

The Sin-principle Condemned To Death

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

"There is there fore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of the sin [principle] and of the death. 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 [as an offering] for sin, condemned the sin [principle] in the flesh: that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4, Accurate translation) .

Paul is still relating his experience. He has described in the seventh chapter his bitter bondage to the sin (depravity) dwelling in him, and the cry of despair it occasioned. That is the mournful wail of the seventh of Romans, Paul's experience trying to live up to his law-ideal -- in his own strength, without the help of Christ or the Holy Spirit, whom, as yet, he did not know.

Some say that that chapter is a picture of St. Paul's best, and of every Christian's best!

Never! In that passage there are up to verse 25 twenty-nine "I's"; "law" nineteen times; "sin" fourteen times; "me" ten times; "dead and died and death" seven times, and no Christ and no Holy Spirit. Is that a Christian experience? If so, then the naked aborigines of Australia, worshipping snakes and sacrificing to demons are Christians! Indeed, is that the way St. Paul was in the habit of describing his Christian experience? Emphatically not. In the first seven verses of the first chapter of this epistle, containing only one sentence, he had eleven references to Christ. His beloved Savior was "all." In Him He always triumphed, and was more than conqueror. He called God and men to witness "how holily and unblameably he walked among men" (1 Thess. 2:10).

No, the eighth chapter was the up to date Christian experience of St. Paul. It so utterly contradicts the experience of the seventh that they cannot both belong to the same man at the same time. There he was "carnal, sold under sin," a wretched captive tugging at his chains; here he is free. There he was trying to save himself; here he is already saved by another. There he was groaning; here he is shouting happy. There it was agonizing prayer; here it is rapturous praise. There he was hopelessly defeated; here he is victorious and more than conqueror through Christ. There it was dark despair; here it is cloudless hope.

In the sixth chapter Paul exhibits sanctification and a life of holiness as provided for in the atonement, both a blessed privilege and a solemn duty. In the eighth chapter it is Paul's experience and the possible experience of every Christian. It begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation from God.

Godet reports Spener as saying, "If the Holy Scripture was a ring and the Epistle to the Romans its precious stone chapter 8 would be the sparkling point of the jewel." The Holy Spirit brings Christ potentially into the Apostle's life, Who not only justifies him but abides in him as a new principle of death to the sin principle and life to God.

1. Christ justifies the sinner. "There is, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (verse 1). He is fully justified, pardoned and restored to the favor of God. He is also adopted into the divine family, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the fact. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16).

The phrase "In Christ Jesus" means not a legal or federal union. It is a vital union, such as Jesus described in the parable of the Vine and the branches, a living relation, which passes the holy life of Christ into us.

Mel Trotter, when a helpless, hopeless drunkard, ready to go to hell for a drink, got saved so completely and wonderfully that for years he became the leader of Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. Wonderful Savior!

II. Verse 2. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of the sin-principle and the death." Godet, the great French Commentator, says, "Verses 14 describe the restoration of holiness by the Holy Spirit. Sin entails death on the justified, in whom it regains the upper hand as well as on the unjustified" (8:12-13). There is therefore only one way of preventing sin from causing us to perish; that is, that it perish itself. Grace does not save by patronizing the sin but by destroying it.

The word "law" occurs in this second verse twice. No one can rightly interpret the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans without critically noting the sense in which the word "law" is used each time it occurs. In this verse

it does not mean any statute, or decree, or legislative enactment. Dr. Maclaren says it means here "Constancy of operation." Godet calls it "controlling power imposing itself on the will." Dr. Steele says it means "Uniform tendency." Dr. Barnes says it means the influence of the sin (principle) and the death;" that is, if we substitute any one of these phrases for "law" we shall get the meaning of the verse: "The influence of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the influence of the sin (principle) and the death;" that is, the moral death that accompanies the sin (principle) .

That is the Apostle's wonderful testimony of deliverance, which he gladly proclaimed to the world. He believed that the power of the Holy Spirit which broke the power of the sin principle over him can deliver others too. In substance he confessed: "The controlling power of the Holy Spirit in one instant (aorist tense) made me free from the influence or power of the sin (principle) depravity. I tried intellectual methods; but found that they could not free me from the domination of carnality which had captured my passions and desires. I whipped myself up to keep the law of God; but I found that the proneness to evil would not loosen its grip upon my being. I tried every human resource, and all miserably failed. Nothing touched the necessity of my case until I heard of Jesus Christ. When I applied to Him He sent the Holy Spirit who subverted and expelled the tendency to sin, and set me free."

III. The law of God could not do this. Hear St. Paul further; -- verse 3: "For what the law [of God] could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned [to death] 'The Sin in the flesh.'"

"Law" in this verse means the law of God, the moral law. This law could not justify or sanctify, as Paul knew by sad experience. It condemned every kind of sin, but could not save from it. The flesh hindered it. "Flesh" (sarx) here means "the seat of passion and frailty" and then figuratively "the carnal and rebellious principle itself" (Adam Clarke) . Human depravity fatally hindered the law of God.

