

The King's Pardon

The War Within – Part V

Romans 8:1

Introduction

Bob Sheffield, a staff member with the Navigators missions organization, told the story of how, before becoming a Christian, he played professional hockey in Canada. He was tough and he loved to fight, on and off the ice. Once, as a result of a barroom brawl, he found himself in jail, and with a criminal record to boot.

Some years later, Bob and his wife became Christians. They accepted a temporary assignment with the Navigators in the States.

Bob had to apply for landed immigrant status, which would allow him and his wife to continue in ministry in the United States. But because he had a criminal record, his request was denied. After every effort to get beyond his criminal record, they decided to take a long shot and apply in Canada for what is called, the "Queen's Pardon". Following thorough investigation, the pardon was granted. Bob Sheffield received the following notice in the mail:

Whereas we have since been implored on behalf of the said Robert Jones Sheffield to extend a pardon to him in respect to the convictions against him, and whereas the solicitor general here submitted a report to us, now know ye therefore, having taken these things into consideration, that we are willing to extend the royal clemency on ... Robert Sheffield. We have pardoned, remitted, and released him of every penalty to which he was liable in pursuance thereof.

From the moment he received this document in the mail, whenever Bob was asked on a form if he

had a criminal record, he could honestly answer, "No." The pardon meant he was released from any possible punishment for the crimes, and the record of the crimes themselves was completely erased.¹

Why? Because Bob Sheffield had received the Queen's Pardon.

We arrive today, at this same announcement that every one of us has received, as it were, in the mail – a direct letter from God. The letter is called Romans. And the King's Pardon is declared in the very first verse of chapter 8.

As you are turning to that passage, I want you to know that this chapter has been called by many Bible scholars, commentators, and pastors to be the greatest chapter in the whole Bible. One man wrote that if the Bible were a cluster of precious jewels, the book of Romans would be the diamond in the center of the cluster and chapter 8 would be the sparkling tip of the diamond.

The King's Pardon – Romans 8:1

Chapter 8 of Romans begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation. In verse 1, the King's Pardon is recorded, saying,

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What an amazing verse! The glittering sparkle of the gospel is immediately evident ... and it is unlike any truth that man could ever conceive of.

Pardon without penance?

The religions of the world would never conceive of such a verse to follow Romans chapters 1 through 7. We have been told already in these chapters that:

- we are all sinful – “There is none righteous, not even one” (3:10);
- we have – “no excuse” (2:1);
- “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23);
- “the wages of sin is death” (6:23);
- our propensity to sin wraps around us like a rotting corpse (7:24).

Then, in the last verse of chapter 7, we are faced with the reality that sin will continue to war against us in our flesh.

The very next verse should read, “Therefore there is guaranteed condemnation to everyone, even those who claim to know Jesus Christ.”

Surely mankind cannot get off the hook without some sort of payment for our past. The natural mind of mankind demands that there can be no such thing as pardon without penance. Surely God does not mean what it seems to say!

I studied, this past week, the theology of penance. It is a world-wide phenomenon that is found, in some fashion, in virtually every religion outside of true Christianity.

Webster defined “penance” as, “punishment or suffering undergone to atone for sin or wrongdoing.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Penance is one of the sacraments of Roman Catholicism which, along with the Orthodox church, teaches that penance is that act whereby the sinner can atone for sins committed after baptism. The penance might be the praying of a certain number of prayers or doing some good deed.

In other countries and in other religions, people do all sorts of things to somehow earn a sense of pardon. Surely an eternal pardon cannot be freely given! Surely sin cannot somehow be forgiven without paying some sort of penalty!

