

Contrasts

The Contrast of the Old Self & New Self

A Sermon on Romans 8:1-10

Year A - Lent 4
22 - March - 2020

JJ¹

We compare and contrast ourselves with other people all the time. Sometimes without even realizing it. Sometimes to make us feel better about ourselves—like me vs. a criminal on the news. Sometimes to see how well I’m progressing in school or work—me vs. a classmate or coworker. Sometimes with style and fashion. Most often simply to distinguish ourselves from another person.

Now let’s consider the greatest comparison contest ever held between two people—that of Jesus and Barabbas. Jesus truly was innocent in every way. Not only was he not guilty of the crimes his enemies accused him of, he had never once committed a crime, even a misdemeanor. But there’s more! He never once even committed a single sin!!! But Barabbas, on the other hand, he was a rascal and a scoundrel. In many ways he was an anarchist. He took part in rebellions—violent rebellions. He was a murderer. The contrast between Jesus and Barabbas was so clear, that even pagan Pontius Pilate could easily see the good and evil. Pilate could easily see who was the man to release, but the Jews didn’t want Jesus. This worried Pilate, and it worried his wife so much that she had such a terrible dream because of this, she warned her husband to just let Jesus go.

Well, we know what Pilate did. He let Barabbas go and handed Jesus over to be crucified, just as the Jews, Jesus’ fellow countrymen, wanted.

Now you might think Pilate was just being a pragmatist. He didn’t want there to be a riot. You might think he was just being a ruthless Roman, but he was still troubled by the whole idea of putting an innocent man to death, and one who was completely unlike anyone he had ever met. The real reason is just as clear as the contrast between Jesus and Barabbas. It’s because Pilate had no new self—he did not have faith.

So, Pilate condemned to death a man who never should have died, instead of condemning Barabbas, and the riotous crowd. But all this happened so that what Paul writes to us today could be our reality and so that we could plainly see the **CONTRAST OF THE OLD SELF & NEW SELF.**

Jesus was condemned for us so that Paul could write: **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** But with those wonderful words of gospel promise we must understand why God has to make such a beautiful promise. We have to understand why we have to be given a **NEW SELF** in

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for “Jesus Help”. It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

the first place. The reason is just as ugly as the promise is beautiful.

Notice that Paul says there is **now** no condemnation. If now there isn't, then at one time there was. There was once condemnation because of who we all were at one time—unbelievers. An unbeliever is a person who is a slave to sin and therefore controlled by what we call the **OLD SELF**. This is what everyone is from the moment they are conceived.

Paul characterizes what we were, saying, **those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires.** By nature our minds are only set on sin—we are completely selfish—it is impossible for us to be selfless.

You may have a hard time swallowing this pill when you consider all the people in the world right now who are not believers, who have only the **OLD SELF**, but are doing so much good in the world during this pandemic. First, let us thank God that he can and does work good for his people even in terrible circumstances. Let us also thank God that he can and does bless us even through those who do not believe. But remember, this doesn't do anything for God. And that stresses the point Paul makes today.



He says, **the sinful mind is hostile to God.** By saying this Paul isn't just saying *what* those who are controlled by the **OLD SELF** do, but *who they are*. An unbeliever is an enemy of God! An enemy of God **does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** The **OLD SELF** has no desire whatsoever to listen to any of God's commands. And even if the **OLD SELF** would have a desire to do so, which is impossible, it would still be impossible for the unbeliever to keep any of God's law in a way that is acceptable in God's sight. This is why Paul says that **those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

And you can find this way of thinking in your own heart. Think back to the compare and contrast I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. Any of that comparing and contrasting you do to make you feel better about your-

self, or that you're doing better than others and are therefore secure before God—that's trying to earn forgiveness and grace through the law—that's working through the **OLD SELF**, and it will leave you in the eternal contrast of heaven... hell.

All this is why **the law was powerless** to save people because **it was weakened by the sinful nature.** The law was not the problem. Sinful mankind is the problem. That is why no one can undo sin through good behavior. No one can put them-

selves in God's good graces. No one can please God, even if they found a perfect cure for the Coronavirus and saved the lives of tens of thousands worldwide, apart from faith—apart from the **NEW SELF**.

That's why God sent **his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.**

This, friends, is why **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** Jesus didn't distance himself from humanity like we are all supposed to do now. Jesus knew with 100% certainty that if he came close to us, he would die! And still he came! He came for me, you, all people! He came and lived among us, born as that baby in Bethlehem, looking like any ordinary Hebrew boy. He lived a holy life perfectly under his own perfect and holy law. And then he offered himself over to his enemies, completely controlled by the **OLD SELF**, to give himself as the offering for all our sins.

In Christ the Father condemned us in our sin by sending our sin along with Christ to hell as he suffered on the cross. He did all this **in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us!** We stand perfect before God only because Christ's perfection has been

made our own through faith! **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** Once we were enemies with God. Now we are at peace with God because of Christ Jesus! We have been given a **NEW SELF** and therefore a new life to live!

And with this new life Jesus sets us the example of selfless living saying, **whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many** (Mt. 20:26-28).

Opportunities to serve surround us every day, even in these days of trial and isolation. In fact, it's at these times more than any when we can live according to our **NEW SELF**. And it starts by remembering who you are in Christ. You are children of God. You are loved by God. You have a confidence that cannot be broken by Coronavirus or any other catastrophe! You have confidence because you rely on the unbreakable promises of your God! **Never will I leave you ... Because I live, you also will live ... nothing can separate you from my love ... Don't be afraid.**

So my friends who I long to see, live in your **NEW SELF**. Live as the Christian you are as you shop, buying only that which you need so that there is enough to go around. Live in your **NEW SELF** as you see and hear of those less fortunate than yourself, as you find ways to support

them. One way you can do this is through your continued offerings to our congregation, especially our new *Christian Compassion Fund*. Live in your **NEW SELF** ready to serve when called upon and as you are able, and not just as it is convenient for you. Live in your **NEW SELF** as you put others needs ahead of your own by remembering to protect those most vulnerable among us. Live in your **NEW SELF** with the calm confidence that this too will pass, even when the end seems far away.

As you do this, the world is going to notice. It's going to notice this contrast between you and them. What they'll be noticing is the **CONTRAST OF THE OLD SELF & NEW SELF**. And even if it's just right here in this little corner of the world, that's okay. You have other brothers and sisters in Christ around the world living just like you—living how God has made you to be. And in doing so, God will use you to bring people to himself and share in our confidence.

God bless each one of you, my dear friends in Christ. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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