

PROLOGUE TO PRISON PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

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Halverson's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, examining the apostle's teaching on apostolic authority, sound doctrine, and the transformative nature of Christ's grace. He explores the profound influence Romans has had on Western civilization and Christian theology.

25 Chapters

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00.4 - Introduction

Introduction -

ROME IN THE DAYS OF PAUL

The Setting for the Epistle

The sun's rays, slanting up over the Campius Martius, had just slightly warmed the marble slabs, and another day in the rule of the Roman Emperor Nero promised fair and radiant skies.

Already the market-place was droning with the prattle and gossip which had need to be dispatched before the day's business began. The chatter grew more strident, and the air became filled with the smells of plucked fowl and the butchers' offerings. While a vendor of fruit feverishly polished and arrayed the crimson and golden orbs, his neighbor with equal bustle filled earthenware jars with ointments sweet and thick.

The rumblings and movement and sound in the palace chambers were hushed and subdued. The handmaidens, their diaphonous gowns the color of sunburst oranges whispering about their bare ankles, prepared their mistress' bath. Yawning they liberally poured oils scented with lemon and vertivent into the warmed sea water which filled the golden-crested pool.

Soon a rising crescendo of activity broke alive. The senators, clad in white and magenta coming together in groups of three or more - a bold one, by chance, alone - walked and talked and made their way to the Senate House. Some were given to coarse laughter and ribaldry. Others, in serious vein, were engaged in heated argument. The curses were many; slanderous and contemptuous the insults that were bandied in the warm morning air.

A few hours passed; and the midday resting period was pierced by the sound of chariot wheels, the drivers sporting a private race and subsequent wager. One could hear the thundering and pounding of the blooded horses, the shrieks of excitement from the women who looked on, and the derisive calls driver to driver.

Scarcely could be heard the piteous wail of a newborn infant girl left on the street to die. A wheel of one of the chariots had scudded over the frail little body. The blood ran red over the rough cobblestones and settled into the dirty cracks. A young woman moaned, and covering her head with a grayish shawl and with head bent low, pushed her way through the gathering spectators.

Yet the excited babble of the crowds spoke of this day as one of unusual vitality, for the Great Festivals had been proclaimed by the Emperor. Speculation was rife.

"Would there really be a chariot race of four camels each?"

"Who was this famous knight brave enough to ride an elephant down a sloping tightrope?"

Gleeful was the crowd's anticipation of Nero's generosity - the thousands of birds of bright plumage, the quantities of food parcels, the vouchers for corn, clothes, gold, silver, precious stones, even slaves and trained wild beasts!

The afternoon in Rome passed amid the spectacles, the gladiatorial shows. To those who preferred the participant sports, the huge gymnasiums and adjacent baths stood invitingly open.

Night, ominous and dark with only a tiny handful of stars, settled over the great city. The streets were almost barren now save for an occasional weary peddler on his way home or a claque of young guardsmen, their bushy hair and splendid dress tell-tale of their positions as applauders for Nero and his beloved lyre-playing.

And now the market-place was closed and filled with the stench of spoiling meat and fruits.

Yet the palace was astir with guests, the women in gowns of purple and gold, sapphire-blue and green, the hue of the tree-dappled hills surrounding the city. The men were resplendent in plumed helmets and robes embroidered and bespangled.

Nero's palace was a structure awesome and wonderful - the long pillared arcade which ran almost a mile, the enormous pool so vast and blue that it resembled an indoor sea and surrounded by buildings built to look like miniature cities. Many parts of these were overlaid with gold and studded with precious stones and nacre from the far seas.

The guests were dutifully awed and chattered amiably as the vain Nero childishly and pompously displayed the dining-room ceiling which rained down flowers and perfume, or the larger circular roof which revolved slowly day and night in synchronous timing with the heavens.

Grandiose and opulent entertainment was the forte of this ostentatious young emperor; and as surely as the wine was poured into the golden goblets, the passions grew more tumultuous.

Nero waved a slender arm and dancing girls in scant and vivid attire writhed to the plaintive sounds of stringed music. Every sense and every desire gave portent of being fulfilled.

Great and magnificent were the trays of food and delicacies - hens roasted on spits to a crackling golden-brown, suckling pigs their snouts agape with crimson apples - viands from far and near to tempt gourmet and gourmand alike.

Gorging and feasting and pleasures of all kinds occupied the night until dawn.

Outside on the blackened sea, only an occasional burst of raucous laughter could be heard in accompaniment to the steady slap-slap of the water against the royal barge. Pillars of fire sent out spurts of gold-red flames into the darkness.

Another day ended in the Roman Empire, an empire whose magnificence before many years, would be relegated to the descriptive passages and odes of the historians and bards.

Now there was across the Adriatic Sea down the craggy, thorny coastline of the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia, down through the ragged Isthmus of Corinth, the city of the same name.

There in the house of the hospitable Gaius, a short, stocky man sat at a table writing in haste. Indeed his hands, worn and calloused with the results of his trade of tent-making, seemed almost

in frenzied haste so filled were his heart and mind with the concern for his beloved friends who also believed in JESUS CHRIST as the SON of GOD.

Now his special feelings of apprehension were for those Christians in the decaying city of Rome. He felt chafed with frustration; he wanted so to express his pent-up feeling with as much clarity as he could command.

Nero had just made one of his spectacular visits to the city of Corinth. The Emperor had arrived reclining on his sumptuous barge, the red of the sails contrasting with the brown-ebony backs of the oarsmen who moved with monotonous but wondrous precision.

Indeed, the Roman Emperor held special fondness for those Greek subjects who so diplomatically lauded his playing of the lyre. He had even, with great beneficence, staged a naval engagement on an artificial lake of salt water with sea monsters swimming in it and a ballet of certain young Greeks.

After Nero's revelry, more than ever Paul was anxious to strengthen and encourage the Christians in Rome.

The door opened and Timothy entered, quietly mindful of the task before the fiery Apostle. His own shabby brown robe was dust-laden, and his feet in their thonged sandals were pricked and grimy. Yet his arms were laden with prizes for his friends - crusty fragrant loaves of bread, sweet ripe peaches offered to him by a shy young girl in an orchard, a silvery string of bass.

Hidden away in the folds of his garment was a small jar of ointment. Tonight he would rub Paul's hands which surely would be aching from long hours of writing.

They would talk tonight - talk that lifted the heart and soothed the spirit. There might be news of fellow Christians - if good, they could rejoice together; if not, they could pray together - Paul, Timothy, Gaius, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater; and perhaps even Erastus would be there.

Paul looked up, his frown of concentration smoothing as he saw his friend. "I've finished this epistle, Timothy. See I've ended it with these words, "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (Romans 16:27).

~ end of introduction ~

01 - Prologue to Prison

Chapter One -

Prologue to Prison (Romans 1:1-15)

In a very basic sense Western civilization is a by-product of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Therefore, at a time when civilization's disintegration and incineration is a possibility, a study of its spiritual and theological roots is certainly in order.

Indisputably Paul's letter to the Romans is one of the most influential pieces of literature ever composed. Nothing written by man has had a greater impact upon modern history than this Epistle written approximately 60 A.D. Augustine, who lived in the fourth century after CHRIST, was a profligate son of a godly mother until he was thirty years of age, at which time he was converted to JESUS CHRIST and became one of the most well-known theologians of all times in the Christian church. Paul's letter to the Romans had a most profound effect upon the life of Augustine.

It was Paul's letter to Rome which liberated the soul of Martin Luther and triggered the Reformation. In his preface to Romans, Martin Luther writes, "This epistle represents the fundamental teachings of the New Testament and is the very purest Gospel, well worth not only to be memorized verbatim but also to be used daily by every Christian as the daily bread of his soul. For no one could ever exhaust this Epistle by study and meditation. The better one becomes acquainted with it, the higher one will treasure it and all the more delight in it."

One has but to contrast those nations which were influenced only by the Renaissance with those nations of Europe which were influenced also by the Reformation to appreciate the incalculable impact of Paul's letter to the Romans upon our modern world.

John Wesley, an Anglican priest and founder of worldwide Methodism, in his Journal for May 24, 1738, recorded these words:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the Romans. About a quarter before nine while he was describing the change which GOD works in the heart through faith in CHRIST, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in CHRIST - CHRIST alone for salvation, and assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now felt for the first time in my heart.

Wesley's preaching not only gave birth to worldwide Methodism, but it broke the back of corruption in England and transformed the empire.

Here is a little episode, sixteen chapters long, which has profoundly affected the culture and civilization which you and I now enjoy, and unfortunately which we are inclined to take for granted. One reason for the rapid decline of the Western world, in spite of all that man is able to do to

"shore up" its ethical and moral standards, is that we have forgotten that the benefits of our culture are the fruit of which the Hebrew Christian tradition, and more specifically what Paul teaches in Romans, are the root. Obviously, if you forsake the root, the loss of the fruit is inevitable. Flowers are lovely for decorations; but having been cut from their roots, life span is fleeting. We can preserve the beauty, the fragrance for a little while, but soon they will begin to stink and be consigned to the trash heap because they have no roots. Our Western civilization has its roots in the Word of GOD, in that which Paul teaches in Romans; and if we ignore the root, we cannot hope to preserve the fruit.

The letter is typical of ancient Rome. Had you been living in Paul's time and written a letter to personal friends, you would have used this style. However, this Epistle is more nearly a theological treatise than any other the great apostle wrote. When Paul wrote to Corinth or Philippi or Thessalonica or Colosse, or to Ephesus, he was addressing himself to some specific need at that time in that place; and therefore the content of his letter in general was limited to that particular subject. Hence, his other Epistles contain only fragments of the Christian message whereas Romans contains what might be termed more accurately the Christian philosophy, the Christian world view. Beginning with the human predicament in history, Paul gives the divine diagnosis, GOD's cure, its application to life here and now, and the ultimate prognosis. No portion of the Bible is more perennially relevant.

The first fifteen verses divide nicely into three parts suggested by three words - the man, the message, and the motive. Who is this man who is writing? "Paul = a servant (slave, bondsman) of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle." His was one of the greatest minds, one of the sharpest intellects the human race has ever produced. Nineteen hundred years after Paul wrote Romans, the Book is still accepted as one of the masterpieces of logic in human literature.

In this man converged the three great cultures of his time. He was a Hebrew, a fact which he strongly emphasizes in his letter to the Philippians with the phrase, "an Hebrew of the Hebrews." In all probability Paul was able to trace his genealogy back to Abraham on both sides of his family and was rightly proud of his heritage. He was born and reared in the City of Tarsus, a great university center, the heart of Greek culture, and was, in addition, a freeborn Roman citizen. Only about one in five persons was a citizen of Rome in Paul's day, and many of those purchased this citizenship at great price.

Now this Hebrew, who was a Roman and in a sense a Greek, delighted in calling himself a slave of JESUS CHRIST. Think of it, the most influential man who ever lived since JESUS CHRIST voluntarily submitted to the total mastery of CHRIST. In his Colossian Epistle Paul declares, "All things were created by Him (Christ), and for Him (Colossians 1:16)."

You and I were made for CHRIST, and life is empty and futile until we are CHRIST's. We remain a caricature of the person we can be until we are slaves of JESUS CHRIST. We remain subhuman, subnormal. Life is an empty shell, no matter what is put into it until one belongs to JESUS CHRIST. "Made for CHRIST." Paul knew that a man could be really free only when he was CHRIST's slave.

William Penn declared that either we shall be governed by GOD or ruled by tyrants. This is true individually as well as collectively. If JESUS CHRIST is not our LORD and MASTER, inevitably we

shall be mastered by some tyrant, perhaps the tyrant of self, which is the worst of all. No man is free except the one who is the slave of JESUS CHRIST.

The story of Paul's conversion to CHRIST is recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts. Incidentally, at the moment CHRIST claimed Paul, he would hardly have been considered a candidate for conversion. As a matter of fact, his opposition to the Gospel, his hostility to CHRIST and the Church had reached its explosive zenith.

Sometimes in your love for a friend or a relative, you are burdened for his salvation and inclined mistakenly to measure how near or far he is from CHRIST in terms of his reaction to the truth. Imagine, for example, being concerned for Saul's conversion; this would have seemed the least propitious time to speak to him about trusting CHRIST. "Breathing out threatenings (Acts 9:1)," Doctor Luke records, he was on his way to Damascus to imprison Christians, and at that unexpected moment he was apprehended by the Son of GOD!"

Hostility may be an encouraging sign. Recall JESUS' word to Saul as he lay on the road blinded? "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (Acts 9:5)." Inexorably the SPIRIT of GOD was dealing inwardly with this man, wooing him; and the more he felt the inward working of the HOLY SPIRIT, the more he rebelled outwardly. This is often the way people react to the working of the SPIRIT of GOD through our witness and our love. Therefore, despair of another's salvation is never justified, we must always reckon on the faithfulness of GOD.

In the 22nd and 26th chapters of Acts is recorded Paul's testimony when he was making his own defense. It is found also in Galatians chapter 1 and Philipians chapter 3. What does Paul say about himself? First he reminds his hearers of his blind allegiance to his race and religion. A "Hebrew of the Hebrews (Php 3:5)," he was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jews. They were the separatists. In fact, the word Pharisee stands for separation. Then, he declares that he was more zealous for his religion than any of his contemporaries. He makes the amazing claim, as "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Php 3:6)," and, incredibly, dares to say "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more" (Php 3:4). Think of it! Here was one who had exceeded all his contemporaries in zeal and enthusiasm and commitment for his religion, who now says I count all of this as dung, or garbage, because it was in opposition to JESUS CHRIST.

Please note that while the word Pharisee does have a connection with separatism, remember that the Pharisee is also a lost man. Biblical separation is a most important doctrine of our faith in light of our Christian distinctives. The Pharisee was separated from GOD because of unforgiven sin, while the Christian is to be separated from the world and its evil philosophy (as well as those that embrace it even if they are themselves brothers in CHRIST) BBB

It was Paul's very religious zeal which made him GOD's enemy. The supreme expression in history of man's rebellion against GOD is religion, whatever you call that religion - Buddhism, Shintoism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Christianity is not the hope of the world-JESUS CHRIST is! Christianity has no power to save - only CHRIST has the power to save but the Western world has settled for a Christless Christianity, just another religion powerless to save, just another ethical system incapable of producing ethical man.

Paul leaves no latitude of interpretation in the matter of his call and purpose as he declares himself to be "separated unto the gospel (Romans 1:1)." There is no mistaking his message, "the gospel of God." What is the Gospel of GOD? The word Gospel means "good news." Have you heard the good news of GOD? Many Americans are unfamiliar with the good news of GOD. They have been Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and other denominations; but they know not the good news. Christianity to them has become a burden. It has become a form of piety which is obnoxious and unrealistic. Paul was separated unto the good news of GOD!

The word separated is important. It is one of the most abused words in the Bible. It has led Christians to isolate themselves from the world so that they have no contact with those whom they are commanded to reach. From the security of their position, they lob messages over the walls of their isolation to the world outside; but there has been no contact - and love does not work without contact. JESUS said, "Ye are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)." Salt works only on contact. JESUS said, "Ye are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)," and light is meant to dispel the darkness. Where it is dark, there they need light! To the person who understands the term correctly, separation means two things: It means to be singled out by GOD from others and to be assigned to a specific duty or call or purpose in the same sense that we the electorate, for example, separate one man to be President of the United States. So Paul (each one of us for that matter) was called of GOD and separated from others to a specific task, the Gospel of GOD.

***Biblical separation is not isolationism, for Paul says that it is impossible to leave the world in order to get away from sinners - but it is sinful Christians that we are to avoid.

We separate ourselves from the world, but not from lost seekers for truth. When it is apparent that a person is only looking for a fight - we warn once or twice - and then we reject as a heretic. But we always give them a chance to change their heart first - and then we understand that we can not toss pearls before swine.

His point is good though, at the beginning of the paragraph - that Paul was separated unto the Gospel of GOD, which means that he was not interested in the gospel of the world - the social gospel, or the other false gospels. *** BBB

What about this Gospel? For one thing Paul says it was, "promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures (Romans 1:2)." The Gospel was not an innovation of Paul's, not a New Testament nor apostolic invention; it was the message of the prophets, the message of Moses. Indeed we shall see that by this Gospel, Abraham, the first Hebrew, was justified. The message of the Old Testament is identical to that of the New. It is rightly understood, there is no cleavage between Israel's faith and Christianity; they are two halves of the whole. They belong together as the Bible combines Old and New Testaments between its covers. The Gospel, which was promised to Abraham and Moses and the prophets, was fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST.

Further, Paul declares it was the Gospel "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ (Romans 1:3)." You can take Mohammed out of Islam and the message of Islam remains. You can take Buddha out of Buddhism, and his message retains its integrity; but you remove JESUS CHRIST from the Gospel, and you destroy it. It is the Gospel concerning His Son, JESUS CHRIST is absolutely central and indispensable to Christianity. The Gospel is about JESUS CHRIST, GOD's Son. This is what

makes it good news. Christianity was not meant to be the intolerable burden of rules and ritual which it had become and by which Luther was enslaved until he understood Romans, but a Person, JESUS CHRIST, Who came to do for man what man was incapable of doing for himself.

Who is JESUS CHRIST? The apostle tells us that he "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh (Romans 1:3)," he was a man; and He was "declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4)," He was GOD!. He was both man and GOD, not half man and half GOD, not a demigod. He was fully man and fully GOD. He was man's perfect representative before GOD, and He was GOD's perfect representative to man. He was the one true mediator between GOD and man. This is Incarnation, GOD in human flesh. Paul suggests two witnesses to His Deity: "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Amen!

When JESUS stood in the Jordan River after having been baptized by John, the SPIRIT descended as a dove and a voice from Heaven proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). GOD the HOLY SPIRIT witnessed to JESUS CHRIST; and the second evidence is the resurrection from the dead. Four days after they buried JESUS, the tomb was empty. His resurrection was physical. His was a bodily resurrection, and today, 1900 years later wherever JESUS CHRIST is, He inhabits that resurrected body in which some day, soon we trust, He shall return to earth again.

One historian has said, "Physical death is the most absurd fact in history." It is! It is utterly irrational! Consider the compounded frustration with which death thwarts history - the lives that are snuffed out without having an opportunity of accomplishing their ambitions and fulfilling their aspirations. Think how generation by generation death blasts man's hopes, collectively and individually. It is humanity's Number One enemy. But JESUS CHRIST has destroyed that enemy by dying Himself and rising from the dead, and He holds out to any who will receive Him the hope of everlasting life. Not just spiritually, but physically, for these bodies which you and I now inhabit will some day be redeemed and raised from the dead as was His body on the Day of Redemption.

You will notice that the apostle speaks of "obedience to the faith (Romans 1:5)," which is another way of describing the Christian's response to JESUS CHRIST - obedience. Furthermore, he points out that this is for the whole world, for all the nations, for Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish (Romans 1:14). The Gospel is for everybody everywhere. It is universal! Why foreign missions? Because there is a need? No! Foreign missions because JESUS CHRIST said "Go ye into all the world (Mark 16:15)." The need is there, and it is felt and is an incentive, but the real justification for foreign missions is a mandate. JESUS CHRIST said go everywhere preaching; and if the Church of JESUS CHRIST is not going everywhere preaching, she is disobeying her LORD and MASTER.

There is some thing else to be said, which is that one of the evidences that the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST has broken into the heart of a man is that he is restless until everybody hears this message, which is exactly what motivated the apostle Paul to Rome.

Undoubtedly, Paul was interested in Rome because it was the greatest city of the empire. Undoubtedly, he was interested in Rome because it was the capital. There was Caesar's household; there were the leaders of the world. Undoubtedly, he was interested in Rome because it was influenced as no other city. But he longed to go to Rome not simply because of its influence

nor because it was the capital. He longed to go to Rome because, as he said in Romans 1:14, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." I must do this. I am under obligation.

Christian, there is some thing radically wrong with your faith if it has not burdened your heart so that you must share it. Paul had to go to Rome in order that he might have fruit there. He had to go to Rome in order that he might strengthen the Church that was there. He had to go to Rome in order that he might benefit from the faith of the Church in Rome. All of these things were true, but he had to go to Rome because the Gospel had made him every man's debtor.

In his introduction Paul intimates how he prayed earnestly that somehow by the will of GOD he might be able to go to Rome, which intimation leads to two very practical facts; namely, the two answers to his prayer. First of all, he was prevented from going to Rome. We are inclined, you see, to think of GOD's will in our lives as signifying always the green light, always an open door, always an easy access. No, often GOD's will includes a red light, a closed door, a brick wall. Often GOD's will prevents us from doing that which we feel is most important to do. in this too GOD is leading. He sometimes prevents us from doing that or being that which we feel is important for the cause of CHRIST, the permissive will of GOD!

But there was a second answer in the affirmative. Paul got to Rome - in chains! He entered Rome a prisoner; this too was GOD's answer. Through that prison and beyond its walls the message of the Gospel blazed to the far reaches of the empire. In that prison were born epistles which have succored and nourished the Church for nineteen centuries. From that prison in the very household of Caesar the message penetrated. The Roman prison became a pulpit from which thundered the Gospel to that empire and all the empires to follow until CHRIST returns to claim His eternal crown and throne.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Although quoted as Scripture, it is not, yet still true, "GOD works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." Quit trying to predict GOD's plans. He cannot be second-guessed. Be open to His surprises. Relax in the confidence that His ways are always best. Surrender yourself to Him in the knowledge that He will lead; that He has led; that He indeed is leading right now unless you refuse to be led. And whatever happens, receive this as GOD's will. Maybe it means prison, chains, confinement, frustration; but if it is GOD's will, it is GOD's victory.

The older I grow in the LORD, the less disposition I have to manage the affairs of CHRIST either in my life personally or in the life of the Church; the more I desire just to let CHRIST do what He wants to do and take my hands off of the situation. That is the way a slave operates, you know; he just takes orders and keeps busy.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

02 - The Power of God

Chapter Two -

The Power of GOD

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17)

Two clear, strong verses in the introduction to his Epistle to the Romans, by which the apostle Paul declares his theme. The Gospel of CHRIST is " the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," in it " the righteousness of God (is) revealed" . . . " the just shall live by faith." Romans is the whole Bible in embryo. Romans is, as it were, the Bible abridged. Implicit in these two verses in the message of the letter. The Gospel means good news. The reason is found in these two verses.

The passage under consideration divides nicely into five parts:

One, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

Two, "It is the power of God unto salvation."

Three, "To every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Four, "Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."

Five, "As it is written, The just shall live by faith."

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Why should it have been necessary for the apostle to say this? Is it conceivable that one should be ashamed of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST? Indeed it is. The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST has been an embarrassment to many, so embarrassing to some that they will not preach it; so embarrassing that some will not speak of it. There are pulpits where the Gospel is unacceptable. Here is a church advertisement in a daily paper announcing a new religious broadcast. And what is its appeal? It is directed to the intellectual, to the one who desires a "respectable faith" without a naive Gospel! The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST is not popular; hence the apostle Paul significantly emphasizes deep personal pride in the Gospel by his negative declaration.

Why are men ashamed of the Gospel? Paul says to the Jew the Gospel is a "stumbling block"; to the Greek it is "foolishness." A stumbling block to the Jew because he requires a sign. What sign does he require? The Jew thought of his MESSIAH in terms of an earthly kingdom, the restoration of the Throne of David, giving the Jew a place of preeminence among the nations. They did not see their MESSIAH as "despised and rejected of men," as a suffering servant. They did not see their MESSIAH hanging on a Cross, His body broken, bleeding, a crown of thorns on His head. This could not be their MESSIAH. But it was; and as we traverse Paul's letter to the Romans, we

shall discover that the Old Testament taught that the MESSIAH was to be this.

The Gospel is foolishness to the Greek, and one enamored of intellect. The Gospel is an offense to pride of intellect, and Paul is writing to Rome, the mistress of the world. What is his message? He proclaims a despised and rejected Nazarene, crucified on a Cross as a common criminal. Is this message supposed to have appeal for the proud Roman? Paul is not ashamed of it! Paul is proud to declare it; but how many, for no other reason than ego, deprive themselves of this glorious message?

You will remember the interesting story of Naaman (2 Kings 5), the captain of the king's host of Syria. Naaman was a great man, possessing all that any man could want, enjoying status and position; but says the Scripture with penetrating realism, "he was a leper," a type of sin in the Bible. He would have paid any price to be rid of his leprosy.

Now it happened that in one of the wars between Syria and Israel, a little Jewish girl was captured in Samaria and taken to the house of Naaman. When she learned of his desire to be cured of leprosy, she said, "Oh if he only knew of the man of GOD in Samaria!"

The king of Syria, hearing this, ordered Naaman to go to the King of Israel, and in the course of events Naaman was brought to Elisha, the man of GOD. Elisha sent a servant who said, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (2 Kings 5:10).

Naaman responded in proud wrath saying, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (2 Kings 5:12).

But with irresistible logic the servant said (2 Kings 5:13), "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" Yielding to such clear logic the wise captain turned and washed in the water seven times and came up clean.

There are men and women who for no other reason than sheer unmitigated pride are depriving themselves of the cleansing, forgiving, regenerating power of GOD in the Gospel. Offer them profound thoughts, some thing intellectual which appeals to their pride of understanding, this they will take seriously. Give them some difficult thing to do that they may boast in accomplishment, it is acceptable; but to simply trust what JESUS CHRIST did on the Cross of Calvary, how many turn their backs on that incredible offer?

Thank GOD that the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest intellects who ever lived, could say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Why - "For it is the power of God unto salvation" The power of GOD. One historian, looking back upon the millenniums of human frailty, upon the perennial failure of humanity, generation by generation, century by century, declared, "nothing that is possible can save us." With what wisdom he spoke. The possible cannot save us - it requires the impossible. That is the reason why Paul was proud of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST because it is the power of GOD unto salvation. This is not man's doing, not human effort, not human achievement, individually or collectively. It is not ethics, not morality, not charity, not a sociological reform movement; it is the power of GOD. That is the Gospel, and nothing less works.

Bruce Catton, editor of American Heritage and a leading authority on the Civil War, speaking on the theme "What 1861 Has to Say to 1961," gave three-quarters of his remarks to a contrast of the weaponry and the science of war between 1861 and 1961. The last quarter of his talk was addressed to what he declared to be history's greatest problem; namely, human nature, the most explosive fact in history. He closed by pointing out that the problem of 1961 is identical to that of 1861, human nature. The problem in 1961 A.D. is identical to that of 1961 B.C.; it is man himself.

Is it possible that there are still those who believe human nature is capable of changing itself? Have we learned nothing from a Mussolini or a Hitler or a Stalin or a Khrushchev or a Mao Tse Tung? Not that we would make scapegoats of these men, but in them we see the evil of human nature in the ultimate. In them we see the logical and inevitable product of failure to take GOD seriously. It is only because of our pride that we will not admit the bankruptcy of humanity.

"We have harnessed the atom," declared General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, "but we will never make war obsolete until we find a force to bridle the passions of men." Where is there a force to bridle the passions of men? Paul's answer is the Gospel, for it is the power of GOD unto salvation. "Military alliances, balances of power, League of Nations, all in turn have failed," declared General of the Army, the late Douglas MacArthur, at the Japanese surrender ceremony, "leaving the only pathway to be by way of the crucible of war." Now the utter destructiveness of war blots out this alternative. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door.

The problem is basically theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence, an improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science and literature and art and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh. Two thousand years ago JESUS said, It is "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11). Everything that is wrong with history springs from the heart of man. It is the touch of human nature that makes the atom a threat. There is nothing wrong with nuclear fission apart from the way man uses it. The touch of man upon history infects history.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" - for whom? EVERYONE! Jew or Greek. To the apostle that meant everybody, Jew and non-Jew. The apostle Paul, an "Hebrew of the Hebrews" who took his religion more seriously than any of his contemporaries, states emphatically that the Gospel is salvation for the Jew. There are places in our American society today where such a remark will be received as religious intolerance. If this be so, JESUS, a Jew, was intolerant as was Paul, a Jew, one of the proudest Jews who ever lived. Men say, "Well, they have their religion." To be sure they do, but it is not a saving religion. There is only one way a Jew can be saved, and that is by the Gospel; and as a matter of fact, we shall see subsequently in our study that the first Hebrew, the progenitor of Israel, is the supreme example of the salvation by faith, the crowning argument for the efficacy of the Gospel.

"It is the power of GOD unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"; it is universal truth; it is for everybody. This is the justification for foreign missions, JESUS said "Go," and the Christian Church is not at liberty to do less. The Church that is not going to the whole world with the Gospel is failing, in disobeying her LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. The Christian who is indifferent to missions is some thing less than Christian for JESUS CHRIST

said "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The Gospel works for the one who believes it. Belief is not a matter of the intellect; it is a matter of the will. It is said that the encyclopedias published in Russia today teach that JESUS CHRIST never existed. What is more irrational? The Encyclopedia Britannica gives twenty thousand words to the life of JESUS, but the Russian encyclopedias teach that JESUS was nonexistent! Stated in Association Press release datelined London: "Russians say Christmas is a capitalistic plot. Radio Moscow declared today that JESUS CHRIST never existed, that Christmas is a capitalistic plot to keep the working people in chains. The image of the supposed founder of Christianity is purely legendary and mythical. Science long ago established that JESUS CHRIST never existed."

There you see unbelief. It is not a question of the intellect at all; there is nothing intellectual about this. This is sheer stupidity. No, really it is not stupidity; it is diabolical; it is from the pit of hell. Making the truth a lie, that is unbelief. There is not a man anywhere at any time in history who honestly challenged JESUS intellectually who did not receive reasonable satisfaction from Him. No fact of history is more intellectually satisfying than He who is Truth Incarnate. It is not that men cannot believe; it is that they will not. They simply reject the evidence which is overwhelmingly for JESUS CHRIST.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Why is it the power of GOD unto salvation? "For therein (in the Gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." The Gospel exposes the righteousness of GOD. The Gospel unveils the righteousness of GOD. The Gospel releases the righteousness of GOD. Later in the Epistle we shall discover the dominant, inflexible line Paul draws between the righteousness of GOD and the righteousness of man. No one is more qualified to draw this basic distinction than he, for no one had succeeded so well in human righteousness.

Recall his testimony in Php 3:4. He dared to say, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more." But Paul discovered that it was his religious zeal, his very drive for human righteousness that made him so hostile to CHRIST, that made him the number one enemy of the Church, that made him oppose GOD. And Paul will remind Israel that it is their attempt to achieve their own righteousness which prevents them from coming to CHRIST and receiving the righteousness of GOD which is by faith.

Someone has said that the devil's best argument against the Gospel is a good man. There are citizens in American cities who never darken the door of a church; and if you ask them why, they will say, "I am as good as anybody who goes to church," and as a matter of fact outwardly they are. It is their goodness which keeps them from JESUS CHRIST and the Gospel.

It is not the men on skid-row, or on all of the skid-rows in America combined; it is not those in the second precinct in Washington, D.C., or of all of the substandard precincts of our cities; it is not the men in the prisons of our country who will finally be responsible for the demise of our civilization. If our nation dies, it will be due to the respectable people in our country who on the basis of their self-righteousness will not come to JESUS CHRIST and be saved. The attitude is the real enemy of the Gospel, not skid-rows and prisons and tenements but good people who refuse CHRIST. It

was they who put Him on the Cross 1900 years ago, and they have been crucifying Him ever since.

Obviously, if your righteousness is the result of what you have been able to achieve; whatever else you say about it, it is self-righteousness. And it is the enemy of the righteousness of GOD. The righteousness of God is as far removed from human righteousness as Heaven is from hell. The difference is measured by infinity, and it is presumption consummate for any man to assume that he can stand before Almighty GOD on the day of judgment and expect his human goodness to qualify him for eternity. GOD will say, "Why did you reject my Son? Why did you not believe the Gospel which I provided for your eternal salvation?"

No man is good enough; and we shall hear Paul insisting in no uncertain terms, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)... There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10)." Of course this is not a popular message, but it is the truth of GOD, and a man rejects it to his eternal peril.

Paul testifies in Php 3:8-9 "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss (He refers to the total of all his religious achievements) for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." This is a remarkable thing. You can have this righteousness in a moment; you can have it forever by believing in JESUS CHRIST, consenting to CHRIST, acquiescing to CHRIST, trusting CHRIST, and what He did for you on the Cross of Calvary.

How beautifully He put it in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). It is as if JESUS said all you need do is desire, you shall have. Indeed, we shall see in Romans 2 that this is precisely the prerequisite - the man who desires eternal life will have it. Want it, and you may have it. Have it forever! That is the glory of the Gospel.

Finally, the apostle Paul quotes from the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:4), "As it is written the just shall live by faith." The Gospel was not Paul's innovation. The Gospel was not invented by the apostles. The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST was not introduced by the New Testament. Paul opened his Epistle by declaring, I am "separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures (Romans 1:1-2)." Moses preached the Gospel. Abraham who lived before Moses is Paul's strongest evidence for his message. The Psalmist wrote about the man whose sin is not imputed to him, a fact which Paul argues in Romans 4.

The Gospel was the theme of the Old Testament; in fact, it is found, in type, away back in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had covered their shame with fig leaves, which did not satisfy; they ran and hid from GOD. The record declares that GOD covered them with coats of skin - blood sacrifice. Nothing but the shedding of blood has ever been satisfactory to cover sin. Writes the author of Hebrews, "without shedding of blood is no remission (Hebrews 9:22)." The covering of our first parents with coats of skin was prophetic of the sacrifice of the Son of GOD upon the Cross of Calvary; and when one accepts JESUS CHRIST as his SAVIOUR and LORD, he is clothed in the garment of His righteousness, robed in His perfection. That is the profound efficacy of the

Gospel.

Quoting from the Old Testament Paul writes, "The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17)." Who are the just? They are those who, having trusted in the Son, are reckoned as perfect by the FATHER. This theme will be covered much more adequately in Romans chapter 5; but suffice to say here, when a man believes in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, GOD the FATHER sees him as if he had never sinned. He has been totally absolved, hence justified. The FATHER imputes to that man the righteousness of the Son. The FATHER credits that one with the perfection of His Son and GOD sees him now covered by CHRIST's righteousness. There is no longer fear of judgment, no longer any uncertainty as to one's eternal welfare, for it is not the questionable validity of his own merit upon which he depends but upon the worthiness of CHRIST's Person and His Work.

"The just shall live by faith." "Live by faith." "Live." It requires great patience to wait for Romans 6, 7 and 8, where Paul discusses the sheer workableness of the Gospel - how to live daily, hourly, moment-by-moment by faith. Most Christians fail not because they do not try. Indeed, effort may be the cause of failure as with Paul, as with Israel, (Romans 10:1-4) but because they do not appropriate the resources given in the Gospel for daily, hourly, moment-by-moment use.

