

070225 Another Law: No Condemnation 22/08 February 25, 2007GG

Another Law: No Condemnation

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 22, [Nu 8](#) February 25, 2007GG

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and 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 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. ([Ro 8:1-4](#))

After the conflict and pervasive sense of condemnation in the seventh chapter, the naïve eye would not expect to read the dramatic shift of emphasis to be seen throughout the eighth chapter of Romans. If we were to extend Paul's analogy of marriage with which he opened the seventh chapter, we might look at a dual theme: in the seventh chapter Paul describes life with the "old husband," the law and the general spirit of legalism, while he introduces us to our "new husband" in the eighth chapter. There is a certain appeal to this overview, but the depth of inner conflict in the seventh chapter, coupled with Paul's consistent use of personal pronouns and present tense verbs indicates an even deeper significance.

Early in the dialogue of the seventh chapter it appears that Paul used "law" or equivalent terms to refer to the moral code of the Mosaic Law. As we move into the closing verses of the chapter, he clearly shifts his use of "law" from "proscriptive" to "explanatory." I use the term "proscriptive" in the sense that a moral code either "prescribes" certain conduct by commanding it, or it "proscribes" certain conduct by prohibiting it under threat of penalty upon violation of the code or commandment.

Paul's use of "law" in the closing verses of the seventh chapter more equates to the use of the term "law" in the world of science, as in "Newton's Law." In this sense the word describes factual and predictable events. In this sense "law" explains a "universal" fact that we may predict and expect without exception. Paul's description of a "law" that when he would do good evil was present, his delight in the "law of God after the inward man," and his sense of conflict at the other "law in my members" all exemplify the "scientific law" use of the word.

Now our question regarding the meaning of "law" shifts to the eighth chapter. When Paul tells us in the first verse that "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,*" and follows that sentence with a reference to "...the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus..." is he using the term "law" in the sense of a moral code, as in the Mosaic law, or is he using the word in the sense of a scientific—or in this case, a spiritual—principle? Given the context and Paul's use of the word to state factual spiritual principles in the close of the seventh chapter, it is my belief that he continues this use of the word as he opens the eighth chapter.

The question of Paul's intended use of the word "law" is crucial to our interpretation of the opening verses of the eighth chapter. If Paul intends a prescriptive-proscriptive sense of the law, then his qualifying clause, "...who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit..." may also be prescriptive-proscriptive. However, if he intended the word "law" to refer to a factual and predictable "universal" spiritual "law," a brief explanation of the way things are in the realm of the Spirit of God and His life-giving work, we should expect the qualifying clause to describe these people rather than direct them.

The fundamental question is quite significant to our theological assessment of Paul's teaching, especially through the remainder of the eighth chapter and his continuation of this teaching into subsequent chapters in the Book of Romans. With only a couple of exceptions—which upon close examination are not really exceptions—every verse in the eighth chapter of Romans begins with a

connective word (“For,” “That,” “Because,” “So,” “And” as just a few examples). Thus Paul will explain in the second verse what he intended in the first verse. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.* Now we surface the obvious question and the distinction between the two possible meanings that Paul may have intended in his use of “law” in this context.

Why is there “now no condemnation” to those who are in Christ Jesus? Is it because they practice predestined and near-flawless faith and obedience, the corrupted view of predestined and irresistible perseverance? Or is it because of the life-giving, sin-cleansing work of the Holy Spirit in freeing us from the “law of sin and death”? Paul—I believe—answered the question by his straightforward wording of the second verse.

If our personal walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh explains the absence of present condemnation, then we would expect Paul to go into a concise explanation of how faith and obedience to the commandments of God produce the state of “no condemnation.” However, if Paul is referring to the universal law, principle of fact, in which the Holy Spirit gives spiritual, eternal life to every one of God’s elect in precisely the same manner, we would expect him to explain this truth rather than leap into a long list of prescriptive-proscriptive rules. (Never get too far away from [Joh 3:8](#); “...so is **every one** that is born of the Spirit.” God’s method of salvation is first of all single; He doesn’t need several different methods, depending on the age, mental capacity, or geographic or cultural state of the individual. Thus any doctrine of salvation that involves man’s action or will for some folks to gain eternal life, while it relies on divine mercy as an exception for others to be saved clearly is not the Biblical method that God designed, and that Jesus explained in His conversation with Nicodemus.) Rather than urge his readers to examine the law of Moses or any other law for that matter, Paul immediately tells us that this life-giving, condemnation eradicating work of God is something which “...the law could not do,” but it is something that God did accomplish by “...sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin....”

This wondrous sense of “no condemnation,” according to Paul, comes through the harmonious work of the Holy Spirit as He applies the righteous work of the Lord Jesus Christ to each individual elect in regeneration.

Interestingly Paul closes this verse with the same clause that he used in the first verse/sentence in the chapter, “...*who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit....*” Never does Paul go into precise details to explain this term. Never does he set artificial hurdles or standards of conduct in the individual regenerated elect. He merely states the principle. They “...*walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*” If the clause defined compliance with a prescriptive-proscriptive moral code in the first instance, it must also apply to a similar code in the second instance. If it rather applies to a statement of universal fact, as with the “laws” of science, in the first instance, it should consistently be interpreted to apply to the same “law” in the second occurrence.

