

From Gloom To Glory

Romans Chapter 8

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I want you to open your Bibles tonight to one of the greatest chapters of this precious old Book-Romans 8, verse 1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This wonderful chapter opens with no condemnation, and it closes with no separation. Verse 38: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus."

This chapter opens with no condemnation and closes with no separation, and in between no condemnation and no separation we have in verse 28: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." We have a similar statement in Psalm 84:11: "The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Grace for today, glory in the future glory land, and between grace and glory the Lord withholds no good thing. So in Romans 8, between no condemnation and no separation, all things work together for good.

In the quietness of this Sabbath evening let us think for a few moments of the privileges that come to those who are "in Christ Jesus." If in Christ there was only pardon, it would be well worth while. Contemplate on what it means "no condemnation," no guilt, but pardon full and complete. Some years ago I went through Australia's largest prison. After walking through the long corridors of cells I stepped into the observation room where a condemned man is placed. It is so named because medical men observe him day and night to note the nervous reaction of a man who is facing death. I stepped into the death cell where he would end his last half hour of life. I stood at the door of the death cell where men facing their execution stand. I took the two steps to the trap door where they are launched into eternity.

As I stood at the door of that death cell I wondered how a man would feel when he was facing this awful experience. I asked the warden whether he had witnessed an execution. He assured me he had seen several. "Tell me, warden," I asked, "how do they take it?" "To be candid, Mr. Burnside," was the warden's reply, "very few can take it. When they get this far they can't walk. We have to carry them." As I stood there at the door of that death cell I thought, How would a prisoner feel if a pardon was handed to him? He would just about collapse with joy. Friend, tonight you are either in Christ, or you are in the death cell. For "the wages of sin is death"-the second death, the death beyond the grave, the death that follows death. But, "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. Think of it! Pardon! Free! "No condemnation!"

The Judgment Seat of Christ

"No condemnation" implies a judgment. If there is condemnation there must be a judgment. There is a judgment, and we must face it. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:10). We are all judgment bound. Millions try to ignore it; they just don't think about it. We may deny the judgment, but we will not avoid it. Denying or ignoring a fact doesn't destroy it. We cannot escape the judgment. There is only one safe way to face that great day, and that is to be in Christ. Always remember there is only one way of escape, there is only one way of acquittal, there is only one way to escape condemnation, and that way is "in Christ Jesus." Thus the child of God carries to the judgment his own pardon, the pardon from the judge Himself. A pardon signed by the judge. What security "in Christ" brings, what pardon! Not till we stand before the great white throne will we fully know what it means to have no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

What does "in Christ" mean? One may say, "I am in business," or, "I am in advertising," or, "I am in law." They mean that that is the ruling motive of their life. The child of God is "in Christ." Christ is uppermost, He is all in all. Christ enjoined this. He said we are to abide in Him, as the branch lives in the vine. We are hidden in Him for safety, as in the cleft of a rock, sheltered from the storm. As the fugitive was safe from the killer in the city of refuge, so in Christ Jesus there is pardon, there is life, there is safety-for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

But no condemnation, glorious as it is, is not all. Note but a few of the gems in this wonderful chapter, for this dear old Book is studded with similar jewels as the Milky Way is with stars. In Christ there is no accusation, for in verse 33 we read, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." There is no defeat, for in verse 37 we read, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." There is no separation from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (verse 39). Circumstances may separate friends, the restless waves of the wide ocean may roll between them, but no circumstance, no distance, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

These glorious privileges have a special application to God's people in these last days. For in Romans 8, verse 1, we read: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The word "therefore" refers us to the previous chapter. Romans 7 describes the child of God looking within. That Paul writes as a converted person is apparent, for in verse 22 we read: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Now, it is only a converted man who delights in the law of God. Verse 14 says, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." The law of God is perfect; it is holy, just, and good; it is spiritual.