Southern California papers carried the story during the last war of a certain man from the southern mountains who migrated out to the West Coast and secured employment with an aircraft industry. He wanted to do his part for the war effort; and having a large family, he did not qualify for the military. A number of weeks went by, during which his paycheck failed to show up in the office as being cancelled, and subsequent investigation revealed that he had all of his paychecks neatly filed away. Having never seen a check before in his life and being unfamiliar with its use, he assumed that these papers were an expression of appreciation for his part in the war effort; meaning he was working at another job to support his family.

Humorous to be sure, yet tragic when you realize it is not unlike many Christians. GOD has given a blank check, so to speak, signed in the blood of JESUS CHRIST, His Son, payable to whomsoever will, whenever he needs it, in whatever amount is needed. Unfamiliar with these inexhaustible resources GOD had made available or indifferent because of pride, we deprive ourselves of precious benefits, meanwhile working overtime in a futile effort to become what only the Gospel can make us by faith alone. "The just shall live by faith." Is it any wonder Paul was proud of this message?

~ end of chapter 2 ~

03 - The Wrath of God

Chapter Three -

The Wrath of GOD (Romans 1:18-32)

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

"Speak to me of the love of GOD - not His wrath," said one man. "I can understand a GOD of love, but a GOD of wrath is meaningless." He did not understand a GOD of love because love is meaningless without wrath. Integrity implies order which, if broken, brings destructive consequences. The father who does not discipline a child does not love that child in the right way; he indulges him, and that indulgence can destroy the child.

The term "wrath of GOD" in the Bible does not mean that GOD is an arbitrary, capricious, small, jealous being who at a whim has set up petty rules to regiment human nature and who loses his temper when his rules are broken and then tries to get even with the transgressor. The term "wrath of GOD" implies an orderly GOD who has created an orderly world. We know when the tide comes in and goes out, the precise moment of the sitting and the setting of the sun. We live in a predictable universe. We know that if we step off a high building, we shall fall; but the very force which makes us fall holds us to the earth and keeps us from being flung into space as the earth turns on its axis. It is an orderly world.

Dr. Werner Von Braun, speaking at Wheaton College, was asked this question, "Is it consistent with Christian faith to probe into space - is this not contrary to our religion?" Dr. Von Braun did not believe that it was, rather that GOD had given man a mind and curiosity and that He intended that man explore creation in order to learn about it and obey it. He said, "If GOD does not want man to get to the moon, all He need do is confuse man just a little bit." The implication was clear. Because we live in an orderly universe, as science discovers the laws by which it operates and obeys those laws, we can expect to get to the moon. If we disobey them, the consequences are obvious.

We live in an orderly physical universe, which is a blessing to man. It assures him a measure of peace and harmony and security. It is a dependable world which makes progress possible. The scientific method is dependent on this order. When man fails to cooperate with GOD's order, he suffers.

- "Break the law of architecture, the building collapses.
- Break the law of agriculture, the crop fails.
- Break the laws of health, the body suffers."

This is the operation of the wrath of GOD in the universe. Not only is the universe orderly in the physical sense, it has moral and spiritual as well.

J.A. Frost, the great historian, said, "One lesson, and one lesson only, history may be said to repeat with distinctness that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that in the long run it is well with the good, and in the long run it is ill with the wicked." "The wrath of GOD is the inevitable punishment of sin. It is built into the very structure of the universe" (James M. Stifler on Romans).

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul sets forth the revelation of GOD's wrath against the sin of man. This is the Divine explanation for man's dilemma in history. Here is GOD's diagnosis of the very problem we face in our modern, mid-twentieth century world.

Man's unrighteousness is expressed in two aspects: one is suppression of the truth; the other is rejection of GOD. Notice, for example, in verse 18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." The meaning of the phrase "hold the truth in unrighteousness" means to "hold down, or suppress the truth", and in verses 21 and 28, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."

Much could be said on that little phrase "neither were thankful." Thanklessness is godlessness. According to a report recently made, the average per capita giving to overseas work in 1960 was \$2.35. Think of it! In our prosperous America - the giving per capita for a member is less than a penny a day to missions. The offering plates are passed and men drop in a quarter or a half dollar or a dollar bill in much the same spirit as they used to flip dimes on the stage for a performer. Utterly indifferent to the mercy of GOD on our nation, thankless. Why, men waste \$2.35 nearly every week of their lives. GOD pity us. "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful (Romans 1:21)." ". . . they did not like to retain God in their knowledge . . ." (Romans 1:28)"

In Romans 1:18-20, Paul makes it clear that GOD has made Himself known from the beginning of creation; so that wherever men reject GOD and serve idols, they do so in spite of GOD's revelation of Himself, in spite of the fact that GOD has made Himself known. Paul insists that wherever men are idolatrous they are without excuse. Occasionally someone will ask about an aboriginal people deep in the interior in a primitive area of a continent. They have never had any opportunity to hear the truth; they have never had any light.

The Bible says "From the creation (Romans 1:20)," GOD made Himself known so that they are without excuse. The Psalmist writes:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. (Psalms 19:1-3).

Wherever men worship idols, they do so in spite of GOD's revelation of Himself in nature, and in conscience. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:19). GOD Himself has done it. Therefore, the idea of religious evolution is incorrect. Religion has not evolved from primitive animism (The belief that all natural objects possess souls - American College Dictionary) and polytheism (Belief in many gods) to a refined monotheism (Belief in one true GOD). The opposite is true; humanity has degenerated from belief in the true GOD to the primitive religions. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the

world are clearly seen," says the apostle Paul. Therefore man, all men, are without excuse. They have suppressed the truth and they have rejected GOD. That is the essence of sin.

Basic to Paul's treatment is the distinction between the root of sin and its fruit. We are inclined to think of sins in terms of the fruit, in terms of conduct, in terms of the deed, rather than the attitude which produces the deed, the root which produces the fruit. Sin is not robbing a bank nor committing adultery, nor lying nor stealing; these are the evil results of sin. These are the sins born of sin. Sin is to reject GOD and suppress the truth. Sin's way is rebellion against GOD and against GOD's universe. Sin's way is the way of insubordination. Sin in the original, essential sense is man's declaration of independence from GOD.

Some father is reading this who would not tolerate for a moment insubordination in his son. He would not tolerate for a moment anarchy in his home, yet he is insubordinate to his heavenly FATHER and a spiritual anarchist because he will not be ruled by GOD. Perhaps he is not militant in this anarchy and insubordination; he may be quite respectable in it; his rebellion is expressed by simple indifference. Though he believes in GOD, GOD really is not very important, practically speaking, in his life. This is sin's root.

Now what are the consequences of this? Or, in other words, what is the nature of GOD's wrath which is revealed against this? Here, too, there are two aspects though they may compose a distinction with a real difference - consequences and judgment. What are the consequences of disobedience or rebellion; what is the nature of the wrath of GOD as it opposes unrighteousness? First, there is intellectual darkness. Obviously, if a man rejects light, he is condemned to darkness by choice. Paul says in Romans 1:21-22, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." "Intellectual revolt against what a man knows to be right is always attended by the darkening of the whole understanding. Refusal to accept the truth of GOD destroys the power to discriminate between truth and error."

Perhaps most of us have had the experience in our childhood or early youth of fabricating a story which we have told so often to so many people that we do not remember whether it really happened, whether it began as the truth or a lie. We have come to believe it ourselves, and yet deep down inside we are quite sure it never happened.

Here is a news release datelined London, reporting on Radio Moscow's declaration that:

Jesus Christ never existed and Christmas is a capitalist plot to keep the working people in chains. "The image of the supposed founder of Christianity" the Home Service Russian language broadcast asserted, "is purely legendary and mythical. Science long ago established that Jesus Christ never existed."

Now the tragic fact is that the Russians really believe that. They are absolutely sincere. Their minds are blinded because they have suppressed the truth and they believe a lie. This was true of Hitler. It was true of Mussolini. Hitler's propagandistic principle was basic - simply tell a lie often enough and people will believe it.

The second consequence is idolatry,

"And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 1:23-25).

My schooling and youth came between two World Wars, and during that period of time there were engraved upon the facade of many libraries, philosophy and science building on many campuses of the world these words, "Man is the measure of things." Man was his own god. There is nothing man cannot do, not a problem in history which given time man cannot solve. That was the great age of humanism. Then came World War II, nuclear fission, Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and the shallow, optimistic confidence in human nature was blasted, leaving a terrible vacuum. Having rejected GOD - JESUS CHRIST - and believing in the god, man, what was there to believe in now?

In the Saturday Review there was a story of Otto Molden, who more than any other single individual has dedicated himself to the formation of a United States of Europe. He established in a little Tyrolean village a seminar each summer to which more than thirteen thousand people have come since 1945 to discuss the rejuvenation of the intellectual life of Europe. Otto Molden told of a young German who as a boy had learned the Horst Wessel Song and subsequently was taught that the root of all evil is militarism. Now he is waiting to be drafted into the army! "Result?" said Molden; "He is utterly cynical and he believes in nothing."

A young chemistry professor, teaching at the University of Tokyo, said, "I have been away from Japan only two years, yet upon my return I find the students utterly different from those I knew when I left. They believe in nothing. When I am dogmatic about chemistry, they rebel and will not accept it. They believe in nothing. The world of Asia and Africa and Europe, not to mention America, is filled with a generation - millions of youth - who believe in nothing."

Someone recently told me about a young woman, a Colombian, who is teaching on a certain university campus on the East Coast where she bears a living witness for JESUS CHRIST. She was called in by the Dean of Women who said, "Now look, my dear, you know you don't have any right to propagate your faith on this campus." The Dean continued to talk to this young woman for twenty minutes about the law concerning religion in public schools; and when she was through, this very wise Christian said, "But you have been witnessing to me about your faith for twenty minutes." It is all right for a schoolteacher or a professor to ridicule Christianity, but let nothing be said in its favor; this is against the law! This is the wrath of GOD working out in history because we would not take GOD seriously.

Jeremiah in his prophecy, Jeremiah 2:5, reminds us that man is incurably religious; he must have some kind of GOD, and he becomes like the god he worships. If man will not follow the true GOD, he must find a substitute; he must have an idol, and he grows into the image of the god or the idol he serves. Thus Paul says, Romans 1:23, "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." If these are the gods of people, and they are, then there is no mystery to Paul's description of the degeneration of human personality in the rest of the chapter. Man becomes like his god; this is inescapable and inevitable.

- Is your god money? You become hard and metallic and crass. You clank through life if money is your god!

- Is power your god? You become like a beast - thoughtless, ruthless.

- Is popularity your god? You become giddy and shallow and empty.

Every man must have some kind of a god. If he will not have the true god, he will have a substitute; and he becomes like his god.

Strictly speaking, even the atheist has a god. He believes in No-god! He has faith in No-god with a capital "N." There is the god of Nihilism. The god of the hollow soul, the god of the empty life, the god of purposeless and goallessness and aimlessness and wretchedness in life.

You believe in nothing, you become nothing!

The second aspect of the wrath of GOD is judgment, and judgment is summed up in four words, "God gave them up." Ponder these words well. This is not a careless casting aside of a loved one but reluctant capitulation to man's freedom which GOD Himself guaranteed in creation. He is like a father sadly, unwillingly yielding to a son who insists on his own way. Having done all that he could to appeal to the son, the father knows he must finally let the son have his freedom with its consequences. Love works this way too. Many fathers have had to let sons go because they loved them. And many sons have to go to the end of the line like the prodigal before they understand this love of the father and return.

To the prophets of the Old Testament the judgment of GOD was continually active in history, but it was cumulative and came to its apex, to its consummation on what they called "the Day of the Lord."

What of our day with all our knowledge and sophistication? Juvenile delinquency, crime, mental illness, alcoholism, divorce, drug addiction, sex perversion - all are increasing at a rate exceeding the population growth. GOD gave His people up! He let them have their way! This is what you want to do - do it!

- He gave them up to lust;

- He gave them up to impurity of heart;

- He gave them up to vile passions.

- He gave them up to inordinate affection, perversion, homosexuality;

- He gave them up to reprobate minds.

Beginning at the 28th verse, Paul reviews the long, loathsome log of filth, culminating in the ultimate statement of the wrath and judgment of GOD upon human personality: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:32).

Not only do people do these things, but they are actually entertained by watching others do them. It would be unfit to print some of the things that I saw as a bellhop in a commercial hotel when I

was in my teens. It is not uncommon in certain areas of any modern city in America to be confronted by a sly, serpent-like, side-glancing little guy, who holds out a picture unbelievably indecent and invites you to a little private show. And there many respectable American citizens who go to the little private show, especially when they are away from home. These persons are not all on skid-row either; some come from the nice big office buildings, from behind mahogany desks. Entertained by filth! This is the wrath of GOD. Men's minds may become so reprobate that they actually take pleasure in viewing perversion in others.

Now, as a matter of fact, Rome was exactly as Paul describes it in this passage. The writers of Rome in that era, in fact, indict their own times far worse than Paul has here in his letter - of the first fifteen emperors of Rome, fourteen were homosexuals. It was a day of unprecedented, indescribable brutality, and yet it was the day of a great civilization. Some of you have ridden over the very cobblestones where the Apostle Paul set his feet on the Appian Way; you have looked at the Forum, the ruins of which still stand, the Coliseum, the aqueducts, and you have marveled at this civilization of two thousand years ago.

But do you remember, when you marvel at this civilization, that the floors of the amphitheaters ran red with the blood of Christian martyrs? Do you remember that a man could be famous if he invented a more brutal way to dispose of human life! If a man did not like what his slave did, he could destroy him on the spot. If parents did not like a child, if they did not wish to keep a new-born infant, they could throw it out! Literally! One historian says that not a day went by in those times in Rome when there were not thirty or forty babies thrown out in the streets unwanted!

Significantly, one thing which characterized this amazing civilization was religious tolerance! The Romans tolerated any god for the sake of peace in the empire. Beware when religious tolerance becomes a justification for religious indifference and rejection of GOD.

Sin begets sin; this is the wrath of GOD. The more a man sins, the easier it is to sin until he does not even know that he is sinning any more. "I want my own way." "I do as I please." You may! You may jump off the Empire State Building too if you please. There is the story of the man who did; and as he passed the twentieth floor on his way down, he was heard to remark, "Well nothing's happened yet!"

There are men today who are on their way to skid-row as surely as if they were already there - still living in nice homes. They are on their way; it is just a question of time. You stand beside a man on skid-row and he stinks; he swarms with lice, and he is not even conscious of it. He does not smell himself. You can get used to anything. Your soul can get so used to smut, it never bothers you just as your body can get used to dirt. That is the wrath of GOD, inexorably operative.

GOD does all in His power to love and lead men, but He will not coerce because love is not coercive. If man insists on his own way ("All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6), GOD will finally capitulate to that man's insubordination and anarchy. Reluctantly, but He will. GOD's wrath may be summed up simply in this way - man left to himself, no restraints, no inhibitions. Indulge his lust over and over again, more and more, without restraint, endlessly. That is hell! Just man left to himself to satisfy his appetites, increasing, monotonous, unending boredom and exhaustion. That is the wrath of GOD.

If you insist on having your way, as much as GOD loves you, He finally must give in to your choices.

We were studying Romans 1 some years ago in a doctor's home in Hollywood with a number of other doctors and their wives present. Among them was a fine young M.D. who had a great reputation in Southern California, a brilliant man and a graduate of John Hopkins Medical College. When we finished Romans 1 that night and opened the discussion for questions, this doctor spoke up saying, "I don't ever remember reading the Bible, but tonight I have seen myself in Romans 1; now what do I do about it?"

I said, "That's the wonderful thing about the Gospel. The blood of JESUS CHRIST, GOD's Son, cleanses from all sin." Though a man has decided he wants his own way and follows his own course, at any moment if he will ask, GOD will lovingly intervene and cleanse him and forgive him and restore him. This is the Gospel, and it is for everybody!

~ end of chapter 3 ~

04 - But We Are Different

Chapter Four -

But We Are Different (Romans 2:1-16)

Paul has painted a pretty black picture about human nature in the last part of Romans 1, and now he anticipates the Jewish reaction. He is sure of two things: first, that the Jew will agree with what has been written about the pagan Roman, Greek or Gentile; secondly, that by a neat little twist of logic the Jew will exclude himself from the picture. He will say, "This is certainly true of the Romans, but we are different!"

The Jews, Paul concluded, had suffered physically and they would readily endorse Paul's indictment of the Gentile; but they would also, with rather common human pride, divorce themselves from the withering blast and reason, "That's true of them, not of us!" Forget it not that the writer of Romans is poignantly aware of this attitude, for he himself embraced it with deep conviction and zeal. The Apostle Paul could not easily erase from memory those days as Saul of Tarsus when with righteous rage boiling he did all he could to extirpate the Christian Church. With deep embarrassment he remembered his arrogant condescension toward the most cultured non-Jew; he could not forget the superiority he had felt of himself and his people. He does not indicate immediately that he is addressing the Jew; that comes a bit later in the passage, but there is no mistaking whom he has in mind.

"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges: for wherein thou judges another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judges doest the same thing" (Romans 2:1). Underneath human nature is all alike; the same heart in the Jew as in the Gentile; the same affinity for sin and unrighteousness and godlessness. How easily they forgot or overlooked the chronic defections of Israel from her peculiar role as the chosen of GOD: the Golden Calf of Aaron hours after GOD had thundered on Sinai; the whining and grumbling in the wilderness; the recurring worship of Baal; the stoning of the prophets. They had a tradition, in fact, that Abraham sat beside the gate of hell to keep all Jews out, however evil their deeds. They thought of themselves as invulnerable to the judgments of GOD. Were they not sons of Abraham? Had not the promises been given to Abraham? Were they not the disciples of Moses? Had not the law been given to Moses?

Now Paul must expose this devilish perverseness in the human heart which causes a man to justify himself by condemning another, this despicable practice of exalting one's self by down-grading another. It is a common propensity of the human heart to condemn in others that which we most despise in ourselves. Someone has pointed out that one cannot point a finger of criticism at another without pointing three fingers at himself. The critic stands condemned because he sees in others what he is unable to handle in himself.

This tendency is dramatically and vividly revealed in the so-called perfectionist, who, because he cannot be what he knows he ought to be in himself, demands perfection in those about him,

making life for them utterly intolerable.

So Paul admonishes, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judges them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" (Romans 2:3). Then Paul reinforces his argument with the principles by which GOD judges a man, four principles of Divine judgment, in verses Romans 2:2, Romans 2:6, Romans 2:11 and Romans 2:16.

The first, "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things" (Romans 2:2), in contrast, of course, to the error of the Jews' judgment against the pagan. When man judges man, he is at best subjective in his judgment. Furthermore, he does not have all the facts. GOD's judgment is according to the truth, not in an abstract sense but according to the actual condition of the man being judged. No man can hide from GOD; no man can fool GOD; no man can deceive GOD. He may deceive a neighbor by condemning in someone else a sin for which he is guilty; he may deceive a friend that way; he may thus deceive one in his own family; may even deceive himself, but he cannot deceive GOD! He knows all about us! Our lives are an open book to him. Indeed He knows the secret thoughts of the heart, and Paul reminds us in Romans 2:16 that it is upon the secrets of man's heart that GOD's judgment is based. He judges on the basis of the secrets of one's life, things which no one else knows, which may have been covered so successfully that they have been forgotten. GOD is utterly objective and unprejudiced in His judgments.

At this point in his argument the Apostle Paul issues a sober warning - beware of presuming on the mercy, the patience, and forbearance of GOD. Deferred judgment is ignored to one's mounting peril. The fact that the wrath of GOD has not fallen is not to be equated with Divine indulgence or absolutions.

Indeed, the very fact that GOD is patient, the very fact that GOD is good, the very fact that GOD forbears is meant to stir men to repentance. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4) Do you not see America, that the very benefits that GOD has given ought to lead us to repent instead of hardening our hearts and taking for granted every gift, every act of mercy as though it is ours by right of special privilege?

America, America, beware! GOD is patient. GOD is long-suffering. GOD wants men to come to repentance. But by continuing to harden your heart against GOD's very patience and goodness, you simply store up for yourselves treasures of wrath! What a picture!

The Hebrew prophets thought of GOD's wrath as being operative continually in history, but it was also cumulative, increasing to that moment when the consummate wrath of GOD would overflow on the Day of the LORD. This day is coming for every man, for every woman. "The judgment of God is according to truth."

Secondly, GOD will "render to every man according to his deeds." Just that explicitly does Paul state this principle in Romans 2:6. Does this, therefore, mean that Paul is contradicting his own theme, "The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17)." Notice that he points out beginning at Romans 2:7, that he is talking about the one who longs for immortality. In other words, the deeds are the expression of the desire which GOD sees and honors.

This is illustrated in two familiar incidents in the New Testament: Cornelius, for example, whose story is recorded in Acts, chapter 10. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:1-4).

A parenthetical note is in order here. Not uncommonly one will hear a well-meaning Christian say that the only prayer of the unsaved man which GOD hears is this, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This is simply not true. Here is an "unsaved man" Cornelius. Think of the means GOD used to get Peter to go to him! It required a special vision, repeated thrice, after which GOD had to rebuke him. And when Peter tried later to explain to the Jews this apparent deviation to a Gentile, he said rather apologetically, "What was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17)" Of this "unsaved" man Dr. Luke records, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

On another occasion the Jews came to JESUS on behalf of a certain Roman centurion (Luke 7) and said, "he was worthy for whom he should do this. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue" (Luke 7:4-5). JESUS responded to the request; but when He was near the home of the centurion, the Roman officer bade Him to come no farther, for said he, "Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof" (Luke 7:6).

Here was an "unsaved," good man, desiring immortality, whose good works were no substitute for faith in JESUS; nor did he assume his goodness efficacious for salvation. He was not basing his hope for eternal life upon his good deeds. Not at all. Here was a man whose reputation for goodness was generally accepted, and yet who himself felt utterly unworthy of JESUS. Such a one, says Paul, shall be given eternal life.

The same principle is found in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). If you want it, you shall have it. GOD will give it to you. The authentically good man does not present his record to GOD saying, "Look what a good man I am - I deserve Heaven!" The authentically good man whose virtue commends itself to GOD is always aware of his unworthiness, yet he seeks immortality and eternal life. GOD gives to the man who desires it eternal life. It is a gift. It cannot be purchased. It cannot be earned. But the sincerity of the man who "seeks for glory and honor and immortality" will be evident by "patient continuance in well doing."

Thirdly, Paul tells us, Romans 2:11, "There is no respect of persons with God." GOD is impartial in His judgments. The Jews had quite a case: sons of Abraham, Moses, the law, the prophets, the Ark of the Covenant, the priesthood, the Tabernacle, the Temple. The Gentiles had none of these things, but it is as though Paul says, "So what?"

The modern counterpart of this boast is expressed in other ways; for example, "I am a church member!" "My mother sang in the choir and taught a Sunday school class." "My father was a minister as was his father and his father's father." "I am on the Session of the Church." "I was raised in a Christian home." How easily we equate salvation with pedigree or environment or

inheritance. "I am an American; of course I am a Christian!" It does not necessarily follow.

The apostle penetrates this illusion, explodes its complacency as he writes. You say you have the law in contrast to the Gentiles, but the very fact that Gentiles keep this law of which you boast demonstrates the fact that they have the law in their own hearts. Long before GOD gave the Decalogue to Moses, he engraved that same law upon the hearts of Adam and Eve.

Thomas Guthrie describes Dr. Livingstone's experience among the rawest tribes of Africa, "on whose Cimmerian darkness no straggling ray of revealed truth had ever fallen, natives ready to admit that they were sinners. Indeed, they hold almost everything to be sin which, as such, is forbidden in the Word of GOD.

"Nor is it possible," continues Guthrie, "to read his clear statements on that subject without arriving at this very interesting and important conclusion - that the ten commandments received from GOD's own hand by Moses on Mount Sinai are but the copy of a much older law, that law which the finger of the MAKER wrote on Adam's heart and which, though sadly defaced by the fall, may still, like the inscription on a time-eaten, moss-grown stone, be traced on ours."

Years ago in Kansas City an eminent contemporary philosopher was addressing a large crowd in the lovely Civic music Hall. He had been laboring the point that there are no absolute moral standards, morality being a product of social mores. When he had finished his lecture, he opened the meeting for questions; and the first to respond was a senior high boy. "Sir," he said, "Is it ever right to tell a lie?"

The inadequate answer of the philosopher was interesting, but it was not to the satisfaction of the student, nor, for that matter, to anyone else in the auditorium. Why? Because when GOD created man in the Garden of Eden, he engraved on his heart that which later he wrote with his finger on the stone He gave to Moses.

Paul is saying, listen my people, all that you have is meaningless if you do not obey the Commandments because the Gentile, though he has not Moses' law, has that law written in his heart, his conscience. He knows when he does wrong and when he does right, his conscience either accuses him or excuses him (a neat little device of each man's conscience, incidentally, excusing himself by the process of rationalization). GOD's judgment rightly falls upon all men, Jew or Gentile, Jew and non-Jew. He is not a respecter of persons. You keep the law, you will not be judged. No matter how much law you have, you break the law, you cannot escape judgment.

Finally, the fourth principle of Divine judgment is this, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16). JESUS CHRIST is the JUDGE. The FATHER hath given all judgment into His hands. The day is coming when each of us shall stand before JESUS CHRIST to be judged. You do not even believe in Him; some day you shall to your own condemnation. For every eye shall see, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that JESUS CHRIST is the supreme GOD of the universe. He is the JUDGE, and the standard of judgment is the Gospel. But, you say, there are people who have never heard the Gospel. How do you know? The Gospel was not a New Testament innovation, remember. Paul says in his introduction, he was "called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures)" (Romans 1:1-2).

In Romans 4 Paul uses the progenitor of the Hebrew race, Abraham, who lived two thousand years before CHRIST, as the supreme example of men who are saved by the Gospel. Paul has told us in Romans 1 that there is not a corner, not a niche, not a cranny in the universe where GOD has left Himself without a witness, so that all men are "without excuse." This is the condemnation, that "light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). This was that "true Light, which lightest every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

The question finally resolves to this: what does JESUS CHRIST mean to you? Is it a matter of indifference to you who JESUS CHRIST is? Is this just a matter of intellectual persuasion, or is JESUS CHRIST really LORD and SAVIOUR? You must answer that question now or later, for some day you shall have to give an answer, and you will be standing in His presence when you do! Is JESUS CHRIST a matter of indifference to you? Does it matter who He is, what He said, what He did on the Cross, the fact that He arose from the dead, and that He is coming again? Is this the most glorious fact in your experience?

~ end of chapter 4 ~

05 - Who is a Real Jew?

Chapter Five -

Who is a Real Jew?

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:17-29).

Paul states explicitly in this passage that he is writing to the Jew, anticipating his reaction to the condemnation of the non-Jew in Chapter One, which he knows will meet with hearty approval from the Jew, who at the same time will exclude himself from the broad implications of the indictment. Hence Paul is driving home the fact of Jewish inclusion; he stands in the same need of salvation by grace through faith as the non-Jew; the way of salvation for the Jew is no different from that for any other man. This leads to a very interesting development; namely, that historic Judaism is not in opposition to Christian faith.

On the contrary, it is bound to it, each being indispensable to the other. We think of the Bible as one book comprising Old and New Testaments, and it is. Likewise the doctrine of the Old Testament and of the New are one faith, not two mutually exclusive religions but the faith of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. You will find this harmony developing more in detail and depth as we progress. This means therefore, that a Jew does not repudiate his history and heritage when he embraces faith in JESUS CHRIST. Contrarily he fulfills his destiny, and conversely it means also that the Gentile when he embraces faith in JESUS CHRIST becomes in a very real sense a true Jew, a member of spiritual Israel.

In Ephesians Paul declares that JESUS CHRIST has eliminated the cleavage between Jew and Gentile, has made them both one; and the Church is no longer Jew or Gentile but one body in CHRIST. Incidentally, when one approaches a modern Jew with this in mind, it not only makes it interesting and challenging to talk with him about CHRIST, but it makes one far more effective in his witness inasmuch as the average Jew has the idea that to accept Christianity constitutes a radical repudiation of his heritage. When he can be shown that it is only as he receives CHRIST that he enters into this heritage which is rightfully his, another light is cast upon his own attitude toward the Gospel.

In Romans 2:17-29 Paul answers the question who is a real Jew, thereby dispossessing Jew and Gentile of the caricature so commonly held between both. He begins in the first four verses, Romans 2:17-20, by itemizing those things in which the Jew boasts. "Behold, thou art called a Jew," he writes; and one senses the edge of his words as the argument unfolds. Let it not be forgotten that the author is a "Hebrew of the Hebrews (Php 3:5)," not a bigoted Gentile, but a Jew who loved his own; one who surpassed his contemporaries in religious zeal, who could boast more than any other of his religious achievements.

In what does the Jewish faith boast? The Jew relies on the law. Not that he keeps it, as Paul reveals later, but simply that to him it was given. "I am a Jew! I am above the judgment of the Gentile. Obviously this condemnation (Romans 1:18-32) does not apply to me. I am a Jew! I have the law!" The modern counterpart is the man who says, "I am a Roman Catholic!" "I am a Presbyterian!" "I am a Methodist!" "I am a Baptist!"

He boasted of his relationship to GOD, says Paul. The Jew believed that GOD had chosen him as a peculiar people and that, therefore, he was immune to judgment, his conduct notwithstanding. He boasted of knowing GOD's will. Of course he did, a fact which Paul amplifies subsequently. The Jews had the oracles of GOD, the law of GOD; the prophets were of Israel and with their message he was familiar. He knew what GOD wanted, but did he obey? He approved what is excellent, Paul says.

Now this is another aspect of the tendency to criticize in others what one despises in himself, a very subtle rationalization whereby approval of excellence is made to imply practice. The very approval becomes a facade behind which is hid one's failure to comply. Paul boasted that he was instructed in the law. From childhood a Jewish boy was schooled in the Old Covenant; so Paul reasons, you boast because you are instructed in the law, believing that the law is the embodiment of all knowledge. You boast that you are a guide to the blind (JESUS referred to them as "blind leaders of the blind Matthew 15:14"). You boast that you are a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, teacher of children. Paul's words drip with sarcasm for their sheer egoism. You are a superior people!

GOD has endowed them with all these advantages. Why? In order that they might strut? In order that they might parade their superiority? In order that they might separate themselves from all others? This is precisely what they had done. The Jewish attitude to all non-Jews was one of cold-contempt. Tacitus said of the Jews, "Among themselves their honesty is inflexible, their compassion quick to move; but to all other persons they show the hatred of antagonism."

Juvenal declared that if a Jew was asked the way to any place he refused to give any information except to another Jew, and that if anyone was looking for a well from which to drink, he would not be led to it unless he had been circumcised. Here is a startling, incongruous fact that the very doctrine which ought to have produced the saint was so perverted that it produced an arrogant, loveless egotist. What kind of a belief is it that produces the superior person who holds in utter contempt all others as inferior?

Beware, lest we make the same mistake; for the fact is, and Paul's sword cuts both ways here, the Christian often becomes this kind of man. The very ones that ought to be loved for CHRIST's sake are treated with contempt, or at least with condescension; ignored and condemned, they are often abandoned by the Church that ought to be seeking them in the love of JESUS CHRIST! When we ought to be wooing men for CHRIST, we draw our self-righteous robes about us and walk on the other side of the road! We think of ourselves as superior to the one who does that which we consider wrong or fails to do that which we construe to be right. "I don't drink; obviously I am superior to the man who does!" Be careful, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)."

Beware, if there is that in you which makes you feel superior to another; for whatever else the grace of GOD does in a man, it produces humility - genuine, authentic, bonafide humility. The very man who wrote these words called himself the "chief" of sinners, "less than the least of all saints," and so he states the tragic contradictions in the next verses, Romans 2:21-24. "You teach others; do you teach yourself? You preach against stealing; do you steal? (There are many ways to steal.) You preach against adultery; do you commit it? You abhor idols; do you rob temples?"

The very fact that Paul addressed these questions to the Jew implied their guilt. The answer gave birth to the question! Such boasting increases judgment. Boasting in the law, you dishonor GOD by breaking it. Then he calls to witness against them Isaiah 52:5, "Now therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord; and my name continually every day is blasphemed." The fact of Christian profession means that the name of GOD will be blasphemed because of inconsistencies.

It is possible that someone is alienated from JESUS CHRIST because you profess to be a Christian when your life is contradictory; one whom you are not only failing to lead to CHRIST but are driving from CHRIST by your pride, your arrogance, your lovelessness, your icy orthodoxy? This is what Paul is talking about. True religion is more than profession or position. Superior knowledge does not extenuate guilt; it aggravates guilt.

Finally, he closes the chapter by the discussion of the true Jew. First of all, and now Paul touches on the most important sign and symbol in the Old Testament, GOD sealed His promise to Abraham with circumcision, the promise, which he says in Galatians was fulfilled in CHRIST. Circumcision is uncircumcision if one does not keep the law, and conversely uncircumcision becomes circumcision if one keeps the law. Furthermore, the uncircumcised Gentile who keeps the law condemns and judges the Jew who is circumcised and fails to keep it! This is rather startling, the possibility that some of the very people whom we are judging and condemning GOD will use to judge us! Paul concludes the real Jew to be he that is one inwardly, and real circumcision is not of the flesh; it is of the heart. Real circumcision is not external; it is inward.

The truth is plainly obvious. External position, profession, practice are worse than nothing if they do not represent a change in man's inward condition. Better not to make any profession at all. It becomes very plain in this passage of Scripture that professionalism in religion is wholly undesirable. It breeds the most detestable man, the most abhorrent personality - the self-righteous, self-centered, self-deceived superior stuffed shirt! JESUS illustrated such a man in Luke 18:9-14, a parable for some "which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

"I," he had "I" trouble; he had cataracts on his ego!

There it is, like it or not; it bites deeply into orthodox Christianity because it was the very orthodoxy of the Jew which was his condemnation. Is orthodoxy enough? Does it make a difference whether one's life is Christ-like, whether there is love, warmth, humility, understanding, compassion, concern, sympathy? One's very orthodoxy may make him hard, cold, indifferent and intolerable! The higher one's knowledge, the greater his responsibility; the blacker this sin of irresponsibility, the deeper the condemnation - this orthodoxy without CHRIST. The Pharisees, remember, trusted in their own righteousness, trusted in themselves - and on the basis of their own supposed superiority - (and their religion devoid of CHRIST) - WERE CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE BETTER, and superior.

