

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

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans **Lesson 3: The Human Condition**

The Bible says that this world will become very wicked in the last days just before the second coming of Jesus. The Lord Himself asks, "When the Son of man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8), implying that it will be very rare.

Paul says, "In the last days perilous times will come." Then he lists many evil things that people will do, even those who profess to worship God. "For men will be ... unthankful, unholy. ... From such people turn away!" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

The Bible is clear on two realities of human life: (1) "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [and (2) all are] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24).

Ellet J. Waggoner, one of the 1888 "messengers," describes the meaning of falling (or coming) short: "People are fond of imagining that what are called 'shortcomings' are not so bad as real sins. So it is much easier for them to confess that they have 'come short' than that they have sinned and done wickedly. But since God requires perfection, it is evident that 'shortcomings' are sins. It may sound pleasanter to say that a bookkeeper is 'short' in his accounts, but people know that the reason for it is that he has been taking that which is not his, or stealing. When perfection is the standard, it makes no difference in the result, how much or how little one comes short, so long as he comes short. The primary meaning of sin is 'to miss the mark.' And in an archery contest, the man who has not strength to send his arrow to the target, even though his aim is good, is a loser just as surely as he who shoots wide of the mark." [1]

Our fallen human condition is "enmity against God." The solution? To "be reconciled to God" by realizing how Christ was "made ... to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:20, 21, *King James Version*).

Sin is the source of all the suffering and anguish in the world, and everyone is born with the problem in his or her nature. The classic definition is, "Sin is the transgression of the law," the "law" being understood as God's law (1 John 3:4). But the Greek is only one little word, *anomia*, which literally is, "a state of being against the law." In other words, sin is heart-rebellion against the government of God, not merely outwardly doing things that are unlawful. Another word for it is "alienation." "The carnal mind is enmity against God," heart-alienation (Rom. 8:7). And "enmity" always finds expression.

The ultimate expression of that inner hatred is seen when the human race vented that pent-up hatred of God in their murder of His Son (see Acts 3:14, 15). Human sin

blossomed into the murder of the Son of God—and all of us were implicated (Rom. 3:23, 24; Zech 12:10). It happened because of a deep-seated principle: hatred cherished in the heart always leads to the act: “Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). And of course, “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him,” says the same verse.

Can this terrible sin be eradicated? The Bible says Yes! But only through repentance for the sin of murdering the Son of God. Far from being a negative experience, such repentance is the foundation of all true joy. Repentance is not our tears and sorrow balancing the books of life; it is our appreciation of what it cost Him to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isa. 53:4).

Repenting only of superficial sin leaves a deep stratum of further alienation which remains unrealized, unconfessed, and therefore unhealed. It is not enough that sin be legally forgiven; it must also be blotted out. This problem of unrealized sin pervades the entire church in all lands, and its practical effects weaken the witness of every congregation.

The good news is that the gracious Spirit of God will convict His people of that deep reality. Then He will be able to give the gift of ultimate repentance. His giving only awaits our willingness to receive. The issue is not the assurance of our own personal salvation, but the honor and vindication of the One who purchased our salvation.

One may never have heard the name of Christ, but he senses in his heart that he has “sinned and fall[en] short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). There is an awareness, however dim, of a perfect standard in the divine law and in Christ. The Holy Spirit penetrates human hearts with the conviction of “sin, and of righteousness” (John 16:8-10)

Ellen White expressed it this way: “The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character, the more clearly shall we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the heart before Him.” [2]

One of the great gospel truths of the 1888 message is that a higher motivation becomes realized in the close of time than has prevailed in the church in past ages—a concern for Christ that He receive His reward and find His “rest” in the final eradication of sin. All egocentric motivation based merely on fear of hell or hope of reward is less effective. The higher motivation is symbolized in the climax of Scripture—the Bride of Christ making herself “ready.”

That’s why we read in Revelation 12:11 that God will have a people who “overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb.” Repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the last gift He will give before He is finally withdrawn from the earth when the seven last plagues must fall (Rev. 15, 16). Repentance is a newly gifted hatred for sin that constrains one

“henceforth” (KJV) to deny self and to take up the cross to follow the Lamb of God (2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Luke 9:23). Repentance includes receiving the precious gift of the atonement, that is, of being reconciled to the God whom once we hated (Rom 5:7-11).

“Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people, ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.” [3]

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

Endnotes:

[1] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 70.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561.

[3] Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

Notes:

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

https://youtu.be/TNKwO_DMAM0

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