One evening I was conducting a cottage meeting in the north of Australia and a man rose and stated that he would like to give several reasons why he would never be a Seventh-day Adventist. I discovered he was a minister of another church, so I gave him permission to speak for half an hour. He used arguments against the law of God that were very familiar to us all. Among other scriptures he used Romans 7. After replying to his propositions, I drew the attention of the audience to Romans 7, verse 12: "Wherefore the law is holy," not "was" but "is." Thirty years after the cross the law is holy. Holy people will be in harmony with a holy law. Only the unholy would want to oppose a holy law. Again we read in verse 14: "For we know that the law is spiritual, not "was," but "is." The law is spiritual. I said, "friends, a holy man would never attack a holy law; he would never attack a spiritual law. Holy people will be in perfect harmony with a holy, spiritual law."

After the discussion his wife came to me. She was very concerned, and under deep conviction. She told me she felt that she should be a Seventh-day Adventist, but her husband came forward, took her by the arm, and led her away. They left the district soon afterward. Years later I preached one Sunday night at a Queensland camp meeting. At the close of the meeting a man came to the front to speak to me. He asked me if I remembered this particular meeting. I assured him I did. He said, "I am that minister. My wife that night was under very deep conviction. She felt she should be a Seventh-day Adventist, but I fought her. Tonight she is an atheist, and I made her an atheist. Please, Brother Burnside, pray for me. I made my wife an atheist."

Friends, it is a serious thing to fight the Spirit of God. "The law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." There is nothing wrong with the law of God, but there is much wrong with you and with me. In this wonderful chapter we have a child of God looking within, and all he sees discourages. He sees self. Note the "I's" of verse 15: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not." And verse 18: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing." Paul is looking within and sees no good thing, until finally he cries out in verse 24: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

"Lord, Me All Rubbish Too Much"

Note the word "wretched." It is interesting. It is only found in one other place in the Bible-referring to the Laodicean people of the last days. Christ says they are wretched and they don't know it (Revelation 3:17). They need Christ within. With what long-suffering love and wonderful condescension He knocks and invites us to sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:20, 21). These words addressed to the Laodicean church of the last days have a strange application to each of us tonight. It means God's people need above all else the experience of Romans 8. In us there dwells no good thing, but we are wretched, as a recently converted savage in New Guinea prayed, "Lord, me all rubbish too much." And friends, so are we. We desperately need Christ, but in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation, and God wants to lift us from the wretchedness of Romans 7 to the glory of Romans 8. From gloom to glory is God's plan for us, and what glory!

Romans 8:17 says, "And if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." You will recall that Christ promised the Laodicean church a place on His throne in glory. They become joint heirs with Christ. Joint heirs! Who can explain the wonder of this? To be a joint heir with Christ is better than being a millionaire. Truly, friend, to have everything except Jesus Christ is to have nothing. To be "in Christ" is to receive all. And it's an everlasting all, for from the love of God there is no separation.

This certainly is the message the world needs today. It is needed more than ever before. It is so appropriate, too, for these last days, for in verse 22 we read: "For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now," waiting for the adoption: to wit, the redemption of our bodies. This manifestation will take place at the Second Advent of our Lord. This groaning world needs Christ; it needs the coming of Jesus. God has given to you and to me this wonderful message for this tragic hour.

Recently I held several evangelistic campaigns among the light-skinned people of the South Pacific islands. They loved to ask questions. Every night the question box was well filled-up to 100 and more questions a night. One impressed me more than all others. It was this: "Why do Seventh-day Adventists have the latest news from God?"

Evidently that native was impressed by the fact that God has given us a message that contains up-to-the-minute truths from God. He had grasped the truth. God has certainly given to you and to me an answer to the world's needs. "Behold, he comes!" is the message the world needs, and how it needs it!

I had just finished preaching one evening on the glories of the better land to a crowded theater in Apia, Samoa, when we heard announced over the radio from Honolulu that the rocket had been fired from Johnson Island, and if all went well the high-altitude hydrogen bomb would be exploded in ten minutes. We hurried to the beach, hoping we would have the privilege of catching perhaps a glimpse of a flash on the horizon. That was the most we could hope for, for we were 1,000 miles from Johnson Island. With a portable radio we listened to the countdown, and then suddenly the place lighted up like day-not just a flash, but the light continued for minutes. We had plenty of time to look around. Palm trees miles away were clearly visible. Then the whole of the sky slowly turned blood red, like raw meat, although it was a clear, starry night.

