

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – Paul and the Rebellion – 27 Feb - 4 Mar 2016

Christ conquered death, thus Paul says, “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). We focus on the part entitled “Adam and Jesus” with verses from Romans 5:12-19.

First principles: Note that in verse 12, the apostle Paul goes back to the very beginning: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” There can never be any presentation of the Gospel, if these facts are ignored. The story of the fall of man must be as literally true as the story of the cross – the latter depends entirely upon the former. “Death by sin,” death came by sin, for sin is death. Sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death (James 1:15). “To be carnally minded is death” (Romans 8:6). “The sting of death is sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56).

There could be no death if there were no sin. Sin carries death in its bosom. So it was not an arbitrary act on the part of God that death came upon men because of sin. It could not possibly be otherwise. “To be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). He is goodness itself. Goodness is His life. Righteousness is simply God’s way. Therefore righteousness is life. It is not merely a conception of what is right, but it is the right thing itself. Righteousness is active. As sin and death are inseparable, so are righteousness and life. “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). Death passed upon all men: Note the justice here. Death passed upon all men; why? “for that all have sinned.” “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20). And this is also a necessary consequence of sin, it contains death, and death cannot come in any other way than by sin.

Romans 5:12 begins a proposition that is not concluded; verses 13-17 are parenthetical; we must pass on to the eighteenth verse to find the conclusion. But as the mind would naturally lose the first part of the statement on account of the long parenthesis, the apostle repeats the substance of it, so that we may perceive the force of the conclusion. So the first part of verse 18 is parallel to verse 12. “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men to condemnation.” The conclusion is, “Even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (verse 18).

“Death reigned from Adam to Moses ...” (verse 14). It does not imply that death did not reign just as much afterwards. The point is that Moses stands for the giving of the law; “for the law was given by Moses” (John 1:17). Since death reigns through sin, and sin is not imputed when there is no law, it is evident from the statement that “death reigned from Adam to Moses,” that the law was in the world just as much before Sinai as it was afterwards. “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). There can be no sin imputed when there is no law; but wherever there is sin, there death reigns as well.

Verse 14: “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come.” How is Adam a figure of Him that was to come, Christ? Just as the following verses indicate, that is, Adam was a figure of Christ in that his action involved many besides himself. It is evident that Adam could not give his descendants any higher nature than he had himself, so Adam’s sin made it inevitable that all his descendants should be born with sinful natures. Sentence of death, however, does not pass on them for that reason, but because they have sinned.

Adam is a figure of Christ, but only by contrast. “Not as the offence, so also is the free gift” (verse 15). Through the offence of one many are dead; but through the righteousness of One, many receive life. “The judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ” (verse 16-17). A contrast is all the way through. Everything that came through Adam’s fall is undone in Christ; all that was lost in Adam is restored in Christ.

Verse 17 contains the keynote of Romans 5. Not only is everything that is lost in Adam restored in Christ, but “much more.” “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (verse 10). There is no chance of finding fault with the inevitable fact that we are inheritors of a sinful nature through Adam. We cannot complain that we are unjustly dealt with. It is true that we are not to blame for having a sinful nature, and the Lord recognises the fact. So He provides that just as in Adam we were made partakers of a sinful nature, even so in Christ we shall be made partakers of the divine nature. “Much more.” “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ.” Life of which we are made partakers in Christ is much stronger for righteousness than the life, which we received from Adam, is for unrighteousness. God does not do things by halves. He gives “abundance of grace.”

“Death passed upon all men;” or “judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). All have sinned; therefore, all are in condemnation. There has not a man lived on earth over whom death has not reigned, nor will there be until the end of the world. Enoch and Elijah, as well as those who shall be translated when the Lord comes, are no exceptions. There are no exceptions, for the Scripture says that “death passed upon all men.” For the reign of death is simply the reign of sin. “Elias was a man of like passions with us” (James 5:17). Enoch was righteous only by faith; his nature was as sinful as that of any other man. So that death reigned over them as well as over any others. Remember that this present going into the grave, which we so often see, is not punishment of sin. It is simply the evidence of our mortality. Good and bad alike die. This is not the condemnation, because men die rejoicing in the Lord, and even singing songs of triumph.

“Justification of Life” “By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (verse 18). There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death for every man. He has given Himself for all. He has given Himself to every man. The free gift has come upon all. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift. It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that has ever lived should not be saved to eternal life, except that they would not have it. Many spurn the gift offered so freely.

“So by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous” (verse 19). Men are not saved through their own obedience, but through the obedience of Christ. Here is where the skeptic cavils, and says that it is not just that one man’s obedience should be counted as another’s. But the man who rejects the counsel of the Lord does not know anything about justice, and is not qualified to speak in the case. The Bible does not teach us that God calls us righteous simply because Jesus of Nazareth was righteous many thousand years ago. But it says that by His obedience we are made righteous. Notice that it is present, actual righteousness. The trouble with those who object to the righteousness of Christ being imputed to believers is that they do not take into consideration the fact that Jesus lives. He is alive today, as much as when he was in Judea. “He ever liveth,” and He is “the same yesterday and to-day, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). His life is as perfectly in harmony with the law now as it was then. He lives in the hearts of those who believe on Him. Therefore it is Christ’s present obedience in believers that makes them righteous. They can do nothing of themselves; Christ in His love does it in them. The summary: “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Why are all not righteous by One who was righteous? they do not wish to be. Men are not merely counted righteous, but actually made righteous, by the obedience of Christ, who is as righteous as He ever was; He lives in those who yield to Him. His ability to live in any human is shown in the fact that He took human flesh many thousand years ago. What God did in the person of the Carpenter of Nazareth, He is willing/anxious to do for every believing man. The free gift comes upon all, but all will not accept it, and hence all are not made righteous by it. Yet, “many” will be made righteous by His obedience – who will be one of the many?