Heed the words of JESUS CHRIST, "Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only." "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?." "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

The Word of GOD is "quick, and powerful." It is a "two-edged sword." It is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It exposes the secrets of man; "dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow (Hebrews 4:12)."

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 11:15)."

~ end of chapter 5 ~

06 - The Faithfulness of God

Chapter Six -

The Faithfulness of GOD

Romans 3:1-8

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just."

Two questions the Apostle anticipates in the light of the strong condemnation of the Jew in Chapter 2. First, what advantage has the Jew? If what Paul says is true, then what is the difference between the Jew and the Gentile? What is the value of being a Jew? What advantage does he have, and what profit is there in circumcision? Perhaps as we think about these two questions, we can appreciate just a little bit the radical, revolutionary impact of Paul's teaching upon Jewish complacency. Paul himself had been through it; had he not taken his religion more seriously than his contemporaries? Had he not boasted that if any other could be proud of his achievements, he more? Surely the Apostle Paul had felt the blasting power of the truth against his own personal complacency and pride and stubborn zeal.

The Jews did not feel they were to be dealt with as other men. GOD had chosen them as the covenant people of Abraham, and insights into their attitude abound in the New Testament as, for example, when John the Baptist began his public ministry with the message, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3:2)." One can almost hear the Jews saying to John, "Of what must we repent, we are the children of Abraham?" John replies, "think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). There is a basic truth intimated here; namely, that it is easier for GOD to make a man out of a stone than to bring a man to repentance.

It is easier for GOD to create a man than to change his heart. In the words of a popular song, "It took a miracle" to hang the stars in place, but the greatest miracle is the power of GOD which moves a rebellious and unrepentant heart to conversion. On another occasion, when JESUS was having one of his verbal encounters with the Pharisees (John 8), they boasted, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man" (John 8:33). It was a favorite saying of the Jews

that all Israel hath a part in eternal life.

Justin Martyr wrote, "They supposed that to them universally who are of Israel or the seed of Abraham, no matter how sinful and disobedient to GOD they may be, that the eternal kingdom shall be given to them." Strange as this attitude may seem, it has its modern counterpart among us, as we shall see.

Paul begins to answer (verse 2) and herein is a graphic reminder that this is not a theological treatise but a letter, for Paul barely begins to answer the two questions he raises when apparently he gets sidetracked by a more important idea which forces itself upon him and with which he is constrained to deal. He does not return to his answer until chapter 9. For this reason one should not be too discouraged when trying to outline Paul's epistles that they do not always fall into neat and orderly form. These are letters, and there are spontaneity and the element of impulse which we see so clearly in this passage.

Raising two questions which he knows will occur to the Jew, he answers, "Much every way." That is, there is great advantage to the Jew; there is great profit in circumcision, in every way, chiefly, or to begin with, "because that unto them were committed the oracles of God," and that is the end of his answer until chapter 9. The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of GOD, and the word is probably used here, not in a limited sense as, for example, the commandments but in the broadest sense, referring to all the writings or the words of GOD, inclusive of the promise to Abraham, the Decalogue given to Moses, and the writing and preaching of the prophets.

Then the Apostle Paul engages a large question, a theological and historical problem, which he himself must have pondered deeply and wrestled with often because of his strong conviction as a Jew. He too would have regarded the Jews as immune to the judgments of GOD. He too would have believed with all his heart that they were a peculiar people for a peculiar place in the future. Following his conversion on the road to Damascus, while on the backside of the desert for three years, he "conferred not with flesh and blood," (Galatians 1:16) he must often have faced this apparent contradiction. In view of the teaching of the Old Testament, the promise that GOD gave to Abraham, the law which GOD gave to Moses, and the whole Old Testament economy flowing out of these two things, the promise and the law, with all the teaching and writing of the prophets, if Israel failed, does this constitute GOD's failure? Has the Old Testament failed? Has somehow GOD's plan in history been thwarted?

As a matter of fact, long before Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, the SPIRIT of GOD was undoubtedly burning conviction deeply into his heart about this, and it must have been one of the imponderables which made it difficult for him to acknowledge CHRIST as his MESSIAH.

Peter faced this when the SPIRIT of GOD directed him to go to Cornelius, the big stubborn question: Does the admission of the Gentiles to the MESSIAH, if JESUS be the MESSIAH, and the rejection of the Jews, if they will not accept JESUS, constitute the failure of the Old Covenant? What an overwhelming prospect, the failure of GOD! Everything we can say critically of the Pharisees to the contrary notwithstanding, this would pose a perplexing dilemma, not easily resolved. Is everything which I have believed wrong?

In Paul's day Rome, in order to maintain peace within its borders, was tolerant of the worship of any GOD; nevertheless, the Romans were greatly intolerant of Jewish monotheism* which, due to

Greek and Roman polytheism**, was looked on as atheism***. The strength of Jewish monotheism rested with Jewish destiny.

* monotheism - Belief in one true GOD.

** polytheism - Belief in many gods.

*** atheism - Belief in no GOD.

"Paul's considered resolution of this problem is very simple, very explicit, very dogmatic. He simply states, "let God be true, but every man a liar." The idea of GOD failing is preposterous, intolerable. He illustrates it with the 51st Psalm, in which King David, confessing his own grievous sin, prays, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest (Psalms 51:4)." In such crucial days we need to remember this answer of Paul's, the absolute dependability of GOD, the absolute faithfulness of GOD, the absolute integrity of GOD; no matter what is happening in history.

Regardless of what happens to me personally, however circumstances may converge upon my life to seem to destroy me, let GOD be true! If GOD is not true, then who, what can be trusted? The very foundations are removed! Paul's answer is exceedingly realistic and very practical: "Let GOD be true, but every man a liar (Romans 3:4)." Job concluded likewise, though in a different way, when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

Then comes a second thought based on the Jewish propensity to rationalize his position, thereby justifying himself; and Paul anticipates another question, "Well, if our failure glorifies GOD, if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of GOD, is GOD then not unjust to chasten us, to judge us for this?" Paul says parenthetically (verse 5), "I speak as a man," by which he means he is employing the reasoning of some regarding this, and then he utters the strongest negative in the Bible, "God forbid!" For he reasons, if this were true, how could GOD judge anybody?

For example, how could He judge the Gentiles? If the evil of man glorifies GOD, and He is thereby unjust in judging men, who could be judged? The argument continues in Romans 3:7-8, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come?" Here we have an early illustration of modern pragmatism, the end justifies the means. Some people apparently slanderously charge that Paul is teaching this. His answer to the accusation is simply, "they deserve damnation!"

The end does not justify the means, ever, but this process of rationalization in order to self-justification is a very familiar human practice. In our own nation, for instance, what a great nation we are, how much we have done for the world! We are a Christian nation, some insist. If so, it is only nominal. We imprint our money, "In GOD We Trust." Look at the millions of dollars we are giving away to help rehabilitate the nations of the world, the food that we are sending. Did not the idea of "CARE" originate in the United States of America? What good people we are! It can't happen here, it can't happen here! Surely GOD is on our side! Surely GOD is with us! The Germans in two world wars had the same idea when they engraved on the belt buckles of their army uniforms, "Gott mit uns." It is seen in the individual who refuses to acknowledge his sin while busily justifying himself on the basis of good works.

It is personified in the alcoholic. How many I have seen whose lives are broken, yet they will not admit they are alcoholics. Here is an intelligent young man, a medical doctor, who every evening comes home, goes immediately to the refrigerator, takes out a can of beer, then another, and another, and another; lapsing into drunken sleep, he wakes up sober, goes back to the job in the morning, then comes home to go through the same pathetic routine. As we talked not long ago, he insisted, "My wife thinks I am an alcoholic, but I'm not!" Or another, with a bottle of cheap wine, all the while we talked he would interrupt his conversation as he stuck the long neck of that bottle deep down in his throat yet stubbornly declared, "I'm not an alcoholic!"

But let us not make a scapegoat of the alcoholic, for the same basic deceit and escapism is in the man who says, "I'm not a sinner!"

John touches the heart of this self-deception in the first chapter of his first epistle when he says, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:5-9).

How many people deprive themselves of the blessings of GOD, the blessings of forgiveness and cleansing because they rationalize and justify self instead of acknowledging their sin, walking in the light and receiving GOD's forgiveness and cleansing! How many Christians allow their fellowship to be broken with those about them because they will not acknowledge their own sin! They may blame everybody else but never themselves. That is alcoholism in essence; only the form is different! How quick we are to rationalize and justify our sin.

I suppose that this is the most amazing phenomenon in a pastor's study when he is counseling - the ability of men to turn evil into a positive good by some twist in their reasoning. Of course we see the ultimate of this in Communism today, in Khrushchev, who calls disorder order; for whom a lie is the truth, for whom peace is war. That is its ultimate expression, but it is in everyone of us. What delight to walk in the light and quit trying to build these self-deceiving defenses, but rather let them be destroyed. The defensive person is so obvious, so transparent, so quick to blame others when, if he admitted his need, his failure, his sin, the grace of CHRIST could flow in with its healing and cleansing and renewal. Very practical, isn't it?

In the final analysis, the real trouble with the Jew was the fact that he had accepted the privilege implicit in the oracles of GOD but had rejected the corresponding responsibility, and in so doing he had forfeited the privilege. He had received a promise through Abraham which he readily accepted, but he had also been given the Ten Commandments, and he was expected to obey them. Circumcision was the symbol of his faith in the promise of GOD to Abraham; obedience should have been his response to the Commandments which GOD gave through Moses.

Actually, these are the two basic elements in real belief: trust in GOD's promise, obedience to GOD's law. Where there is not obedience, there is not belief in the Biblical sense; and this is true today in the Church as it was in Israel in Paul's day.

We sing the song,

"trust and obey, for there is no other way

To be happy in JESUS but to trust and obey."

We have received all of the blessings and the benefits that are implicit in the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, but have we assumed the obligations as well? If we have not, then we repudiate the benefit. This is inevitable. We receive the gift of freedom in our wonderful country; what are we doing about it? We enjoy all of the blessings that are part of our Western way of life. What are we doing to preserve it? We are enjoying all the privileges; are we letting someone else assume the responsibility? If we do, it is inevitable that we will lose those privileges by default, which is exactly what is happening in our modern world.

We still enjoy the benefits of the Hebrew-Christian tradition which gave us our splendid culture, but many of us are ignoring or rejecting the message of the Word of GOD which produced that culture. We are like the Jew of the first century. The same process which took place in Israel through the years from Abraham to CHRIST has been taking place in our world and in the Church from JESUS CHRIST to the present day!

~ end of chapter 6 ~

07 - The Light of the Law

Chapter 7 -

THE LIGHT OF THE LAW

Romans 3:9-20

Review is in order inasmuch as we now reach the end of the first major division in Paul's letter to Rome.

The first seventeen verses comprise the introduction with Romans 1:16-17 stating the theme, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also the Greek, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith." Beginning at the eighteenth verse through 3:20, the Apostle Paul argues the necessity of the redemption that is in JESUS CHRIST by proving that the whole world, Jew and non-Jew, is in sin and guilty before Almighty GOD.

In the first chapter of the epistle beginning at verse 18, he demonstrates that the non-Jew stands convicted before GOD; then anticipating the Jewish reaction, he shows, beginning with chapter 2 through the 8th verse of chapter 3, that the Jew also as well as the Gentile stands condemned before GOD. In this present passage, Romans 3:9-20,

we have what might be called in the vernacular the "wrap up" of the argument. He begins with a question so ambiguous that no commentator is dogmatic as to its meaning.

The question is, "What then, are we better than they?" Who are "we" and who are "they"? Some say the "we" refers to the Jew. Paul has been discussing the Jew's advantage so the question naturally follows, "Are we Jews better than the non-Jew or the Gentile?"

There are others who believe that he is asking exactly the converse, "Are we Gentiles therefore better off than the Jews?" Because, you see, the Apostle Paul has now demonstrated that the Jew had advantages which increased his guilt inasmuch as he failed to live up to the responsibility inherent in them. The question makes sense either way, the point being, "Is there any defense left for Jew or Gentile?" The answer is an unqualified "no," after which the author states, "Have I not been showing you that all men are condemned?" His argument thus far concludes the sinfulness of all men, and now he is going to settle it with evidence from the Word of GOD. He is going to close this division of his letter by demonstrating unequivocally the universality of sin, the indiscriminate sinfulness of human nature.

That phrase "under sin" is an interesting word. It means to be under the authority of sin, under the reign of sin. The "reign of sin" will be discussed later at the end of the fifth chapter, The whole world is under the dominion of sin; the whole world is under the power of sin; the whole world is in sin's empire. This, incidentally, sheds some light on an apparent contradiction in the Word of GOD. John 3:16 declares, "For God so loved the world . . ." This same author admonishes in his first

epistle (1 John 2:15), "Love not the world."

Is this a contradiction? No, it is not, for in John 3:16 he is talking about a different world from the one in 1st John. In John 3:16 he is talking about the people that are in the world; GOD loved all the people in the world from Adam and Eve to the last person that will ever be born. GOD loves everybody. GOD is indiscriminate and impartial in His love for all men everywhere; He does not love one man more than another; He does not love the white man more than the black or vice versa; GOD is no respecter of persons. GOD loves the world in this sense; but the world order which has set itself against GOD and is operating contrary to His order, we are told not to love. We are told to reject it, not the people in it but the principles by which they operate contrary to GOD's law.

Finally, Paul comes to the proof, the ultimate proof of the universality of sin, and it is interesting to observe that he counts the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be this unanswerable proof. Here we have an insight into Paul's appreciation of the Old Testament Scriptures. So far as this brilliant Jew was concerned, this man who has influenced human history more than any other save JESUS CHRIST Himself, excepting Moses perhaps, the Old Testament was conclusive. Paul entertained no doubts whatsoever about its infallibility. Hence, when he marshals references, as he does in verses 10 to 18, the proof is final, the matter is closed, debate is silenced. Indeed he says just this, "That every mouth may be stopped. (Romans 3:19)"

He uses here a typical rabbinic device in teaching and preaching, the stringing together of unrelated texts in defense of his argument. This was called "charaz" in the Hebrew, and it means literally the stringing of pearls. Observe these pearls of wisdom which the apostle strings together in this passage. Beginning at the tenth verse he says, "As it is written, there is none righteous," None is righteous. And lest there be any doubt about his meaning, he adds, "No not one." Then in verse 11, "There is none that understandeth." In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote, "the world by wisdom knew not GOD. (1 Corinthians 1:21)" No one understands.

You will recall in Chapter 1 a quotation from a London monitored broadcast originating in Moscow, in which, with all seriousness the Communists declared that JESUS CHRIST never existed, a fact which science has so proved! They really believed this; they apparently were sincere.

How can this be, this utterly irrational fact? The Bible says the whole human race is this way until it repents. Paul says, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." The very fact that one recognizes JESUS CHRIST as Lord is evidence that he has been taught by GOD (John 6:45).

Recall Peter's remarkable testimony in Caesarea of Philippi (Matthew 16:13-17), "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." JESUS said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." This truth is not arrived at by the normal, rational processes; it is a gift of GOD.

"There is none that seeketh after God." One can almost hear people say, "Now wait a minute, is there any place on this earth where men do not seek after GOD? Look at the primitive animistic religions of Africa and Asia; what of the religion of Islam and Buddhism and Shintoism? How can the Bible declare that no one seeks after GOD? Sixty-five percent of the American people are church members; how can it be said, "No one seeks after GOD?" Why, we are a religious world!

Indeed we are, and now let it be understood that this is precisely the point, man's religion is evidence of the fact that he is not seeking GOD!

Why did the Pharisees crucify JESUS CHRIST? Because of their religion! Why did the very man who authored this letter, Saul of Tarsus, persecute the Christian Church and do everything he could to exterminate it? Because of his religion. In history the supreme expression of man's rebellion against GOD is religion, whether it is Christian religion or any other. One reason the Christian nations, so-called, are impotent in world affairs today is that they have made of Christianity a religion.

In Africa today you might hear a Moslem evangelist saying to the Nationals, "Who is causing all the trouble in the world today? Who started the First World War? - the Second World War? Who has the H-bomb? Who possesses the threat of thermonuclear war? Do the Moslem nations? They do not. They are peace-loving. It is the Christian nations that are the great disturbers of the peace in our modern world." Would you have any defense?

Dr. Reginald Thomas, on a Sunday morning Bible Hour over NBC was pointing out that faith which is authentic must be organized, a fact which he demonstrated from the New Testament. But said he, "We are in great danger in our modern world of organizing JESUS CHRIST out of His Church!"

This happens; that is the reason why I cannot get excited about Church union; it is possible to organize JESUS CHRIST right out of His Church. When we have diluted and emasculated faith in JESUS CHRIST and made of it a religion, it is as powerless as any other. Religion cannot save; only JESUS CHRIST can save! History clearly shows that men are ingenious in their effort to avoid GOD, to avoid JESUS CHRIST, and about this we shall speak more.

"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable" is the record. Literally this means they have "turned sour"; what a description of human nature without CHRIST, "they have turned sour." When you read, "They are all gone out of the way," you are reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way. (Isaiah 53:6)" This is sin in its root sense, in its essence - man going his own way. "I want my own way!" That is the root sin. You cannot tolerate this as a father. My seventeen-year-old son says, "I will have my own way!" He will discover that this is an intolerable situation in the home, and it is intolerable in GOD's universe, man insisting on his own way and inventing religions to uphold his anarchy.

"There is none that doeth good, no, not one." Here he speaks of the inwardness of man as it is expressed through his lips. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, (Matthew 12:34, Luke 6:45)" declares the New Testament. "Their throat is an open sepulchre." You can almost smell the stench which rises from the open grave with its putrefaction. "With their tongues they have used deceit." Polite society refers to it as little white lies. "The poison of asps is under their lips." How easily one can poison a person with his lips! Probably there is no more effective way to destroy man than with speech. Some are masters at this kind of destruction. "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

It is difficult to go anywhere in our modern society today in the normal course of events without exposure to smut and profanity. Go to an average service club where the respectable leaders of the community sit together for lunch weekly and listen to the profanity, the jokes and stories at

each table and then to the anecdotes which the speaker so often feels are required to establish rapport with his audience. One's soul writhes within at the sordid conversation of men.

"Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known." Interesting that this should have been written. For two thousand years man had been unable to find the way of peace; and today, nineteen centuries subsequent to this writing, peace seems more elusive than ever before. How can we expect peace with Russia when we cannot even have peace on our city streets in traffic; when we cannot have peace across the backyard fence or between a white man and a dark man, between management and labor, between husbands and wives? What right do we have to expect world peace? "The way of peace have they not known."

But you say, "This is rather rough on human nature, and I am not willing to accept it."

Well, you need not; it is your prerogative to hold to an optimistic illusion about mankind if you wish. Bear in mind, however, that this is the Divine estimate as GOD sees into the heart of man, not his outward appearance. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

The October 28th, 1962 issue of Saturday Review contained a startling editorial by the editor, Norman Cousins, which gives a glimpse of human nature beneath the veneer of civilization and culture:

"In Las Vegas the head of the local Civil Defense Agency recently called for a militia of five thousand men to protect residents in the event of thermonuclear war. The men would be trained to crush an expected invasion, not from foreign shores but from Southern California. (He is not being facetious.) It is believed that Los Angeles as a major city would be under direct attack. 'Survivors,' warned J. Carlton Adair, the Las Vegas Civilian Defense official, 'would come into Nevada like a swarm of locusts; obviously they would have to be repulsed.'" So the Civil Defense leader in Las Vegas is asking for a militia trained to kill Southern Californians trying to escape the horrors of thermonuclear war.

In a less organized way other Americans are now preparing to kill Americans. A Chicago suburbanite, according to Time Magazine, intends to mount a machine gun at the entrance to his fall-out shelter and blast away at shelterless neighbors who might try to get in out of the radioactivity. Countless other Americans may be making no open declaration about their intentions, but they are calmly going about the business of equipping their shelters with guns or tear gas devices, just in case desperate neighbors might want to poach on their preserves during or after an attack. Some are now preparing their children psychologically to accept the murder of their playmates; all this goes under the heading of Civil Defense.

In Hartford, Connecticut, at a private meeting of local residents who had come together to consider Civil Defense problems, one citizen advised his neighbors that firearms were standard equipment for shelters along with stocks of food and medicines. "People who are wounded or suffering from radiation will run around like mad men trying to find shelter," he warned, "and since there will only be so much water and food for one's own family, the intruders will have to be turned back, even if it means shooting them." A woman who lived next door to the citizen who had just given this advice, asked a question. "John," she said, "you and your family have been our closest friends for ten

years. Do you mean to say that if this city is bombed, and my baby and I were caught in the open, and we were hurt and came to your shelter, you would turn us away?" John said, "You build a shelter of your own. I've got to look out for my own family." "But suppose we had built a shelter of our own, yet were caught by surprise, being out in the open at the time of an attack, and we discovered that the entrance to our shelter was covered with rubble, and we had no place to turn excepting you, would you still turn us back?" The answer was still yes. "But suppose I wouldn't go away, and kept trying to get in, would you shoot me?" John said that if the only way he could keep his friend out would be shooting her and her baby, he would do it.

This is our modern world; "the way of peace have they not known!" (Isaiah 59:8)

In Romans 3:10-18, the apostle reverses the sequence which he used in the first chapter. There he began, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. . . ." Refusal to worship GOD resulted in the reprobate conditions which followed. In other words in chapter 1 he states the causes first, then the consequences followed by the cause, verse 18, "There is no fear of GOD before their eyes." Man individually or collectively, when he does not reverence GOD, degenerates; this is inevitable, and this degenerative process is at work in history, has been working from the Garden of Eden when our first parents disobeyed GOD. Whether we like it or not, we are living in an eschatological period in history; more than any former generation we are experiencing the cumulative result of this degenerative process in human nature.

Some years ago it was my privilege to hear a psychiatrist lecture in Berkeley, California. On the blackboard he had drawn islands on the upper left-hand corner and in the lower right-hand corner. The psychiatrist began by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to talk about sin. I realize it is unconventional for a psychiatrist to talk about sin; nevertheless, I am going to do so." In the upper left island he wrote "GOD" and down on the lower right island he wrote "man," then explained this separation of GOD and man as sin. GOD is on an island, and man is on an island, and between GOD and man there is an impassable gulf; but he continued, "The point of sin is this, GOD didn't put man on the island; man put GOD on the island. This is sin, man banishing GOD from his life. Man alienating himself from GOD." This is original sin, and everything that plagues history comes as a result of this banishment.

What is the conclusion of the matter? We have already intimated, Paul declares, "The Jews have no defense since I have demonstrated from their Scriptures that they are under sin. The Gentiles certainly have no defense for I have shown that they have the law written in their hearts. Thus the mouths of all men have been stopped. Man no longer has any recourse; all men are guilty before GOD."

Then is stated one of the most basic facts about the law to be found in Romans. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." By keeping the law no one can be justified, the reason being that the law was meant to reveal to man his sin, that he might turn to GOD in faith for salvation. In Galatians Paul says, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24). The law cannot redeem us from sin; the law only reveals the fact of sin, the remedy for which is JESUS CHRIST. Now Paul begins with verse 21, the redemption, apart from the law, in JESUS CHRIST, by virtue of His cross and resurrection. Having painted the pessimistic picture of the human dilemma, Paul now moves into the glorious optimism of the Divine solution, the grace of GOD through JESUS CHRIST.

In the 12th verse, the Apostle Paul says, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable." That is to say, they have been rendered useless. This is how sin works in a man's life; it renders him useless. He may be busy, even productive, but he will not be all he was created to be. He will not be the man GOD intended. Unredeemed man is ultimately useless because he was made to glorify GOD and enjoy Him forever.

One vivid picture of this is the story of the master violinist who, falling on evil days, brought his instrument to the pawn shop for a loan. The pawnbroker took the precious instrument and laid it on the shelf. Two things are true of that instrument while it is on the shelf: it is in the possession of one who is not its rightful owner, and it is not being used for its created purpose; it is just gathering dust. To be without JESUS CHRIST, unredeemed by His self-sacrifice; to be without His management in one's life, regardless of how busy one may be, is to be possessed by someone other than the rightful owner; to be used for some purpose less than the one intended. It is to be a man on the shelf!

Finally, the violinist is able to redeem his violin; rushing into the pawnshop, he lays down the ticket and the money with interest, receives his instrument and hurries home. Breathlessly he enters his studio, opens the case, takes out the violin, dusts it off, tightens the bow, tunes the strings and puts it to his chin. Once more the instrument is in the possession of its owner and it begins to make the beautiful music for which it was created. That is redemption and that is what JESUS CHRIST does for man.

There is another way of looking at this. The word "glory" means literally to fulfill one's purpose. The glory of the flower is fragrance and beauty. The glory of the sun is to light and warm the earth. The glory of the rain is to wet the ground that it may bring forth fruit. The glory of man is to glorify GOD. This is the explanation for the purposelessness, the directionlessness, the meaninglessness of life. Today persons of all ages in all parts of the world are saying, where do I find meaning for life? The answer is, only in JESUS CHRIST is there meaning.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

08 - The Righteousness of God

Chapter 8 -

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Romans 3:21-31

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Human goodness or virtue is incapable of justifying man. Thus the Apostle Paul declares finally and conclusively, to his own satisfaction at least, the bankruptcy of the best that man can do to save himself. Not that this reflects on the validity or efficacy of the law; indeed it is a confirmation of the law's place and purpose in the divine economy as Paul points out at the close of the chapter.

The law was never intended to be a means of salvation except as it pointed man to his need of grace in CHRIST. When a man says, "The Ten Commandments is my religion," he is bound by the Ten Commandments; and his condemnation is the greater because he has embraced them and broken them. When a man says, "The Sermon on the Mount is my religion," he is condemned by his own boast when he does not live up to it.

When a man says, "The Golden Rule is my religion," he judges himself by his failure. This is not an uncommon attitude. "If a man just lives up to the Golden Rule." "If a man just lives up to the Sermon on the Mount." That is a big "if." For "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Romans 3:20)" For a man to take refuge in moral law serves only to increase his condemnation. The reason the law will not save is reserved for later discussion, (chapters 6 through 8) but it is quite apparent; man fails to keep the law.

The second major division of Romans has to do with the divine solution to the human dilemma set forth in chapters 1:18 through 3:20. GOD made a promise to Abraham. This promise, though immediately relevant to Israel of whom Abraham was the physical progenitor, was actually universal and cosmic in its application and meant to be fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST, the MESSIAH. This means, therefore, that GOD does not have two ways to redeem man, one for the Jew and another for the non-Jew. On the contrary, from the inception of humanity man's rightness with GOD has always been dependent upon faith.

You see this, for example, in Hebrews, chapter 11, the great "faith" chapter, where the author begins with Abel.

By faith Abel offered a sacrifice acceptable unto GOD. Justification through faith is not a new principle; it was introduced in the Garden of Eden. The law, given four hundred years after Abraham, was designed to lead men to faith, to make man see his helplessness apart from the undeserved favor of GOD. The law helps one realize how far short he falls from GOD's expectations. The man who says the Sermon on the Mount is his religion is doing the very same thing the Jew was doing in Paul's day, professing the law as his religion but ignoring its practice.

This is the most difficult reality for man to accept, righteousness through faith. The fundamental conflict in history is man's will against GOD's will, the most subtle expression of which is man's goodness versus the righteousness of GOD. Those who resent the Apostle Paul do so because he continually reduces the best that man can do to zero with its edges rubbed off. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD (Romans 3:23)... There is none righteous, no, not one. (Romans 3:10)" We want to argue, surely some are righteous. He answers, "No, not one!"

It is difficult to accept the idea that salvation is by faith through grace alone! We want to believe that some thing we do is acceptable with GOD, and it is this subtle expression of carnality in the human heart more than any other single thing that defeats the work of CHRIST in the world. Man's best militates against grace, not man's worst - man thinking he is good enough without CHRIST's help.

The new birth is a gift of GOD to be received by faith.

Having begun by faith we embrace rules and regulations which, if kept, accrue to our credit. Failure to keep them is to our discredit; thus we tend to be constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation, with the pride of achievement or the despair of failure. This is a passion of the human heart, and it is the hardest thing in the world for us to realize that the best that we can do, however effectively, is "filthy rags" in GOD's sight. Paul declares GOD's righteousness to be "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." (Romans 3:21-22)

The righteousness of GOD has been manifested or revealed. Man never reasons his way to an understanding of the righteousness of GOD. By pure reason man can understand that GOD is good, or that He is holy, or that He is perfect, or that He is powerful. Yet man never does discover the righteousness of GOD this way; it comes alone by revelation. It is revealed apart from the law. That is, GOD's righteousness is not apprehended through the law. All the law tells us is that GOD is perfect and that He is a judge; and if we break His law, we are doomed. The perfection of GOD, the justice of GOD, is apprehended through His law but not His righteousness. Nevertheless, and Paul never lets us forget this, the law and the prophets witnessed to this righteousness of GOD which has been revealed.

The truth is not an innovation with Paul of the New Testament or the apostles; it is an Old Testament doctrine.

The Old Testament does not have one way by which man is saved, the New Testament another; the salvation which is in the New Testament is at the heart of the Old Testament. There is only one way to be saved from Adam in the Garden of Eden to the last man who will ever live and to this the law of Moses and the prophets testify. This righteousness of GOD has been revealed in the Gospel. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST: for it is the power of GOD unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also the Greek, for therein (that is, the Gospel) is the righteousness of GOD revealed." (Romans 1:16-17)

The righteousness of GOD involves more than GOD's character, more than His attributes, more than His perfection or holiness. Righteousness is active. Righteousness expresses itself in GOD seeking to redeem man, GOD giving Himself for man's salvation. Hence it is revealed only in the

Gospel. Notice Romans 3:25-26 : "Whom (JESUS CHRIST) God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." The sacrifice of CHRIST, which is the heart of the Gospel, was to show GOD's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He has passed over former sins. From the Garden when Adam and Eve sinned until the moment that the Son of GOD died on the Cross of Calvary, GOD had apparently done nothing to absolve man from his sin. To be sure, he gave the Old Testament economy, the entire structure of worship and sacrifices and offerings; but the author of Hebrews makes it very plain that these had no power to forgive sin. As a matter of fact, says the author of Hebrews, the sacrifices under the Old Testament economy were the reminder of sin. It was as though the guilt of man were compounded generation by generation, century by century, millennium by millennium until the very justice of GOD would be questioned.

Certainly the blood of bulls and goats is not sufficient to make a man just before GOD.

This is the problem with which Paul deals here. The death of CHRIST who was the Lamb of GOD and whose blood was shed "from the foundation of the world," occurred at a given moment in history in order to demonstrate the righteousness of GOD although He had endured the sin of man through all those millennia. The death of CHRIST was to prove at the present time (Romans 3:26) that GOD Himself is both righteous and that He justifies him who has faith in JESUS, or, "That He might be just, and the justifier."

This is the great theological and philosophical dilemma of history. How can GOD remain just and forgive a sinner? How can GOD forgive sin, justify the sinner, and remain holy? The greatest minds have wrestled with this cosmic problem. There is only one answer, and that answer is in JESUS CHRIST and the Gospel. If GOD ignored sin, He would be less than holy and just. If He punished sin, refused to forgive, He would be something less than loving and merciful. Justice is satisfied if the sinner is punished, but love and mercy are frustrated.

Suppose, for example, one of our local judges should have before him a criminal whose guilt was known by everyone, and though he knew the man was guilty, should forgive and free him. We would not accept it. We would unseat this judge as quickly as possible. We demand justice in our courts. We demand that the criminal be punished. We do not want the judge to be sentimental or sympathetic. We want justice; sentimentality has no place in a court of law; and if we require this of man, how much more so of GOD! This is the dilemma, how can GOD be just and justify the sinner? The answer is in JESUS CHRIST and is so stated in Romans 3:23-25.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God!" (Romans 3:23-25) The clue is in the word "propitiation." The idea contained in this very remarkable word is that of making satisfaction for sin by atonement. These words give us two pictures, the picture of substitution and that of sacrifice. They tell us that GOD put forth His Son to be our substitute, to actually suffer our penalty, and to be our sacrifice. He was, in the words of John the Baptist, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Isaiah puts it this way: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) Every sin from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the end of the human race was put upon the Son of GOD on the

Cross of Calvary. He died as though guilty of our sins. This was not a third party, laying down His life on the cross; this was GOD Himself, the One sinned against in CHRIST, suffering the penalty of sin!

This is the great mystery of the Atonement, the great mystery of the righteousness of GOD; GOD Himself, against Whom man sinned, in the Person of His Son took upon Himself the consequences of man's sin and laid down His own life on the Cross of Calvary to absolve man from his guilt. This is the Gospel! this is the righteousness of GOD! "The righteousness of GOD, according to Paul," says C. W. Quinby, is "GOD's willingness to redeem sinful man." It is His nature to seek and to save the lost. Justice and mercy are met together in the Person of JESUS CHRIST on the Cross. Perfect justice is satisfied; sin has been judged, condemned and punished, and perfect love is satisfied. The One Who was sinned against, He Himself bore the penalty rather than the sinner that the sinner might go free! The author of Hebrews tells us in chapter 10 that JESUS CHRIST was the complete fulfillment of the total Old Testament sacrificial system. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul writes, "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." The Bible does not explain this; it simply declares it to be so, to be accepted by faith that we might enjoy the salvation which was wrought in this infinite transaction on the Cross.

Finally, Paul concludes this chapter by asking, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. (Romans 3:27)" On what grounds? On the grounds of faith, no man has kept the law; all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD, and GOD saves all who will believe the Gospel. Man has nothing, therefore, in which to glory before GOD. The Jew cannot glory over the Gentile because the Jew had had special advantages. The Gentile cannot glory over the Jew because of Jewish neglect of those special advantages. All, Jew and Gentile, are saved by faith. The circumcised is saved by faith. The uncircumcised is saved by faith. The one who had the law is saved by faith. The one without the law is saved by faith. There is no other way for men to be saved! Man has no ground for pride.

How often have we been filled with self-esteem over little successes, or even perhaps over another's failure when we should be thanking GOD for His grace; boasting inwardly when we ought to be praising our SAVIOUR? How we take refuge in a few little meritorious efforts instead of glorying in the Cross of JESUS CHRIST. What happens when we boast like this? We become "superior" people; we never say this; we simply act this way to our "inferiors." Boasting, pride, ego, it is no wonder the SPIRIT of GOD cannot pour out revival upon the Church; we are so inordinately proud of our piety instead of being humble before GOD over our continual sin and failure from which only His grace can save us.

