

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

The Gospel in Galatians **Lesson 11: Freedom in Christ**

One of the more valuable aspects of the 1888 message is the honest approach it takes regarding sin. It never excuses or minimizes that sin is completely offensive to a holy God. E. J. Waggoner focuses on the essence of the sin problem when he uses the example of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-13). Her condition is called a “spirit of infirmity” (*Revised Standard Version*; “sickness,” *New American Standard Bible*). Sin deforms all of us just as the woman was crippled. When Jesus healed her He said, “you are *freed* from your infirmity” (vs. 12, emphasis added).

Many tend to underestimate the power sin has over us, especially when we believe sin to be specific acts. It is easy to convince ourselves we can control our actions, but we laugh at the alcoholic who claims he or she can quit drinking any time. Many of us know there are things in our lives we need to clean up, but the pressure isn’t great enough to compel us to change, maybe someday.

There are even folks who nervously attend lectures at Seventh-day Adventist gatherings where the big question is whether the Sunday laws are getting closer. The unspoken but misguided idea is that when the laws start to be enforced we can tuck ourselves back into church so we don’t have to give up anything in the interim. The parable of the ten virgins tells us this will not work.

Returning to the crippled woman, Waggoner explains: “Now note how accurately this describes our condition before we meet Christ:

“(1) We are bound by Satan, ‘captured by him to do his will’ (2 Tim. 2:26). ‘Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin’ (John 8:34) ...

“(2) We have a ‘spirit of infirmity’ and can in no wise lift ourselves up or free ourselves from the chains that bind us. It was when we were ‘without strength’ that Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6, *King James Version*). These two words ‘without strength’ are translated from the very same word that is rendered ‘infirmity’ in the story of the woman whom Jesus healed.” [1]

When Jesus told the woman she was freed from her infirmity, there were no conditions, but she did have to believe she was healed. “Faith does not make facts. It only lays hold of them ... the liberty wherewith He makes us free is the liberty that existed before the curse [of sin].” [2] “Now the truth is stated that if a person does anything with the hope of being saved by it, that is, of getting salvation by his own work, Christ is ‘of no advantage

to him.’ [Gal. 5:2]. If Christ is not accepted as a complete Redeemer, He is not accepted at all.” [3]

Like the Judiazers told the Galatian Christians, “Many have an idea that they must do some part of the work alone. They have trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, but now they seek by their own efforts to live aright. But every such effort must fail ... It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace.

“... Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. ... Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.” [4]

This is frustrating to people who want the reassurance of seeing their Christian experience progressing. It’s simply a day-by-day choice to let God direct everything in their lives. So is this just a passive life, no plans required, just bump along life aimlessly? Yes, in the sense that we don’t plan things without God, but no in the sense that we follow the plans God has already developed for us.

Waggoner caught the idea: “Think of it! God Himself has wrought the good works with which we are to appear before His throne. And how are we to get them?—Simply by trusting Him; by appropriating those good works by faith. God Himself comes to dwell with those who believe His word, and He lives out His own life in them. This thought is enough to fill every soul with love and joy and confidence. ...

“The secret of the whole matter is to acknowledge that in us dwells no good thing, and that God alone is good, that we are nothing, but that He is everything; that we are weakness, but that power belongs to God, ... Christian activity comes only through passive submission to God, as the clay is passive in the hands of the potter.” [5]

The Galatian Christians had rejoiced in the freedom of the true Gospel that allows us to rest in Christ, but legalistic and intolerant people had tried to take that freedom away by adding a requirement other than faith in the Gospel.

“God’s law is the truth (Psalm 119:142), and the Galatian brethren had started out to obey it. They succeeded in the beginning but later on had been hindered in their progress. ‘Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone’ (Rom. 9:32). Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no stumbling in Him. The perfection of the law is in Him, for His life is the law.

“The cross is and always has been a symbol of disgrace. ...The offense of the cross is that the cross is a confession of human frailty and sin and of inability to do any good thing. To take the cross of Christ means to depend solely on Him for everything, and this is the abasement of all human pride. Men love to fancy themselves independent.

But let the cross be preached, let it be made known that in man dwells no good thing and that all must be received as a gift, and straightway somebody is offended.” [6]

Freedom is a fragile thing because it cannot be forced. God cannot use force, so He uses His love to draw us to Him. Lay hold of that, don't resist.

—Arlene Hill

Endnotes:

[1] Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, a verse-by-verse study of Galatians, p. 106; CFI ed. (2016).

[2] Ibid, p 107.

[3] Ibid, p. 110.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 69, 70.

[5] Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 173, 174; Glad Tidings ed. (1999).

[6] *The Glad Tidings*, p. 113.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/iYG-OO7DxTE>

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org