Common Ground

Because of the human tendency to exaggerate the ideas of those with whom we disagree, it is necessary to emphasize some central facts surrounding this lesson. Sadly there are some folks who will readily hurl irresponsible and inaccurate accusations against any and all who disagree with them of being “antinomian” or other ad hominem accusations. Interestingly, it was this same false accusation that Paul’s critics hurled against him for teaching the doctrines of grace as he taught them (Go back to the first nine verses of the third chapter of Romans and be sure to notice the accusation they used against Paul and how he categorically rejected it).

While some people exist who are in fact antinomian (opposed to any moral prescription or proscription from God—the relativistic, pseudo-New Age “God loves us too much to impose rules and regulations

on us” blasphemy), most Christians agree that God has commanded His children to do certain things, and that He has prohibited them from doing certain other things. I do not question that we honor God by consistently walking after the leading, teaching, and guiding of the Holy Spirit, most often through the study of Scripture and never contradictory to the teaching of Scripture. Nor do I question that God has categorically commanded every one of His regenerate elect children to obey the teachings of Scripture in their daily conduct; “...Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” ([2Ti 2:19](#), KJV) However, the question at hand is this. Is this what Paul intended in these verses, or did he have something else in mind? Based on the verses that explain the first verse, it is my belief that Paul was dealing with a principle of fact, not with the God’s commandments and the believer’s “perseverance” in faith and obedience. If he had intended the believer’s response to the teachings of God or of the gospel, Paul would have explained this “law” in significantly different ways than we see in the verses. His specific explanation corroborates the principle that the emphasis in this context is on the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, not on the regenerate elect’s subsequent conduct.

Do regenerate elect people conduct themselves differently from the unregenerated and wicked people in the world? To some extent they do, but Paul never develops any kind of minimum performance standards in this context that would justify the arrogant and carnal practice of those who advocate that, unless a person exhibits certain behaviors, he/she is in fact not “really born again at all.”

The Greater Truth

Paul’s emphasis on God accomplishing in the Incarnation and in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ what the “...law could not do...” as he explained the first verse and the amazing fact of “no condemnation” that will permeate the whole eighth chapter of Romans, clearly directs us toward the divine perspective. As God looks upon each one of His beloved children from a legal perspective, He sees in them the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. That righteousness, not the regenerate elect’s conduct, forms the sole basis from which God now views His elect as void of condemnation and wholly spotless before Him in the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we perceive our present state before God as it factually stands, we must conclude with Paul that “There is therefore now no condemnation...” And if we follow Paul’s line of reasoning in this context, we must explain that glorious freedom from condemnation through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ—and that work imputed to us by the Holy Spirit in regeneration—as the exclusive basis for our present standing before God. Later in the chapter (verses twelve through fourteen as just one example) Paul will emphatically teach us the importance of our faithfulness in serving God. However, in these opening verses to the eighth chapter Paul is affirming that our legal, eternal standing with God stands on far more solid ground than our “feelings,” our sense of conflict and condemnation as we struggle against our own selves to overcome sin and to practice righteousness. Rather than building his case that our final and eternal standing before God rests on us and on that intense conflict, Paul is affirming that our true standing with God rests on the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, given to us in regeneration experientially through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the end it is Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s Law that gives us righteous standing before God, not how we act or feel. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration changes our deepest nature. Although still children of Adam according to the flesh, we are now “A Child of the King” according to the Spirit of God, and that “Child of the King” standing is what Paul affirms in this lesson.

Is this a historical interpretation of this passage? Yes, it is, though many other interpretations exist historically as well. I quote below from the Geneva Bible footnotes 61 to this verse.

(8:2) A preventing of an objection: seeing that the power of the Spirit is in us is so weakly, how may we gather by this that there is no condemnation for those that have that power? Because, he says, that power of the life-giving Spirit which is so weak in us, is most perfect and most mighty in Christ, and

being imputed to us who believe, causes us to be thought of as though there were no relics of corruption and death in us. Therefore until now Paul reasons of remission of sins, and imputation of fulfilling the Law, and also of sanctification which is begun in us: **but now he speaks of the perfect imputation of Christ's manhood, which part was necessarily required for the full appeasing of our consciences: for our sins are destroyed by the blood of Christ, and the guiltiness of our corruption is covered with the imputation of Christ's obedience, and the corruption itself (which the apostle calls sinful sin) is healed in us little by little,** [bold for emphasis] by the gift of sanctification: but yet it is not complete, in that it still lacks another remedy, that is, the perfect sanctification of Christ's own flesh, which is also imputed to us.

b. The power and authority of the Spirit, against which is set the tyranny of sin.

c. Which kills the old man, and brings the new man to life.

d. That is, absolutely and perfectly.

e. For Christ's sanctification being imputed to us perfects our sanctification which is begun in us.

(8:4) The very substance of the law of God might be fulfilled, or that same which the law requires, that we may be found just before God: for if with our justification there is joined that sanctification which is imputed to us, we are just, according to the perfect form which the Lord requires.

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