But "God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Christ took on Himself human nature as God originally made it, without any sinful propensity. There was no "he hamartia, the sin principle" in it. Jesus came to do for us and in us what no written or unwritten law of God could accomplish.

Dear old Dr. Maclaren said: "That life of Jesus, lived in human nature (in a human body) gives a new hope of the possibilities of that nature lived in us. What the man Christ Jesus was He was that we may become. In the very flesh in which the tyrant (the sin principle) rules, Jesus shows the possibility and the loveliness of a holy life. He condemned to death the sin in the flesh as wholly unnecessary and no essential part of it."

Godet quotes Theophylact: "He sanctified the flesh and crowned it by condemning to death the sin (principle) and by showing that the flesh is not sinful in its (essential) nature."

"But," someone asks, "do not some teach that we must have sin in us"? and "No man can be free from sin while in the mortal body, which sin must indwell us to the last moment of our lives"? Let there be no mistake about that: "It is ever taught at Keswick, as in every part of God's Word, that there are to the very last hour of our life upon earth powers of corruption within every man which defile his very best deeds and give even to his holiest efforts the nature of sin." "We shall never be sinless in this world." "We do not at Keswick make light of those depths upon depths of mischief that lie hidden within us."

Yes, we are compelled to admit that this is the fundamental element, and warp and woof of most Keswick teaching. And the "higher life" conventions in the East repeat this same unscriptural nonsense. And so do the Moody and Torrey Bible schools. Torrey says in one of his books: "There is not a line of Scripture that warrants the idea that the baptism of the Spirit cleanses from inbred sin!" Poor Torrey!

What about these texts:

1. Acts 15:8, 9 (R. V.), "Giving them the Holy Spirit . . . cleansing their hearts by faith."
2. Rom. 6:18 (R. V.), "Being made free from the sin [principle] ye became servants of righteousness."
3. Rom. 6:27 (R. V.), "But now [not at death] being made free from the sin [principle] . . . ye have your fruit unto sanctification." That is exactly what sanctification is -- deliverance from the sin-principle.
4. Rom. 8:2 (R. V.), "Law of the Spirit . . . made me free from the law of the sin."

5. I John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" v.9. "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

What can possess educated men like Dr. Torrey to pervert and distort and deny the plain, unmistakable meaning of such texts? And yet they pretend all the time to be preaching holiness. But observe, it is a new brand of modern holiness -- "Corrupt" holiness! "Sinful" holiness! "Depths upon depths of mischief" holiness! -- a kind the writers of the Bible never heard of. Yet this moral rubbish is being peddled out all over the English-speaking world, in the interest of the father of lies, to side-track true holiness, that cleanses the heart. See I Thess. 5:23 and 2 Peter 1:4. "Exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

IV. What man could not do and divine law could not do, Christ has done for us. Christ, by His incarnation, provided for the pardon of sins, and the expulsion of the sin principle. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and by the entrance of the Spirit of holiness into our nature, the great usurper -- the sin principle -- is driven out, executed.

Clarke says: "The design and object of the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ was to condemn sin: to have it executed and destroyed -- to annihilate its guilt, power and being in the soul of a believer."

Godet says: "The condemnation of the sin by Christ's life is the means appointed by God for its destruction in ours."

Alford: "Sin is throughout the passage an absolute principle. The Apostle is not speaking of the removal of guilt, but of the practice of sin . . . by the new and sanctifying power of the Spirit by Christ. The context shows that the weakness of the law was its having no sanctifying power. It could arouse sin but could not cast it out." This noble quotation endorses my whole argument, and my translation, "the sin-principle" of the Greek noun for sin in the singular number with the article "the" before it. "The sin" occurs twenty-nine times in three chapters, meaning always "the sin principle." Sixteen of the world's greatest commentators endorse our argument and translation and do not leave Torrey and his Keswick friends an inch of standing. Bless God! we have the truth, and "the mind of Christ," and of the Spirit.

V. Notice the results, v. 4. "That the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Alford: "We must look for the meaning of the word 'condemned' in the effects -- victory over sin, and casting out of Sin" (the sin principle) . This is very important to the right apprehension of the whole chapter, in this part of which, not the justification but the sanctification of Christians is the leading subject. Christ's victory over the sin is mine, by my union with Him, and participation in His Spirit. Whedon: "The righteousness of the law does not mean imputed righteousness, nor simply innocence, but an actual and active personal righteousness, energized by the Spirit." This does not sound much like "Corruption holiness," does it?

Dear Dr. Maclaren wrote: "Remember the alternative. There must be condemnation for us, or for the sin that dwelleth in us. There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus, because there is condemnation for the sin that dwells in them. It must be slain or it will slay us. It must be cast out, or it will cast us out from God. It must be separated from us, or it will separate us from Him. We need not be condemned: but if it be not condemned, then we shall be." In your case, dear reader, which shall it be?

Oh, struggling hearts, mourning over spiritual failures and defeats; falling below your ideals, watching and weeping and striving in vain, do you want to keep God's law, and live a victorious life pleasing to Him? Then come in faith to Him who opened the fountain for sin and uncleanness. Come to Him who prayed that you might be sanctified, and shed the blood that cleanses from all sin. Come in faith, and you will not be disappointed.