I read one news report from San Fernando, Philippines, where ten men and one woman were voluntarily crucified in a bizarre ritual of penance. The story reported,

Close to a thousand residents and tourists watched under the hot sun as these eleven people staggered into a fenced knoll where neighbors dressed as Roman centurions awaited with wooden crosses, hammers and four-inch nails. Bus driver Chito Sangalang

grimaced as the nails were driven into his palms and feet as he was nailed to a cross. The cross was hoisted aloft for the crowd to see. This is the fourteenth year in a row that this man has had his hands and feet nailed to a cross. One American tourist said, “It’s amazing to see people sacrificing themselves for their sins.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Another scene in Havana, Cuba, photographed by the Canadian Press, showed the way one man was trying to appease God’s wrath. The man was shown in the picture, lying on his back on a dirt road. Attached to his ankle was a chain that was several feet long. The other end of the chain was wrapped around a large rock. The caption explained that the man was pulling the rock, inch by inch, on a pilgrimage to a sanctuary dedicated to St. Lazarus.^{iv}

From Thailand, the value of penance is received by abstaining from food. One major religion that I cannot pronounce, teaches that the luminaries in the sky, which they believe are gods, acquired their superiority and joy as a result of penance. Without a doubt, this religion teaches that through penance, the very status of godhead may be acquired.

I found illustrations of penance in religions located in Japan, China, and India. Hinduism includes acts of penance for forgiveness. Every twelve years, millions of Hindus flock to a city in India, with the belief that dipping in the Ganges River will cleanse away the sins they committed that year. Every year, scores of people are crushed in the mob.

People do not do that in America en masse, yet. However, there are Buddhist and Hindu temples being built in this country at the rate of at least one a week.

In America, people do not go to the river en masse, yet. They do not go to Jordan Lake for absolution, yet. Although, with the name Jordan Lake sounding much like the Jordan River, someone someday will probably attach mystical experience to bathing in its waters.

I remember watching one televangelist selling water from the Jordan River, claiming it had special healing power. He probably did not realize how close his mysticism was to Hinduism.

In this country, however, millions of people do penance other ways. They believe they can atone for their sins and earn their redemption primarily through good works.

Muhammad Ali summed up this perspective in a recent interview. He said,

One day we're all going to die, and God is going to judge our good deeds and bad deeds. And if the bad outweighs the good, you go to hell. But if the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven.^v

That is the typical view of religion around the world – certainly in America.

A recent magazine article told of a sixty-seven year old man named Bill, who had donated over one hundred pints of blood over the years. There would be no doubt that many people owed their lives to this man's kindness. When asked why he did it, he responded,

When that final whistle blows, and [God] asks, "What did you do?" I'll just say, "Well, I gave one hundred pints of blood."

Then Bill added with a laugh, "That ought to get me in."^{vi}

How tragic. This man is counting on the giving of one hundred pints of blood to get him to heaven. He will one day, discover that he has been trusting in the *wrong blood*.

The apostle Paul has already declared in Romans, chapter 5, verses 8 and 9,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

He wrote in Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 7,

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

When Paul delivers the King's Pardon in Romans, chapter 8, verse 1, he does so on the basis of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.

Five key words in Romans 8:1

Now, let us make a closer inspection of this verse by taking note of five key words or phrases.

Words of summary

1. First, there are words of summary.

Our verse begins by stating,

Therefore there is . . .

In other words, Paul is saying that on the basis of everything he has taught, not just the previous verse, but every previous verse, that man is sinful, but Christ is the savior of sinful mankind; that man cannot save himself, but can be saved by Christ alone.

Words of safety

2. Secondly, there is a word of safety.

With all that in mind, Paul now bursts forth with this incredible statement,

Therefore there is now[!] . . .

Now! This is the word of safety.

The words, 'there is' are not provided in the verse. Simply read, it states,

Therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

"Therefore, now!" The Greek word is "nun" (vov), and it is a word with reference to time in the present. You could amplify Paul's words to read, "Therefore, at this present time . . ."

That is incredible. Paul is actually emphasizing the fact that you do not have to wait until you get to heaven to know that you are no longer condemned. Freedom from condemnation is an experience that can be enjoyed in this life . . . right now! You can read and claim your pardon now! All who have placed their faith in Christ alone and received from Him the free gift of salvation, are safe – now! Now!

Think for a moment, your eternal life does not begin when you get to heaven, it began when you accepted Jesus Christ. You have yet to be clothed with an immortal body – the one you have now will not last – but your spirit has been granted eternal life now! "Therefore, now" – you are safe now!

And would you notice the comprehensive sweep of this pardon? He does not say, "Therefore to you who are mature, there is no condemnation," or "Therefore to the strong believers, there is no condemnation." We might say that.

If we were God, we might want to hold back on this sweeping pardon and let only the really godly children in on the secret; let only the really good sons and daughters find out about this truth. That is the way I am tempted to be at times, as a father.

You may remember the story of the businessman who was called up in front of an audience of business men and women gathered to hear a lecture on motivation. The lecturer asked if the man would be

willing to walk across a narrow steel beam that he had lying on the stage. The speaker said, if the man did it successfully, he would be paid twenty dollars. The man gladly did so – and got the twenty dollar bill. Then the speaker said, “Would you be willing to walk across this beam if it were suspended between two forty story buildings, for twenty dollars?”

The man said, “Of course not.”

“That’s not enough motivation for you, is it?”

“No sir, it isn’t.”

“Well,” the lecturer said, now making his point, “what if I was standing on top of one of those buildings, holding one of your children over the edge, and I told that you I would drop your kid if you didn’t walk across the beam. Now would you be motivated?”

The man thought a moment, and then asked, “Which kid do you have?”

God is entirely motivated toward the safety of every one of His children – no matter who you are. He is not only *entirely* motivated, He is *eternally* motivated toward your spiritual safety which began at your conversion and will last forever.

Word of certainty

3. Thirdly, there is a word that communicates certainty.

The next word found in the King’s Pardon is the word, “no”.

Therefore, now no[!] . . .

This is a word that communicates certainty!

The word translated “no” is a very strong Greek term, “ouden”. It is extremely emphatic. In fact, in the Greek New Testament, this negative adverb appears as the very first word of this verse, which was their method of emphasizing a point. Paul is wanting to emphasize the point that condemnation is completely and utterly out of the question.

One translator wrote it this way, “No (!) not even one little bit of condemnation to them in Christ Jesus.”

Word which demands substitution

4. So, we have received this pardon, and upon examining it, we have discovered a word of summary, and safety, and certainty, and now, fourthly, a word which demands substitution.

Therefore, now no condemnation[!] . . .

This word “condemnation” only appears in the book of Romans – in this verse and in chapter 5. It relates to the sentencing for a crime, and especially to the penalty that the verdict demands.

So, Paul is, in effect, saying, “There is no penalty for crimes against God.”

That is an amazing declaration! There is no sentence to serve!

Religion could never conceive of such a thing.

Would you notice that the Bible does not say, “Therefore, there are now no grounds for condemnation”? Paul does not say, “There are no grounds for accusation.” He does not say, “There is nothing in us that deserves condemnation.” He does not say these things because there is . . . because there are grounds of accusation!

Well then, how can God ignore the grounds of our deserved condemnation? How can God not deliver a sentence to guilty humanity?

J. I. Packer put it this way,

Isn’t God’s moral perfection seen in His perfection in judgment? Would a God who did not care about the difference between right and wrong be a good and admirable Being? Would a God be morally praiseworthy Who put no distinction between His saints and the beasts of history, the Hitlers and Stalins (if we dare use names)? Would He be perfect then? Moral indifference would be an imperfection of God, not a perfection. And not to judge the whole world would be to show moral indifference and [partiality]. The final proof that God is a perfect moral being, not indifferent to [issues] of right and wrong, is the fact that He has committed Himself to judging the [whole] world.^{vii}

So, how can Paul say that there is not one little bit of condemnation in the mind of God?! The very next phrase in Romans, chapter 8, verse 1, explains how.

Words of security

5. Fifthly, there are words of security.

Therefore, now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

These are the words of security.

Being a Christian is not simply being outwardly identified with Christ, but being part of Christ. We

are not only united with Christ by faith, we are united in Christ. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 27,

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

He also wrote in the same chapter, verse 13,

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . .

In other words, Christ lives in us and we live in Him.

Do I understand how I am in Christ and Christ is in me? No! It is one of the profound mysteries of the gospel – that, by faith in His cross-work alone for my salvation, as Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20, says,

. . . it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . .^{viii}

This is the key to the King's Pardon – you have to be *in* Christ Jesus.

Since Jesus Christ was condemned, satisfying the wrath of God for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2), those who come by faith to Christ are no longer within the reach of God's wrath – for they rest in the finished work of Christ on their behalf.

An Old Testament event sheds light on this profound New Testament mystery. Noah's ark was built over the course of more than a hundred years. After the barge was built, God commanded Noah to cover the ark with pitch – within and without with pitch – that tar-like substance that would keep the water out. It is interesting that the word for "pitch" is the same Hebrew word that is used elsewhere for "atonement". The ark would become a symbol of atonement. The ark would, if you please, face the wrath of God, the judgment of God, the sentence of God's moral purity, and all those inside the ark would be saved.

You probably remember that after Noah and his family built the ark, God did not tell them to drive eight long spikes into the outside timbers of the ark and then, tell them, "Listen, as long as you and your family can hang on, you will be saved, but if you once let go, you will be lost." No! God literally shut the door behind them (Genesis 7:16).^{ix}

Then, the wrath of God fell on all of humanity – those inside the ark were saved, while those outside the ark were lost.

What it meant for Noah and his family to be "in the ark," it means for us today to be "in Christ". Therefore, in Christ – our secure atoning ark of

salvation – there is no condemnation, now and forever.^x

What a pardon!

What about the unbeliever?

What about the unbeliever?

II Thessalonians, chapter 1, verses 7b through 9, says,

. . . the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

Jesus said, in Mark, chapter 16, verses 15 through 16,

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

The world is divided into two classes before the throne of God:

- those outside of Christ;
- those in Christ.

Or:

- those who are trying to pay for their sins themselves;
- those whose sins have already been paid for by Christ.

If you are outside the ark today; outside the body of Christ, accept Him today, before it is eternally too late.

I offer you the King's Pardon. In it you discover the words of summary; of safety; of certainty; of substitution, and of security.

Conclusion

Let me quickly wrap up our study by offering a couple of wonderful benefits that come from the King's Pardon. There are hundreds of them; let me give you two of them now.

The King's Pardon can silence the guilt of your conscience about your past!

1. The King's Pardon can silence the guilt of your conscience about your past!

Isaiah refers to Satan as an accuser. And we give him plenty to work with, don't we?

I can imagine him saying:

- "Peter . . . remember the rooster";
- "David . . . remember Bathsheba";
- "Paul . . . remember the murder of Stephen you took part in."

My friend, what does that accuser say to you? "Remember that thought . . . remember that act of promiscuity . . . remember that party . . . remember that abortion! You don't have a prayer! You deserve to be condemned. God will never forgive you – you just remember that!"

But God said in His word, as we are told in Isaiah, chapter 43, verse 25,

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Ladies and gentlemen, when that old liar comes and whispers in your ear, I recommend you take him to Mount Calvary, point to the cross, and remind him that God has forgotten!

You do not have to drag a big rock along the ground to get God's attention; you do not have to repeat a dozen prayers to jog His memory; you do not have to feel the pain of nails being driven into your hands and feet, His Son has already taken that punishment for you.

There is nothing for you to do but place your faith in the One who has done it all, and then, receive your everlasting pardon and praise His name!

The King's Pardon can subdue the anxiety of your heart toward the present and the future!

2. The King's Pardon can not only silence the guilt of your conscience about the past, but it can subdue the anxiety of your heart toward the present and the future!

Paul wrote to Timothy and said, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 13,

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

John wrote, in I John, chapter 3, verses 19 and 20,

We . . . will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

God knows everything about you. He is not going to look at you one day and say, "Oh my, I didn't know you did that . . . thought that . . . said that . . . planned that."

No! He knows everything!

When you came to Christ, you brought everything about you, past, present, and future, into that living Ark. And because you are in Him, the judgment of the perfect Judge will not condemn you – you are safe forever.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This is the King's Promise; this is the King's Pardon.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/19/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Tom L. Eisenman, Temptations Men Face (Intervarsity, 1992), pp. 21-22.

ⁱⁱ New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus (Lexicon Publications, 1995), p. 742.

ⁱⁱⁱ Viola News.UK

^{iv} Craig Brian Larson, Choice Contemporary Stories (Baker Books, 1998), p. 19.

^v "Ali," Reader's Digest, (Dec., 2001), p. 93.

^{vi} Joe McKeever, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, Kenner, Louisiana.

^{vii} Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 504.

^{viii} John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1991), p. 400.

^{ix} John Phillips, Romans, p. 122.

^x John Phillips, Exploring Romans (Moody Press, 1969), p. 122.