Paul will drive this fact home more and more in Romans 6, 7 and 8 - that there is never a split-second of our lives that we are not absolutely, utterly, totally cast upon the grace and mercy of GOD. There is not one thing of which we can boast. If we do, the very boast is sin and confirms our need of grace.

Pride goes when men take Romans seriously. This is the reason why Romans produced the Reformation because it exposed the conceit of man. It eliminated anything upon which man could get hold in order to boast. It makes it possible for the mighty, exhilarating infinite grace of GOD to deluge the bankrupt human heart, bring the vitality and drive of the life of GOD in CHRIST to man.

The big question is this: Have you received this grace? Is someone saying, I refuse to accept this; there are certain ways in which I may be bad, but I am not so bad as many I know. I am much better than many. Is it possible that you will continue trusting yourself, boasting in your own merit and virtue, however small it is, however microscopic? Are you going to be like a man standing before the judge, charged with the crime of robbery, who says, "Judge, I think you ought to let me off. I never murdered anybody. I never committed any other crimes; I just committed robbery - that is all."

Is that what you are trying with GOD? Oh Lord, I haven't murdered, I haven't robbed, I haven't stolen! But you have been proud, you have been covetous, you have been jealous, you have envied, you have been angry. Yes, LORD, I have been all these things, but I haven't murdered anybody. Is that the way you think? Repent and receive the righteousness of GOD which is a free gift through faith in CHRIST because He shed His blood on the Cross.

Or are you one who has accepted the Gospel but is still trusting self? If you analyze your own life, are the things on which you depend most your own strength of will, your own ability, your own piety, your own decisions? There is so much self-esteem and pride and boasting in us, and the grace of GOD just cannot work because we will not let it. We are too full of our own virtue. We are saved but powerless because we are conscious of how good we think we are compared to many others: how much better we know the Bible; how much we pray; how often we witness when others do not. GOD forgive us! How desperately we need grace continually.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

09 - Abraham Believed God

Chapter 9 -

ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD

Romans 4:1-16

Abraham, father of the Arab through Ishmael, father of the Jew through Isaac, father of the Christian through JESUS CHRIST. The three great monotheistic religions of the world, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity began with this one man. Abraham!

Abraham was a Christian, not in the conventional, commonly accepted sense of the word today, to be sure, but neither was Abraham a Jew in this sense. As a matter of fact, he was not a Jew in the way the Jews of JESUS' day thought of Jewry. It was quite obvious in much of this discussion with JESUS that they did not understand their own Scriptures.

This would have been true of Paul as Saul of Tarsus. He did not understand Isaiah, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, (Isaiah 1:18)" or "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty GOD, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, (Isaiah 9:6)" or "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)" Saul of Tarsus did not understand Isaiah nor Jeremiah or Ezekiel, nor for that matter, Moses or Abraham until he was converted to CHRIST on the road to Damascus. (See 2 Corinthians 3:13-16). Now the Apostle Paul writes with the deep and revealed insight of these Old Testament saints.

We see this in Simeon. Dr. Luke records that Simeon was a devout Jew who devoted himself entirely in his last days to the temple. The SPIRIT of GOD had witnessed in Simeon's heart that he would not see death until he had seen the MESSIAH. Here was an Old Testament Jew in JESUS' day who had the insights about which Paul is speaking in Romans, chapter 4, and there were many like him. For example, JESUS said to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)" Nicodemus should have understood as Simeon did, for example, and JESUS' word was a mild rebuke.

Having declared that righteousness is by faith, through grace, apart from the works of law, and furthermore that the law and the prophets witnessed to it; (that is, the law and the prophets, JESUS CHRIST and the apostles, are one in their doctrine concerning the Gospel), Paul now discusses the supreme question so far as the Jew is concerned; and in so doing, the apostle administers the coup de grace in his argument for justification by faith. He begins with the question, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?"

This is basic; the Jew could not reach beyond father Abraham, and Paul's answer is absolutely revolutionary to those who heard it then as well as to many today when its force finally breaks in

upon us. In substance, he says Abraham was justified by faith through grace, and by this, because of this, he has become the father of all who have faith - circumcised or uncircumcised. That is his answer; now for some probing.

In the first five verses the Apostle Paul discusses Abraham's righteousness. He asks, hearkening back to his comment on boasting at the end of the third chapter, Does Abraham have anything in which to boast? This is a very practical question, for it touches a very sensitive area of Christian experience, the ego. Man craves to achieve something to which he can attach merit. This is the stubborn fact that keeps pestering faith; carnality, flesh, pride. Does Abraham have any thing in which to boast? If he does, it certainly is not before GOD because his righteousness was a gift of GOD to him because he believed. Not that his belief was meritorious, a subtle insinuation pride makes if it can boast of nothing else.

After all, what credit is there to one who believes in GOD? Discredit for not believing, but certainly no credit for believing in GOD. You would not, for example, give any special credit to a person for believing in the sun. What is remarkable about this? One is irrational not to believe. There is nothing exceptional about believing in the sun. Nor is there about believing in GOD. Something is wrong with the one who does not! "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. (Psalms 53:1)" This is carnality at work, crediting to belief or faith or "decision," a virtue which they do not deserve.

Continuing in verses 4 and 5 Paul argues if it were any credit to Abraham, then it was not a gift of GOD; it is his due, like wages to the man who works. The Word of GOD declares that his faith was reckoned as righteousness. GOD reckoned him righteous! This was said by Moses (Genesis 15:6); therefore, Moses certainly understood justification by faith; and as if that were not enough, he quotes from Israel's great King David (verses 6, 7 and 8), who also must have understood righteousness through faith by grace, as expressed in Psalms 32:1-2. GOD's righteousness, the only authentic righteousness, is a gift to be received not a goal to be achieved. At this point a question is appropriate: have you received this gift, or is righteousness still something you are trying to achieve? Have you received the gift of righteousness?

Then Paul goes on in verse 9 to show that this blessing was not limited to the Jew; it was a universal blessing. Hence the question, "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?" In his answer Paul makes one of his most revolutionary points. His answer poses a question, "How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision." The answer is history; it was reckoned before he was circumcised.

Moses records in Genesis 15:6 that GOD reckoned Abraham righteous, and in Genesis 17:25 , after Ishmael was born, at least fourteen years after he was reckoned righteous, Abraham was circumcised; and circumcision was simply the symbol and seal of righteousness which he already had as a gift of GOD.

There is something else to be seen here; circumcision, like any other religious rite, is significant only in terms of the reality which it symbolizes, and yet carnality is so strong in man that he is inclined to think of rites or sacraments as meritorious; keep the sacraments and earn merit. We may not put it explicitly, but we tend to feel that way. This kind of sacramentalism is a reproach to the promise GOD made to Abraham and a reproach to the blood of JESUS CHRIST, GOD's Son!

It is a marvelous device by which an entrenched hierarchy may protect its vested interest, but there is nothing biblical, Christian or Jewish, about it.

The sequence in the last half of verse 11 and 12 is not accidental. Reckoned as righteous before he was circumcised, this was deliberate in order that Abraham should be the father of all who had faith, circumcised or uncircumcised. This is a radical switch;

- Abraham was first the father of the uncircumcised!
- Abraham was first the father of the Gentile!
- Abraham was reckoned righteous before he was a Jew!
- He was reckoned righteous before Ishmael was born.

Ishmael was the son of his marriage to Hagar, the handmaiden of Sarah. Ishmael was the progenitor of the Arab race, and the Arabs and the Israelites are not exactly friends. Incidentally, is it not significant that this act of disobedience in which Abraham and Sarah did not rely on GOD's promise but tried to work it out by themselves produced Ishmael and the Arab, and four thousand years later at the mid-twentieth century, the Jew and the Arab constitute one of our knottiest international problems without any solution in sight?

Imagine what a blow that must have been to the Jew who insisted that before a Gentile could become a Christian he would have to be circumcised, he would have to be proselytized to Judaism. Many were, a practice which Paul opposed zealously. In fact, the first church council met to resolve this issue (Acts 15). The Jews were insisting that Gentiles must be circumcised to be in the faith. Now suddenly Paul drops this bombshell; Abraham was the father of the uncircumcised before he was the father of the circumcised.

But that is not all. This matter of faith had not only to do with the righteousness which is a gift of GOD, it had also to do with the deep national aspirations of Israel. "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (verse 13 following). The devout Jew of Paul's day had a very clearly defined eschatology*. Simeon, for example, mentioned earlier, came into the temple at the time Mary and Joseph entered with the Baby JESUS; and he took the child in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. (Luke 2:29)" Why? You promised me that I would see the MESSIAH before I died. I am ready to go, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou has prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

* Eschatology- The doctrine of last or final things.

What was the glory of his people Israel? Never were days so glorious for Israel as when King David reigned upon his throne. That was the epitome of Israel's glory. From that day she declined, and in the heart of every devout Jew who pondered over the Old Testament there was this desire, this aspiration, this Messianic conviction that the day would come when another greater than David would reign upon that throne and Israel would inherit the world. Now Paul is saying that this promise was not exclusively for the Jew. They seemed not to have heard all of Abraham's promise; their attitude was that this promise was limited to the circumcised. No, circumcision had

nothing to do with it except as a sign. Do you have faith in GOD?. This promise is for all who have faith.

Paul knew whereof he spoke. This is a glorious fact, and what a day to believe that JESUS CHRIST is the Lord of history, that He holds history in His hand, that He is ordering history at this very moment to serve His eternal purpose. He reigns now.

Paul just touches this here; he will deal with it later on in Romans 9, 10 and 11. Then, he argues in verse 14 and 15, if this promise of inheriting the world were only to those who adhered to the law, faith would be negated and the promise would be void or meaningless. Why? Because there is only one thing to do about a promise and that is to believe it. GOD said, "I will," Abraham accepted it. That settled it. GOD made a promise which Abraham accepted by faith, and he says the law does not apprehend this promise; all the law can do is to bring wrath. The blessing promised by GOD to Abraham is universal.

Finally, in the last of this chapter from 16 to 25, Paul becomes very explicit concerning the faith which GOD reckoned as righteousness in Abraham. It was not just a vague faith in GOD; everyone has this kind of faith except the atheist - faith that GOD is good or GOD is love or GOD is omnipotent or omniscient - all of which is true; but there is something more in the faith which is reckoned as righteous. Paul's description begins with verse 17, Abraham believed One Who "quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." He believed in a GOD who raised the dead, who could create out of nothing.

The resurrection of JESUS CHRIST and the resurrection of man are the very fullness of Christian aspiration. We profess that we believe in the resurrection. There is a loved one whose body you placed in a grave in the hope that that body would be raised from the dead; that is the heart of the Christian faith. One great event in history upon which the whole superstructure of Christian faith rests, which if discredited, renders Christian faith null and void; that is the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, without which faith is empty.

Paul is zeroing in on the faith reckoned as righteous. It was faith in the GOD who raised the dead, but the description continues, verse 18, Abraham "against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." Abraham hoped when it was hopeless. What was hopeless? Sarah was ninety years old, and he was one hundred years old; Sarah had never been able to bear a son; now was it not ridiculous to expect a child to be born to her? It was biologically impossible, yet GOD said, "Sarah shall have a son!" Verse 19 says, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." When he considered the circumstances, he did not weaken in faith. He chose to believe in GOD instead of the circumstances, a choice we make continually, and unfortunately, many times we choose to believe the circumstances instead of GOD's promise. Abraham believed the promise.

Analyze our faith, most of the time we believe the circumstances of our own ingenuity. Face to face with an impossible situation we say, yes, I believe GOD will do it, but we look for some way we can work it out ourselves, and when we have exhausted all the possibilities, our faith collapses. We have not believed GOD at all; we have believed our own resourcefulness. We are like Jacob, desperately trying to work ourselves out of our dilemmas. But after we have exhausted all the

alternatives, we can be sure GOD has unnumbered ways that would never occur to us in a million years. He is not limited to a few alternatives. He has an infinite variety of solutions to your problem.

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief," says Paul, verse 20, "but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Glorifying GOD in impossible circumstances, that is how to be strong! Finally, verse 21, for "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." His faith was related directly to the promise. What promise? That he would become a mighty nation through a miracle son, Isaac, by the womb of Sarah. This is the reason faith was reckoned as righteous. There was nothing vague about Abraham's faith. But there is still more. Remember when GOD said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Genesis 22:2)" The commentary in Hebrews, chapter 11, is illuminating, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Do you recall the occasion when the Sadducees thought they had JESUS on the horns of a dilemma? The Sadducees were the first century counterpart of our twentieth century modernists who reject belief in the supernatural, who believe the grave is the end and there is no life after death. They came to JESUS rather smugly with what they thought to be an inexplicable problem. One can almost see them, grinning knowingly, rocking on toes and heels, rubbing their hands together as they challenge JESUS. "Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. (Mark 12:19)" Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. (Mark 12:20-23)" They really thought that they had Him.

JESUS' answer (Mark 12:24-27) was classical. He said to the Sadducees, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?" Then with painful penetration, "Have ye not read in the book of Moses" (The Sadducees would be proud of Moses and the law), who called GOD "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" They lived four hundred years before Moses, his GOD was theirs who lived four hundred years before him. Did the great lawgiver believe in the GOD of the dead or the GOD of the living? The implication is obvious; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living still!

You may believe many things about GOD and remain unsaved, for the faith that GOD reckons as righteous is faith which sees Him as a GOD Who can raise the dead, Who indeed demonstrated it when He raised His Son, and Who promises to raise up us also likewise. The day is coming when these mortal bodies shall be immortal, when these corruptible bodies shall be incorruptible, and these immortal, incorruptible, eternal bodies will inherit the world! This Christian faith embraces as

certain. This is our hope!

~ end of chapter 9 ~

10 - Peace With God

Chapter 10

PEACE WITH GOD

Romans 5:1-11

"Therefore," with which Paul opens chapter 5 refers back to the beginning of the second major division, the 21st verse of the 3rd chapter. Having shown in 1:18-3:20 that man's dilemma is sin, he presents GOD's solution beginning at Romans 3:21, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets," a theme which he amplifies through chapter 4. The substance is stated in the last two verses of the 4th chapter; righteousness "shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up JESUS our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:24-25)" Everything that Paul says in chapters 5 through 8 is the application of these redemptive acts, CHRIST crucified for our transgressions, raised for our justification. The arguments in Romans 5:1-11 can be summed up in three phrases, the provision of justification, the permanence of justification, and the proof of justification.

To begin with, Paul sees justification as an accomplished work, "Therefore being justified," or "since we are justified." Justification is not hypothetical, not just a vague possibility, but a present reality for him who trusts in JESUS CHRIST. What are the provisions of justification; what is included in this profound reality? First of all, it means to be made guiltless. It means to be absolved as if one had never sinned. It is to have the burden of guilt lifted and removed.

To be sure, there are those in the Church who do not enjoy this experience for the same reason that the Pharisees did not because pride will not allow them to admit failure. JESUS reasoned with them, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick" (Mark 2:17). "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Obviously, the man who will not acknowledge his sin is not receptive to forgiveness. Guilt will persist however much he may try to ignore it or squelch it. One of the serious self-deceptions in life is the attempt that is made to explain away guilt without dealing with the disease of sin itself, a practice which is deadly inasmuch as guilt suppressed is infectious, poisoning personality after sensitivity to it has ceased.

One effect of this is illustrated by the occasion when JESUS was dining with a Pharisee and his guests, and an infamous woman came to the dinner - a common enough occurrence in those days when the rabble gathered on the periphery of a feast to take the crumbs. This woman, you will recall, bathed the feet of JESUS with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and smothered His feet with her kisses. The Pharisee in his self-righteousness and hypocrisy grasped this incident as an opportunity to discredit JESUS. After pointing out to the Pharisee that the woman had observed the proper amenities he, as host, had neglected, JESUS made this penetrating observation; her love is great for she has been forgiven much, "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47).

Some love JESUS little because they have been forgiven little; not because they do not need forgiveness, but they would rather endure guilt, try to cover it, than walk in the light, acknowledge their sin, and receive the forgiveness and cleansing of GOD. They love little because they have been forgiven little.

But justification means more than the removal of guilt. Justification does not leave a man morally neutral; it is to be made righteous, to have the righteousness of CHRIST added. Israel's King David apprehended this profound truth, Paul reminds us (Romans 4:6) quoting from Psalms 32:1-2, where David speaks of righteousness of GOD being imputed. This is an accounting term; GOD's righteousness is added to the credit side of the ledger more than balancing whatever be the debt on the other side. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him (CHRIST) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Thus it is to be justified; not simply to be absolved from guilt but literally to be made righteous by JESUS CHRIST, to be seen by GOD in the righteousness of JESUS CHRIST. When the Father looks at the justified man, He sees him clothed in the perfection of the Son of GOD. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).

But justification means more than the removal of guilt and imputation of righteousness. It means to be at peace with GOD! This is more than peace of mind, which may be very shallow, like a tranquilizer, simply numbing one to reality as though drugged or anesthetized. Paul is concerned with something infinitely greater than peace of mind; he is speaking of peace with GOD! The war is over between man and GOD, and hostility has ceased; there is no longer alienation and estrangement; reconciliation has taken place. Man, now reconciled to GOD, is at one with Him. In the last verse of this message Paul says, "by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:11)" Atonement is to be made at one with GOD.

Something more, justification is through JESUS CHRIST. Paul will never let us forget this, He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Also in verse 9, "being now justified by his blood . . ." Paul never takes this for granted. GOD did not justify us simply because He loved us! He would have been less than just. Sin must be dealt with. The penalty must be satisfied. Justice demands it! So the Son bore the penalty; justice and mercy, righteousness and love met together in His crucifixion. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In verse 2 Paul declares, "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." This too is included in justification; we have been granted a position of favor. Grace is unmerited favor, the operation of which Paul discusses in verses 6 through 10. We have been given a position of unmerited favor in which we stand! Firmly, immovable. Notice that Paul says that we have peace with GOD, we stand in grace; this is a fact, not a theory. In other words, GOD has introduced into our lives a new relationship which guarantees perpetuity.

This leads to the second phase, the performance of justification, verses 2 through 4. It has been noted that the word "faith" does not occur again in Romans until the 9th chapter, the 30th verse, and then it is used in the same way it has been used up to now, in terms of righteousness through faith. All that follows from the 5th chapter, 1st verse to the end of the 8th chapter describes the fruit

or results of justification, the inheritance of those who are justified. Having been justified by faith, that which Paul now discusses, chapters 6, 7 and 8, shall be true of us.

Implicit in justification is the total redemptive work of GOD; that is, justification having taken place, the completion of the work of salvation is absolutely certain. (Php 1:6) Hence, we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God! (Romans 5:2)" This is an accepted fact, a deferred fact to be sure, but nevertheless absolutely certain. We glory, or exalt, in a future which is assured, the justified one will share the glory of GOD. This is inevitable.

Notice that hope is a noun, not a verb. Hope is something we have, not something we do. Christian faith is not a hope-so proposition. We rejoice in the absolute certainty of sharing GOD's glory. Nothing less could satisfy a man who was made in the image of GOD who was made to live forever. Eternity has been written in our hearts; only eternity will suffice; eternity with the Lord is certain because we have been justified.

Nor is that all, for justification has more than future implications. "And not only so," he says, "but we glory in tribulations also." Thus the down-to-earth realism of Christian faith, which is relevant here and now. It turns out that the only rational way to face the realities of life - the tragedy, the discontinuity, the catastrophic - is by faith in GOD. The justified have the only answer to the imponderables, the inexplicables, the confusions and perplexities, the two-horned dilemmas that confront modern man - war, suffering, disease, misery, starvation. Walk through a children's hospital; how can one believe in a GOD of love when little babies suffer? Well, the suffering is a fact, is it not? Reject the GOD of love, does this make the suffering make sense? You do not eliminate the fact of misery by rejecting faith in GOD; you only compound the predicament. Suffering has a ministry in life; we rejoice in suffering, in affliction, because we know that suffering produces endurance.

The Bible has much to say about endurance, the quality of lasting. What a difference between the man who crosses the finish line and the one who drops out of the race ten yards from the tape, between the fighter who fights until the bell rings and the one who throws in the sponge. What a contrast between the man who finishes what he begins and the man who is always starting something and never finishes anything. "tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience." Experience is the product of suffering; the man of quality is the tested man.

Finally, experience produces hope. You see what Paul is saying, the very difficulties in life argue for the Christian's hope. Think of the poetry, the art, the music, the architecture, the wondrous beauty that has been born out of suffering. Think of the poverty of art museums and libraries if men had not suffered. How often men and women remain nominal and casual in their church, perfunctory in worship, bobbing on the surface of faith until tragedy galvanizes devotion, sets faith on fire and CHRIST becomes a living reality. Suffering is a servant of the justified man - a very efficient, fruitful servant.

In these eleven verses Paul has given what might be called the three phases of redemption. Though indivisible, this three-fold distinction is justification, freedom from guilt, imputation of righteousness; sanctification, the operation of righteousness received when justified, or in other words, Christian growth; and glorification, the resurrection of the body. Justification, the beginning of the Christian experience; sanctification, the development of the Christian experience;

glorification, the consummation of the Christian experience. Justification, verse 1; sanctification, suffering which produces experience, verses 3-4; glorification, sharing the glory of GOD, verse 2.

Romans 5:5 introduces the proof for justification. "And hope maketh not ashamed." Why? Because GOD's love becomes a personal reality, for "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"; experiential, not just profession or performance, but literally possession. Paul says in Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"; something, someone within proving that one is a child of GOD, the confirmation of the HOLY SPIRIT. Do you have this confirmation? Is your Christianity an experience, or simply a performance?

One woman testified to the fact that she had been a church member for forty years but had known JESUS CHRIST only seven weeks. She was on the church rolls; she believed everything, I suppose, that a Christian is supposed to believe; she went through the motions of being a Christian without knowing JESUS CHRIST as a reality in her heart. One great evidence of justification is personal experience, the reality of the HOLY SPIRIT in one's own life. Is JESUS CHRIST real, or is your religion just form, just external? The LORD, addressing the Church at Sardis says, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead! (Revelation 3:1)" Church members at Sardis, having the name but not the reality; Christian in name only, nominal Christians. Is this the extent of your religion, or are you alive unto GOD in CHRIST?

But the proof of justification is more than a subjective experience. Justification is rooted and grounded in objective historic fact, and so Paul sets forth in verses 6 through 10 the logic of grace. He says in verse 8, "God commendeth his love toward us," GOD shows His love to us, GOD proves His love toward us. How does He prove it?

Paul argues from the greater to the lesser, from the maximum to the minimum; verse 9, "being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" We have been justified; therefore we have no fear of wrath. Justified, no fear of future wrath; acquitted, no fear of GOD's future anger or judgment. Having been made righteous, there is no fear of final retribution, so runs the logic.

One recalls the words of JESUS, "He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life, (John 5:24)" no fear of future condemnation because of present fact, he is passed from death to life!

Paul reinforces the proof of justification with three strong propositions: Verse 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Verse 8, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Verse 10, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." We were incapable of helping ourselves. He helped us. We were breakers of GOD's law, men with a record, He died for us! We were hostile to GOD, enemies, He laid down His life for us! If GOD did this for us when we were hostile enemies, how much more now that we have been made friends can we be absolutely certain of eternal life and glory? Having been justified there is no longer the possibility of condemnation. We have been absolved from the guilt of past sins. We, the justified, are absolutely secure in JESUS CHRIST by virtue of His sacrifice on the cross!

It is interesting to note that Paul uses the word rejoice or exalt three times. Three things he says in which the Christian, the justified one, rejoices. He rejoices in the hope of sharing GOD's glory. Secondly, he rejoices in suffering. You try it. Rejoice in suffering, and see how the grace of GOD can turn tragedy into triumph. It will not eliminate the suffering; it will transform it! And finally, rejoice in GOD! That is the ultimate joy, rejoicing in GOD Himself, not in His gifts, nor in His benefits, nor in His blessings, but in Him.

We are the bride of CHRIST. What sort of bride is she who loves her husband only for what she gets out of him? Pity the husband whose wife's love is so commercial. This makes sense in marriage, but how many of us are more interested in GOD's gifts than in GOD the giver; in the benefits rather than the benefactor? This is the supreme Christian joy; rejoice in the Lord!

~ end of chapter 10 ~

11 - The New Race

Chapter 11

THE NEW RACE

Romans 5:12-21

This is one of the most difficult passages in Romans because of the language and because of the theme. Paul has concentrated here tremendous truth, deep and high and broad. We might entitle this particular portion of Paul's letter "A Brief Resume, The Consequences of Sin and the Gift of GOD." It is as though the apostle arrests the progress of his argument in order to clarify the universality of sin, covered in the first three chapters, and the efficacy of GOD's gracious provision in JESUS CHRIST, covered in chapters 4 and 5, and continued through chapter 8. Here is another of those sweeping, comprehensive overviews of which Paul is so amazingly capable. In relatively few words he frames a philosophy of history and man.

Here is an insight into Paul's anthropology and the Christian view of history. He begins by explaining how sin entered the world of man; he does not discuss the origin of sin but assumes it, showing how it infected humanity. He begins, "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. (Romans 5:12)" No explanation for the origin of sin, he simply declares that it entered into the human race through the disobedience of one man, and through that one man passed upon the whole human race as did death its inevitable consequence. Man was not able to stop the spread of this sinful infection because all men sin; thus the infection spread throughout the human race.

Verses 13 through 17 are parenthetical. He raises a subject in verse 13 which anticipates verses 20 and 21. He says in verse 13, "Until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law; nevertheless, death reigned from (in the no-law days) Adam to Moses." Why then the law? The answer comes at the end of the chapter in preparation for chapters 6,7 and 8. The purpose of the law is to make man aware of his sinfulness, or as he puts it in Romans 5:20, "that the offence might abound" so that man, aware of his need, might allow the grace of GOD to abound in his life, a practical theme for later discussion. The point is that even though there was no law until the time of Moses, sin was in the world and death by sin.

Remember Paul's statement concerning Gentiles? In the first chapter he said there was a law in the human heart identical to that which GOD gave Moses on Mt. Sinai, and though the Gentiles do not have Moses' law, they have its essence written in their hearts. When they disobey this inner law, their conscience either excuses or accuses them. The law was built into the human heart when GOD created man. Notice that Paul is talking about sin, not sins. He is talking about something endemic in the nature of man, not his misdeeds.

In the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sin as "Any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of GOD." Since it is more than misbehaving, more than transgressing GOD's law, sin

means failure to be all that GOD expects us to be. Sin has to do with man's nature as well as his conduct, and what Paul is saying is this, "One act of disobedience by Adam wrought a constitutional change in human nature, and this constitutional change was transmitted to all of Adam's descendants." * In other words Paul is discussing "original sin," he is saying that men since Adam are born as sinners. Of course this is unacceptable to our modern world.

* Stifler on Romans

On one occasion, when discussing this in a young marrieds' class, I used one of my children as an illustration of "original sin." At the close of the service a young father who was getting his doctorate in psychology at the University of California in Los Angeles approached me. He was irked to say the least, that I had had the temerity to illustrate it with one of my children. When he finished his criticism, I asked him what he believed. He said he believed babies are born into the world morally neutral. "Can you demonstrate this?" I asked.

"No," he answered.

"You reject the doctrine of original sin because it cannot be demonstrated, but you accept this psychological view although it lacks any proof; how do you explain that?" I asked.

Was not his hostility an example of human aversion to Biblical truth, rising from a built-in antipathy to GOD which is the essence of what is called "original sin"? I reminded him that not too many years ago we were being told by psychologists that babies were born into the world positively good and that only an unfortunate environment produced bad children. He said, "We don't believe that any more!" Psychology seems to get nearer and nearer to the Biblical doctrine of original sin.

General Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines expressed this view when he said, "We have harnessed the atom, but we will never make war obsolete until we find the force that will bridle the passions of men." Bruce Catton, editor of Heritage Magazine and one of the leading authorities on the Civil War, expressed it in an address on the theme, "What 1861 Has to Say to 1961," when he pointed out that the problem in 1861 was identical to the problem in 1961, human nature. Nothing has happened to change human nature in a century. "All have sinned. (Romans 3:23)" All are sinners. The Psalmist cried out, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalms 51:5).

At the end of the 14th verse Paul points out that the first man, whose act of disobedience transmitted sin and death to the whole human race, was a type of another who should come; and in verses 15-17 he writes of GOD's remedy in this second man, come to cancel the infection which entered through the first man. By a series of contrasts Paul demonstrates the quality, the strength, the adequacy, the certainty, of grace in CHRIST. "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift." Why? Many died through one's trespass; many have trespassed, and through one act of righteousness many are made righteous! As the disobedience of one man brought death to all, the obedience of one brought to many righteousness and life. The free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin, for the judgment following one man's sin brought condemnation, but the many who were condemned are made righteous by one man's obedience.

In the same way that this sin and death, transmitted through the first Adam, affects the whole human race, the grace of GOD in JESUS CHRIST, on the grounds of His righteousness and obedience, will be transmitted to all who will receive it. Therefore, if the sin and death which

resulted from Adam is certain, the righteousness and life which comes from JESUS CHRIST are certain. Just as the whole human race has been infected by Adam's transgression, so those who will receive the free gift can be benevolently infused with righteousness and eternal life. So Paul summarizes, Romans 5:18-19, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." One man's disobedience, many were made sinners; one man's obedience, many will be made righteous.

Consider this passage in four parallels: two men, two acts, two results, two races. Two men, the first Adam, the last Adam (Adam in the Hebrew is the word for man); Adam and CHRIST. About these two men the entire human race polarizes. Two acts: The first, disobedience; the second, obedience. GOD placed the first Adam in a perfect environment with no inward compulsion to sin, a free moral agent. Everything around him was an inducement to live righteously, to obey GOD. There was one restriction, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Genesis 2:17).

Is it not significant that in a perfect environment this one prohibition became the central preoccupation of our first parents. It was as though they were blind to the blessing of GOD because here in focus was a prohibition! What a perversity in the human heart, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:19). The very desire or will to do good somehow stimulates the desire to do evil. There it was, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, (Genesis 2:17)" and this restriction became bigger than all the privileges with which GOD had endowed their world, and they disobeyed.

The last Adam, entered an imperfect world, a world infected with sin, in which the consequences of sin had been accumulating for millennia. He too was without sin, He too could choose, except now the environment was sinful, and He chose to obey. He said, "the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. (John 14:10)" He said, "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). He said, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). JESUS was a man. He was a man like Adam with the equivalent choice but with a great disadvantage because the environment was evil, and He obeyed. The first Adam disobeyed; the last Adam obeyed. Recall when JESUS came to John the Baptist to be baptized, and John, humbled before the One whose shoelaces he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose, declined; but JESUS said, " thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

JESUS CHRIST could have chosen the way of self-will, He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He could have chosen to obey the devil in the wilderness temptation. He could have chosen on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) to return to His glory rather than surrender to the ignomy of the cross; but, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!" (Php 2:6-8) He took the long road of obedience from heaven's glory to the indescribable shame of death by crucifixion! Obedient, perfectly obedient, so that when JESUS CHRIST hung on the cross, there was no sin in

Himself that needed to be covered; He was a perfect man as well as GOD, a perfect mediator between GOD and man.

Two results - the first Adam disobeyed, and sin was transmitted to the whole human race and death by sin. The last Adam obeyed, and GOD's grace transmitted righteousness to all who will receive the free gift and eternal life which results from this righteousness.

Finally two races. The old man. That race of people who, having the same choice in a sense which Adam had in the garden, decided against GOD, against CHRIST, which is the way the choice is manifested today since His advent. Refusing the free gift of GOD, the way of righteousness, they remain "in Adam," and suffer eternal separation from GOD. Then there is the second race, The new man. Those who receive the free gift of grace in JESUS CHRIST, who are made righteous and who will live eternally in fellowship with the Father. Around these two Adams polarize the whole human race.

The important thing to see is that every human being has in essence the same choice that our first parents had in the Garden. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:16-19).

These two races are eternal races, one living eternally separated from the Father, the second living eternally in fellowship with Him. The practical point is, you choose the race to which you will belong. Each of you has this choice. You decide whether you will continue out into eternity a member of this old race of which the first Adam who disobeyed, was the progenitor; or having been born of GOD through the grace that is the LORD JESUS CHRIST, you will be a member of the new race which lives forever in eternity with the Father.

Years ago a friend, having occasion to take a train trip, got on the train early, took a window seat, opened his Bible and began to read. As the coach filled up, the seat beside him was left vacant because "nobody wants to sit beside a fanatic who reads a Bible in public." Finally the coach was full; and just before the train pulled out, a man walked into the coach rather jauntily, whistling, observed the empty seat, the man reading the Bible, walked past. Suddenly it dawned upon him that the only empty seat was beside the Bible-reading man; he walked into the next coach, apparently found no empty seats, and finally the victim of terrible circumstances, he found it necessary to seat himself on the aisle seat next to the man reading the Bible, but he sat as close to the aisle as he could. He expected the Bible reader to "nail him."

Nothing happened; my friend was silent, and finally the passenger exploded, and said, "I suppose you are a preacher!"

My friend said, "Yes, I am a preacher."

Well, this was the worst; imagine a man being a captive audience to a preacher in a train! Finally the man said, "Suppose you believe GOD is going to send everybody to hell."

My friend said, "No, I don't believe GOD will send anybody to hell." The man was greatly relieved; at least the preacher had a degree of intelligence.

My friend waited a moment; then he said to the man seated beside him, "No sir, GOD will never send anybody to hell. He has done everything He could to keep men out. Over the gate of hell is a Cross, and on that Cross is a man, the Son of GOD. You can't get into hell without turning aside that man on the Cross. He is there to keep you out."

That is it, eternity with GOD is contingent upon man's choice. GOD, who created man in His image with freedom of will, will not impose even heaven upon man in violation of that freedom. The way of everlasting life in fellowship with the Father has been provided in the Son, available to all men. "Whosoever will may. . .!" What do you will?

~ end of chapter 11 ~

12 - The Free Gift of God

Chapter 12

THE FREE GIFT OF GOD

Romans 6:1-14

If sin in the human heart is the basic problem in history from which all other problems issue, and it certainly is so far as the apostle Paul is concerned, then what greater gift could GOD give than a full and final solution to the problem of sin? This is precisely what GOD has done in His Son JESUS CHRIST, which is why Christmas, rightly understood, is eternally significant. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)"

Everything the Apostle Paul is saying to us now can be summed up in this word "believe." The theme of his epistle is, "The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17)" "We walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)" "Whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)" The words that we now read in Romans 6, 7 and 8 are really a commentary on this one word, "believe." How does one believe? What does it mean to believe? How are the benefits or the fruits of belief appropriated? this is what he is talking about.

The Bible teaches that JESUS CHRIST not only frees from the penalty of sin as Paul has demonstrated in Romans 5; JESUS CHRIST also frees from the power of sin, which is the theme of Romans 6, 7 and 8. occasionally it is well to remember that there were no chapter and verse divisions in Paul's letter. Especially ought we to remember that, at this point, because it will help us ignore the artificial break between chapter 5, verse 21 and chapter 6, verse 1.

As a matter of fact, chapters 6, 7 and 8 begin with Romans 5:20-21, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS Christ our Lord" In the 13th verse of the fifth chapter, in sort of a parenthesis within a parenthesis, the Apostle Paul said that sin was in the world in the pre-law days, that is from Adam to Moses; but that sin was not imputed (counted or reckoned) where there was no law. Sin was a fact, and death by sin, but it was not imputed or reckoned without the law.

In the same sense, for example, it is possible for us to know the symptoms of the disease, without knowing what the disease is. We may have nausea or a fever or pain in various parts of our body and yet not have any idea as to the cause. We see war, racial problems, management and labor disputes, homes and marriages rent by divorce, juvenile delinquency and crime, drug addiction and alcoholism; these are the symptoms, but we need something that will reveal to us their cause. What is the proof of these problems? We need, as it were, an x-ray which will reveal the source of the trouble in order that we may deal with it.

This is precisely the function of the law. It is like an x-ray which helps us to know that which causes the wretchedness of humanity and in history. The law came in to reveal sin not unto condemnation but, on the contrary, in order that the sinner might know the disease and receive the cure in the grace of GOD through JESUS CHRIST the Lord. The doctor does not diagnose trouble and then say, "Now that you know what it is, die by it!" He diagnoses the disease in order that he may prescribe a cure, and the law is designed to reveal the sin in order that we might recognize first of all the need for a cure and find that cure in the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Paul says "the law entered, that the offence (sin) might abound. (Romans 5:20)"

There are two things to be said here: one is the law did not produce the sin any more than x-ray produces the disease; and two, it cannot remove the sin. The law reveals the fact of sin in order that we might find the cure. "The law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, (Romans 5:20)" (This is not the end of the sentence). "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:21)" Chapters 6,7 and 8 follow this theme, Grace is more than pardon from sin; it is power over sin! Grace is not just a covering for sin, but the infusion of new life into the believer; that is, the life of CHRIST - a perfect, sinless, righteous life.

Justification, which Paul talks about in Romans 5, is righteousness imputed or put to our account on the credit side of the ledger against the debt of sin. Sanctification is righteousness reigning in the life. The great lesson we need to learn, and about which Paul is speaking in the next three chapters, is this: we must learn to appropriate the power of GOD in CHRIST through grace. We must allow that power, that righteousness, that life to rule us. We must learn to let His life have its way in us. We must learn to give way to CHRIST in the daily walk. Or to look at it another way, we need to learn how to receive the gift that GOD has given, the resources that GOD has given. We fail as Christians not because we do not try hard enough; we fail because we do not avail ourselves of the resources of GOD.

You might use the atmosphere as an analogy to grace. Needing breath, you open your lungs and there is plenty of oxygen available. You cannot store up oxygen inside very long, only as you need it, can you take it. But it is always available when needed unless something goes wrong with the breathing apparatus. Paul is speaking in Romans 6, 7 and 8 about this malfunction of the ego which causes us to go on in self-confidence instead of recognizing how inadequate self is and depending upon the resources of GOD in JESUS CHRIST. In other words, just "breathing in" grace as necessary. We can't store it up; but it is always available, however much we need, whenever we need it, whatever the need may be.

There are three problems Paul faces:

The first is a problem of ignorance (it may be pride),

- ignorance of the resources that GOD has made available in CHRIST,
- ignorance of the meaning of grace,
- ignorance of the bankruptcy of humanity,
- ignorance of the Adam nature,

- ignorance of the inadequacy of the flesh.

JESUS said to the Pharisee, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matthew 9:12). They were filled with their own self-righteousness, so they did not turn to CHRIST for help.

They have their counterpart in the Church; those who unaware of their own need, go on in self-delusion until there is a crack-up or tragedy. Then suddenly they wake up to the fact that they are spiritually ill and need a physician, the "Great Physician," the Lord JESUS CHRIST. This is the tragic ignorance that predominates, not only in the world, but in the Church, so that a great number of church members are literally going on their own steam, literally operating on their own energies and strength. Thus all the world sees of Christianity is the best that man can do by his own efforts; they fail to see the grace of GOD operative in many church members. Paul has to resolve this problem of ignorance or pride (it could be either or both) in the believer who is unable or refuses to acknowledge his inadequacy until he comes to the end of the line.

The second problem Paul confronts is this; though failing, one does not depend on the power of CHRIST because he is preoccupied with the struggle.

The third problem is unwillingness to submit to CHRIST that grace may reign because it is so easy to yield to the perpetual flirtation of the flesh, inborn habitual self-centeredness.

Chapter 6 begins with a question, a logical question, raised by the statement in the 20th verse of the fifth chapter, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" If grace abounds where sin abounds, then why not abound in sin that we may enjoy more grace? Did not Paul say, "ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). If I am no longer under law, I need not fear transgression. But says Paul, "You are under grace," and grace is an infinitely greater force for righteousness than law. Law cannot enforce itself; grace can, as we shall learn in Romans, chapter 8.

Furthermore, Paul is not talking about sins here, that is sinful actions; he is talking about the genesis of sin, the nature of sin. The law makes me recognize that I have a sinful nature. I don't have to commit the act to know I am a sinner, the law itself reveals this to me that I may turn to grace. The answer to the question, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (Romans 6:1)" is the strongest negative in the New Testament, "God forbid!" "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein! (Romans 6:2)" This you must understand, as a Christian you are dead to sin. You do not feel dead; that is the reason why Paul must inform us.

It is basic to our Christian experience that we realize we were baptized into CHRIST's death, and raised to walk in the newness of life. John the Baptist spoke concerning JESUS, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Paul is not talking about a rite or a sacrament here; he is talking about the dynamic act of GOD when the HOLY SPIRIT baptizes or grafts a believer into the body of JESUS CHRIST, so that the life of CHRIST, the righteousness of CHRIST, is literally in him; he has been infused with CHRIST's life. We are united with Him in His death, and we are united with Him in His resurrection; the old self has been crucified, that is, the sinful body has been destroyed. We are no longer enslaved by sin! Or to put it another way, the Adam nature, the hold of the old nature, has been broken; it has been

snapped, severed; therefore, live now in the new life that CHRIST has provided.

But you say, "Paul, we appreciate everything you are telling us, but it is not true to the facts; and it does not square with my experience." Which leads up to the next word, "reckon" or "reliance." Rely upon this knowledge rather than your feelings. You see this is a matter of faith, "the just shall live by faith," so he says in verse 11; "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We may not feel that we have been emancipated from sin, that this Adam nature has been broken. As a matter of fact this has nothing to do with feeling; it is a matter of faith in the Word of GOD which declares it to be so. Knowing this, therefore, we count on the truth of it, live on that basis.

Recall when Paul used Abraham as the supreme example of the just living by faith, he illustrated it with the birth of Isaac. He says Abraham was "not weak in faith"; he considered the facts: Sarah was ninety years old and childless, her womb was barren. He was one hundred years old. These were the facts; the situation was impossible. But he was "not weak in faith," though he considered these facts, he was "strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4:19-21)"

Very well, GOD says in His Word, know that we are dead with CHRIST and alive with CHRIST, that we have been buried with CHRIST and risen with CHRIST, that the old nature has been crucified. We have been emancipated. The throttlehold of the Adam nature has been broken. We are free now to live in CHRIST. I do not feel this, but GOD's Word says so; therefore, by faith, I rely upon what GOD says to be true even though my experience seems to contradict it.

One great philosopher said, "Faith is the assent to any proposition on the credit of the proposer." James M. Stifler says, "To conclude about ourselves what GOD has declared about us in the Gospel is faith." So in these verses, 3 through 10, the emphasis is on the word knowledge, "know," and in verse 11, "reckon" or "rely" on what you know because GOD has said so. Rely on this promise however you feel. Rely on what GOD's Word says to be true, and you will discover that it is.

You see, this is one of the very practical problems in the Christian life. We say that we trust GOD when circumstances are good; but we prove our distrust when circumstances are contrary, indicating we have been trusting circumstances rather than GOD all the time. This is the test for faith, the acid test: you don't have to have faith in GOD when circumstances are right, the circumstances sustain you. Faith in GOD has its opportunity when circumstances fail you. It is this reversal of circumstances which allows faith to be exercised that it may be virile and strong.

When that first Christmas was ushered in, it was during one of the most corrupt and depraved times the world has ever known; yet GOD said, "on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:14)" That announcement was reality, not illusion. Faith which is dependent upon circumstances is not Christian faith. Faith is in GOD and in His ability to do what He has promised, no matter what the circumstances are like, in you or outside of you. Circumstances to the contrary notwithstanding, you can rely implicitly upon what GOD says.

Or to look at it another way, before justification I was "dead" to the availability of GOD's power in grace, and therefore limited in my resistance to sin, to my self, my own strength, my own ability.

Whenever I was tempted, I had to fight it alone, and most of the time I was whipped by it; but now, having been justified, I have been quickened to a new life; I have been made aware of a new resource in JESUS CHRIST. Having been made aware of this new resource, I am free at any given moment of any hour of any day to reckon on the new resource, to appropriate it.

Now a third word, "submission." Paul, because of their ignorance, spiritually speaking, is going to use a human analogy" (Romans 6:15-23). "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." Whenever you yield yourself to someone, you are his servant to obey him. You know that you can become the slave of anyone to whom you surrender. You can become a slave of sin, which leads to death, which is what you were in your old Adam nature, but from which you have been emancipated. Its hold having been broken in your life, you are free now to be a slave to righteousness, which leads to eternal life! The choice is yours. And furthermore, Paul says, this is the way grace works in your life, to make you want to choose righteousness. Thus the rationalization - I am not under law; therefore I may sin because I am under grace - is repudiated. This is not the way the Christian thinks; grace produces abhorrence to sin and a desire for righteousness.

You have been reading the Sermon on the Mount for years. One little verse you have read again and again, and you have been impressed with its beauty; but do you realize how practical it is? Paul is stating the same truth here in another way. The verse is, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)" GOD says you provide the appetite, I will satisfy it! He did not say, "Blessed are they that struggle to be righteous." He said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst" after it.

This is a clue, you see, to Romans 6. Know that you are dead with CHRIST and alive in CHRIST, that you have new life flowing through you, life that is perfectly righteous. Know that this is the power of an endless life! Reckon on this! Sin will keep protruding; sin will keep lying; sin will keep asserting itself. The old Adamic nature is constantly making itself felt, but you have been delivered from it. Know this, count on it, and then yield yourself to grace, to CHRIST, and become His servant unto righteousness, His slave unto righteousness. There are many synonyms of this word: "yield" or "submit," "relinquish," "let go," "take your hands off," "assent," "acquiesce," "receive," "accept," "consent."

Walk by faith in what GOD says to be true, however much your experience contradicts it. You will find out it is true. You will find out it works. The power is there, and it is available if you will take it. Actually, this is the way of Christian action. You may think of Christian action in terms of what you do for GOD, of what you do for your community, of what you do for other people. This is the great peril in Christian action movements because they encourage the old Adamic nature to do the best it can to solve its own problems. But really authentic Christian action is to know the facts about yourself and the grace of GOD, rely on those facts, submit yourself to CHRIST. You will find that the power of an endless life will be operative in you, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment, step-by-step if you meet these three conditions. Society around you will feel the impact of grace working in and through you.

Paul closes this wonderful chapter with a very familiar verse, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of GOD is eternal life. (Romans 6:23)" If you choose to yield yourself as a servant of sin to obey it, you get your wages; that is inevitable, and the wages are death; but the free gift of GOD is eternal life through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. You see the remarkable thing about this is - we can have Christmas every day of the year. Christmas every hour of the day. Christmas every minute of the hour. Christmas every second of every minute by knowing the facts, reckoning on them and yielding to the reign of CHRIST in grace and righteousness in our lives!

~ end of chapter 12 ~

13 - The Bankruptcy of Man's Best

Chapter 13 -

THE BANKRUPTCY OF MAN'S BEST

Romans 7:15-25

In the last half of the fifth chapter the apostle spoke of two men, the first man, Adam (Genesis 1:26), and JESUS CHRIST whom he calls the second Adam, each the progenitor of a race.

The first Adam transmitted sin and death to all of his descendants by his original disobedience in the Garden of Eden; JESUS CHRIST, the second Adam, transmits righteousness and eternal life to all who receive Him. Romans 6, 7 and 8 instruct us how to live as heirs of JESUS CHRIST, as members of the new race, rather than heirs of Adam, as members of the old race; how to overcome the old Adamic nature and engage the new nature received when JESUS CHRIST became our SAVIOUR. In the words of Romans 5:20-21, how to allow grace to reign in our lives rather than sin. He is expanding his theme to show how "the just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17)"

Paul wants it understood that the law given through Moses was not extraneous to this theme. It was Jewish presumption concerning the law which led her to spiritual impasse. Having the law was meaningless if it were not obeyed, and the Jew who had the Ten Commandments was not exempt from obedience any more than the Gentile who has the same law engraved on his conscience. It is the doer of the law who is justified before GOD, and no man keeps the law; therefore, he concludes, by the law shall no flesh, Jew or Gentile, be justified.

This raises the question, What purpose then the law that GOD gave Moses? He answers (Romans 5:13), "sin is not imputed when there is no law," and (Romans 5:20) "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound." The purpose of the law was to expose sin, as, for example, x-ray exposes disease. This exposure of sin by the law was not unto condemnation and death any more than the exposure by the x-ray is to death. The x-ray is in order to diagnose; thus GOD gave the law that man might recognize his sin and find the cure in JESUS CHRIST; in Paul's words (Romans 5:20-21), "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." As the old Adamic nature reigned unto death, now let the new CHRIST nature reign unto life! As you were a slave to your Adam nature, now become a servant to the new CHRIST nature since you have been regenerated.

Romans 7 is a commentary on Romans 5:20, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound." Romans 8, the first seventeen verses, amplifies the second half of the principle (Romans 5:20-21), "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life."

Speaking to those who know the law, Paul opens Romans 7 (verses 1-6) using marriage to illustrate the principle of death which he discusses in chapter 6. Who does he mean by "I speak to them that know the law?" He certainly does not mean only the Jew, for he has already pointed out the Jew and Gentile are in the same condition. No, he is speaking now to the Christian as contrasted to the non-Christian, Jew or Gentile. Those who are not Christian do not know the law, a very significant fact, by the way. Paul says in the seventh chapter, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (Romans 7:9)" When was Paul alive without the law?

Recall his testimony in Philippians, chapter 3, for example, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (Php 3:4-6)" From his childhood he knew the law. He knew it better than his contemporaries, took it more seriously than they, struggled desperately to keep it, declared in fact, that insofar as the law was concerned, he was blameless.

Now this same man cries out in the end of chapter 7, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?." Indeed he says as much in the testimony in Philippians, "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss. (Php 3:7-8)" What are the "all things" he is talking about? His religious achievements, his moral and ethical achievements. "For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Php 3:8-9)"

In other words, until Paul met JESUS CHRIST on the road to Damascus, he did not know the law; he only thought he did. We have his modern counterpart in the Gentile who says rather smugly, the Sermon on the Mount is my religion, or, the Golden Rule is my religion. One man said in a service club meeting some time ago, "Just give me the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule, and you can throw away the rest of the Bible!" You can almost feel the smugness, the complacency, the egotistical satisfaction of a man who talks like that.

What is wrong with such thinking? The same thing was wrong with Paul before he met CHRIST on the road to Damascus. It is self-deception. It reveals that one does not know the law nor understand it. I have never met a man yet who lives up to the Golden Rule, have you? He boasts of it as his religion in exactly the same way the Jew boasted in the law! They did not keep it, but that seemed to be unimportant; they had it! I have the Golden Rule, but do I live up to it? No man does! "The Sermon on the Mount is my religion." Have you ever really considered the Sermon on the Mount? Just take one verse out of it, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)" Purity within, not conduct, nor conversation, JESUS talked about an inward condition. How many times have our hearts held desires that we would never dare to share with a most intimate friend? Anyone who embraceth the Sermon on the Mount, who takes it seriously and tries to live up to it, will be led to despair.

Occasionally, he may achieve some virtue and be proud of it, but then pride is the root sin; most of the time he will be filled with despair over failure. Who does not pillow his head night after night

with this sense of self-failure! We will not even make New Year's resolutions any more because they are meaningless after the first twenty-four hours! Before conversion, virtue to Paul was relative as he compared himself with others; he felt he was doing as well as any, better than most. So we, comparing ourselves with ourselves, conclude that we are doing pretty well! Having been raised in what we call the Christian ethic or roughly, the Christian culture, we feel that we are managing our lives as well as the average. There are some who may live better than we, but we do as well as most, and we settle for a comfortable average in morals and ethics. But the average is tragically low.

To illustrate further, for every person that is in church on an average Sunday morning, there are five or ten who are not. Why are they not in church? One reason is that they observe the lives of church-goers and cannot see any difference. They reason consciously or unconsciously, "I can't understand why a man wants to waste an hour and fifteen minutes sitting in a pew on Sunday morning when he could be reading the paper or playing golf or raking the lawn or just sleeping in. Why should a man get up for church every Sunday!"

You may have heard of the little boy who said, "Mother, I am eight feet tall!"

"Eight feet tall," she said, "how did you measure yourself?" He showed her a six-inch ruler.

We measure ourselves with our little six-inch rulers and are quite self-satisfied; but when we perceive the perfect law of GOD and measure ourselves against it, we are reduced to size. That is what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. "The law entered... sin revived, and I died. (Romans 7:9)" That must happen to every man, Jew or Gentile, before he understands law or grace. Up until that moment he will live his life more or less satisfied with his own virtue.

Paul says, I am writing to Christians who know the law. He is instructing Christians; this instruction is not for non-Christians. In giving the place of the law he uses the analogy of marriage. A woman is bound to her husband according to the law of marriage as long as the husband is alive. When he dies, she is free to marry another; but as long as the husband lives, should she marry another, she commits adultery. We were, so to speak, married to the law in the old Adamic nature. We did not know it, perhaps, and were complacent; nevertheless, we were under it. Even in the pre-law days, from Adam to Moses, sin and death reigned over those who did not have the law.

Now (Romans 6:14) we are no longer under the law but under grace. We are no longer bound by the law; we are bound by grace. We are no longer enslaved by the law; we are enslaved by grace, which is exactly the phrase he uses at the end of the sixth chapter, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God. (Romans 6:22)" In other words, yield yourselves to this new nature which you received in JESUS CHRIST, inasmuch as you are no longer enslaved by the old nature which you received from Adam.

But he goes a step further. He points out that the law not only exposes sin, it actually triggers sin, aggravates sin. In verse 5 he says, while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. Then verse 8, but "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." Apart from the law sin may be inactive, but somehow the law excites sin, induces it. Verse 11, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." And finally verse 21, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Paul is

simply saying this: there is that about human nature which, when you tell it it can not, it wants to!

There was Adam in the Garden, placed by GOD in a perfect environment and told, everything is yours except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, don't touch it. That prohibition immediately became the central preoccupation in the midst of their perfect freedom, and the fruit became a necessity. You as parents know that the surest way to get your children to do some? thing is to tell them they cannot. Wise the parent who has learned this. This is the Adamic nature, and this is the reason that law cannot help us; it just aggravates this nature.

The law is incapable of saving, and the reason for this is discussed in the last half of the chapter; it is the Adam nature. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

How many, many times have you been tempted; you knew it was wrong; you did not want to do it; you thought of the consequences, but you did it. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." Now when he says "flesh" he is not referring merely to the physical body but to this Adamic nature, man's sinful nature; the contradictory streak which makes a man do what he abhors, fail to do what is right. "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." I can will what is right but I cannot do it. You might as well give up on New Year's resolutions.

"Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But 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." There it is. This is the frustration of man, from the first generation to this, in spite of all of the devices, the schemes he invents by which to ignore this fact in his life.

This is one reason for alcoholism, the escape from reality. This is one reason men keep inordinately busy; they do not want to think about themselves. This is one reason people escape into pleasure, into society, to for? get self; and when they are no longer able to hide, if they can afford it, they go to a psychiatrist. Or they may take their life, which is not an escape, for they just change their location. Paul is describing what man is like in the old Adamic nature, but he is also showing us we need not any longer be bound; we have been released, emancipated by the power of GOD in JESUS CHRIST.

The late Dr. Cyril E. M. Joad was one of Britain's famous and popular free-thinking philosophers. He had a reputation for "cynical dissection of man's pride and accomplishments." He was one of the most zealous church-baiting agnostics in Britain. He testified:

"Sin and evil I dismissed as the incidental accomplishment of man's imperfect development. The evil in man was due, I had been taught, either to economic circumstances or psychological circumstances. For were not psychoanalysts telling me that all of the regressive, aggressive, or inhibited tendencies of human nature were due to the unfortunate psychological environment of one's early childhood? The implications were obvious. Remove the circumstances and trust children to psychoanalyzed nurses and teachers, then virtue would reign."

The solution to the problem - war, racial tensions, management and labor strife, divorce, crime, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism - is to expose children to psychoanalyzed nurses and teachers. He goes on,

"I have come flatly to disbelieve all of this. I see now that evil is endemic in man (that's what Paul is saying in Romans 7) and that the Christian doctrine of original sin expresses deep and essential insight into human nature. Once I got as far as this it seemed there was nothing to be lost and everything to be gained by going the whole way. What better hope was offered than by the Christian doctrine that GOD sent His Son into this world to save sinners."

Paul is talking about three kinds of people, those who know not the law. They may know about the law, may say "the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule is my religion." Keeping the law is immaterial; having the law is religion. What a shallow, transparent, defensive device is this; yet men hold it, good men, intelligent men. They do not know the law; they do not understand the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule; they do not have the slightest comprehension of the Hebrew-Christian ethic, of the morality of GOD; they settle for mediocrity in the moral realm, mere respectability. They are moral, ethical vegetables.

Secondly, those who have been quickened by the grace of GOD to understand the law, who realize they are sinners and cannot save themselves, who recognize in JESUS CHRIST their solution and accept the grace of GOD in CHRIST as a remedy and live daily on this basis. Whenever such a one finds sin asserting itself in his life, he knows it is useless to resist in his own strength, which is the Adam nature; he acknowledges his weakness, the bankruptcy of the old nature transmitted through Adam and the adequacy of the new nature transmitted in JESUS CHRIST. He submits himself to the new nature, allowing it to reign in grace and righteousness to eternal life.

The third kind is the man who has been illuminated by the law and knows that he is a failure; but instead of coming to the Lord JESUS CHRIST, he either takes pride in his failure, boasts of his sin, becomes an articulate infidel and pagan; and the only defense he makes against failure is to act as if it does not bother him. (What a bully, what a loudmouth and what a profane man he becomes!); or, having been made aware of his failure; and either because he is uninstructed or though instructed, because of pride or some other reason, he will not come to CHRIST for forgiveness and cleansing.

Yet he cannot stand the sense of failure so he escapes, maybe into more sin or liquor, or busyness working night and day, or he runs off to conventions and conferences or loads his life with pleasure. He labors to stop the gnawing guilt. If he can afford it, he may consult a psychiatrist and may be told this guilt is artificial, false, adolescent.

Perhaps someone reading this fits this description. The law has illuminated your heart and you know that you are a sinner; you are living a defeated life, not because of your sin but because somehow, for some reason, you will not let grace reign in your heart through JESUS CHRIST. I invite you to move rapidly from Romans 7:25 into the experience Paul describes in the first four verses of Chapter 8.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

14 - The Law of Life

Chapter 14 -

THE LAW OF LIFE

Romans 8:1-17

Paul concluded in the middle of the third chapter, verse 20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight"; immediately thereafter he pointed out that GOD's righteousness has been manifested "without the deeds of the law" in the Gospel, and that this righteousness of GOD is to be received by faith. Righteousness is not a goal to be achieved; it is a gift to be received.

The proposition stated, Romans 3:21-31, is illustrated with Abraham and David, chapter 4, and applied, chapters 5 through 8. Hence the "therefore" by which Paul begins Romans 8, refers back to everything he has said beginning at the 21st verse of the 3rd chapter. In a more specific sense (8:4), the "therefore" in 8:1 refers to the last verse of the 7th chapter, but it is important to see 8:1-17 in its relation to 3:21 following.

In other words, Romans 8 does not introduce a new theme; Paul is penetrating more deeply into the subject of chapters 5,6 and 7, enunciating the same truths, exploring the same propositions, applying the same principles.

These principles are first, the inadequacy of human nature; secondly, the adequacy of JESUS CHRIST; and thirdly, the application of CHRIST's adequacy. That is to say, in Romans 8 Paul is exploring to greater depth the practice of justification by faith. He begins, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ JESUS. (Romans 8:1)"

The "now," incidentally, is not used chronologically as though Paul were saying, there is no condemnation at this moment though there may be in the future; but rather, "Now therefore, on the basis of what I have already written," because of these facts, there is no condemnation. The man in CHRIST is free from the threat of condemnation forever, no fear of the consequences of my sin and failure, ever. The condemnation has been lifted and I am free from it.

It may help to work our way through this rather complicated argument by asking some simple but basic questions as we go along. The first question, what does Paul mean when he uses the phrase "in Christ"? What does it mean to be "in Christ," "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ." You will recall in Romans 5:12-21, Paul referred to two men, the first Adam and the second Adam, that is, Adam and CHRIST; two acts, disobedience and obedience; two results, sin and death as a result of Adam's disobedience, righteousness and life as a result of CHRIST's obedience; and two races of people. The whole human race polarizes around these two men, those who are in Adam by necessity of birth, and those who are in CHRIST because they have chosen Him.

A word about original sin is in order; it is not to be thought of in terms of conduct, but of choice. When the Bible uses the word sin (singular), it is not talking about the misdeeds of men but rather man's choice against GOD, man's self-alienation from GOD. To illustrate, when one hears the Gospel and refuses it, that is in the nature of original sin. John puts it this way in the 3rd chapter of his Gospel, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)" You may argue with this doctrine of original sin, but it is more than dogma or theory.

If you can find any better way to explain what is wrong with mankind, be assured that thoughtful Christians will welcome any other adequate explanation or diagnosis of mankind's dilemma.

Meanwhile, Paul's explanation has proven to be thoroughly consistent with things as they are. Our interest in original sin is not academic, any more than a doctor's interest in a diagnosis is academic. Diagnosis is supremely important because it makes a difference as to whether or not the proper cure will be applied; therefore, instead of considering original sin as a dogma to be accepted theologically, think of it as GOD's diagnosis as to what is wrong with the world.

As history unfolds, we become increasingly aware that what the Bible teaches about the sinfulness endemic in human nature is most realistic.

The Bible says Adam disobeyed GOD, his sin and its consequences were transmitted to all his descendants. JESUS obeyed GOD, His righteousness and its reward, eternal life, are transmitted to all who accept Him. As all men are in Adam, therefore; so all Christians are in CHRIST. "In Adam" is to have a sinful nature which leads to death. "In Christ" is to have a new righteous nature which leads to life.

JESUS CHRIST became fully man in order that as we were one with Adam, we might be one with Him; as we were involved in Adam's sin, we are now involved in JESUS' perfection. "In Adam" man broke GOD's law; "in JESUS" man obeyed GOD. Man is lost because he is involved in Adam's transgression; man is saved who is involved in CHRIST's righteousness by faith in His life and work and Word. This then is what it means to be "in CHRIST," to trust Him, to believe in Him, to accept the gift of righteousness which He provides.

Another question: How is it possible that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"? You will recall in Romans 5:20-21 Paul said, "the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS Christ our Lord."

That is the theme of 8:2, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:2 is another way of saying Romans 5:20-21. "The law of sin and death" is identical with "sin hath reigned unto death"; "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS" is identical with "grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life." The word "law" here is not used in the sense of ordinance or statute but as we speak of the law of gravity.

The next question, how does this work? How does the law of "the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS hath made me free from the law of sin and death," or how does "grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life" and free me from sin's reign unto death? The answer is given in

verses 3 and 4: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" that is, because of sinful human nature. GOD has done it! This is basic - it is GOD's doing.

In Ephesians 2:8-10 Paul declares, "by grace are ye saved through faith . . . it is the gift of GOD: not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ JESUS unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We are "GOD's workmanship!" A Christian is GOD's doing. No man can make himself a Christian. GOD's business is to make Christians, only He can do it. "GOD has done it!"

We have it all turned around, you see, Christianity has become for us what man does for GOD, what he does for his fellow man, and what he does for himself.

Christianity has become piety, doing something for GOD; religion, doing something for GOD; liturgy, doing something for GOD. Or it has become sociology, man doing something for his fellow man. Or it has become psychology, doing something for oneself. But this is not authentic Christianity. Christianity is the antithesis of this man-centered effort. Christianity is man recognizing his own inadequacy, the sufficiency of GOD's provision in JESUS CHRIST, and its acceptance by faith. GOD has done it! You accept it! The law could not do it, not because there was anything wrong with the law, but because of the "weakness of flesh."

This raises the question, what does Paul mean by "flesh"? He is not referring to the physical body; he means "human nature in its vulnerability to sin and temptation": (Stifler); that part of man which gives sin its chance, its bridgehead. He means everything that attaches a man to the world instead of to GOD.

To live according to the flesh is to live a worldly life, to live a life dominated by the dictates and the desires of sinful human nature instead of a life dominated by the love of GOD. We have made worldliness in the Church a matter of smoking, drinking, going to dances and the theater, and so forth. Therefore, if one does not drink and dance and smoke and go to shows, he is not worldly! Some have carried it further; cosmetics are worldly; a certain way of dress is worldly. We have made worldliness a matter of externals. But the Word of GOD defines worldliness as inward.

In the words of John, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16)" You may not smoke nor drink nor dance nor play cards nor go to the theater and still be extremely worldly. The very purpose for refraining from so-called worldly practices may in itself be worldly. You may separate yourself entirely from the world, isolate yourself from its entertainments and still be worldly. When the family down the street gets a new car and you think you must have a new car, that is worldliness.

When you go to someone's home and you are impressed with the lovely furniture and the thick carpets, and you think, "the next thing we are going to do is to change the carpet and buy new furniture," that is worldliness. When these concerns dominate the life, this is the "flesh," this is carnality. And because of this element in man's nature, the law cannot save him. Man is congenitally the slave of this "flesh."

Then how does GOD do for man what he is incapable of doing for himself? "Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"; (Romans 8:3) He destroyed it, neutralized its power.

JESUS CHRIST was the second Adam. He entered history, faced the same choice as the first Adam; He obeyed, where the first Adam had disobeyed; therefore He was perfect. He obeyed GOD every time He had a choice; He was perfect in His obedience. Then He died on a cross as though guilty of Adam's sin! He took upon Himself the sin of the whole human race, He poured out His life upon the cross of Calvary, a sacrifice (expiation) for sin.

Now CHRIST dwells in those who accept Him. Men who reject Him remain in Adam. Available to all, His power is efficacious for those who accept Him, obviously. That tempting drinking fountain in the hall, electric so the water is ice-cold, is for everybody. If you refuse to use it, your thirst remains; but that does not alter the fact that it quenches thirst. The fountain is for all but efficacious only for those who drink.

In verse 2 Paul says, "the law of the Spirit of life hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death works like the law of gravity, holding man to the ground, spiritually speaking. You can not break this law; try, and it will break you. Jump out of the Empire State Building in disregard of the law of gravity, whether you believe the law or not it will destroy you.

You cannot break the law of gravity! But you can introduce another law, the law of aerodynamics, and fly! In the same way "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS" has broken the hold of the "law of sin and death," and I am free of the law of sin in Adam. This is Paul's theme in Romans 6, illustrated from his own experience, in chapter 7. Therefore, he says in Romans 8:4, the "righteousness of the law," is "fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." In other words, the way to be a victorious Christian, in fact, is to walk after the Spirit instead of after the flesh.

The secret of living the Christian life is not self-improvement by righteous discipline and self effort, the secret is to walk after the Spirit. If you have a bad habit, the way to break it is not by sheer effort, which results most often in failure (though some certainly succeed); the way to break a bad habit is to walk in the Spirit. If you are constantly victimized by a certain temptation, growing weary of it, humiliated by it, and you pillow your head night after night having capitulated to the same temptation, the way to break it is not by some heroic struggle but to walk in the Spirit.

This suggests an important insight into the new birth. Paul testifies at the end of Romans 7 "with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)" Some radical change has occurred in Paul's mind as a result of the new birth, for in Ephesians 2:3 he describes those outside of CHRIST, the natural man, the man still in Adam, as obeying the "desires of the flesh and of the mind." That is, the desires of flesh and mind agree in unregenerate man. But now (Romans 7:25) he says, "with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Mind and flesh are opposed. When a man is born of GOD, his mind is transformed. (Mind here is more than intellect; it is the whole man in his unity, the whole personality.) The body is just a house, a tabernacle, in which he dwells during his earthly pilgrimage. The person occupying that body is changed by the power of GOD while the flesh principle remains the same; it still continues to serve the law of sin and will until the day the body is put into the grave.

Paul indicates, therefore, that there is no reason to expect this flesh to be any different because nothing happens to it by regeneration. That is to say, I am no less subject to temptation today than

twenty-six years ago before I accepted CHRIST and was born of GOD. As a matter of fact, some temptations are more insistent now than they were then. My flesh is the same; the same sinful desires await their opportunity to spring into action, but now with the mind I serve the law of GOD; I have a new mind, a new purpose, new motivation, new loyalty. I desire to live for GOD as a result of spiritual birth. I have been emancipated from the flesh by the power of GOD.

This brings us to a further question; what is it then to walk in the flesh and to walk in the Spirit? Paul describes it here in a very interesting way. It is to "mind the things of the flesh". (Romans 8:5) To live according to the flesh is to "set your mind" on the things of the flesh. Tony Fontane, the young singer, bought a new Cadillac on an average of every nine months; his wife had to have a white mink stole and a white mink coat; they had to be covered with jewelry; they lived in an \$85,000 home in Beverly Hills. This was normal. Then came the automobile accident, as a result of which Tony was converted. He believed that GOD was calling him to sing the Gospel; he lost his home in Beverly Hills, and today Tony and his wife and ten-year-old daughter are living with the wife's parents. The white mink stole and coat are gone, and the Cadillacs are gone. They had "set their minds" on mink and Cadillac's and an \$85,000 home; they were living according to the flesh. Now they have "set their minds" on the Spirit.

