

June 28, 2020

Romans 7:1-13

“That You May Belong to Another!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every human being is spiritually married whether they like it or not. It doesn't even matter if one knows it or not. It is simply the case. We are either spiritually married to the law or we are spiritually married to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, and his powerful pardon.

Being married to the law is a terrible marriage. It isn't that the law is a bad husband, but rebellious humanity makes for a horrible wife. Put the good law and a bad wife together and the wife sees the truth about herself everyday and discovers that no matter how hard she tries she just can't be good enough. The very existence of her husband reveals to her that she is truly a hopeless failure.

We are bound to this law-husband for as long as he lives but what if he were to die? Could we possibly marry another man? Is it even possible that another man will even want a woman such as us? How can a savior-husband even begin to reach us? The woman that we are and the marriage that we are in must die and must be daily kept dead. This can only begin to happen when grief turns away from a self pity party and every form of self justification into a real godly grief about who we are and the impossibility of saving ourselves.

We can never be as good as our law-husband. We must then die to our law-husband. That brings us to the fourth verse of our epistle lesson for this morning: "... you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so *that you may belong to another*, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God." **That You May Belong to Another!** What a powerful statement! Martin H. Franzmann in his commentary on *Romans* explains it in this way:

When Christ's body hung upon the cross, when God spared not His own Son but gave Him up for us all (8:32), when Christ took on Himself for all of us the curse of the Law that struck us all (Gal. 3:13), then we died to the Law. The Law had done its utmost and was done with us, for we were all included in the body of the Crucified; His love, God's love, has made His death the death of us all (2 Cor. 5:14). The same act of God that delivered us from the dominion of sin has freed us from the dominion of the Law, and for the same purpose: that we might live to Him who died and rose for us and thus bear fruit for God, the fruit of a life drawn from His life and lived to His glory.

Through our participation in the death of Christ we were set free from the curse and damning power of the law. Nowhere do we see this more concretely than in our Baptism. What we have in our epistle lesson is a reiterating of what Paul says in Romans 6:3-4, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." We must die before we can live. And we come to life in the forgiveness of all our sins. As you can see, salvation brings a complete change in our spiritual relationship as remarrying after the death of a spouse brings a complete change. We are no longer married to the law, but we are now married to Jesus - the gospel of forgiveness. He is the divine bridegroom of his church.

You have died to the law through the body of Christ **That You May Belong to Another!** Through Jesus, who lived a perfect life for us and suffered our hell and died our death, we have “died with him to that which held us captive” in order that we might be married to the one who has set us free through his pure goodness and loving sacrifice. Our marriage to Jesus is entirely different than when we were married to our law-husband. Our law-husband was good, but he doesn’t love and forgive us. Rather, he demands love and shows us how unloving we really are. Moreover, because of who we are and what we have done he condemns and threatens us with everlasting punishment.

On the other hand, the apostle Paul writes of our savior-husband in these glowing terms: “... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).” It is wonderful to belong to another - to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Notice that he desires to present us as holy and without blemish. By faith in his holiness and since he is the unblemished lamb, we are presented as clean and beautiful - without spot or wrinkle. We are a gorgeous bride.

Since our Lord has done all of this it just doesn’t make sense that we would ever turn his work into the opposite. It doesn’t make any sense that we would purposely seek to soil ourselves with all those things that he died for on the cross. As I have said in the past, Jesus did not die on the cross for our sins in order that we might now have a free ticket to do every sort of evil against him. On the contrary, he is our head and we are his body, that is, we receive his love and strive to submit to his love for we now love as we have been loved. This is not the burden of our old husband, for our new husband has said it well (Matthew 11:28-30): “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

So then, we have become dead to the law through the body of Christ in order that we might belong to him who rose from the dead “in order that we might bear fruit,” as Paul writes in our epistle. It is the case of every believer in Jesus that we are counted dead to the law. Christ was put to death with violence and we with him. We died to sin. Consequently, we have been completely severed from the law through the death of Christ and we now belong to Jesus and are raised with him unto newness of life. What our law-husband demanded of us and constantly said of us - all that we resented - we now desire to willingly do for Jesus by faith to his praise and honor. We love him, for he has loved us, and we love one another. Our wonderful union with him naturally produces fruit. The Lutheran theologian, Paul E. Kretzmann, in his *Popular Commentary of the Bible* says it well. He writes:

Just as death releases every person from the obligation of the Law, so the death of Christ has definitely released us from the liability of the Law, has annulled the Law, in fact. And whereas the believers before their conversion were bound under the Law, they are now, by the death of Christ, liberated from the former obligation and now belong to the resurrected Christ as their rightful Spouse. And the result of this wonderful union is the bringing forth of fruit unto God, the fruit of good works, which are done to the praise and honor of God.

When we were married to our law-husband and dominated by our evil desires, we brought nothing but the fruit of death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. Through Jesus Christ a change has come. As Jesus our Savior himself says, “So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit (Matt. 7:17-18).” We who believe in Jesus’ righteousness are counted as righteous - declared to be healthy trees. As it says in Isaiah 61, our Savior has been set apart to bring the good news of pardon, to bind up our broken hearts, to set us free, to right all wrongs, to dry our tears, to give us gladness, to strengthen our spirit, that we “may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.” We belong to Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott