

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-06-24—UNDER THE LAW

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

In last week's Sabbath Thought, I discussed two systems of law—the Law of Sin and Death and the Law of the Spirit of Life:

ROMANS 8:2 Because **the law of the Spirit of life** in Christ Jesus has delivered me from the **law of sin and death**.

When Adam chose to eat the fruit of a tree against the command of God, he chose the Law of Sin and Death as the default law for all mankind:

ROMANS 5:12 Wherefore, as **by one man [the Law of Sin and Death] entered into the world**, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

The trees in the garden in Eden were *symbolic* of the two laws. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolized the Law of Sin and Death that was authored by Satan and the Tree of Life represented God's Law of the Spirit of Life. Ever since Adam made his choice, all mankind live "under" the Law of Sin and Death, as Paul affirms:

ROMANS 3:19 Now then, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those **who are under the law [of Sin and Death]**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty** before God.

So what does it mean to be "under the law"? In simple terms it means to be governed, influenced, or controlled by a set of rules and regulations. Strange as it may sound, though, simply living *under* the Law of Sin and Death has caused **ALL to sin**:

ROMANS 5:12-14 Wherefore, as **by one man sin entered** into the world, and death by sin; and so **death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned**: 13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless **death reigned from Adam** to Moses, **even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression**, who is the figure of him that was to come.

This is astounding when you think about it. Even though it was **Adam** who disobeyed God, this says that all have sinned simply because they are *under* the Law of Sin and Death! Before examining why this is the case, notice verse 13, which can be somewhat confusing: "until the law, sin was in the world: but **sin is not imputed** when there is no law." (I added the comma after "until the law," to make it clearer.) If all have sinned (v12), then what does it mean that "sin is **not** imputed"? This in no way suggests that sin does not **exist**; it simply says that it is not *imputed*—or attributed—against the sinner. In other words, God does not judge people for their sin UNTIL they have a choice and the means to repent:

JOHN 12:47-48 But if anyone hears My [*Jesus Christ's*] words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for **I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.** 48 The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, **that shall judge him in the last day.**

However, there is still the question of how and why all have sinned simply because they live under the Law of Sin and Death. The answer is that it is a WAY of life that CAUSES people to sin. The Law of Sin and Death directs this world to operate on principles of competition and greed, which *produce* lust, pride, envy, jealousy, selfishness, etc. How? It rewards those who act in accordance with those principles and punishes those who do not. In fact, it is hard to survive in this world except by competition and greed:

TITUS 3:3 For we also were once **foolish**, disobedient, **deceived**, **serving all kinds of lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**

As abhorrent as these sins are, we have all been “foolish” and “deceived” into LIVING the way of the Law of Sin and Death. To see how this works, ask yourself: Why does starvation exist in a world that can produce food for everyone? It exists because of principles of competition and greed: Farmers produce food so they can make a profit; shippers transport the food to other countries so they can make a profit; and distributors sell the food locally so they can make a profit. However, the poor cannot buy the food because they obviously have no money. See the problem? Distributors cannot pay the shippers unless the poor pay for the food. Shippers cannot pay the farmers unless the distributors pay for the shipping. Farmers cannot produce the food unless the shippers pay for it. Even if all of those involved in this chain of food production and distribution *wanted* to feed the poor, the Law of Sin and Death makes it hard to do so. It actually *promotes* starvation because the law is *based* upon principles of competition and greed.

Living under the Law of Sin and Death sets our minds and causes us to act according to the WAY of sin—“the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 John 2:16). Satan is the author of the Law of Sin and Death, so in living by it, a person becomes more like him. Even the most well-intentioned people sin because those rules are designed to make those under it take on the ways of Satan.

DEFINITION: Being <u>under</u> the Law of Sin and Death means being subject to laws that cause sin simply because they are the status quo—the manner and thinking in which all live their lives.

“Sin is the transgression of [God’s Law of the Spirit of Life]” (1 John 3:4). The Law of Sin and Death is *sin* because it is contrary to God’s Law. The Law of Sin and Death causes all to sin eventually because it influences the thoughts, actions, and words of people.

One might think that simply keeping the Law of the Spirit of Life would change things. But there was a problem—the ancient Israelites proved beyond any doubt that mankind is incapable of keeping it:

EZEKIEL 20:21, 24-25 But **the children [of Israel] rebelled against Me. They did not walk in My statutes, nor keep My ordinances to do them**—the ordinances which, *if* a man do, he shall even live in them. And **they polluted My Sabbaths**, and I said, I would pour out My fury on them, to fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness. ... 24 Because **they had not done My ordinances, but had despised My statutes and had polluted My Sabbaths**, and their eyes **were after their fathers' idols**. 25 Wherefore **I also gave them over to ~~their own~~ statutes that were not good, and ~~their own~~¹ ordinances [of the Law of Sin and Death]** which they could not live.

The Law of the Spirit of Life is “is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14), so it cannot be kept physically. In fact, the only way to keep it is mentioned in the name: it is a law “**of the Spirit.**” Unlike the Law of Sin and Death, physical people cannot perfectly live UNDER the Law of the Spirit of Life; eventually, they fall away. The Law of the Spirit of Life must be IN a person and lived *spiritually* through God, not physically. Physical humans are subject to “the sin [*transgression of Law of the Spirit of Life*] that so easily entraps us” (Heb. 12:1). Without a spiritual component, physical people cannot keep the Law of the Spirit of Life:

EZEKIEL 36:27 And **I [God] will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My ordinances and do them.**

Only with God’s Holy Spirit IN a person can physical people continue in the Law of the Spirit of Life. The Holy Spirit is also required because it liberates people from living UNDER the Law of Sin and Death:

ROMANS 8:2 Because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has delivered me** from the law of sin and death.

Freedom from the Law of Sin and Death only comes through *baptism*—which releases a person from being under it by ‘death’ in a watery grave. **Choosing** the Law of the Spirit of Life only happens through *repentance*. **Living** by the Law of the Spirit of Life requires the *Holy Spirit* in one’s heart and mind. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is so crucial to having the Law of the Spirit of Life IN a person that:

MATTHEW 12:31 Because of this, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men except the **blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; that shall not be forgiven** to men.

Anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit CANNOT have the Law of the Spirit of Life IN them. *Blasphemy* is hateful and spiteful condemnation or rejection of something. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is the “unpardonable” sin because it is an absolute rejection of the Law of the Spirit of Life!

¹ “*Their own*” were added by the translator.

God IS agape love², so His Law *defines* agape love. The Law of the Spirit of Life is His WAY of life. A person with the Holy Spirit dwelling in them is committed to living according to the Law of the Spirit of Life and, as a result, BECOMING agape love.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit also brings judgment. Romans 5:13 said, “**until the law** sin was in the world: but **sin is not imputed** when there is no law.” God postponed judgment of sin UNTIL the law. Which law? The Law of the Spirit of Life:

JOHN 16:7-8 But I [*Jesus Christ*] am telling you the truth. It is profitable for you that I go away because if I do not go away, the Comforter [*the Holy Spirit*] will not come to you. However, if I go, I will send it to you. 8 And when that one [*the Holy Spirit*] has come, **it will convict the world concerning sin**, and **righteousness**, and **judgment**:

Once the Holy Spirit is offered to a person, it begins God’s judgment. Notice:

1 PETER 4:17 For **the time has come for judgment to begin** with the household of God; and if it first *begins* with us, **what will be the end of those who do not obey** the gospel of God?

When Peter asks, “what *will be* the end of those who do not obey?” he is referring to the time when God judges the rest of the world by offering to give them His Holy Spirit. Those who then reject the Law of the Spirit of Life will have their sin IMPUTED to them—and sin brings death.

The Law of Sin and Death is a way of competition and greed whereas the Law of the Spirit of Life is a way of giving and receiving³. They are two completely different rules for living. All live *under* the Law of Sin and Death but the Firstfruits of God have rejected it and have the Law of the Spirit of Life IN them. As for the rest of the world, there is coming a day when “I [*God will*] sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and **a new spirit will I put within you**: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And **I will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.” (Ezek. 36:25-27). Then will the Law of Sin and Death vanish away forever!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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² 1 John 4:8, 16.

³ Phil. 4:15.