Something must be said here that is very important.

Someone is reading this whom GOD has prospered; you live in a good home, and you drive a big car. Thank GOD for it! This does not necessarily mean that you are living according to the flesh. If GOD did not have some people like you in homes like you have, other people in homes like that might not be reached. He has put you there for that purpose. Some people can live in a hovel and be more preoccupied, have the mind more set on things than people who live in a mansion. JESUS said it is the love of these things - not the things themselves. GOD prospers men for His own glory. Thank GOD for what He has given you, the lovely home, your new car, but do not set the mind on these things. Those who live according to the Spirit "mind... the things of the Spirit. (Romans 8:5)"

Remember JESUS' counsel in the Sermon on the Mount, "seek ye first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness. (Matthew 6:33)" That is, set your mind on the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness; these other things will follow in His providence. If you are a man who has the ability to make \$100,000 a year, setting your mind on the things of the Spirit is not going to damage that ability; if anything, it will sharpen it, enhance it, purify it. You may be able to make \$150,000 a year and you will use it GOD's way. Set the mind on the Spirit. One way leads to death; the other way leads to life. The set of the mind is the clue.

I remember the first time I saw sailboats. I was born and reared in North Dakota; sailboats were unfamiliar in my youth. One day, driving along the Pacific coast, we came upon a large lagoon in which about seventy-five boats were sailing. Never having seen a boat under sail, I stopped the car and was amazed by the phenomenon of many boats blown by the same wind yet going in every direction. I thought to myself, how is this possible? Of course this seems naive to sophisticated people, but to me, even at twenty, it was an amazing thing. What made the difference? How could these many sailboats thus by the same wind go in all directions?

It was the set of the sail; the rudder helped, but it was the set of the sail. So it is in the Christian life; set your mind on the Spirit; let the winds of temptation, the winds of tragedy, the winds of difficulty, the winds of circumstance blow against your life; they will blow you on course. Set your mind on the things of the flesh even when favorable winds blow; they will blow you to ultimate destruction. It is the set of the mind that counts.

One step further Paul takes us when he says, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)" As a matter of fact it is incapable of submitting to GOD. That is the reason JESUS said it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:24)" Not because he is rich; that is not the problem, but because he has set his mind on the riches, and his mind therefore is hostile to GOD's way. The mind set on the flesh is not able to please GOD, he concludes in verse 8. In verses 9, 10 and 11 he hastens to reassure those who are in CHRIST that they are in the Spirit and not in the flesh because he knows from personal experience, as he has testified in chapter 7, that the Christian is going to be discouraged again and again by the stubborn death-throes of the flesh.

Paul knows the Christian is going to think that Romans 8 is unrealistic and contrary to the facts because he has gone through it himself. He is concerned that each Christian know that to be "in CHRIST" is to have the SPIRIT of CHRIST whether he feels like it or not. The important thing is to believe GOD's Word, not feelings. The hardest thing a pilot who has flown by the "seat of his pants" has to learn when they put him on instruments, is to obey the instruments instead of his feelings. Men have cracked up when the instruments said one thing and they believed the way they felt instead. The spirit of man may crack up as well doing what his feelings dictate rather than that which the instruments indicate.

Paul is urging, do not believe your feelings, believe the instrument of GOD's Word. If you are in CHRIST, you have the Spirit; if you do not have the Spirit, you are not in CHRIST. To be in CHRIST is to have His Spirit; this is inevitable. If CHRIST is in you, His SPIRIT is in you. Believe it!

Before closing this passage, Paul anticipates the glorious hope of the Christian, "if the Spirit of him that raised up JESUS from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you, (Romans 8:11)" that is, raise your mortal bodies from the dead. You see, this redemption that is in CHRIST, this righteousness that is in JESUS CHRIST, is not just for the soul of man; it is for the body as well. What a day that is going to be when the graves of Christians are opened, when the little urns holding cremated ashes crack and break, and brand-new bodies, immortal and incorruptible, rise from those graves and urns at the coming again of JESUS CHRIST! That is the great hope of the Church.

Paul's conclusion, verses 12 to the end of our passage, is this: "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. (Romans 8:12)" You say, "I feel like I am." Of course you do, argues Paul, so did I, that is what I express in Romans 7, but you are not. You have been liberated by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ JESUS." Remember his instructions in Romans 6? Know this to be true, reckon it, and then yield to the reign of CHRIST. Once more he enunciates these great affirmations: these things are true, know it, believe it, depend on it, and you will find it works.

I come to the church late of an evening. It is dark. I want to get something from the auditorium, and I go to the light switch believing that if I flick that switch, the auditorium will be flooded with light. Imagine someone with me who has never seen electricity. I say, push that button and the darkness will disappear and this room will be filled with light. He says, how can this be, surely it is not that simple. But it is, and he flicks the switch and there is light.

Now Paul is saying, listen, it is dark, and your flesh is terribly powerful; you have desires and temptations that embarrass and humiliate you even if nobody else knows about them. You know you are not the man you ought to be. I have great sympathy for this human condition so real in myself, Paul says as he cries, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24)" But there is a solution, I know on the authority of GOD's Word that we have been liberated; there is a power resident in us identical to that power which raised the Son of GOD from the grave. Push the button of choice or decision; that power is operative instantly as you will discover; reckon on it and yield. It is really wonderful! It is for everyone of us. Quit struggling, quit trying, start trusting, and the result will obtain. We are heirs of GOD because "ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)" We are children of GOD; and if we are children of GOD, we are heirs; if heirs of GOD, we are "joint-heirs with Christ, (Romans 8:17)" which means that we may share now in His power as we are going to share in His glory.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

15 - History's Painful Waiting

Chapter 15 -

HISTORY'S PAINFUL WAITING

Romans 8:18-25

Here is one of the most timely passages in Romans, so relevant to the present world situation. It is an exciting glimpse into Paul's philosophy of history; one of his definite insights into the Biblical view of history. It is important for us today in the light of the world's confusion and convulsion to know that GOD rules, that what is happening is the fulfillment of His purpose in history.

Paul begins, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Think of three words in conjunction with this passage: suffering, longing and glory. The suffering about which Paul speaks is not that which is commonly identified as suffering: difficulties in life, tragedies, reverses, illness, crippling, diseases. These are implicit in what he is saying, but he is thinking about a suffering which is more basic, which he refers to later as "the bondage of corruption," to which the whole creation is subject. Because of man's sin in the Garden, the whole created universe, all that is in the universe, has been cursed. You will find this in the 17th verse of the 3rd chapter of Genesis, "Unto Adam he said, Because thou hast harkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree... cursed is the ground for thy sake; In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. (Genesis 3:17)" The whole created universe is suffering because of man's first disobedience.

What is the nature of this suffering? It is emptiness, futility, frustration. It is exquisitely demonstrated by history's dilemma in this modern, sophisticated, progressive mid-twentieth century with its accumulated knowledge and experience of the ages and its stubbornly persistent compounded problems. Our libraries are filled with volumes written by experts on marriage and the home; daily papers carry columns dispensing free advice to husbands and wives; marriage clinics and counselors abound, and divorce increases. Alcoholic research by universities, church and social welfare agencies has given deep insights to the cause and cure of alcoholism; meanwhile in America alcoholics increase at the rate of fifty an hour, twelve hundred daily, seventy percent of them women.

It is an age of psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and psychosomatics; yet our mental hospitals are bursting with patients. There is never enough room for those needing care, and mental illness is claiming more and more victims while millions of dollars are spent annually on tranquilizers and stimulants.

Giant advances have been made in child psychology and understanding; social workers specialize in juvenile problems; juvenile courts and agencies are dedicated to youth while every major city has its share of guidance counselors and youth leaders; in spite of which delinquency is increasing with alarming rapidity. Criminology has become a science as has the rehabilitation of the criminal;

yet crime is increasing at a rate greater than the population explosion.

Modern developments in agricultural sciences and machinery have forced the curtailment of production; yet millions of humans go from the cradle to the grave without ever knowing the luxury of a full stomach. The peoples of the world long for peace; the United Nations rises out of the ruins of an abortive League of Nations; yet we have had two world wars in a quarter century and the only peace known today is a "truce of terror," and "immoral deadlock," a cold war. Humanity is in foment, boiling with desire for personal dignity, equality, freedom and independence; yet more than one-third of the world's population languishes under government paternalism and tyranny. With all our alliances and the discussion negotiation and pontification about one world and a united mankind, the world is tragically disunited; two Germanies, two Chinas, two Koreas, two Viet Nams, more than fifty new independent nations since 1945; and increasing tension and rift within both the Communistic bloc and the free world.

In science and technology we have progressed beyond our wildest dreams; yet the consummate product of this progress constitutes a major threat to the survival of civilization. How smart are we anyway? We take one step forward, two steps backward, and label it progress. The more we know, the less capable we seem to be to manage our problems. This is the "futility" to which Paul is referring - a universal, perennial frustration. In the words of the wisest man in Israel, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 1:2)" From this "bondage" the whole universe craves release.

Consider the limitations time and space impose upon us, the creeping limitations of old age, the great universal enemy - death; the dis-peace of the world, the lack of freedom, the slavery, the bondage, the perennial helplessness of man to achieve the kind of world he dreams about. This is the universal suffering of which personal suffering is a symptom. From this, Paul declares the human race and inanimate matter as well (the whole created universe) are longing to be delivered. How we long for it! Medical science is doing all that it can to eliminate disease. We are doing all that we can to sustain and prolong life.

How we resent old age. Some people will not even admit it, clinging to the illusion that if they pretend it is not and try to cover it up, its effects will be neutralized. Far better, incidentally, to approach old age in the spirit of the Word of GOD, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day! (Proverbs 4:18)" With what zeal we labor to resist this decay which is inevitable in our bodies; nevertheless we grow more weary, less able to do what we would. Wrinkles appear, the temples grey, the head begins to bald, and we stop growing except in the middle. Thus are the frustrating limitations to which the whole universe is subject and which we long to over? come.

Often flying in a jet across America, after an hour or two with the trip half over, I leave my seat to stretch, look at my watch and wonder if we are ever going to get there. Then I think to myself, how was it ever possible to do business when people had to travel by train? How could anything ever be accomplished? How did they ever manage to live? The symptom is showing, you see. That which is a luxury soon becomes a necessity and a new luxury demands our interest. That which we thought we could get along without suddenly is necessary, and then it is never enough. In our boredom we need something more. This is a manifestation of the longing to be delivered from bondage to decay and corruption. Never is enough!

A friend of mine said this recently in a testimony, "There is something worse than wanting a thing and not having the means to get it, and that is having the means and not wanting anything," whereby he pictured the sheer monotony of a life that has everything and yet is not satisfied. Well, nothing satisfies this side of the grave because we were made for eternity. Nothing satisfies completely in this life because we have an infinite appetite. Nothing satisfies but GOD and His plan. The whole universe languishes, painfully waiting, absorbed, for that is the strength of the world, literally absorbed with persistent expectation, like a woman in childbirth, for the day when the sons of GOD shall be revealed.

Paul says that not only does the whole created universe long to be delivered from this bondage to corruption and decay, but so do we who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit. (Romans 8:23)" Having been born of GOD because JESUS CHRIST dwells in our hearts and having an intimation of that which is eternal, we long for it. Or we ought to long for it. I suppose that this is one of the major tragedies in the church of JESUS CHRIST today? - we have learned somehow to be sub-Christian in the things which give us satisfaction in life; we don't really long as we ought for the return of JESUS CHRIST and "the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23)" and "the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)"

Recently I received from a medical doctor in Washington a letter which was quite complimentary about our daily broadcasts. But he qualified his compliment by saying something like this: "There is one suggestion I should like to make; this medieval idea of CHRIST being sacrificed on the Cross doesn't help your broadcast. It isn't acceptable to modern man." This is not an uncommon attitude toward the crucifixion of JESUS CHRIST, and this attitude is reflected not only toward His death, but toward this whole matter of life after death. Implicit in what that man said is the belief that everything that is important is this side of the grave. Perhaps we believe in life after death, but it is some very vague and ethereal thing that is not too important.

Most of us live as though what we get and what we do, and what we enjoy before being laid away in the grave are primary. Will you allow me to ask, what difference there is between this view and the Communistic view of life? Some of the details may be different, but the goals are identical; and in our so-called Christian world, we operate on the basis - get while the getting is good, all you can because we have three score years and ten, if lucky, maybe four score. The day comes so soon when one grows less efficient, and the body will not produce as it did, and it is not able to enjoy as much as it had; therefore, get all one can now as quickly as possible.

One student of the Bible suggests that the word "glory" means the fulfillment of purpose:

- The glory of a violin is to produce music;
- The glory of government is to preserve the rights of man;
- The glory of the sun is to shine and provide heat;
- The glory of the flower is beauty and fragrance;
- The glory of a tree is to bear fruit, to give shade and beauty;
- The glory of anything is the fulfillment of its created purpose.

When Paul speaks of the glory of man, he is referring to something more than incandescence; he is talking about purpose, the very purpose for which man was created. He is talking about the meaning of life, the meaning of history. The glory of Christianity is the return of JESUS CHRIST! We await that cataclysmic moment in history when the Son of GOD returns to earth; the graves are opened, and the bodies of those who have been laid away will be raised, new, incorruptible, immortal bodies; when that generation of Christians still alive upon the earth at His coming will be changed instantaneous! Yet their bodies no longer corruptible or mortal! This is consummation for the Christian, but because we have lost this vision, because we do not yearn for this moment for which the whole created universe longs, we are so often victimized by our circumstances.

A dear friend, reared in the Christian faith by a godly mother and father, upon attending university, lost his faith. One night he stood up in a Bible conference where others were testifying to the reality of CHRIST in their lives; and he said, "I have to be honest with you. I have been raised in the Church, but I have become intellectually convinced that GOD does not exist. I no longer believe the Bible; I no longer believe in JESUS CHRIST or the Church. I have become an atheist. Subsequently while studying at Oxford, this same young man had an experience which brought all of his thinking to a crisis in his own life. Intellectually he was convinced there was no GOD but was unable to resist the conviction that without faith in GOD and immortality, life had no meaning. As a matter of fact, he intimated that the most logical impulse in his life in those days of atheism was to commit suicide; there was no reason for living. Often when putting the car away at night, he would literally talk himself out of remaining in the garage with the motor running. It seemed terribly logical.

One evening at Oxford, when his living group met for its monthly seminar, a student read a paper on Christian ethics. My friend was interested because implicit in the paper was the idea of an absolute ethic which suggested a GOD who imposed these ethics upon man. When the paper was read and a discussion ensued, he asked three questions of those present: "First, do you believe in GOD and in JESUS CHRIST; secondly, do you believe in life after death; and thirdly, do you believe that such a belief is necessary to give meaning to life?" Thirteen out of thirteen men said "no" to each of the three questions. My friend observed these men carefully for the next few days; again and again they demonstrated by their actions that the faith which they denied was indispensable to give meaning to their lives. As a result he wrote to Princeton Seminary admitting that he was an atheist but requesting permission to spend one year on the campus studying theology. His request was granted and the end of his first year, he returned to his church, stood up in another Bible conference testimony meeting and said that he had come back to faith in JESUS CHRIST. Today he is a preacher of the Gospel.

When you get right down to issues, life is meaning? less apart from that which lies on the other side of the grave; and even though we may have intellectually repudiated it, emotionally we live on this basis. We must! Immortality is more than just a deposit we leave for our posterity, more than a discovery or invention or good things we have added to make the world a better place in which to live, and for which we will be remembered. Immortality is infinitely more than this. The Apostle Paul insists that immortality is to live forever in a body that is incorruptible, immortal and undefiled.

When GOD made man, the record declares, He formed him of the dust of the ground; that is, the body came first, and breathed into him and he became a living soul. In II Corinthians, chapter 5,

Paul says, that which we really long for is to have immortal bodies. We do not desire to be incorporeal creatures, that is to be bodiless ghosts, or angels, roaming the universe, aimlessly drifting. Our desire is to have bodies that will perfectly serve the goals of our minds and hearts, goals which are always beyond us. The artist has never painted his perfect picture; the musician has never composed his perfect symphony; the pianist has never played his perfect concerto; the poet has never written the perfect poem; the author has never written the perfect story. Man has never achieved the perfect political, economic and social order.

Indeed, there is a curiosity about man which keeps him restless and dissatisfied. He wants to know more than just his community or his city or his state or his nation or the world. He wants to know what is on the other side of the moon. We may act very sophisticated about space; but when the news comes that some body has a picture and can report what is on the other side of the moon, we are interested. Of course, GOD has built this into us, and sin has frustrated this in us; so the whole creation groans for that moment when the Son of GOD returns, when the sons of GOD are revealed for what they are, when our bodies are raised from the grave, when the desert shall blossom as the rose, when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, when men shall beat their swords into plowshares and nations shall study war no more; when righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; and there shall be peace without war or the threat of war or disease or death; when there shall be no tears and no pain.

This is the glory of Christianity, and this has been guaranteed to us by JESUS CHRIST. GOD help us to look forward to this. It is a legitimate hope, and Paul says we wait for it patiently; and when that moment comes, the whole created universe shares in the freedom of the sons of GOD.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

16 - Unshakeable Foundations

Chapter 16 -

UNSHAKEABLE FOUNDATIONS

Romans 8:31-39

Four of the most beautiful and profound assurances to be found anywhere in the Word of GOD close the 8th chapter. These are not, however, simply assurance for the believer, but, in addition, they constitute a strong defense of the integrity of GOD.

It is very important for us, especially in times of transition like today, to remember that the ground of our faith is the integrity, the character, the faithfulness of Almighty GOD. When we are inclined to fear, to hysteria, to panic, to doubt, to preoccupation with concerns which are in the Father's hands; we remind ourselves through passages such as these that GOD is absolutely faithful, that for Him nothing is too hard, nothing is impossible. As we consider these four wonderful promises, which are really one, bear in mind that Paul is emphasizing the absolute trustworthiness of the GOD in whom our faith rests. Here are four unshakeable foundations for confidence in any age or time.

In the middle of the eighth chapter Paul points out that there has been built into the very cosmos a frustration in which the whole created universe joins, including the children of GOD. This frustration is not final but will be resolved at the return of CHRIST when the sons of GOD, bought by His sacrifice, are revealed to the world. At that time the whole cosmos will participate in the emancipation of the sons of GOD. Now he crowns this profound view of history with these remarkable assurances.

The first begins with the 26th verse where Paul points out that one reason for Christian assurance is the faithful intercession of the SPIRIT of GOD, who prays for the saints according to the will of GOD. Prayerlessness is one of the sad symptoms of twentieth-century Christianity. Some years ago a survey was made of the time that preachers spend in prayer, and it was concluded that the average pastor spent about two minutes a day in prayer! If this be true, what do you suppose is the average of the people in the pew, inasmuch as there are at least certain inducements to prayer among pastors which may not be true of laymen.

This does not mean, of course, that we measure prayer in terms of length as though one who prays twenty minutes is obviously twice as prayerful as one who prays ten minutes. But certainly this is an indication that prayer is not taken very seriously. As a matter of fact, many sense impotency and powerlessness in the Church of JESUS CHRIST, much of which can be attributed to prayerlessness.

GOD sends the rain and the sun upon the just and the unjust. He is indiscriminate in certain of His gifts; they are for all of us, however good or evil, however righteous or unrighteous. But there are certain things which GOD does not give His people, except they pray. James says, "Ye have not,

because ye ask not (James 4:2)" I suppose that one of the major tragedies of the Church, perhaps in every generation but certainly in our century if they could be measured, would be the things that remain undone, the terrible poverty in the Church simply because of prayerlessness. How much remains undone because we do not ask GOD?

But there is a ray of light in this black prayerlessness; Paul declares that the "Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of GOD. (Romans 8:26-27)" What a remarkable fact that the SPIRIT of GOD is interceding for us even when we are prayerless ourselves! In verse 34 Paul reminds us that the SON also intercedes for us. A fact upon which the author of Hebrews bases the believer's security. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto GOD by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)" GOD the HOLY SPIRIT is interceding for us even when we are inarticulate in prayer, interceding for us even when we in our infirmity do not know for what to pray.

There is a significant phrase in the Acts at the instance of electing the deacons when the apostles, encumbered with the temporal affairs of the Church - widows, orphans, and the like, urged the Church to elect seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, (Acts 6:3)" and charge them with the temporal responsibilities; in order that we, the apostles said, may "give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word. (Acts 6:4)" There is this 'giving one's self to prayer,' that the HOLY SPIRIT may use that "given" time, that "given" surrender to intercede through the believer according to the will of the Father and to the glory of the Son of GOD. Even if you feel inarticulate in prayer, even if you are prone to be prayerless because you do not know how to pray, you may set apart a time in the day 'given to prayer' and to the Word, a time when you allow, if only for ten or fifteen minutes, the SPIRIT of GOD to pray in you and through you.

Actually, words in prayer are not for GOD but for man inasmuch as the Lord knows our thoughts before we think them. He knows them "afar off, (Psalms 139:2)" in the words of the Psalmist. He knows what we are going to think about tomorrow or the next day or ten years from now. We do not use words of prayer in order to inform GOD of that which He does not know. Words aid our concentration, our conscious relationship to the FATHER. Give yourself to prayer, reserve a time in the day, however small, that is "given" to prayer and the Word. Let it be a time when you have the sense of allowing GOD the HOLY SPIRIT to pray in you according to the will of the Father even though it may be to express a burden of concern which you cannot even verbalize.

The second remarkable foundation for assurance to the Christian is what we commonly call providence, in which I suppose almost everybody believes. The trouble is that we believe in providence when circumstances go well; we find ourselves disbelieving when circumstances are contrary. Here is one of the most profound promises in GOD's Word, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love GOD, to them who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)" No matter what happens, GOD is in it for good to His own glory, and the profit of those who love Him and are called of Him.

If you have responded to JESUS, you are called of the FATHER; about this there is no doubt whatsoever. In this the Word of GOD is quite explicit; JESUS said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. (John 6:44)" If you come to CHRIST you have been drawn there by the Father. JESUS said, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. (John 6:45)" If you have responded to the Gospel of the Lord JESUS CHRIST you have been taught of GOD. The very fact that you come to JESUS indicates you have been taught by GOD and drawn by the Father to Him; therefore, you qualify for this promise; you are one who is "called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)"

This is not to say that everything that happens to Christians is good or that Christians are immune to unfortunate circumstances, but GOD uses whatever happens for good. "All things work together for good"! (Romans 8:28) Circumstances may be evil or evil intended, but GOD is able by the catalyst of His grace to turn it to profit and benefit and blessing in the life of a believer.

Paul reinforces this promise in Romans 8:29-30 : "For whom He did foreknow, He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified"! Reformed theology asks this question, "What are the decrees of GOD?" The answer is, "The decrees of GOD are that GOD foreordains whatsoever comes to past."

Predestination* is not a humanly contrived dogma; it is derived from the Word of GOD. Calvin did not invent this word nor the doctrine which it describes; he discovered it in the Scriptures: the sovereignty of GOD, His Providence in the affairs of men, His care of men in the microscopic details of life is clear Biblical teaching. Of course we have difficulty with this doctrine just as we have difficulty with the doctrine of the Trinity; how can GOD be three-in-one? When we try to resolve that paradox, we generally emphasize the unity of GOD at the expense of His plurality or the plurality of GOD at the expense of His unity.

The same result often accrues when we try to rationalize the sovereignty of GOD in the affairs of men and reconcile it with man's freedom; we end up rejecting GOD's sovereignty and believing in man's freedom or vice versa. The Word of GOD teaches that GOD is sovereign and man is free at one and the same time; nothing takes GOD by surprise; He has not relaxed His controls. Nothing happens anywhere, any time, ever will - the bad as well as the good - that GOD does not control. He uses all things for His purposes. Paul recommends that we rest in this glorious reassurance.

It is a matter of history that much of the great art, or poetry and literature, the great music and drama have come out of suffering; the man of character is usually the man who has suffered; the life that is free from suffering is often the life that is empty or shallow or superficial or unsympathetic. Suffering and tragedy introduce into life a dimension which nothing else can. The righteous do suffer; the most righteous man who ever lived, the perfect man, suffered more than any other; but in the words of the author of Hebrews, He was made "perfect through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)" GOD works in everything for good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose. This is an irrevocable promise upon which our confidence is based.

The third unshakeable foundation is the sacrifice of His Son. Paul asks this question, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)" How do we

know that GOD is for us? He demonstrated this by the death of the Son upon the Cross of Calvary and His resurrection again from the dead. Note the statement that GOD is for us is based not upon anything existential or subjective but upon objective fact, upon historical events; CHRIST died on the cross and rose again from the dead; therefore, we know that GOD is for us. Now if GOD be for us, who can be against us? Who is there to oppose the one whose defense is Almighty GOD? Paul continues, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of GOD's elect? (Romans 8:33)" Who dares to condemn a child of GOD when the Judge Himself died on the cross for that child? What irresistible logic, what an unshakeable foundation for faith and hope and assurance! If you are ever inclined to wonder about GOD's care, GOD's sovereign overrule in your life, no matter what the circumstances may be, remember the Son of GOD on the cross is risen from the dead!

Finally, the fourth unshakeable foundation, which is really the ground for the others, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:35)" Can anything separate us from the love of GOD? Anything you mention, in heaven, on earth, under the earth; anything at any time, any force, and evil; can anything separate us from the love of GOD? The answer is "No!" Nothing, nothing, nothing! No matter what happens, and this is just another way of putting Romans 8:37, we are "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." It is significant to notice here that there can be no victory where there is no battle.

In my first pastorate during World War II, there was a young man, the only 4-F in the church who belonged to the young adult group. I approached him one day and asked him if he would serve as president of the young people's society. He said he would think about it for a week, after which he replied, "You know, I never like to fail at anything; and lest I fail as president of this department, I would like to decline."

What virtue is there in not failing if one never tries? The reason some people never fail is because they never do anything! The reason they have no victory is that they never have any battle. The Word of GOD declares "In all these things" we are super-victorious, "more than conquerors through Him that loved us. (Romans 8:37)" Every? thing that happens to you, ever will happen, that is happening now, however tragic, however difficult, however impossible, however hopeless, however inexplicable; in everything that has happened, will happen and is happening to you, GOD leads in victory to His own glory and to your eternal benefit.

The sum and substance of these remarkable assurances is simply this, that the Christian cannot lose! He is utterly, totally, irrevocably secure in JESUS CHRIST. Whatever happens to him GOD turns to blessing and profit by the miracle of His grace. This is the realism of the Christian faith, you see; GOD does not spare the Christian trouble. He does not insulate him against tragedy and difficulty; but He is with him in it and brings him through it and out of it more than a conqueror!

We are living in dark, unpredictable days; and it is not inconceivable that unprecedented catastrophe will come when those who have disregarded the Word of GOD, ignored the Church and gone their busy ways without prayer nor Bible nor Christian fellowship will be like animals.

Panicked by circumstances, groveling in the dust, they will run in all directions, beside themselves with fear. But there will be others on that day, thank GOD, men and women who are rooted and grounded in assurances such as these, who will manifest poise and equilibrium and leadership. We may come upon a time like this. GOD grant that when those who knew not JESUS are beside

themselves with fear, distracted by distractions, there shall be about them those who are firm because they are in CHRIST, secure now and forever.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

17 - Justice and Mercy

Chapter 17 -

JUSTICE AND MERCY

Romans 9:14-24

If one sought to be popular in the pulpit, to preach simply what folks like to hear, he certainly would skip over the 9th chapter of Romans, for not only is this a difficult chapter; it contains a very unpopular truth, a truth which we find ourselves intuitively resisting. What Paul is discussing in this chapter is the very knotty problem of the sovereignty of Almighty GOD; GOD reigns, He is the final authority and the final arbiter. Whatever He does is right; nothing happens outside of His control, however infinitesimal or microscopic! He is the ruler of the cosmos! He ordains whatever comes to pass; nothing takes Him by surprise. The question then is raised, if GOD is sovereign, is man free? Paul does not give us an explicit answer to that question but he does answer it implicitly, and we get more of an answer in the 10th and 11th chapters.

It is my conviction that this teaching is very practical. It is possible to be purely academic about it, to keep aloof from personal experience, but it was not so designed. Paul was writing to Christians for their reassurance, their edification, their encouragement; and especially in a day such as ours there ought to be strong encouragement, reassurance and confidence in such a passage as this. The important thing is, what kind of a GOD do you believe in? Is He a little GOD or is He the GOD of the Old and New Testaments? In the words of J. B. Phillips, "Is your GOD too small" for the times in which we live, or do you have faith in the GOD of the Book?

If we really believe in the GOD of the Book, fear is unbecoming, hysteria is unbecoming, panic is unbecoming; the need for Christians of poise and promise is going to increase, not diminish, in the days ahead. The importance of being oriented in the scriptural view of GOD has never been greater; therefore, GOD grant that His sovereignty shall not simply be an academic matter with us, but one of experience; that our faith, our trust, our confidence shall be rooted and grounded in the nature and the integrity of GOD.

Two issues are involved in Romans 9: first, Paul's deep concern for his own people, Israel; and secondly, his deeper concern to uphold the fidelity of Almighty GOD. He begins this chapter in Romans 9:1-3 by expressing his concern for Israel. "I say the truth in Christ," says he, "I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He does not resolve this problem in the 9th chapter; we must wait until the 10th and 11th, but this mention is made to indicate the fact that these three chapters are not the writing of an anti-Semitic but the writing of a Jew who was proud of his Jewish legacy and heritage; one who was so burdened for his own people that he could wish himself literally condemned if that would lead to their salvation. It reminds us of Moses, who in the midst of the murmuring of Israel while agonizing in prayer said, "Drop my name out of the Book of Life, if it be

possible to save this people!"

We are living in a day in which it is very easy to be misunderstood when one speaks with New Testament conviction.

Recently I had a rather lengthy telephone conversation with a Jewish lady who listens regularly to a devotional broadcast which I make. Though quite complimentary, she entertained deep concern about certain basic Christian truths because, being Jewish, she feared the possibility that these truths might be misconstrued and used to feed anti-Semitism. Two things ought to be said: first, we cannot stop preaching the truth in order to avoid this, which I told her. The heart of our message is the Gospel, which is that JESUS CHRIST was crucified for our sins; and if one cannot preach the Gospel, there is no point in preaching; this is the message and it must be preached even if it is offensive. Furthermore, this is not an anti-Semitic doctrine, nor does it imply that the Jews were "CHRIST-killers," a view held by ignorant people, however intelligent they may seem to be. It was the sin of man, Jew and Gentile, that put the Son of GOD upon the cross of Calvary, and Gentile and Jew alike must assume responsibility for the death of CHRIST.

What Paul is doing here is simply declaring certain facts about GOD, about Israel, and about the Gentile; and he is speaking out of a heart deeply compassionate toward Israel, willing to be sacrificed for her sake if necessary. He mentions Israel's advantages, Romans 9:4-5. "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, (When Israel was encamped, the tabernacle was at the center of the community; and rising out from the Holy of Holies over the Ark of the Covenant was the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of flame by night, indicating GOD's presence and glory.) and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, (The Book of Leviticus deals with the service of GOD, Israel's worship.) and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Let us never forget this, that the One Whom we worship was born of a Jew!

Yet with all of these advantages, Israel in large measure, rejected her own MESSIAH, not entirely, however, as we shall see, and therefore every advantage compounded her judgment. This is one of the terrible implications in preaching, to realize that if you illuminate truth the one who hears, if he does not accept the truth and obey it, is judged by the very truth which is proclaimed. Judgment increases with every hearing of the Gospel if it is rejected, the truth was meant to be obeyed, not simply intellectually apprehended.

The question then arises, if Israel with all of these advantages rejected GOD and is therefore outside the pale of His love, how can we take seriously what we have just read in the 8th chapter of Romans for did not Paul say, "All things work together for good to them that love GOD, to them who are the called according to His purpose? (Romans 8:28)" Was not Israel loved of GOD? Was not Israel called according to His purpose? He asks the question, "If God be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)" Was not GOD for Israel - who then can be against her? The whole principle, you see, of the faithfulness and fidelity of GOD is involved in this question of the Jew, GOD's chosen people, to whom belonged all of these advantages through history. What about them if they are now cut off? And so we ask: Does Jewish rejection of the MESSIAH constitute the failure of GOD? The answer is no; this fulfills the very purpose of GOD; this is the unfolding of GOD's will in history.

In the light of Paul's glorious declaration at the end of chapter 8, how is it that the chosen of GOD have now been rejected by GOD? He answers it this way (Romans 9:6-7), "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel (he will amplify this later) Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children." He then quotes from the Old Testament, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Isaac was a miracle. Abraham was past a hundred and Sarah, who had never been able to bear a child, was ninety. GOD said, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son. (Genesis 18:10)" GOD meant what He said, and Isaac was the son of the promise. Now in Isaac is true Israel called, they are the children of the promise, and it is these children of the promise who are reckoned as true Israel, who are reckoned as the descendants of Abraham. We will see at the end of the chapter that all who have faith are the descendants of the true Israel.

Paul has already told us this in the 4th chapter; this is not a new doctrine. You recall that Abraham and Sarah in their impatience tried to work out this promise in their own way: Sarah gave Abraham her handmaiden Hagar as a wife, and of that union was born Ishmael. Who was Ishmael? The father of the Arab, and of the Arab came Islam.

This is the picture. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called, (Genesis 21:12)" and having illustrated it with Sarah, he illustrates it with Rebecca, a stronger illustration because he says in Romans 9:10-13, "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Here it is though very difficult for us to accept; when they were still in the womb of their mother, their destiny was foreordained of GOD! Before we were born, our destiny (not salvation) was ordered of the Lord; indeed we are told in the Word of GOD, called or elect "before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)" And we see that election in the Old Testament was of the Hebrews over all the Gentiles, and in the New Testament, it is the Lord's Church.

But this raises a serious problem. If before Jacob and Esau were born GOD already loved one and hated the other before one had the opportunity to earn His disfavor and the other had an opportunity to earn His favor, how then could GOD blame Esau? Is GOD unjust? Is He unfair? And Paul uses the strongest negative in the Bible in answering, "GOD forbid. (Romans 9:14)" I should like to say here that this ought to be the first answer. Can GOD make a mistake? However unjust what GOD does may seem to us, is it really unjust? Oh, how desperately we need to understand today that we ought to allow nothing to impugn the integrity of Almighty GOD. GOD is GOD! Of course, whatever GOD does is just for He is a just GOD!

That is, nothing that Esau could do would force GOD to allow Him to be the chosen race - this was for Isaac and his seed alone. In this sense, GOD's decision was "irresistible."

There are those who, unwilling somehow to rest upon the integrity of GOD, try to explore and explain these things; but they succeed only in explaining them away, thereby raising greater difficulties theologically and intellectually. The fact is that men of science accept many things which they cannot explain; this is not peculiar to Christian faith; this is not wishful thinking; this is not contrary to reason nor to intellect. "Let God be true, but every man a liar. (Romans 3:4)"

Paul said in an earlier chapter, GOD is not unjust. He supports his argument from the Old Testament: did not GOD say to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion?" (Romans 9:15)" Implied here, you see, is the fact that man has no claim on GOD but His mercy. GOD would not be unjust to reject all men. On that occasion when JESUS CHRIST lifted the veil between the now and the hereafter, the story of the rich man and Lazarus, "the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me!" (Luke 16:22-24) He was in torment, but he did not ask for justice; he asked for mercy. Never in history or beyond history will any man, whatever his destiny, question the justice of GOD; therefore Paul says, verse 16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (Romans 9:17)"

Pharaoh also is an example of this. GOD said, for this purpose He raised up Pharaoh, in order that He might demonstrate His justice, His mercy, and His glory. And so did GOD raise up Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin; and so has GOD raised up Khrushchev. GOD is free to have mercy on whom He will, and He hardeneth whom He will!

Paul gives two answers, first, "Who art thou that repliest against (questions) GOD? (Romans 9:20)" Now that may seem to be begging the question, but ponder its logic. Who am I to question GOD? This is one of our problems; in our human sophistication we dare even to question GOD! Then with irresistible logic, he asks (Romans 9:20-21), "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why has thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"

What kind of a GOD do you believe in anyway? Just a big Santa Claus, or do you believe in a just GOD who has everything in control, whose actions are never questionable?

There is another answer intimated here beginning at Romans 9:22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" Just a glimpse into the patience of GOD with men that He could have rejected long before; as though GOD is waiting, hoping that they will see the light, giving them every opportunity to turn their hearts to repentance, enduring their irreligion, their pride, and their sin.

Then he quotes from Hosea and reminds Israel what GOD had promised in Old Testament times, that He was going to raise up a people that were "not My people" (Romans 9:25) and a nation that was "not beloved" in order that He might show His glory in them. From Isaiah he suggests a theme he is going to cover later, the remnant in Israel; even Isaiah understood that not all of Israel would be saved, but those who were descended from Isaac, that is, "a remnant. (Romans 9:27)"

Then he comes to the final answer beginning at the 30th verse; yes, GOD is sovereign but Israel is responsible, for she stumbled over the stone, the rock, JESUS CHRIST!

Notice his language (Romans 9:30-33), "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness." Why? "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." They stumbled over the stumbling stone, "Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of

offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Why did Israel fall? Because she pursued righteousness by works, not because she was indifferent to righteousness; she was interested in righteousness on her own conditions.

Recall what the serpent said to Eve in the Garden? He did not say, disobey GOD, eat this fruit and go to hell. He said, "in the day ye eat thereof... ye shall be as gods! (Genesis 3:5)" What the serpent insinuated to Eve was this, "Look, you be godlike on my conditions instead of GOD's conditions." This is original sin, and it is the root of all religion in history; be righteous on your own conditions; be righteous your own way; follow your own law, your own ethics, your own morals. This is the reason why Israel did not obtain righteousness because she sought it by works rather than by faith. While pursuing righteousness through your own good works; you stumble over the chief stumbling stone, JESUS CHRIST.

This is the great hindrance, greater than any other; this is the greatest sin, rejecting the love of GOD in CHRIST, the righteousness, which is a gift of GOD through faith! JESUS CHRIST is the issue. What does He mean to you? Are you trusting yourself or Him?

~ end of chapter 17 ~

18 - The Way of Salvation

Chapter 18 -

THE WAY OF SALVATION

Romans 10:1-13

The message of the 9th chapter of Romans is the sovereignty of GOD and the election of those who are saved. Scripturally this doctrine brooks no argument; quarrel with this, you quarrel with the Apostle Paul and the Word of GOD. Clearly does Paul illustrate the truth with the story of Esau and Jacob whose destiny before they were born when still carried in their mother's womb was determined by GOD before either could do good or bad that he might be justified or condemned. GOD said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (Romans 9:13)" No doubt about this.

Paul is very clear in Romans 9 concerning the sovereignty of GOD and the election of those who are saved. Now, however, Romans 10 deals with the responsibility of those who are lost, for Paul makes it equally clear that one is lost because he rejects the truth as it is in JESUS CHRIST, but because he rejects the Word of faith. So if we have GOD's sovereignty in Romans 9, we have the other side of the coin, man's responsibility in Romans 10; man is responsible for his own lostness.

Much more space could be devoted to this theme of the sovereignty of GOD and the responsibility of man, but we would not come to the place where we found a neat compromise between these two paradoxical truths; the Word of GOD teaches both to be true: GOD is sovereign, man is free and responsible. We cannot finally resolve these two truths which to us seem to contradict each other, but this is not the only doctrine with which we have this difficulty.

We believe in the unity of GOD because the Bible clearly teaches the unity of GOD, "The Lord our GOD is one Lord"; we are monotheists; we believe in one GOD, but the Bible also teaches that the Father is GOD, the Son is GOD, and the HOLY SPIRIT is GOD. The Bible does not teach that each of them is one-third of GOD, the three composing one GOD; but that GOD is GOD the Father, the Son, and the HOLY SPIRIT; they are three, and yet they are one. How can three be one? Men who insist on resolving this paradox do so at the expense of one truth or the other. Either they sacrifice the deity of JESUS CHRIST and the deity of the HOLY SPIRIT to uphold the belief in one GOD, or they sacrifice the unity of GOD. Either way a basic truth about GOD is sacrificed.

So it is with this: GOD is sovereign, man is free and responsible. Both are true. How can both be true? With this, as with the trinity and other ultimate truths, we must wait until we are able to comprehend more fully. Paul reminds us, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)" For the present hold both to be true because the Word of GOD teaches both and does not attempt to reconcile them nor to resolve the paradox.

The general theme of Romans 10 is that Israel is responsible for her lostness because she has rejected the word of faith. Paul begins the 10th as he does the 9th chapter, expressing his concern for the salvation of Israel. He is a Jew, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews, (Ph 3:5)" as proud of his Hebrew legacy as any Jew. He confesses, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (Romans 10:1)" Here we have a Jew concerned for the salvation of Jews.

This is important for us to see inasmuch as it is not uncommon for Christians to have the idea that the Jews have their religion and should be left alone; and it is not uncommon for Jews to think that Christians are anti-Semitic when they press the claims of the Gospel. To be sure, there are Christians who are anti-Semitic, but they are less than Christian in such an attitude; they forget that our LORD JESUS CHRIST was a Jew. This Jew, Saul of Tarsus, held in his heart before GOD continually the hope and the prayer for the salvation of Israel, and we can wisely embrace his concern.

In the next two verses he says some very amazing things. He says concerning Israel, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2)" There is such a thing, you see, as being ignorantly zealous; and if there is anything worse than ignorance, it is ignorance mixed with zeal. What was the nature of this ignorance? Paul said (Romans 10:3) they were "ignorant of God's righteousness" and they were "going about to establish their own righteousness." He suggests two kinds of righteousness, the righteousness of GOD and the righteousness of man, which are mutually exclusive. Paul declares that the righteousness of man is in direct opposition to the righteousness of GOD, which is the major lesson of the chapter. It is not so much our evil, our wrong conduct that is the enemy of the righteousness of GOD; it is our own righteousness, our obsession to self-justification. "Going about to establish their own righteousness," Paul says, they "have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

Paul himself, of all men, certainly appreciated this principle because he, more than any of his contemporaries, resented and resisted and rebelled against the righteousness of GOD until he capitulated to the living CHRIST on the road to Damascus. Indeed, he became the chief enemy of the Church in his zeal for GOD, in his efforts to establish his own righteousness, and he declared in his testimony (Ph 3:4-7) that "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more"; after which he lists the reasons for which he could boast: "circumcised the eighth day," etc., etc. He testified "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," but he continued, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

The real human dilemma, the most devastating "evil" is man-made righteousness! It is man's religion which is the supreme expression of sin in history, man's congenital, constitutional, compulsive effort to justify himself, man attempting to establish his own righteousness - coming to GOD on his own conditions rather than GOD's.

This was the chief error of Israel. In the last half of the chapter, Paul substantiates this by referring to the Psalms, Moses and Isaiah; Israel heard this word of faith; Israel understood this word of faith, but Israel rejected this word of faith. His quotation from the 30th chapter of Deuteronomy is a graphic illustration of a devout scholar of the Old Testament viewing it in the light of JESUS CHRIST. He says in Romans 10:6-8, "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But

what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach."

In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:14) Paul finds the word of faith which Israel rejected. Observe the principle, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart. (Romans 10:8)" What had they done? They had externalized the law and had kept it to the letter but rejected it in spirit. They had the "form of godliness, but [denied] the power thereof, (2 Timothy 3:5)" the form without the substance; and "the LORD looketh on the heart! (1 Samuel 16:7)"

This is really the essence of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-28): the law said, "Thou shalt not kill," JESUS said, "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." The law said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," JESUS said, that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." GOD looks not upon the act but upon the heart. It is possible to keep the letter of the law yet sin inwardly. This is the human device, the Satanic strategy, to resist the righteousness of GOD in JESUS CHRIST and to justify it by keeping the law.

Remember that the serpent's appeal to Eve in the Garden of Eden was not to deny GOD, disobey and go to hell; on the contrary he urged, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods. (Genesis 3:5)" The very appeal that the serpent made to Eve in the Garden was the appeal to GOD-likeness, but a GOD-likeness on man's terms.

Through the centuries and the millenniums men have invented one religion after another, "going about to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3)" and refusing to submit to the righteousness of GOD. This is the root problem in history; it is religion that opposes the grace of GOD in CHRIST; it is man's own self-justification that resists the righteousness of GOD which is a free gift.

Now verse 4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:4)" Think of the word "end" in two ways: CHRIST is the end of the law, period; no longer law, now grace. Paul says as much: "We are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:15)" This does not mean that the person under grace is lawless or licentious; indeed it does not, for grace has infinitely more power to constrain a man to righteousness than has the law. The law has no power to produce righteousness (Romans 8:3); it did not have in Old Testament times and it does not have today! The second way the word "end" can be understood is in the sense of destination.

CHRIST is the destination of the law for righteousness; the law was designed for one purpose, to bring us to CHRIST. He uses an interesting analogy in Galatians, the law was "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." The law is the highway which leads to CHRIST for righteousness, and thus it had become the enemy of CHRIST. The law had taken the place of GOD. Ethics, morality, works are our modern Gentile equivalent, that is, human goodness.

Two kinds of righteousness, the righteousness of GOD and the righteousness of man, and the two are utterly incompatible because the righteousness of man leads invariably and inevitably to self-righteousness. Having externalized the law's requirements, I do certain things; I refrain from others. I thereby feel superior to the man who does not live by my rules; hence the law or works breed the "superior" person: who is egotistical, self-righteous and pharisaical. But what does the

righteousness of faith say? "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord JESUS, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9-10)

Excluding those who are indifferent to a good life, we are, each one of us, either zealous to establish our own righteousness or to put our faith in the gift of righteousness by grace through JESUS CHRIST; either we have our own righteousness or we have GOD's righteousness. You will know, depending on whether you are trusting CHRIST for salvation or "going about to establish [your] own righteousness." Pathetically familiar is the man who has been in the church all his life and is still unsaved because he conceives of Christianity as man doing his best by certain moral and ethical criteria. But he has never received the gift of GOD through faith in JESUS CHRIST. Busy trying to establish his own righteousness, he has not submitted himself to the righteousness of GOD in CHRIST.

Is the righteousness that you possess your own, that which you have managed by your own effort, or is it the righteousness of GOD received as a free gift through JESUS CHRIST? Bear in mind that if your righteousness is your own, it represents enmity to the cross of CHRIST, to the righteousness of GOD; your own good works are not just something less than the righteousness of GOD; they are hostile to GOD's righteousness. Man's own goodness is the enemy of GOD's best, and it is more difficult often to reach such a person than it is a man on skid-row who is already disillusioned about himself and knows he has no righteousness in which he can boast; while the good man clings to his own righteousness and refuses the gift of righteousness in JESUS CHRIST.

Paul gives a wonderful little sequence here. "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:11-14) Having read this, you have had a preacher. If never before, now you have heard the Gospel, and you may even have believed the Gospel; but have you called upon the Lord for salvation? You have given approval to the doctrine but have you personally appropriated it? "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!"

Paul closes chapter 10 by showing that Israel herself is among those who have heard but have not obeyed. The ignorance of which Paul wrote in the beginning has no excuse; Israel has heard and rejected, a fact which he verifies from both Isaiah and Moses. Using a quote from Isaiah, Paul portrays the unwearying patience of GOD as He extends His offer of love and pardon to His own rebellious people. In this context Paul introduces one of the uses to which GOD will put the inclusion of non-Jews into the covenant of promise; a fact which will provoke Israel to jealousy and about which Paul will say more later.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

19 - The Unsearchable Judgments of God

Chapter 19 -

THE UNSEARCHABLE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

Romans 11

In the time of JESUS CHRIST, the idea was quite generally held by Jews and Gentiles alike that the promise GOD had made to Abraham was reserved for the Jews to the exclusion of all others. Even Peter had this difficulty, so much so that when the SPIRIT of GOD led him to go to a Gentile, it necessitated a special vision. There were Jews, of course, who understood that Abraham's promise was for all men. Simeon, for example, who came into the temple on that day when Joseph and Mary brought the infant JESUS to present him to the LORD; Simeon, a godly Jew, took the baby in his arms saying (Luke 2:30-32), "mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

Other Jews as well recognized that GOD's promise to Abraham included non-Jews, that in the MESSIAH were all the nations of the earth to be blessed; but most of them had narrowed it down, conceiving it as exclusively for Jews. Today the shoe is on the other foot and Gentiles exclude the Jews from the promise GOD made to Abraham and fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST. Paul, realizing this, writes this chapter with these Gentiles in mind as he wrestles with the apparent exclusion of the Jews from the covenant of grace in JESUS CHRIST.

In the 9th chapter Paul points out that Israel failed to respond to the love of GOD, to be sure; but this did not constitute the failure of GOD's promise to Abraham. That is, in the words of Paul (Romans 9:18), "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." In chapter 10 he shows that though Israel failed to obtain this promise, it was not because of GOD's election but because of Israel's rejection; though GOD is sovereign, man is responsible when he rejects the Lord JESUS CHRIST and is unsaved because he rejects the gift of grace through JESUS CHRIST in whom GOD's promise to Abraham was fulfilled. Now in Romans 11 Paul finalizes this matter of the apparent exclusion of Israel from the gift of grace in JESUS CHRIST. He begins (Romans 11:1) with the question, "Hath God cast away his people?" It is as if Paul were thinking about all the remarkable promises in the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel. What about these remarkable prophecies and promises, are they all in the past? Is Israel's day over? His answer is a categorical "no!" which he amplifies in the balance of the chapter.

Paul points out two things: first, GOD's rejection of Israel because of Israel's rejection of GOD, is neither total nor final; it is only partial and temporary. In the first 10 verses he shows that Israel's rejection of GOD, or GOD's rejection of Israel, is not total, he himself being an illustration of this fact. He reminds his reader that he is a Jew in the covenant of grace; he has received the gift of eternal life through JESUS CHRIST the LORD, and he is an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin.

In this he is not alone; even now there is a remnant of Israel as there has always been a remnant who were faithful. Never was all of Israel faithful to GOD. This is a matter of Old Testament history; the Book of Judges, for example, is such a record. As his second illustration he selects a very familiar incident in the life of Elijah when he actually prayed to GOD against Israel. He prayed (Romans 11:3), "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." GOD's answer was (Romans 11:4), "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal"

Parenthetically, two matters ought to be mentioned here which are peripheral to Paul's theme but very practical and relevant today. First, Christianity is in the minority, a fact which should be borne in mind in our attitude toward other minorities. Anti-Semitism, for example, is not only not in harmony with the Word of GOD but is contradictory to JESUS CHRIST and the Christian life. The Word of GOD declares quite clearly that salvation is of the Jew, and our SAVIOUR the LORD Himself was a Jew! It is completely unlike JESUS CHRIST to be anti-Semitic, unlike JESUS CHRIST to discriminate against any minority. We are a minority - always will be! "CHRIST has His thousands while the devil has his tens of thousands!"

A second very practical principle to be drawn from this is that it is a mistake to equate any culture or any civilization one hundred percent with GOD's way, as though, for example, the kingdom of GOD is identical to the American way of life. We are inclined to this thinking, especially in a period of history when our civilization is threatened within and without, that those who oppose us are one hundred percent wrong while we are one hundred percent right, and therefore we may expect GOD to protect us. In other words, our attitude is like Israel's in the Old Testament economy, and GOD had to discipline them again and again and again. What agent did GOD use to discipline Israel - a more godly nation? On the contrary, He used a godless nation to discipline His own people!. This too is a matter of history, and there is nothing so desperately needed in America today as humility and a repentant spirit before the LORD GOD. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord and ask His forgiveness for our pride, our self-seeking, our materialism, our idolatry!

Having used Elijah's despair as the illustration, Paul shows that Israel failed to receive the promise but the elect obtained it! The rest, says Paul, were hardened because they rejected GOD's truth, and he draws from Israel's prophecy and David's to document this. A psychological law is involved here. When men refuse the truth, their hearts are hardened to the truth. Refuse to obey the word which the SPIRIT of GOD speaks to your heart on a given Sunday morning, it will be easier to disobey the following Sunday morning, still easier the third Sunday morning, until you can hear the truth and remain utterly impervious to its penetrating, convicting, convincing power. It becomes possible to vegetate in a pew, and GOD knows this has happened to many who call themselves Christian. They do not even hear the truth any longer because, having hardened their own hearts, GOD hardens their hearts as well! Not to obey the truth of GOD bears serious consequences.

Another word about election, inasmuch as Paul says twice in this passage very clearly, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it! (Romans 11:7)" This doctrine of election which is taught in the Word of GOD is not to discourage the unbeliever; it is not to give the idea that the covenant of grace is a very narrow and exclusive covenant, which, by and large, eliminates the majority of people. Nor do those outside of JESUS CHRIST ever think of it in this way; it is usually Christians who take this position.

To be sure, there are those outside of CHRIST who academically quarrel about the sovereignty of GOD, election and predestination, and use this as a reason to reject the whole Bible; but we need not take them too seriously. If they did not have this, they would find other ways to rationalize their rejection of Scripture. Excuses for rejecting truth are not difficult to find. But this doctrine is intended to encourage the believer, to show him the strength of his salvation, the absolute assurance and guarantee of it.

The finest statement we have of this is in Hebrews 6:13-20. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Men indeed swear by greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered." The author is simply insisting here that you who have received the Lord JESUS CHRIST have not done so by any merit of your own. You have been called of GOD, through the Gospel, to do so; to Him belongs all the glory, for it is not of works; it is of grace. You can be absolutely sure of your call because GOD guarantees it by two irrevocable things, His promise and His oath! Therefore, entertain no doubt whatsoever concerning your eternal welfare when you trust in JESUS CHRIST and His finished work on the cross of Calvary!

In the second half of chapter 10, Paul demonstrates that GOD has a future plan for Israel. The first ten verses show Israel's rejection of GOD or GOD's rejection of Israel - not to be complete or total - but partial; there is a group of Israelites who have received the Gospel. In the second half of the chapter rejection is not final but temporary because GOD still has a plan for the nation Israel. Beginning at the 11th verse, he says that through Israel's rejection a way has been opened for salvation to be brought to the non-Jew. This too was part of the promise, "In thee," said GOD to Abraham, "shall all the nations be blessed. (Galatians 3:8)" So Paul argues, if Israel's failure resulted in blessing and riches for the Gentile world, how much more will Israel's inclusion in grace mean to the whole world? If by their temporary and partial exclusion the whole world was blessed, how much more will the whole world be blessed when they are again included?

He uses two little analogies which make it sound rather complicated, but it really is not. He speaks of the dough and the lump, the dough being holy, the lump is holy. If you take a piece from a lump of good dough, the piece will be good; but if you have a piece of dough that is bad, probably the whole lump of dough from which the piece was taken is bad. If the root is good, the branches will be good; or if the root is holy, the branches are holy. Israel is the dough, the lump. Israel is the root.

He is addressing his remarks, remember, to the Gentiles, not wishing them to be guilty of Israel's error, of which he himself was guilty when he persecuted the Church. Paul warns the Gentiles against the presumption that because the Jews have rejected CHRIST, GOD has rejected them. Paul urges Gentiles to be humble in their position because salvation is only by grace through faith

in JESUS CHRIST; and GOD still has a plan for the Jews. GOD has used Gentile salvation to humble the Jew. Humility on the part of the Gentile is therefore becoming.

Finally, he holds out this hope for Israel. GOD has a plan, still future, which involves Israel. So he argues that if GOD will include the Gentiles, who were as a wild olive branch, and graft them on to a holy root; how much more will He take the good olive branch that has been broken off and graft it back in again. This logic is irresistible. He strengthens this argument with wonderful passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah, interpreting these in relation to this future plan of GOD for Israel. It needs to be said that in those passages it is not clear whether he refers to the first advent of the MESSIAH or the second advent of the MESSIAH, but one thing is very clear. GOD still has a plan for Israel. He is talking about the nation Israel, not every individual in it, any more than he means every individual Gentile when he refers to the "fullness of the Gentiles."

The chapter closes with a glorious doxology (Romans 11:33-36), one of the most beautiful in the Book. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of GOD! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory forever. Amen."

Paul's doxology is a testimony to the integrity of GOD, the fidelity of GOD, the faithfulness of GOD! What he is saying is that GOD's ways are incomprehensible, but they are to be trusted! Oh, how we need to realize that our faith rests in the integrity of GOD! This is what makes stable, poised Christians. This is what galvanizes a man into proper and effective action at the right time when storms come because he knows that GOD is on His throne, that GOD reigns, and he does not have to be afraid. Paul is speaking for the integrity of GOD, and so ought we speak for the integrity of GOD in these tumultuous days in human affairs.

There are three lessons in this chapter: First, salvation is by grace alone. Secondly, the saved are absolutely secure because their salvation rests upon the Divine call through the Gospel of GOD and His election, And finally, GOD's ways, though incomprehensible, are trustworthy. Depend on it!

~ end of chapter 19 ~

20 - The Christian Ethic

Chapter 20 -

THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

Romans 12:1-8

Having presented the doctrinal basis of Christian faith in the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul now turns to the Christian's responsibility in the light of the truth he has set forth. This pattern is typical of Paul's epistles: doctrine first, then ethics; what man is to believe about GOD, then what duty GOD requires of those who believe.

Doctrine was basic but Paul expected belief to issue in goodness. Indeed, this is the very nature of Christian truth, the essence of Christian doctrine, "truth is in order to goodness." Doctrine which does not issue in life is sub-Christian; it is not doctrine as the Apostle Paul understood it, which suggests that there was no controversy between Paul and James. When James wrote "Faith without works is dead, (James 2:20, James 2:26)" he was agreeing with Paul who believed doctrine ought to issue in life.

To illustrate: you will recall the closing verses of the 5th chapter (Romans 5:20-21), "the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by JESUS Christ our Lord." That is to say, the truth about grace is that it produces righteousness. Or he puts it this way, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of GOD unto salvation to everyone that believed.(Romans 1:16)" Why is it the power of GOD unto salvation? "For therein (that is, in the Gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed. (Romans 1:17)"

In other words, it is the Gospel which produces righteousness in the believer! This is the heart of Christian doctrine, you see, that GOD has acted in history, and Christian ethics is the result of man's response to GOD's action in history. GOD works, man responds - this is the Christian life. Christian ethics is not what man does for GOD, himself or others, but what man lets GOD do in and through him to His own glory. Christian ethics is the work of GOD in the believer!

Paul expresses it this way in another context, 2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Grace abounding, good works abounding; it is abounding grace which abounds to good works. The only work that pleases GOD in the believer is the work that He initiates in the believer. Good deeds that we initiate for GOD are not Christian ethics. Good deeds that we initiate for our fellow man are not Christian ethics. Christian ethics are the result of the grace of GOD operating in the life of the yielded believer, a fact we shall understand more thoroughly with Paul's very first ethical admonition, which is the foundation and the fountainhead of all Christian ethics.

Before we see this, let us take one other look at the matter of ethics. We have been discussing the sovereignty of GOD with the related truths, election and/or predestination. Will you observe, please, that whenever the word "election" or "chosen" or "predestined" or "ordained" is used, it is never an end in itself but always as a means to an end; it is always qualified in the Word of GOD.

For example, Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. . ." But there is no period there, yet so often in our thinking we put a period there when we talk about being chosen of GOD. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Chosen to be holy and blameless in love! To be chosen of GOD means to be holy and blameless in love, the fruit of the choosing of GOD in the life.

Or Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works. . ." "Created"! Only GOD can create. Man can invent, man can discover, but only GOD can create; that word is reserved for GOD alone. We are (Ephesians 2:10) "His workmanship" (that is, GOD's workmanship) "created," which only GOD can do, "in Christ JESUS unto good works." "Created... unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them." "Created unto good works," ordained by GOD to walk in good works. Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate," but there is no period there. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son . . ." Predestination is unto conformation to the image of JESUS CHRIST. These things all apply to those that are "in Christ, not to those that are not yet saved!

Election is not unto privilege but unto responsibility. We are not predestinated unto a status, but unto service. We are not saved just to be made safe; we are saved in order to serve; and Christianity which is preoccupied with its own personal safety is an aberration of legitimate and authentic Christianity. It is the caricature of a true Christian.

There is a sense in which the saved person, the authentically saved person, is preoccupied with the will of GOD, absorbed in the will of GOD; he then completely is possessed by the will of GOD. His own welfare is really quite secondary. Moses wished that his name might be blotted out of the Book of Life for the sake of his people Israel. How different are Moses and Paul from the person who is so busily preoccupied about his own eternal safety that the welfare and salvation of others, and the commission of the Lord, are secondary if they have any place at all in his life. The very word 'redemption' implies "purchased for a use," purchased for a purpose. We have been redeemed; we have been bought by JESUS CHRIST in order to be used by Him for His purposes in the world.

Therefore, Christian ethics, rightly understood, flow out of the work of GOD in the life of a believer. It is what GOD does for us, and in us, and to us, and through us. Remember JESUS' word in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:16). "Let" (not 'make', as though you could do anything about it, as though you could generate it); "Let" (allow, permit, consent) "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and. . ." And what? And say, "My, isn't he a wonderful Christian?" never! "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Why will they glorify your Father which is in heaven? Because the good works are the works of the Father. Man cannot be given any credit for them. For this reason Paul's instruction to the ethical portion of Romans begins with that remarkable verse at the end of the 11th chapter, Romans 11:36, Romans 12:1), "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . ." All things are "of Him," all things are "through Him," all things are "to Him," to Him belongs the "glory for ever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD . . ."

The first thing to see about Christian ethics is that they begin with dedication to CHRIST. This is not the ultimate, this is the beginning of Christian ethics. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, and be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, (Romans 12:1-2) " that is, that you may demonstrate the will of GOD, that it is "good, and acceptable, and perfect." Paul is going to talk about all these things that are good and acceptable and perfect with GOD in the rest of the epistle.

The first two verses in Romans 12 are basic to everything that follows in this chapter as well as chapters 13, 14, and 15; what follows in these chapters then, is that which is "good, and acceptable, and perfect" with GOD. Now presenting one's body a "living sacrifice" and being "not conformed to this world" but being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" is the foundation and fountainhead of Christian ethics. Until you have responded to the love of GOD in JESUS CHRIST in this way, nothing else you do is significant; GOD does not even see it.

Christian ethics begins with dedication to GOD, JESUS did say love your neighbor, and He did say love your enemy, and He did say a lot of other things, but the first thing He said is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38)" You may be an ethical man and ignore this commandment and thereby be guilty of the greatest sin, for this is the greatest commandment.

As a matter of fact, there are those who travel in Russia who say there is a kind of moral Puritanism in Russia - for quite another reason, to be sure - but the point is, even atheists can be ethical if it pays. Paul is discussing something infinitely more than just human goodness, man-made ethics; he is talking about the very nature of GOD as it is expressed in the life of the believer.

Some years ago at a church conference, I closed a series of messages by speaking on this theme: your body is the temple of GOD; He desires to dwell in it, possess it, and use it for His purposes in the world. When I had finished, because it was the closing of the weekend conference, I invited any to stand who wished to present their bodies as living sacrifices unto the Lord.

The first person to rise quickly to her feet was a very lovely elderly woman. Another older woman, then an older man, after which many others rose. I was curious because I had been impressed with this lady who was lovely and unusually gracious; so as soon as possible I made my way to her and asked, "Do you mind telling me why you so quickly stood to your feet this evening when I gave that invitation?"

Her answer was this, "I am eighty-eight years old, and I have been a church member all my life, but I never knew until tonight that GOD wanted my body, and I stood quickly because I don't have very much time left!" Is it possible for us to be nice, respectable people and never present our bodies to GOD as a living sacrifice? But if we have not done that, we have not even begun to live the Christian life GOD's way! Have you presented your body a living sacrifice to JESUS CHRIST? Have you? You will know if you have; this is as definite as responding to any other kind of invitation. Have you? If you are not sure, you probably have not. This has nothing to do with being a good person. Of course you are good; a bad person would not be interested in this book. Have you presented your body a living sacrifice?

Now notice that first it is dedication; it is making a sacrifice; that is the reason why it is so thrilling when young people do it, because they have a lot of life left to be used to the glory of GOD. It is never too late to do this, for a lady eighty-eight years old can. It is never too soon to do it, so that all of your life can be possessed and used by JESUS CHRIST to do His will in the world. Present your body a living sacrifice; this is holy and acceptable unto GOD; this is your reasonable service. I asked a group of junior high young people what they thought "reasonable" meant. You know their answer? They said, "It would be unreasonable to do any less than that!" It is! It is irrational not to present your body a living sacrifice to GOD.

Then Paul continues, "be not conformed to this world. (Romans 12:2)" It sounds very innocent, but if you are trying to keep up with the Joneses you are failing in Christian ethics because a Christian does not try to keep up with the Joneses. He does not try to keep up with anybody else; he lets CHRIST conform him to His own image. This is basically internal, but it expresses itself externally. Let your mind be transformed by renewing, by a renewing process; allow CHRIST to mold your thoughts.

Instead of being motivated the way the world is motivated let yourself be motivated by the will of GOD so that you begin to see things with CHRIST's eyes, from CHRIST's point of view. You look at things CHRIST's way, you think things CHRIST's way, you have what Paul calls "the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)" You actually see life the way JESUS sees life! This is to have one's mind transformed. This will result if you refuse to allow the world to conform you to its mold. "Everybody is doing it, therefore I must!" This is being conformed to this world.

John in his first epistle defines worldliness as "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16)" Motivated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life is being conformed to this world. Let the SPIRIT of GOD transform your mind until you have the mind of CHRIST.

Paul discusses discipleship in the next verse, 3 through 8, and it is significant that he begins with self-evaluation. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Do not think too highly of yourself, Paul says, that is conceit; but do not think too little of yourself; that is also conceit, inverted pride, which is the worst kind. Christians do not crawl because GOD has given to each one a measure of faith. Then he goes into the beautiful diversity in the body of CHRIST, "as we have many members in one body... so we, being many, are one body (Romans 12:4-5); and every member - every member - has a responsibility, a place in the body and its functions.

He amplifies this in the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians where he points out that the eye cannot say to the ear, "I have no need of you," nor can the ear say to the eye, "You do not need me." Not only is it wrong for someone in the Church to say, "I do not need anybody else"; it is wrong for someone in the Church to say, "Nobody else needs me." We desperately need each other as members of a body; we belong together, each is important to all, and all are important to each. For this reason Paul admonishes us to evaluate ourselves in terms of the measure of grace that GOD has given, for GOD has given each a call; let each obey that call to His glory.

Wherever you are that is GOD's call for you; and if it is not, you ought to be some other place. But the way to know whether or not you are where you ought to be is to assume that you are where GOD has called you and to conduct yourself there as though it is GOD's will; and if it is not, He will soon redirect you. How we need to recapture this understanding from the Word of GOD, that in the New Testament there is no basic distinction between the clergy and the laity! The word "clergy" actually applies to all Christians, and the word "laity" applies to all Christians; the clergyman, the preacher, is as much a layman as any man in the pew, and any man in the pew is as much a clergyman - that is, he bears responsibility for the ministry of CHRIST just as the man in the pulpit.

This is clear in the New Testament, and this dichotomy between laymen and clergy, between the pulpit and the pew, is a tragic distinction which has led to much of the impotence as well as the corruption in the Church of JESUS CHRIST! When the clergy becomes a class by itself, assumed to be better than the man in the pew, it becomes very easy for the clergy to come between the man in the pew and GOD; and this JESUS CHRIST never intended. The work of the ministry belongs to every man and woman in the Body; it belongs to every believer - this is the graphic picture Paul gives.

He closes the chapter with general exhortations that are quite explicit and without ambiguity. The difficulty with these ethical portions in the Word of GOD is not that they are hard to understand, but they are so terribly plain; and one of the little tricks the conscience sometimes plays to justify disobedience of plain truth in the Bible is to encourage us to become deeply preoccupied with "mysteries." Obviously you do not have to do that which you cannot understand. But there is enough that is plain in the Word of GOD about which we ought to be busy.

Incidentally, one of the keys to understanding the profound things of the Word is to obey the plain things. In your leisure read these clear admonitions, beginning at the 9th verse through the 21st verses of Romans, chapter 12: unhypocritical love, respect for one another, preferring one another, honoring one another above self, being honest and loving in all of one's affairs and so on. These are plain, and they do not require any interpretation from preacher or teacher. Basic to all understanding and living of the Christian life is the realization that one has not begun to live the Christian life authentically until he has presented his body a living sacrifice to CHRIST. Have you done this?

