal impediment out of the way, has betrothed her unto himself in righteousness. She is no adulteress in her marriage to Christ; for her obligation to Moses are [*sic*] fully, justly and righteously canceled; and Moses is dead, and cannot pursue her over Jordan: but Joshua is her leader. In the gospel covenant she is legally recognized as the bride, the Lamb's wife.

In the individual experience of all the saints, this doctrine is illustrated. The first perceptible evidence of a quickened state is that in which we find ourselves in bondage under the law, held there by an unrelenting and inexorable power. We have heard of the heavenly Bridegroom, the blessed Savior, and fain would we fly to his arms; but the law, our old husband, holds dominion over us; and until his claims are satisfied, we cannot be wedded to Christ. All our works of obedience to the law fail to bring us any nearer to Christ. All our efforts to liquidate the demands of our old husband prove ineffectual and vain. Nothing short of death can put asunder what God has joined, and we see, and feel, and acknowledge the power of the law, until sin revives and we die. But when the law has pursued us to death, and laid us in our grave, then Christ our Resurrection and our Life is revealed in us, and then we find that we are dead to the law by the body of Christ, that we should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead. Until Christ is revealed, the law holds us in durance, and pours down upon us its dreadful curses; its dominion over us is demonstrated by a flaming sword, which turneth every way, meets us at every point, and will be satisfied with nothing we can do.

Tell us then, while thus sinking in despair, how easy it is to come to Christ and be his bride, while the very heavens lower in darkness, and the flaming sword of Eternal Justice is brandished over our devoted head, and we reply, No man can come unto him, except the Father which sent him draw them. With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. But when God reveals his Son in us, as he did in

Saul, immediately we confer no more with flesh and blood. In the body of his flesh we were slain by the law, and in his resurrection life we are raised up in newness of life. His resurrection life has quickened us, and brought us up from the dead. Death is abolished, and immortality is brought to light. The marriage of the Lamb to us has come, and our heavenly Bridegroom takes us by the hand, and by all that is sacred, covenants and promises to love and cherish, support and protect us as his bride, as long as the days of heaven shall endure.

My guilt, my wretchedness he knows,
Yet takes and owns me for his spouse;
My debts he pays and sets me free,
And makes his riches o'er to me.

My filthy rags are laid aside;
He clothes me as becomes his bride;
Himself bestows my wedding dress,
The robe of perfect righteousness.*

Who that has been slain by the law, and raised from the dead by the resurrection life of Christ, would wish to leave his sacred embrace, to go in search of the dead body of Moses? Our dead husband never blessed, but always cursed us. Our living husband always blesses and never curses. The former required everything, but furnished nothing; but the latter furnishes everything freely, and demands nothing in payment. Then let us with cheerful hearts love, honor and obey him in all things, and never seek another lover.

* These lines are from a hymn called "Bridegroom" written in 1781 by the Baptist preacher John Fawcett (1740-1817).