

The Present Truth Crusade

with Bishop Stephen D. Lewis '08

MARRIED TO THE WRONG MAN

Without faith it is impossible to please God. The reason for this is that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23); and of course sin can not please God. This is why it is that, "the knowledge of what the Scripture means when urging upon us the necessity of cultivating faith, is more essential than any other knowledge that can be acquired."

The Illustration. It is a very simple one, and one which every one can understand. The law of God says of man and woman, "They two shall be one flesh." It is adultery for either one to be married to another while the other is living. The law will not sanction such a union.

For reasons that will appear later, the illustration cites only the case of a woman leaving her husband. The law unites them. That law holds the woman to the man as long as he lives. If while her husband lives she shall be united to another man, she will find herself under the condemnation of the law. But if her husband dies, she may be united to another, and be perfectly free from any condemnation.

The woman is then "free from the law," although the law has not changed in one particular. Least of all has it been abolished; for the same law that bound her to the first husband and which condemned her for uniting with another in his lifetime, now unites her to another and binds her to him as closely as it did to the first. If we hold to this simple illustration, we shall have no difficulty with what follows.

The Application. As in the illustration there are four subjects the law, the woman, the first husband, and the second husband so also in the application. We are represented as the woman. This is clear from the statement that we are "married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead," which is Christ. He therefore is the second husband. The first husband is indicated in verse 5: "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Death is the fruit of sin. The first husband, therefore, was the flesh, or "the body of sin."

"Dead to the Law." This is the expression that troubles so many. There is nothing troublesome in it, if we but keep in mind the illustration and the nature of the parties to this transaction. Why are we dead to the law? In order that we might be married to another. But how is it that we become dead in order to be married to another? In the illustration it is the first husband that dies before the woman may be married to another. Even so it is here, as we shall see.

"One Flesh." The law of marriage is that the two parties to it "shall be one flesh." How is it in this case? The first husband is the flesh, the body of sin. Well, we were truly one flesh with that. We were by nature perfectly united to sin. It was our life. It controlled us. Whatever sin devised, that we did. We might have done it unwillingly at times, but we did it nevertheless. Sin reigned in our mortal bodies, so that we obeyed it in the lusts thereof. Whatever sin wished, was law to us. We were one flesh.

Seeking a Divorce. There comes a time in our experience when we wish to be free from sin. It is when we see something of the beauty of holiness. With some people the desire is only occasional; with others it is more constant. Whether they recognize the fact or not, it is Christ appealing to them to forsake sin, and to be joined to him, to live with him. And so they endeavor to effect a separation. But sin will not consent. In spite of all that we can do, it still clings to us. We are "one flesh," and it is a union for life since it is a union of our life to sin. There is no divorce in that marriage.

Freedom in Death. There is no hope of effecting a separation from sin by any ordinary means. No matter how much we may desire to be united to Christ, it can not be done while we are joined to sin; for the law will not sanction such a union, and Christ will not enter into any union that is not lawful.

If we could only get sin to die, we should be free, but it will not die. There is only one way for us to be freed from the hateful union, and that is for us to die. If we wish freedom so much that we are willing [for self] to be crucified, then it may be done. In death the separation is effected; for it is by the body of Christ that "we" become dead. We are crucified

with him. The body of sin is also crucified. But while the body of sin is destroyed, we have a resurrection in Christ. The same thing that frees us from the first husband, unites us to the second.

A New Creature. Now we see how it is that we are dead to the law. We died in Christ, and were raised in him. But "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God." 2 Cor. 5:17, 18. Now we may be united to Christ, and the law will witness to the union, and sanction it. For not only is the first husband dead, but we also died, so that, although alive, we are not the same creature that we were before. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Gal. 2:20. We are one. The same law that formerly declared us to be sinners now binds us to Christ.

A Different Service. Now that the union with Christ has been effected, we serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. In marriage, the woman is to be subject to the husband. So when we were united to sin, we were in all things subject to sin. For a time it was willing service; but when we saw the Lord, and were drawn to him, the service became irksome. We tried to keep God's law, but were bound, and could not. But now we are set free. Sin no longer restrains us, and our service is freedom. We gladly render to Christ all the service that the law requires of us. We render this service because of the perfect union between us. His life is ours, since we were raised only by the power of his life. Therefore our obedience is simply his loyalty and faithfulness in us.

Sin by the Law. The apostle says that when we were in the flesh, "the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Far from it. The law is righteousness. But it is only by the law that sin is known. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law." "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." 1 Cor. 15:56. "Sin is the transgression of the law." So there can be no sin but by the law. But the law is not sin; for if it were, it would not reprove sin. To convince of sin is the work of the Spirit of God, and not of Satan. He would make us believe that sin is right.

"Thou Shalt Not Covet." It once seemed very strange that the apostle should have quoted only this one commandment as the one that convicted him of sin. But the reason is plain. It was because this one includes every other. We learn (Col. 3:5) that covetousness is idolatry. Thus the law ends just where it begins. It is a complete circle, including every duty of every person in the universe. "I had not known lust," or unlawful desire, "except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Now lust is the beginning of every sin, for "when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." James 1:15. And sin is the transgression of the law.

But the tenth commandment is that one which forbids lust or unlawful desire. Therefore, if it is perfectly kept, all the others must be. And if it is not kept, no part of the law is kept. So we see that in quoting the tenth commandment as that which convinced him of sin, the apostle really included the whole law.

Living with Him. Before leaving this portion we must call attention to the force of the eighth verse of chapter 6: "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." We can see how apt this is when we know that it is our death with Christ that frees us from the union with the monster sin, and unites us in marriage to Christ. People get married in order to live together. So we become united to Christ in order that we may live with him here and in the world to come. If we would live with him in the world to come, we must live with him in this world. In the first seven verses of the seventh chapter of Romans we have had the relation which we by nature sustain to sin, and which by grace we afterwards sustain to Christ, represented under the figure of marriage to a first and second husband. The union with the second husband can not take place while the first husband is living; and in this case the marriage is so perfect, the two parties being literally one flesh and blood, that one can not die without the other; therefore we must needs die with sin, before we can be separated from it.

But we die in Christ, and as he lives, although he was dead, we also live with him. But in his life there is no sin, and so the body of sin is destroyed, while we are raised. Thus in death we are separated from the first husband, sin, and united to the second husband, Christ. In the verses which follow the apostle has pictured the struggle with the sin that has become distasteful. It is really an enlargement of that which has been presented in the first verses: