

Christ and the Second Death

A Thought Paper

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Human nature is depraved, and is justly condemned by a holy God. But provision is made for the repenting sinner, so that by faith in the atonement of the only begotten Son of God, he may receive forgiveness of sin, **find justification**, receive adoption into the heavenly family, and become an inheritor of the kingdom of God. **Transformation of character is wrought through the operation of the Holy Spirit**, which works upon the human agent, implanting in him, according to his desire and consent to have it done, a **new nature**. The **image of God is restored to the soul**, and day by day he is strengthened and renewed by grace, and is enabled more and more perfectly to reflect the character of Christ in righteousness and true holiness. {RH, September 17, 1895 par. 7}

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Seventh-day Adventists, as no other people, have the privilege of appreciating the significance of the Christ's death on His cross because of their understanding of the non-immortality of the soul and its relation to the second death. Those holding to the common notion of the immortality of the soul would naturally conclude that Christ possessed the hope while hanging upon the cross that His soul would be taken to heaven. Since it was at the cross that the Father supremely demonstrated His love toward sinners, it becomes impossible to comprehend God's character of self-sacrificing love while at the same time entertaining the notion of the non-immortality of the soul.

The wages of sin is death (the second) and Christ tasted that death for all men. The ransom required, because of the curse of the law, has been paid for all. Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. No one should ever have to experience the second death, except they spurn and reject the One who saved them from that death.

But how could God be ethical and at the same time die for the sinner, since the Bible is quite explicit that the father cannot die for the children nor may the children die for the father (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:20)? Many Christians including Adventists believe that a mystical transaction occurred beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane which culminated at Calvary whereby Jesus was made to be sin for us in those last moments of His earthly life during which He began to bare the full weight of sin and guilt for all men. It is true that at Calvary that Christ felt the sense of the withdrawal of His Father's presence with the consequence that the weight of sin borne by the Sinbearer now began to become unbearable. This same sense of His Father's displeasure toward sin reached it climax at the cross culminating in equivalent of the second death.

The suggestion that somehow God made Christ to be sin for us uniquely at the cross requires invoking a mystical transaction which is nowhere taught in Scripture. The idea

that Christ was made to sin at the cross is apparently invoked to circumvent the idea that Christ came into world bearing the same sinful nature with which Adam was plagued after his fall in the garden, a nature beset not only with innocent physical infirmities but also infected with the law of sin dwelling in the members of that nature.

It was the expression of justice against sin that crushed out the life of the Son of God. It was the weight of sin that in the garden of Gethsemane caused Him to sweat as it were great drops of blood, and that led Him upon the cross to cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The sins of the transgressor were placed to Christ's account; but in His justice the love of God was manifested toward every human being. {BEcho, May 30, 1898 par. 1}

The suggestion that Christ bore the same nature of Adam after the Fall, a nature infected sin, a nature in which "the law of sin dwells within my members," strikes a discordant note in the hearts of many sincere Christians. In rebuttal to this concept that the law of sin dwelt within Christ's members, a concept repugnant to many, the argument is put forth that if Christ Himself possessed the same nature we all possess (the same nature not the same mind), then He would need a Savior.

It is true that if Christ would have sinned by thought, word or deed, He would have needed a Savior and the fallen race would have been lost. But there is a manner in which Christ did need a Savior, not because He sinned, but because He needed One to help Him from yielding to the temptation to sin. The Bible is clear on this point that Christ, "who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7). In this respect Christ was in need of His Father's saving power to be kept from the power sin that dwelt within in His members. Only by identifying with the "law of sin" that every child of Adam struggles with, could Christ be "tempted in all points as we are."

Moreover it should be self-evident that the sinful nature that Christ bore upon His sinless divine nature could not be saved. That same nature which Christ bore was our nature, infected with "law of sin," which was condemned and was hopelessly under the curse of the law. That same nature met its ultimate destruction when Christ died the equivalent of

the second death at the cross. And there at the cross, the law, the foundation of God's government, was supremely magnified before the on-looking universe.

When humanity's sinful nature met the just requirements of the law at the cross in Christ, then the saying became true: "If one died for all, then all died." And God was shown to be just, ethical and merciful all at the same time. Thus it should be evident that in order to rightly appreciate God's love revealed at the cross, an understanding of the second death in conjunction with the non-immortality of soul must be grasped; but this understanding must also be united with Biblical truth that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (infected with the law of sin) on account of sin and He condemned *the* sin in the flesh."

Paul and the Man in Romans 7

The assertion by some that the man in Romans 7 is Paul in his unconverted state who wants to serve the law but finds the law of sin in his members always seems to overrule the determination of his mind. This claim is opposed by those who assert this desperate man is Paul in converted state. In any event, clearly the man is converted to the holiness of God and His law. Ellen White seems to suggest that Paul found the victory in the Lamb of God who comes in the likeness of sinful flesh and who takes away the sin of the world.

*It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God, to see the benevolence, the fatherly tenderness, of His character. It is not enough to discern the wisdom and justice of His law, to see that it is founded upon the eternal principle of love. Paul the apostle saw all this when he exclaimed, "I consent unto the law that it is good." "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." But he added, in the bitterness of his soul-anguish and despair, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Romans 7:16, 12, 14. He longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was powerless to attain, and cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24, margin. Such is the cry that has gone up from burdened hearts in all lands and in all ages. **To all, there is but one answer**, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. {SC 19.1}*

The Law of Sin in Romans 7

The hopeless predicament of man's fallen nature is succinctly summarized in Romans 7 with phrases such as "sin that dwells within me," and "I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." But God provides the solution for those who desire to be "delivered from this body of death." For those who abide in Christ "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" will set them "free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

But the basis for this deliverance could only be accomplished by uniting the human nature infected with the law of sin with the divine nature of the Son of God resulting the incarnation of the Son of God. Although the divine prerogatives of the Son of God were laid aside, His inherent divinity qualified Him to unite with and partake of the divine power of His Father. So God sent "His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin and he condemned **the** sin in the flesh." The definite article, "the," is employed in Greek text to emphasize the condemnation of the "law of sin" dwelling in fallen man, not simply the generic problem of sinning. From the contextual flow of the passage, even without the definite article, the ordinary reader would naturally come to the conclusion that God conquered the problem of the "law of sin" in the flesh (sinful nature) through the gift of His Son coming in the likeness of sinful flesh. The equivalency of man's sinful nature with Christ coming in the "likeness of sinful flesh" appears to be the thrust of the following two statements.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,"--it could not justify man, because in his sinful nature he could not keep the law,--"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." Rom. 5:1; 3:31; 8:3, 4. {RH, October 17, 1907 par. 10}

The sinful nature of man was weak, and he was prone to the transgression of God's commandments. Man had not the power to do the words of God; that is why Christ came to our world, that He might give him moral power. There was no power in heaven or in earth but the power of Christ that could deliver from the [sentence illegible in original]. He came to meet the difficulty and to remove it. His own arm brought salvation. God sent forth His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh that He might condemn sin in the flesh and reveal the fact to heaven, to the worlds unfallen and also the fallen world, that through the power of divine grace, through partaking of the divine nature, man need no longer stand under the curse of the law or remain in transgression. {14MR 82.3}

The word, “likeness” (*homoioima*), has been the subject of much theological debate, but should simply be understood as it is in Phil. 2:7 where he came “in the likeness of men.” He came as real man, but not simply just a man, He was also God manifest in the flesh, deity and humanity combined. Therefore the word likeness is enjoined to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The same rationale for the word, “likeness,” applies to Romans 8:3 as well. We are warned against making Christ “altogether human, such as one as ourselves.” Thus Paul invoked the word, *homoioima*, not only in reference to His deity, but also to set Him forth as “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

The incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery. That which is revealed, is for us and for our children, but let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be. The exact time when humanity blended with divinity, it is not necessary for us to know. We are to keep our feet on the Rock Christ Jesus, as God revealed in humanity. {5BC 1128.6}

The Spotless Son of God Bore the Curse

The contention is often set forth that if Christ took a human nature infected with the law of sin that this would violate the principle that a sinless, spotless Lamb was always required for the expiation of sin. The Lamb must be spotless to qualify as our all sufficient Substitute.

In the typical sanctuary service, sin was laid upon the spotless unblemished lamb. In this way sin was imputed to the spotless substitute. In a similar manner, the sin of the world was laid upon the spotless Son of God, by virtue of taking fallen human nature infected with the law of sin in the flesh upon His sinless divine nature. Thus sin was imputed to the Son God, since it was our nature, not His nature, which was laid upon Him. The sacrificial Victim was spotless, undefiled and separate from sinners. The Bible is clear that “He bore our sins in His own on the tree.”

The idea that spotless Son of God became the Sin-bearer by taking human nature is amplified by EG White. The Lamb was the spotless sacrifice, separate from sinners, by virtue of not yielding to temptation and by conquering the sin in the flesh.

*By a word Christ could have mastered the powers of Satan, but he came into the world and took humanity that he might endure every test, every provocation that it is possible for man to bear, and yet not be provoked, or retaliate in word, in spirit, or in action. For the honor and glory of God he was to offer himself **a living, spotless sacrifice** to the Father. He must bear, under fierce temptations, the test that Adam failed to endure. He suffered, being tempted; but there was no yielding to the temptations of Satan. He did as the Father had given him commandment. {ST, November 25, 1897 par. 9}*

*Christ, **the spotless Son of God**, honored humanity by taking upon himself fallen human nature. A suffering, tempted man, beset by Satan's devices, his divinity clothed with humanity, he so lived on this earth as to show, by his perfect obedience to his Father's will, what humanity could become by partaking of the divine nature. {RH, September 29, 1896 par. 1}*

Christ stands before us as the pattern Man, the great Medical Missionary,--an example for all who should come after. His love, pure and holy, blessed all who came within the sphere of its influence. His character was absolutely perfect, free from the slightest stain of sin. TMK 44; MM 19-20

Bore the Curse

As we come in sight of Calvary, and view the royal Sufferer who in man's nature bore the curse of the law in his behalf, all national distinctions, all sectarian differences are obliterated; all honor of rank, all pride of caste is lost. {LHU 320.4}