Then, slowly, we saw long wavy bands extending from the direction of Johnson Island straight up, it appeared, into the stars. They extended across the heavens to the other horizon. The whole display lasted for at least thirty minutes before it faded away. All radio ceased for at least half an hour. We couldn't even pick up local radio stations, although they were only a quarter of a mile away. A native was heard to exclaim, "What are the mad white men doing?"

"The powers of the heavens shall be shaken," predicted our Lord. Today the powers of the heavens or of the sky are "disturbed" and "convulsed," as other translations read. What next in the great program of world-shaking events? "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:26, 27). I'm glad I'm an Adventist, aren't you? I'm glad that Jesus as coming again. I'm so glad this world is not forsaken to a mad mankind.

The World Needs the Prince of Peace

This groaning world needs the Prince of Peace, and this wonderful experience of Romans 8 prepares us to stand in that great day. Not only is Jesus coming again but the Spirit of Christ will guide us to prepare for that glorious day. Note the word “know” in this wonderful chapter, as in verse 26: “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” “We know not,” but “he that searches the hearts knows” (verse 27). We don’t know, but He does, and in His guidance we can then “know” (verse 28) that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” What a purpose, what a wonderful Guide the child of God has! That purpose is to make us like Him, to be ready for His coming, when as joint heirs with Him we shall sit with Him on His throne. What a reward! How can you neglect such love? How can you turn from such a gift? Can a groaning, shuddering world eclipse the land of glory and its joys and riches? No condemnation, no separation from God’s love and care since we are joint heirs with Him. A God who knows all is guiding us. These are but a few of the glorious realities of salvation.

Note further from this same chapter, for truly it gleams with gems as the Milky Way gleams with stars. There is no accusation, for we read in verse 33: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” There is no defeat. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (verse 37). And from all this there is no separation. It is eternal! It is sure! It is established by “many infallible proofs.” It is true! It is reality! I know it, not only from personal experience, but I’ve seen it at work in others.

Transforming Grace

For instance, some time ago I sat on the coral sand of a Pacific island as I spoke to the son of a savage, a young man reared in devil worship. It was on the island of Lou. It was well named for it was low. When I was a student at Avondale we had just entered the island of Lou. Our missionary showed me photographs taken by a government anthropologist who had just visited Lou. I won’t describe the photographs. Suffice it to say that men and women were dancing stark naked in a devil dance. It was revolting. I thought, If we gain half a dozen converts from the island of Lou it will be a miracle. Today everybody on that island is a Seventh-day Adventist. I have visited it now on more than one occasion.

A certain young man, reared in such paganism, is now a fruitful soul winner. He told me his experiences while working in New Britain. He faced much opposition and persecution. He had been beaten again and again to try to drive him from that mission field, but he would not leave. Finally in order to get rid of him they took his little son only three years of age and mixed battery acid in food and forced the little fellow to eat it. He rolled in agony for three days and died. The district officer wanted our brother to press his case. He said, “We have a clear-cut case against them.” He wanted to prosecute, but our native brother said, “No, it will not bring back my little boy. I’m not here to prosecute. I’m not here to punish people. I want to win them to Christ.” He has baptized 400 of his former persecutors.

As I looked into the dark, swimming eyes of that son of a savage, a young man reared in Satanism, I realized afresh that the love of Christ can find its way into the heart of a person and radiate out. That is the love I need. It is what you need. It’s what the world needs. That love, like a stream, flows on. It is eternal. From it there is no separation. “Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:39). That son of a savage had found that love, and it had changed him. May Christ give us more and more of that forgiving love. He had found a love that abides, a love that works wonders. For truly, neither persecution nor loss, tragic loss, could separate him from the love of God. Listen, friend of mine, if God can do that for a savage, for a devil worshiper of Lou, He can do it for me, He can do it for you, He can do it for those to whom we preach. May we go out from here to preach that love, to preach, preach, preach, and preach, until preaching days in the world are over, and then as joint heirs with Christ may we ascend with Him to tell to sinless beings the story of redeeming love and the infinite riches of Christ.

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