

Romans 8:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh—The law's inability (to adunaton tou nomou) was not intrinsic defect but human incapacity. *Astheneō* ("weak") describes the flesh's moral impotence, not the law's inadequacy. God's solution: **sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh** (en homoiōmati sarkos hamartias). The phrase is carefully calibrated—Christ assumed genuine humanity (*homoiōma* means "likeness/form") without sin's contamination. He entered fully into our condition while remaining the sinless Son.

And for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (peri hamartias katekrinen tēn hamartian)—The phrase *peri hamartias* is technical, used in the LXX for "sin offering" (Leviticus 4-5). On the cross, God both condemned sin as a power and provided the sacrifice for sin's guilt. Christ's death was substitutionary ("for sin"), judicial ("condemned"), and comprehensive (dealing with sin both as record and as enslaving force).

Historical Context

Paul's language of Christ coming "in the likeness of sinful flesh" anticipates later Christological heresies. Against Docetism (which denied Christ's true humanity), Paul affirms the reality of the Incarnation. Against adoptionism, he emphasizes Christ as God's "own Son" (ton heautou huion), not a mere human elevated to divine status.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Why was the Incarnation necessary—why couldn't God simply forgive without Christ becoming flesh?
2. How does Christ's "condemnation of sin in the flesh" differ from other ancient sacrificial systems?
3. What does this verse teach about the relationship between Christ's person (sinless) and his work (sin offering)?

Interlinear Text

τὸ	γὰρ	ἀδύνατον	τοῦ	νόμου	ἐν	ῷ	ἡσθένει	διὰ
G3588	For	could not do	G3588	what the law	in	that	it was weak	through
G1063		G102		G3551	G1722	G3739	G770	G1223
τῆς	σαρκί	ο	θεὸς	τὸν	έαυτοῦ	υἱὸν	πέμψας	ἐν
G3588	flesh	G3588	God	G3588	his own	Son	sending	in
G4561		G2316		G1438	G5207	G3992	G1722	
όμοιώματι	σαρκί	ἀμαρτίαν	καὶ	περὶ	ἀμαρτίαν			
the likeness	flesh	of sinful	and	for	of sinful			
G3667	G4561	G266	G2532	G4012	G266			
κατέκρινεν	τὴν	ἀμαρτίαν	ἐν	τῇ	σαρκί			
condemned	G3588	of sinful	in	G3588	flesh			
G2632		G266	G1722		G4561			

Additional Cross-References

Acts 13:39 (Word): And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Hebrews 10:14 (Parallel theme): For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (Sin): For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 3:13 (Word): Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

1 Peter 2:24 (Sin): Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Romans 6:6 (Sin): Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Galatians 3:21 (Word): Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

Romans 8:32 (Parallel theme): He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Romans 3:20 (Word): Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Hebrews 2:14 (Parallel theme): Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;