

## ***Sabbath School Today*** **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

### ***Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans*** **Lesson 1: The Apostle Paul in Rome**

During the “beginning” of “the latter rain” of the 1888 era, Ellen G. White is reported to have said, “Let us have all of Romans and all of Galatians.” [1] The “most precious message” is “the third angel’s message in verity.” [2] In other words, it is an understanding of justification by faith, which is parallel to and consistent with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. Of all the books of the Bible, Romans most clearly explains justification by faith. Ellen White understood that the companion books which give the greatest light on Revelation 14:6-12, the third angel’s message, are Romans and Galatians.

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary is practical truth. In other words, it involves the purification of the hearts of God’s people, so that they experience the atonement with God. They have seen the heart-warming truth of the love of God revealed in Jesus’ cross. They realize that if Christ had not died for all, then all would be dead. They can no longer live for themselves, but the *agape* motivation becomes living for Jesus and His Father. They would not willingly choose to bring disrepute upon the Heavenly family into which they have been adopted. This is the real meaning of justification by faith.

Most can identify with the Apostle Peter’s characterization of his brother Paul’s writings, that there are “some things hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16). With that discouraging word can we understand the Book of Romans much less the Book of Revelation? Actually it’s only the honest-hearted believer of God’s promises who can understand Romans. It’s the “unlearned and unstable” who misconstrue Paul’s writings to their own perdition.

It was to such folks that the Apostle Paul wrote his letter in the church at Rome. They were “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Cor. 1:26). They were honest, candid believers. There were probably retailers, skilled craftsmen, day laborers, tradesmen, landscapers, even servants with a few upper class, and maybe a civil servant or two. It was to these kinds of people that Paul wrote. He wasn’t trying to shoot over their heads. He wrote simply and directly in order for them to understand. So this is an encouragement for us to “dig in” and apply our minds to some of the nourishing food of the Scriptures.

It was Martin Luther who declared Romans “the clearest gospel of all” and he was right. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the eyewitness accounts of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the most part the gospels do not explain the deeper meaning of the “good news” and the cross. God revealed the deeper meaning to Paul, and Romans is the “key” to understanding the atonement.

John's Revelation of Jesus Christ as the "Lamb" (25 times)—the Crucified One—is the gospel for the closing age of the Christian era. However, the Revelation cannot be understood without the Book of Romans.

Luther's heart was strangely warmed as he read Romans and saw the truth that "the just shall live by faith." His Catholic training had directed him to receive grace through the sacraments, which would motivate him to do good works that would make the "connect" with God. His agony of conscience was how to know when he had done enough good works. To Luther the joy of discovering that God justifies the ungodly by faith alone was a great release from self-centered bondage in sin.

Luther was on the right track in restoring God's love to the Christian church. However, his successors over-analyzed justification by faith to the point where it became a stale, mysterious book transaction, light-years away from the human heart; whereby, when one had enough faith, God made the necessary adjustments in the books of heaven based on Calvary, and the sinner was justified and forgiven his sins. Thus God experienced the atonement with sin. The atonement was for sins because the sinner believed in the cross.

Such professorial teaching was nothing more than against the law of God's cosmic love. God is not interested in harmony with sin. Christ did not die in order to justify ongoing sin in perpetuity. That is the pagan view of the atonement, which has been absorbed into the Christian church. The idea that the sinner can have "faith" to the degree that God sees evidence in one's prayers, Bible study, witnessing, etc. (all of these things are good when properly motivated by *agape*), and thus forgives the sinner, is a concept of the atonement that comes straight out of heathenism.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7). The only way that Paul could write that sinners could call "God our Father," is because God's gift of the atonement in Christ Jesus reconciled the human race unto Himself. The whole human race of sinners has been legally adopted into the Heavenly family. Now it's for us to recognize this fact and receive the divine revelation of the atonement. [3]

We have been "called to be saints". A saint is one set apart from the world of self-centeredness. Legally, Christ has justified "all" (Rom. 5:18, 19) so that God can "call" everyone to such a blessed, exalted state.

Who among us is not tired of sin? Who is not weary of the continual degradation of sin's bondage? Do you want to know what hell on earth is? "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). Hell on earth is the embarrassment of having one's sins publicly exposed. Jesus never intends for anyone to face such agony.

Paul saw that Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" with a "self" that needed denial. Such temptations that He felt from within are such that we all feel. To sense the

pull of sin is not sin itself (James 1:14, 15). Yet, He “condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3, 4).

The righteousness of the law fulfilled in us is the atonement. It is the practical meaning of the cleansing of the sanctuary. It is true justification by faith. It is Christ’s gift to us as our High Priest in the holiest of all. Thus Romans is an invitation into the Most Holy Place with Christ.

—*Paul E. Penno*

**Endnotes:**

[1] Letter E. J. Waggoner to O. A. Olsen [n.d.]; original in General Conference Archives.

[2] Ellen G. White, *The Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

[3] “The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; it was not made to produce a love that was not in existence; but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God’s heart, ... We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, ... The death of Christ was expedient in order that mercy might reach us with its full pardoning power, and at the same time that justice might be satisfied in the righteous substitute.” (Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Complete Salvation,” *Signs of the Times*; May 30, 1895.)

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/C8ja7yBDa1o>

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