He came forth from heaven to earth, and while on earth, He bore the curse of God as surety for the fallen race. He was not obliged to do this. He chose to bear the wrath of God, which man had incurred.... He chose to endure the cruel mockings, the deridings, the scourging, and the crucifixion. . . . "He . . . became obedient unto death," but the manner of His death was an astonishment to the universe, for it was even the death of the cross. {TMK 339.3}

Bore Our Sin in His Own Body

By becoming the sin-bearer, he lifted from the human race the curse of sin. In his own body he paid the penalty of that on which the power of Satan over humanity is founded--sin. {YI, June 28, 1900 par. 5}

Divinity Combined with Humanity

Another contention often propounded by those who object to the idea that Christ took fallen nature infected with the law of sin goes as follows. If He came with a nature like every child of Adam, he would of necessity have had to sin. But every child of Adam comes into the world not only infected with sin, but also disconnected from God and divine power. At the very inception of the incarnation, the incarnate Son of God was perfectly united His Father's Divine power. He came into the world differently than every other child of Adam. This is why he is our Savior. "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. 'He that hath the Son hath life.' 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life." Yes, Christ began life with a distinct advantage over every other child of Adam. But that same advantage is given to all who choose to abide in Christ. The sinner may begin life anew, in Christ, united with divine power.

By taking humanity and combining it with divinity, He was able to meet every demand of the law of God, to overcome every objection which Satan had made prominent as standing in the way of man's obedience to God's commandments. {14MR 83.2}

*He came as a helpless babe, bearing the humanity we bear. "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." He could ** not come in the form of an angel; for unless He met man as man, and testified by His connection with God that divine power was not given to Him in a different way to what it will be given to us, He could*

not be a perfect example for us. He came in humility, in order that the humblest being upon the face of the earth could have no excuse because of his poverty, or ignorance, and say, Because of these things, I cannot obey the law of Jehovah. Christ clothed His divinity with humanity, that humanity might touch humanity; that He might live with humanity and bear all the trials and afflictions of man. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. In His humanity He understood all the temptations that will come to man (MS 21, 1895). {7BC 925.1}

*Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God's commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. **But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts.** {COL 314.4}*

Passions and Temptations from Within

*Those who would be victors should contemplate the cost of salvation, that they may be subdued by the love of Christ, that their strong human passions may be conquered, and their will brought into captivity to their Redeemer. The Christian is to realize that he is not his own, but that he has been bought with a price. **His strongest temptations will come from within; for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses;** {BEcho, December 1, 1892 par. 4}*

*The words of Christ encourage parents to bring their little ones to Jesus. They may be wayward, and possess passions like those of humanity, but this should not deter us from bringing them to Christ. **He blessed children that were possessed of passions like his own.** {ST, April 9, 1896 par. 6}*

Though He had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling. {HP 155.7}

Satan sought to tempt Christ not only to indulge the grosser passions and to yield to appetite, but he appealed to His ambition. Notwithstanding the enemy's determined efforts, Christ did not manifest a grasping spirit to gain possession of the kingdoms of this world. {18MR 113.3}

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The Spiritual Nature

The spiritual nature of Christ is perceived by some to be identified with His fleshly human nature. It is contended that Christ came with 4000 years of genetic degradation with the weaknesses and innocent infirmities of all humanity, but his spiritual nature was like Adam's before the Fall, free from the infection of sin, the law of sin in the bodily members. This position was pioneered Dr. Edward Heppenstall and taken up by those who followed him. It must be noted however that all 130 hits on the CD ROM for "spiritual nature" suggest this terminology is related to character, behavior and intimately related to walking after the Spirit. The spiritual nature is totally dependent upon development of an intimate union of the human nature with the divine nature.

Idleness and religion do not go hand in hand; and the cause of our great deficiency in the Christian life and experience is inactivity in the work of God. The muscles of your body will become weak and useless if they are not kept in exercise, and it is so with the spiritual nature. If you would be strong, you must exercise your powers. --Review and Herald, March, 13, 1888. {ChS 84.3}

The word of God plainly warns us that unless we abstain from fleshly lusts, the physical nature will be brought into conflict with the spiritual nature. Lustful eating wars against health and peace. Thus a warfare is instituted between the higher and the lower attributes of the man. The lower propensities, strong and active, oppress the soul. The highest interests of the being are imperiled by the indulgence of appetites unsanctioned by Heaven. {CD 382.4}

A religious life can be more successfully gained and maintained if meat is discarded, for this diet stimulates into intense activity lustful propensities, and enfeebles the moral and spiritual nature. "The flesh warreth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." {CD 389.5}

To Jesus the significance of the word and the works of God unfolded gradually, as He was seeking to understand the reason of things, as any youth may seek to understand. The culture of holy thoughts and communings was His. All the windows of His soul were open toward the sun; and in the light of heaven His spiritual nature waxed strong, and His life made manifest the wisdom and grace of God. {FE 442.3}

. Our bodies are built up from what we eat and drink; and as in the natural economy, so in the spiritual economy: it is what we meditate upon that will give tone and strength to our spiritual nature. {AG 228.3}