

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Romans
Lesson 9. No Condemnation

After he described his despair in Romans 7, Paul found joyful hope in the good news of a Saviour who came all the way to where we are, that He might save us from our sins. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1, 2). What does this mean? How deep and thorough is Christ's deliverance from our compulsive habits of sin?

"No condemnation" means release from our inner sense of divine judgment which has hung over us all our lives. Although these feelings of psychic wrong and maladjustment are deep and penetrating, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is even deeper and more far-reaching. A new principle delivers us from the tentacles of fear, guilt, and moral disorder that have enslaved our souls, even from our infancy.

No psychiatrist can accomplish such a profound healing of the human soul as can this "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Wrongs and anxieties from childhood to adulthood, which counselors could not relieve, find inner healing from our Divine Psychiatrist. He who believes the true gospel enjoys the new birth, which is a power working in him or her for righteousness as much stronger than the power of inherited tendencies to evil.

A glorious reality is disclosed in Paul's presentation of our nigh-at-hand Christ which the 1888 messengers, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, picked up on. The reason why Christ has come so close to us is revealed here: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, and for sin, 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 word "likeness" in the original means identical, the same as us. It cannot mean unlike or different from us. Christ who is fully God now became fully man, not with a substitutionary exemption from the human race in some way that insulates Him from our inner temptations, but in a shared sense. He built a divine-human bridge that spanned the gulf of alienation that sin has made, with foundations that reach all the way to the deepest root within the nature of the most helplessly lost sinner on earth.

In no way did He side-step reality by the deceit of an "exemption" from what we must battle with. Such a contrived exemption would negate the basic principle of righteousness by faith and contradict all of Scripture. Further, it would cast Christ in the role of a deceiver, pretending to conquer sin when He never even came close enough

to fight the battle where sin is. Paul's intent is to present Christ as perfectly equipped to solve the problem of sin where it is—deep within our fallen nature. Here is the fortress where the dragon has made his last stand, and here is where Christ confronts Satan. Yet Christ remained perfectly sinless.

Christ had personal experience in fighting the same “war” that we fight. He took our flesh and “condemned sin” in it. Christ in Romans 8 meets the problem of the frustrated Laodicean man of Romans 7. The Old Covenant man of Romans 7, whose trust is motivated by “I, myself” serving the law, thus creating fear and tension with the law, meets the self-centered man with the New Covenant Christ of Romans 8, who gives a new motivation for faith—“no condemnation” and “the righteousness of the law ... fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:1, 4).

Jesus explains to us how He “condemned sin in the flesh” which He took. He fought the same “war” that we must fight, with this tremendous difference: whereas we have been defeated, He won completely. Whereas we have been brought “into captivity to the law of sin,” He brought the “law of sin” into captivity by condemning it. Through self-denial He “delighted” in God's will.

He opens a window into His heart and invites us to look within at the nature of the battle He fought there: “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me”; “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 5:30; 6:38). Here He uses the same phraseology as did Paul in Romans 8:3—the Father “sent” Him on a mission. It involved inner conflict with temptation, not merely outer. Something had to be “condemned” within His nature—His “own will.” Here is where His “war” was fought: He could not do the “will of the Father” except as He denied “Mine own will.” There are those who start with horrified astonishment at the suggestion that Jesus had an inner conflict of that nature; but do not silence Him or suppress His own words.

The glory of Christ's righteousness is that it was not easy for Him. Behold the struggle in Gethsemane when He prays, “Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). We cast contempt on His divine sacrifice if we insist that it was easy for Him, that it involved no inner struggle that drew from His brow that sweat of blood as He scratched the earth with His fingers and wept in agony until He made the final surrender, saying “No” to His own will and “Yes” to His Father's will for Him. The sinless Adam in the Garden had no such inner war between two wills: Jesus took upon Himself a struggle infinitely further down the road from that of the sinless Adam.

It was here in “the likeness of [our] sinful flesh” in the struggle in Gethsemane and at Calvary that the Son of God trampled on the head of the serpent. It is a mystery how the Son of God could ever feel “alienated” from His Father; but it is a fact that He did feel it on the cross, for He cried out, “My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). Although He *felt* this way, the truth is that the Father was not truly alienated from Him, for He was right there with Him, suffering with Him, for “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). “God and His holy angels were beside the cross.

The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed.” [1] It was by faith that Christ bridged the awful chasm of our alienation “in the body of His flesh.” And we are reconciled if we “continue in the faith” which He pioneered (Col. 1:21-23).

The humanity of Christ means everything to us for it is intimately associated with the goal of the cleansing of the sanctuary truth. In Romans 8 Paul connected the post-Fall human nature of Christ, “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” with its practical application to us. “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4). The word “righteousness” is *dikaioma* in the original. The usual word for righteousness is *dikaosune*, which always means the righteousness of God, of Christ, imputed to the believer. But *dikaioma* is different—it’s the actual righteousness of the believer, imparted, not merely imputed. (The lady wears a leopard skin coat, it’s imputed, it’s not hers; the leopard wears the same coat, it’s imparted, a part of him.)

The reason why the long-awaited marriage (wedding) of the Lamb has not yet taken place is that His Bride hasn’t gotten ready. He is ready, she is not. But Revelation 19:8 tells how at last the church will not only have imputed righteousness, but will have *dikaioma*: “To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the *righteousness* of the saints.” No, they won’t save themselves and they won’t have any merit; but their *dikaioma* will at last honor their Saviour, and will give Him “glory” (vs. 7). Do you want to get “ready”?

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 753, 754.

Notes:

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

https://youtu.be/-0PmY-Wc_7k

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