~ end of chapter 20 ~

21 - The Christian and the State

Chapter 21 -

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE STATE

Romans 13:1-14

In discussing man's duty to GOD, Paul covers two passages: the Christian's duty to the State and the Christian's duty to all men. It is interesting that nearly every commentator asks, why does the Apostle introduce this explicit statement concerning human government in this passage of Romans? They suggest several reasons for these first six verses concerning the Christian's duty to the State.

First, he was certainly familiar with that segment of the Jewish population which was rebellious toward any Gentile government. They took very seriously the admonition in Deuteronomy 17:15 that "one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee," and that they should not "set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother." This attitude, for example, was the basis for the question brought to JESUS concerning the legitimacy of taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:20-22), in response to which our LORD requested a coin and asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?"

They answered, "Caesar's."

He replied, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Paul does not say any more or less in this particular passage than is implicit in JESUS' answer. This is one of the legitimate dichotomies of life for the Christian, and there is no reason to assume that there will not often be tension at this point; if we try to escape the tension, we may be in danger of disobeying our LORD as well as Paul's admonition. Incidentally, there is no particular virtue in a life free of tension, a fact which the cult of peace of mind tends to overlook. One may become as a vegetable with peace of mind as his goal.

Secondly, the Apostle Paul knew that then, and through history, there would be perennially in the Church that strain of Christian opinion which took the position that it is wrong to give allegiance to any earthly kingdom on the ground that we owe allegiance only to the KING of Kings. I suppose on this basis in every generation there have been those Christians who have not taken seriously human government. It is quite possible also that though Christians were not in radical disfavor at this time, Paul appreciated with prophetic insight that they would soon be persecuted rather than protected by the Roman government. Especially could persecution be expected from the Jewish quarter, where Paul could see even then a cleavage coming between Jew and Christian.

What he says here concerning the Christian's duty to the state flows out of the last three verses of the 12th chapter (Romans 12:19-21), "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give

place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

As a matter of fact, thousands of Christians have laid down their lives in an economy which persecuted them, even to death. That was true shortly after Paul's ministry. It was really in a sense true of Paul himself, for he spent his last years in prison; many of his epistles were written from this prison. But at any rate, it was true of the heroes of faith down through the centuries. One thinks of Daniel in the lion's den; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace; of Joseph in prison, and many other such examples. It is not uncommon for the children of GOD to leave vengeance with the LORD, and we are so admonished by the Word of GOD.

There is a third probability why Paul wrote what he did here; namely, that he, perhaps more than any contemporary of his, appreciated the achievements of the Roman government. He traveled the Roman roads, knew their amazing lines of communication. As a student of history he knew there had never been an empire like Rome which had brought peace to the whole world. To be sure, it was a peace enforced by Roman legions everywhere, nevertheless it was a kind of peace that the world never previously had known. There was an element of security even for slaves in this economy; the Apostle would appreciate this and recognize the Christian's obligation to such a government. Certainly Paul himself on more than one occasion appealed to Caesar and enjoyed the protection of the Roman government.

I believe there is a fourth reason for Paul's instruction in verses 1 through 6 of the 13th chapter. He was writing to Christians in Rome, followers of CHRIST living in the Eternal City. This would be like somebody anywhere else in the United States writing to believers in Washington, D. C. What would be more natural than that they should urge upon the people of GOD living in the capital city the kind of allegiance to the government that would be a testimony and witness for JESUS CHRIST and would commend the faith to those who were in authority. I am very sure this too was in the mind of Paul as he wrote. What he was saying in fact is this, Christians ought to be better citizens than anybody else. This is elementary.

The instruction given in Romans 13 must be taken in the light of the foundation for all of Christian ethics found in the first two verses of Romans 12 (Romans 12:1-2). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto GOD, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." This is basic to a Christian's relationship to the state. What Paul is saying here is this: you maintain allegiance to the State, not simply for the sake of the State but for GOD's sake. In the same way, for example, he instructed the family in Ephesians, saying, "husbands love your wives... wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, (Colossians 3:18-19)" for CHRIST's sake. The same concern governs the parent-child relationship and the servant-master relationship. In other words, my relationship to the state, to all men, my relationship to my wife, hers to me, ours to our children, theirs to us; the relationship of a manager and a laborer is always to the glory of GOD in the Christian economy.

He closes this passage with a warning, in the light of which the admonition Paul gives ought to be taken, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,

and let us put on the armour of light. (Romans 13:12)" These first six verses in which Paul sets forth the divine right of the State are very plain, lending themselves to no ambiguity; one who tries to make these words mean something else does so to his own dissatisfaction and judgment. It is possible, but probably unfair, to make Paul say more than he really intended. Certainly he was not defending the right of corruption in civil affairs.

He was not defending tyranny in any form. It is clear in verses 3, 4 and 5 that the Apostle comprehends the State to be an instrument of GOD in the world for good and against evil. He is speaking against anarchy and for order in human affairs. He is saying that GOD has instituted government for this purpose.

To be sure, men will abuse and misuse the institution of the State just as men because of sin have abused and misused every other institution in history including the Church of JESUS CHRIST; but this does not mean that the institution is bad or that it should be forsaken. It simply means that men are sinners and rebels in GOD's world, and this is the way they behave with good institutions. As a matter of fact, it is because of this very sin that there must be human government to maintain order in history until the final and ultimate rule of JESUS CHRIST is established. Human government is better than anarchy, and the Christian must recognize the "divine right" of the State.

As has already been said, the language is very plain. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God, (Romans 13:1)" therefore "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Romans 13:2)" There it is. "All authority is of GOD!" "There is no power but of God." "The powers that be are ordained of God," and the Christian is bound to give to these authorities proper recognition. So speaks the Word of GOD. Paul does qualify in verses 3, 4 and 5 the position and function of civil authority, "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. (Romans 13:3-5)" Three times the apostle calls human government the servant (minister) of GOD; the servant of GOD to protect the good; the servant of GOD to punish the evil, and - verse 6 - the servant of GOD for the purpose of collecting taxes.

Now, someone says, this certainly qualifies human government. What if a government is a terror to good and encouragement to evil? There are really three answers to this: One is that there are Christians in history who have suffered this kind of government to their own martyrdom and to the glory of GOD. I have met, for example, dedicated Christians who live in East Germany. I have no doubt about their faith in JESUS CHRIST. I know men who have had fellowship with faithful Christians in Moscow. I have heard the story of at least one dedicated pastor in China who has been kept in solitary confinement for years because of his faith in CHRIST, the witness of whose life has gone throughout China.

A second answer is that many governments are so constituted that the people have some recourse. There are at least forty million Americans that have no right to complain about the present Administration because they did not vote in the Presidential election. This is almost incredible; all of these forty million were not bad people; I am sure there were many good people

among them; there were probably many Christians among them, but it was inconvenient to vote on that day; the weather was inclement, or time could not be arranged, so they simply did not go to the polls. Four out of ten American citizens who had the right to vote failed to do so, and in failing, sealed their lips against any criticism of the status quo.

A third possible answer is, implicit in this passage, what we might call "the right of revolution." There is the right to disobey when the government imposes upon man that which is contrary to the rule of GOD in human conscience. When the authorities forbade the disciples to preach the Gospel, they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men, (Acts 5:29)" and they continued to preach. In the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition we hold that only GOD is the LORD of the conscience, and we ought to be thankful for this. It introduces into Presbyterianism many problems because it leads to strong individuality and great diversity, but it is a safeguard to private judgment. It would be much easier to impose upon people the will of a government, whether it be ecclesiastical or political. Only GOD is the Lord of the conscience; therefore, when the State imposes that which is contrary to the will of GOD in my life, I must obey GOD rather than man. The government of the United States of America is the product of that conviction.

Finally, the Apostle Paul makes it clear in verse 6 that we must pay taxes. Indeed, he says the State is the servant of GOD for this very purpose; and there is an interesting phrase here, "for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (Romans 13:6)"

In verses 7 through 10, the Christian's duty to all men can be summed up in one wonderful four-letter word, L-O-V-E. "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another. (Romans 13:8)" Paul is not simply referring to monetary debts but to all personal relationships for this paragraph begins with the phrase, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. (Romans 13:7)" The point is that there is an order in human relationships which the Christian ought to recognize.

Never refuse to honor the one worthy of honor. Give a man honor who deserves honor, give a man respect who deserves respect. This is what Paul is saying. There is an attitude among Christians that tends to downgrade everybody to the plateau of mediocrity as they so often refuse recognition of leadership in the right sense. Paul insists we have a debt in this regard to honor the man who deserves to be honored; the "sour grapes" attitude is unworthy of the Christian though it is probably often the explanation for his refusal to honor the one who deserves to be honored. If it were possible to lift one group of words out of this passage and brand them in the hearts and minds of the people of GOD, I would pick this: "owe no man any thing, but to love one another. (Romans 13:8)" Every man his due! There will never be a moment in your life when you do not owe love to men. This is one debt that can never be written off because GOD so loved that He gave all of heaven's glory for us. Indeed the Apostle Paul declares that whatever the commandment, it is fulfilled in love.

An article in the Christian Herald concerned itself with one of the great tragedies of life, the problem of fathers who punish little babies until they kill them. In this context the author was discussing the importance of love in the home, and he said they have discovered that often malnutrition and bone disorders in babies are due to the lack of love from father and mother. "I am sure you are familiar with a little formula found in children's hospitals all over the world. TLC means 'tender loving care.' As I have walked through our children's hospital in Taegu, Korea, often

I have seen written over a bed these letters, TLC. Any nurse who enters that room, when she has a minute, picks up that little body that may have been almost dead just the night before, fondles it and caresses it because it needs affection as much as it needs food." Even the softening of the cranium, stated this article, can be due to the lack of affection.

There are men and women who are starved for love, and Paul reminds us that we have a debt out from under which we can never get - to love men. But, you say, I do not and I cannot love men! Then recognize this as disobedience to the law of GOD; ask Him to forgive you and help you to do it. He can and will!

Paul closes this chapter with a warning. Wake up! Start living like Christians; stop living like pagans, for the time is short, "knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep" like children of night. "The day is at hand," begin living like the children of the day because "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Romans 13:11)"

Nineteen hundred years ago Paul said that. If it was relevant then to the Christians of Rome, it is infinitely more relevant to us today because our salvation in this consummate sense is nineteen centuries nearer than when Paul issued the warning. Whether the coming of the Lord JESUS CHRIST is to be delayed for another hundred years, or whether He will come in the next twenty-four hours, it is incumbent upon every Christian to live as though He would return at any moment; for return He shall to reign in righteousness, and His advent will be at an hour men do not expect Him.

That we are living in a crucial hour of human affairs no thoughtful person will deny. It is an apocalyptic hour and it demands Christian citizenship in the finest sense; Christians who are strong and true and faithful, who are composed, and available and efficient. The man who will be invincible in the midst of coming events will be the one who expects the Son of GOD to return to reign in righteousness. Paul is urging, listen Christians, listen, this is your hour; stop living like godless men and start living like the people of GOD. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. (Romans 13:14)"

There is the story of a little boy who, when the clock struck fifteen, with eyes as big as saucers breathlessly rushed into another room to his mother, crying, "Mommy, it's later than it's ever been before!" It is later than it has ever been before. Christian, what are you doing about it, for CHRIST's sake?

~ end of chapter 21 ~

22 - Our Duty To Those Who Disagree

Chapter 22 -

OUR DUTY TO THOSE WHO DISAGREE

Romans 14:1-12

Remember that this passage which has to do with another phase of Christian ethics is to be taken in the light of the 36th verse of Romans 11, and the first two verses of the 12th chapter. These are the fountainhead and foundation of all Christian ethics. In this particular instruction we see the realism of Christian faith, the realism of the Apostle Paul. Christianity is not emotionalism, not sentimentalism; nor is it emotionally or sentimentally idealistic, but always realistic. Christianity is the faith in things as they are.

Paul speaks with great plainness of speech. We should have no difficulty in ascertaining what the Lord is saying to us as members of His Church in this particular passage; yet ironically the ethics herein set forth, including the first part of the 15th chapter, are disregarded or disobeyed as much as or more than any other in the Word of GOD. This is one of the very interesting phenomenon in the Church. People will defend the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures at the drop of a hat but totally disregard clear Scriptural teaching. They believe the Bible is the Word of GOD but so often fail to take it seriously in their own lives.

The Apostle is dealing here with the problem of differences or disagreements among Christians, and the first thing to note is the most obvious: there are differences, there are disagreements among Christians. It is wrong to allow these disagreements to become issues which divide the body. I suppose if we would really probe into many of the divisive movements in the Church, we would discover the issue is not doctrinal at all, but that about which Paul speaks very plainly in the 14th chapter of Romans. In other words, the body of CHRIST is divided unnecessarily because we insist on making issues which ought not to be issues.

Differences are to be expected in the Church of JESUS CHRIST. As a matter of fact, the Word of GOD clearly teaches that diversity is of the very essence of the Church; diversity is of the very essence of Christian community; it takes all kinds of people to make a Church. Paul argues this very interestingly in another context, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? (1 Corinthians 12:17)" If all were a single organ, where would the body be? Quite explicitly in the 4th chapter of Ephesians, the 12th chapter of Romans and the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians, the SPIRIT of GOD through the Apostle sets forth clearly this essential diversity which is the Church, the Christian community.

There are ecclesiastical differences. Some cannot worship in an informal atmosphere; others cannot worship in a formal atmosphere. There are those who like liturgy; there are those who like free worship. There are those who are more comfortable in a church which has a hierarchical form of government, such as the Episcopalian; there are others who are comfortable only in a

completely democratic church such as the Baptist or the Congregational, and then there are others who are right in between, such as the Presbyterian and the Reformed. There are these differences in the body of CHRIST.

The differences with which Paul deals in Romans 14 are matters of conscience. There are certain things in the Christian life which, according to the Word of GOD, are clearly wrong. It is wrong to tell a lie. It is wrong to commit adultery. There are certain things in the Word of GOD which are clearly right. It is right to tell the truth. It is right for husband and wife to be faithful. This is not debatable. But in between the white of the right and the black of the wrong, there is a great area of gray, which we call in theology the "adiaphora," the amoral. There are matters of conscience about which there are great differences among Christians.

Paul is not exhaustive here, but he illustrates by referring to the matter of eating. One believes he may eat anything; another who is weak is a vegetarian. He refers to special days. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. You can carry these out into many different areas of life.

I think of a young minister who was reared in a church which took a strong stand against smoking, and the first parish he had was literally in the center of a tobacco field. Every family head in that church was a tobacco farmer; the money given to the church came from the profits of the tobacco industry.

These are matters of conscience. We do not understand why the SPIRIT of GOD convicts one that a thing is wrong and leaves another undisturbed, but it is a fact of Christian experience. These differences need not constitute disunity in the body. Unity does not mean uniformity. Getting all Christians into the same organization will not guarantee unity and might aggravate disunity. Christians may be institutionally diverse and enjoy a basic unity, for it is our Lord JESUS CHRIST who unites us.

Now Paul suggests seven things we are to do about our differences.

First, we welcome each other. We welcome into fellowship those who differ. Occasionally it happens in the Church that a few who agree become a little mutual-admiration society, never disagreeing (openly, at least) as a result of which they begin to assume everything they believe is right (after all, nobody disagrees with them); and they invariably become ingrown, self-righteous and sterile because they are never exposed to those who hold contrary convictions. Like the familiar story about the man who went to heaven and was being oriented by Peter. The new arrival came to a high wall, on the other side of which there was singing. Upon inquiring as to who was behind the wall, he was told that it was a certain group who thought they were the only ones in heaven! This is not a Christian attitude, to exclude those who disagree. Paul says welcome them in the name of CHRIST. He is not insisting on fellowship with those who deny the deity of our LORD but with those who worship JESUS CHRIST as LORD and love Him but who disagree in some matters with us.

Secondly, he says we are not to despise one another's convictions. If you think it is wrong to eat meat, that is your prerogative; stand by it, but do not condemn the one who does. You approve the eating of meat, GOD bless you, but do not tempt the one who feels it is wrong.

Thirdly, he says we are not to pass judgment upon one another. To his own master each of us stands or falls! For "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of CHRIST, (Romans 14:10)" to give an account.

Fourth, let each man be convinced in his own mind. Be sure if you take liberty in a certain area that it is the liberty of the SPIRIT of GOD, not license. If the LORD convicts you that something is wrong in your life, you had better stop it though everybody else is doing it; no matter how right others may think it is. If the SPIRIT of GOD speaks to you about a matter, you had better obey. To him who knows it to be sin, to him it is sin. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin, (Romans 14:23)" Paul says. Do not let your good be evil spoken of; be convinced in your mind. Obey your conscience in the Lord.

There is a little rule which I think it is safe to follow here, that is, "if in doubt, don't." The minute somebody comes to me and asks "What's wrong with this?" I have an idea the Lord is dealing with him about it; he is probably seeking approval, not an honest answer. If the Spirit was not dealing with him, why should he bring it up?

Have you heard about the little boy in his room upstairs who called down, "Mother is this shirt clean enough to wear once more?"

She said, "No!"

When he came downstairs he said, "Mother, how did you know that collar wasn't clean enough to wear again."

She said, "You wouldn't have asked if it were clean enough."

If there is doubt, don't. Be convinced in your own mind.

Next Paul says all that we do is unto the Lord. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. (Romans 14:8)" In another context Paul admonishes, "Do all to the glory of GOD," eating or whatever you do; do it to the glory of GOD. Then he says, we are not to cause another to stumble. This is one way to view true personal liberty: I have the right to relinquish my right. This is freedom too - the right to forego my liberty out of love for and interest in another. This is the freedom involved when a young man unites with the armed forces, the freedom a mother forsakes when she cares for a child. This is the freedom at the heart of the marriage vows. When a man and woman are united in marriage, they give up their right to themselves to each other.

I suppose that most of the problems in marriage derive from the fact that the average man, the average woman, has some sort of an illusion that though married, one retains his individual rights. On the contrary, you forsake your rights and submit yourself to each other in the Lord. That is the very essence of Christian marriage. I have no rights as a husband. I forsook them in self-giving to my wife, and whenever I try to take them back, there is trouble in our house.

This is our Christian obligation to one another in the Lord; do not cause another to stumble. You are free to eat meat; but if it offends someone, weakens him, if it tempts a brother who is not at liberty to eat meat, then one must forego this liberty.

Finally, he says, pursue righteousness and peace unto edification of the whole church, the whole Christian community. Pursue righteousness, for the kingdom of GOD is not eating and drinking; the kingdom of GOD is righteousness and peace. Pursue righteousness. Pursue peace. That is, do not make an issue of every little thing. Do not wear a chip on your shoulder about these things; you are disrupting the body. You are injuring CHRIST with petty little grievances. Pursue righteousness and peace unto edification.

The Word of GOD is very plain, is it not? So plain that we leave such specific passages as Romans 14 and get interested in Revelation, or in the 3rd chapter of Romans, or the 5th. Paul instructs the weak not to condemn the strong, and the strong not to tempt the weak. Paul says, do not judge one another; encourage one another in the LORD, unto growth and maturity. Paul says, love one another, have care one for the other. GOD grant that we will love each other as the Father loves us so that we will not let petty little differences build walls between us. A church like this would be a novelty in our modern world, a church that radiated the love of GOD because its members were so filled with the love of GOD that no matter how you hurt them - even crushed them - the perfume, the fragrance of the love of GOD would exude from them. This is the pattern. This is the kind of unity our LORD prayed for in the Garden, in His high priestly prayer, and GOD grant that each of us shall heed this clear, plain, explicit teaching of the Word of GOD, and obey it.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

23 - Harmony in the Household of God

Chapter 23 -

HARMONY IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Romans 15:1-7

The ethical instructions begun in chapter 14, verse 1, are continued through chapter 15, verse 14; and as you know, they have to do with the Christian's duty to those who differ with them. It is obvious, yet it must be mentioned again, that differences are normal in the Christian Church, that it is not uncommon for Christians to disagree. As a matter of fact, diversity is of the essence of the Body of CHRIST. Of course, there are some things on which Christians must agree. Not to agree on these is not to be Christian: that JESUS CHRIST is LORD; that He is the Son of GOD; that He laid down His life upon the Cross of Calvary for the salvation of man; that the problem in history is sin, and the solution of that problem is the blood of JESUS CHRIST, GOD's Son. On these all Christians agree as well as on many other things. But there are many things in which we differ, and Paul in this particular passage is discussing our attitude when we differ.

In the first six verses of the 15th chapter, he is a little bit more specific as he addresses himself to those who are strong as to their attitude toward the weak. This is quite apparent in the physical realm. The strong who mistreats the weak is called a bully and is so recognized by everyone. But there are bullies in the spiritual and moral realm, and they are not so easily recognizable. In the physical realm it is expected that the strong have a greater responsibility than the weak, especially in a family. The strong must compensate for the weak, bear the burdens of the weak, share their weaknesses; and if that is true in a family, it is infinitely more so in the family of GOD. So Paul begins by saying we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. (Romans 15:2)"

What Paul is saying is, in the household of GOD strength equals obligation. It is not a matter of pride; it is a matter of increased responsibility. The very fact that one is strong places upon him this duty to the weaker brother. If one thinks he is strong, he places upon himself an obligation to the one he thinks is weak. This simply cannot be over-emphasized, for as often happens in a domestic situation, the strong take advantage of the weak and are critical of the weak, rather than helping them. So it is in the Church; the one who thinks he is strong is critical of the one he judges as weak, and not only does he not bear his burdens and welcome him unto edification to the glory of GOD, he excludes him. It can be inferred quite fairly from this passage of Scripture that the test for authentic strength, spiritually and morally, is the attitude of the one who is strong toward the one who is weak.

If a Christian feels he has matured in the faith, has gone more deeply than others, the evidence of his maturity will not be criticism of the weaker brother. This would indicate immaturity. The evidence of maturity will be his love, concern, sympathy and care for the weaker brother. Thinking one's self strong while condemning the weak is a dead give-away to one's lack of spiritual

character. What a difference in the household of GOD should those who feel they are strong take upon themselves the burdens of those they feel are weak and not consider themselves but consider the weaker brother for his good unto his edification. Thus Paul counsels us.

But he doesn't leave it there. He says that JESUS CHRIST is our example in this; He did not please Himself. As a matter of fact, Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, reminds us that JESUS CHRIST bore the reproach of the sinner. He gave Himself utterly and completely. He sacrificed Himself. He pleased not Himself. This is the hallmark of spiritual maturity, not to please one's self. Indeed, the Scriptures have been given for this very purpose. Not simply that we might be edified, but that we, as we are instructed in the Word of GOD unto the patience and encouragement of the Scriptures, might edify others in the body and that we might glorify GOD together with one mind and one mouth.

He closes this early passage of the 15th chapter, verses 5 and 6, with a wonderful prayer for the Church. Live in harmony with one another, or regard one another to be equally worthy through the example of JESUS CHRIST, a principle which he amplifies in verses 7 through 14. He begins the passage by summing up his argument from the first verse of chapter 14 through the 14th verse of chapter 15. This is the sum total of Christian duty toward those who differ. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)" Consider how CHRIST has welcomed you. Are you worthy to come? Has your life been above reproach? Have you done nothing, said nothing, thought nothing, desired nothing that is contrary to the Son of GOD? Has your life been perfect in the last seven days, in the last twenty-four hours? Yet CHRIST welcomes you. Paul says you are to welcome others this way.

Of course they do things that displease you, they disagree with you, they fail, they sin; so much more are you obligated to welcome them for the glory of GOD! As our supreme example he uses a beautiful picture of CHRIST as the servant. He draws from the Old Testament two passages from the Psalms, one from Deuteronomy, one from Isaiah, showing JESUS CHRIST as the servant of GOD first to the Jew in order that the promises GOD has made to the patriarchs might be fulfilled and secondly to the Gentiles in order that they might glorify GOD for His mercy to them. This is the attitude of a Christian to other Christians, that of a servant, for the Son of GOD was a servant. "And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. (Mark 10:44)" "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)" What a phenomenon would a congregation like this be in our modern mid-twentieth century world, a congregation where each of the members was outdoing the others in serving each other, in loving each other, in caring for each other, in concern for each other; Christians who cared not for themselves but for others, who pleased not themselves but pleased others to the glory of GOD!

How desperately our world needs to see this kind of a demonstration of authentic, New Testament, apostolic Christianity. If we were more like this, men would have less excuse to talk about doctrinal unity. GOD help us to see it. GOD help to blot out of our lives the criticism which we feel towards those that we assume are weaker than we. GOD help us to blot out of our hearts and minds our censorious spirit and put there in its place the love of CHRIST, the concern of CHRIST, the care of CHRIST for those who differ with us. Let us never forget that the more mature we feel we are, the more responsible we are to be like JESUS CHRIST at this point; and if we are not like this, let us

suffer no illusions about our own spiritual maturity. Let us acknowledge our adolescence and let us seek the forgiveness of Almighty GOD and the cleansing of the blood of the SON of GOD, and let us pray that the HOLY GHOST will fill us, and the love of GOD may be shed abroad in our hearts to the glory of the SON and the healing of the Church.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

24 - The Heart of an Apostle

Chapter 24 -

THE HEART OF AN APOSTLE

Romans 15:14-21

We come now to the close of a long journey through Paul's epistle to the Christians at Rome. I realize that it would be possible to spend more than one chapter on these last verses, but explanations seem almost superfluous especially to the 16th chapter. It is as blessed to us in reading as in hearing, and so I want to urge you at your leisure to reflect on the 16th chapter of Romans to which we will point in some aspects.

As Paul closes his letter to Rome, he reveals the heart of a great Christian and apostle. We see into the life of this servant of JESUS CHRIST and we may discover some explanations for his greatness. He begins almost as if he were apologizing to the Christians at Rome for writing them at all. You remember he defends his own ministry later on by saying that the LORD led him to preach the Gospel where it had not been preached; that the LORD had led him to go where no one else had gone lest he build upon another man's foundation. But he is breaking this rule in writing to Rome. So he says to them in the 14th verse, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another, (Romans 15:14)" or instruct one another. Let's spend a moment in this beautiful picture of apostolic Christianity. Here is a congregation so filled with goodness and the knowledge of GOD that they are qualified to instruct each other, to admonish each other.

We have come a long way since that day in Rome. It is now a one-way proposition. The congregation gathers in the sanctuary on Sunday morning, or Sunday evening, or Wednesday night, for an hour or so, expecting to be taught. Almost imperceptibly we have introduced into the church the idea that there is somebody who has unique authority to interpret the Scriptures; almost without realizing it we have established a spiritual hierarchy in fact, if not in theory. A pastor is very often aware of this.

I have given my own self since 1947 to a ministry of meeting in small groups, encouraging inductive Bible study; and one of the biggest hurdles that I had to surmount was my presence as a "professional." Several things would happen. One, most of the people in the group were unwilling to express what they felt about a passage of Scripture or to ask a question because they felt they would be embarrassed by their ignorance; they would wait for the "authority" to speak. Another reaction, though men would participate in these small groups, their attitude was tentative or apologetic and they would expect the pastor to have the final word as though to set the matter straight. Often a pastor feels that people will not allow him to come, sit quietly and be taught through others.

BBB NOTE: As the centuries have worn on and the world in general have fallen further and further away from absolute biblical authority - it IS necessary to be cautious about these so-called "inductive Bible studies" led by all. There was a time when the cults were not as nefarious as today, to the extent that they are quite easily able to blend in with the people of GOD and teach heresies. Oh, pastor, be very, very cautious about these home Bible studies and Ladies' Bible Fellowships. They could end up becoming a charismatic takeover of your church. It won't happen, however, as you maintain your authority over the quasi-ministries in your church

But here is the great apostle, author of more than half the New Testament, again and again in these closing remarks of Romans intimating this kind of a relationship with Christians; and I can say to you that there are pastors in the world today who languish for this kind of relationship with people. They do not want to be a professional class; they do not want to be insulated from the congregation.

We are going to hear more and more about church union, and one of the things that we are going to hear often in defense of church union, especially from those who believe in bishops, is this: "Who is to be pastor to the pastor?" The implication being that bishops have this role. Have you ever thought about that? Who is the pastor's pastor? Someone, with sentimental piety, suggests the pastor's pastor is the LORD. As you read the 16th chapter of Romans, you become aware of the fact that people ministered to Paul constantly. They were able to instruct one another.

In the past fifteen years when exposing myself to small groups for Bible study, I have received infinitely more than I have given; but there are pastors who are desperately lonely for just such a relationship. It may be partially their fault, but, you see, we have made it this kind of situation: the church member comes on Sunday morning to occupy a pew; he places his "subsidy" in the collection plate; and when it is all over, he goes home. He waits to be taught; week by week he returns to be taught.

In apostolic times every Christian was a teacher, not in a professional sense but in the sense of witness. It was not a one-way proposition, as though interpretation belonged exclusively to a special class. Pastors desperately need this reciprocation even more than they need criticism. How many homes have "left-over pastor" at dinner, following church? I wonder in how many homes the little children, whose minds are like delicate recording instruments, whose eyes and ears are taking in everything they hear around the dinner table, are getting a negative attitude toward pastors from the conversation of the adults around that table. I wonder how many children grow up feeling that going to church is a liability because they had to listen to the pastor criticized around the table? When they decide not to go to church, are they not often reflecting an attitude that was communicated by critical parents?

There is nothing in the Word of GOD, you see, that indicates that the pastor is superhuman or abnormal or somehow in unusual ways qualified to resist temptation and to be less human in his attitudes to life than the man in the pew. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul indicates that he was chosen because he was of all men least qualified along certain lines. He called himself the "chief" of sinners. He said he was "less than the least of all saints. (Ephesians 3:8)"

One of the reasons there are not more men going into the pastorate, one of the reasons that men are leaving the pastorate for other professions is this terrible double-standard pressure placed

upon pastors to be superhuman men; and the failure of the congregation to recognize that the work of the ministry has never been given by GOD to the pastor but belongs to the congregation and cannot be delegated. Good men have been broken by congregations who thought the pastor's job was to do the work of the ministry while they subsidized him by coming to church and putting money in the offering plate! We have come a long way from apostolic Christianity.

Now Paul says (Romans 15:14), "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another," but he says (Romans 15:15), "I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind." There is a picture of the real teacher. Not one who keeps introducing new truth but one who is faithful in reminding the people of the truth they already know, to which they have already been exposed, and by which they are not yet living.

One youth official said that, so far as he knows, there is rarely a Jewish young person in the delinquent courts of California, and he attributes it to the patriarchal system. What was this system? The father was the head of the house, for one thing, and he was also the teacher. Not professionally, he only shared what he received, but what was the teaching method? The fathers burned into the minds and hearts of Jewish children the history of Israel.

They were never to forget the fact that GOD had brought them with a strong hand out of Egypt; they would never forget the Passover Lamb; they could never forget the opening of the Red Sea; they could never forget being kept in the wilderness for forty years; they would never forget crossing the Jordan River; they would never forget the battle of Jericho. These things were engraved on their memories.

Read the Psalms of the Old Testament and count the number of times the word "remember" or its equivalent is there! It is no longer considered progressive in our Sunday Schools to encourage children to memorize the Word of GOD. This is modern education. It is one of the explanations for Sunday School failure. The Word of GOD taught Israel to memorize; this is the way they learned. The Jews were not prolific writers. They read the Scriptures, memorized the Scriptures, and taught them to their children when they were sitting down and when they were rising up, when they were going and when they were coming. Thank GOD for Sunday Schools which have not become infected with modernism that no longer encourage the memorization of the Word of GOD. There is a very practical application of this in the passage under consideration.

It was Paul's familiarity with the Word of GOD that gave him direction for his life's ministry. He says that he was called to preach the Gospel where it had never before been preached, that he should not build upon another man's foundation. What is the basis of this peculiar ministry of the apostle's? He quotes from Isaiah 52:15. Before Paul was converted on the Road to Damascus he had probably memorized Isaiah 52:15. If he had not memorized it, he was very familiar with it, so that every time he approached this passage, as he was reading the Old Testament, he would be reminded of this verse.

Now I am sure that this is the way it happened: one day the Apostle Paul was out in the wilderness being taught firsthand from the LORD JESUS CHRIST; he was reflecting on Isaiah, chapter 52, and suddenly this verse held new meaning for him. Paul knew that he was being called by the LORD to go where others had not gone, to preach to those who had not heard.

This is the way GOD directs. If you are unfamiliar with the Word of GOD, how is He supposed to direct your life? If you have not hidden the Word of GOD away in your heart, how does the SPIRIT of GOD speak to you? You are never too old to hide GOD's Word in your heart. You won't have the facility of a younger person, but you ought to be doing it all the time. The reason that some of us are not being led by GOD, or feel we are not led, is simply because we are not exposing ourselves to one of the tools He uses to direct our lives. One of these tools is His written Word.

Beginning at the 22nd verse through the 23rd Paul discusses his future plans. He says now because he was called to this kind of ministry, he has been hindered in coming to Rome, much as he wanted to come to the capital. But he said (Romans 15:22-23), "For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you." Illyricum was on the Adriatic Sea not very far from Rome. Think of this! In three missionary journeys the Apostle Paul had accomplished this tremendous task: planting the Church, raising up leadership and leaving the Church in capable hands; and Paul never stayed more than two years in one place.

Where did we ever get the idea that pastors were supposed to stay put so long? Paul stayed two year's in one place, less time in most others and then moved on. If we make the pastor indispensable to the life of the church, he must stay, you see; but when the congregation is able to instruct itself, they can get along without a pastor. Not that a pastor is not needed; GOD ordained pastors and Paul makes it very clear in Ephesians 4 that they have a place, a function. But why should a particular pastor become indispensable to any local fellowship? Paul by this method had covered all of Asia Minor and gone into Europe through Philippi clear over to the Adriatic Sea. So complete was his ministry (He had probably been laboring now for about sixteen years.) that he says he is now no longer needed in these places; he is free now to go to Spain and will stop at Rome on his way.

Paul says (Romans 15:24), "Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey." Why is he going to come to Rome? There are two reasons, and one is very interesting and human: in the 32rd verse he says he wants to come just to rest. He anticipated a vacation in Rome. But there was another reason. Paul wanted to have the encouragement of the Roman Christians as he made his way to Spain to preach the Gospel. Not only did he want their encouragement, but I think it is clear that Paul hoped there would be a little group in Rome that would accompany him to Spain. This too was the apostolic pattern; he wanted some in Rome to accompany him, to be part of his team.

And there was another reason. Paul had another job to do before he went to Rome, he had an offering from Macedonia and Achaia to take to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and he had some apprehension about this because he had been warned by Agabus the prophet in Miletus that the Jews, the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, were going to trap him and deliver him over to the Gentiles. So Paul says to the Christians in Rome (Romans 15:30-31), "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord JESUS Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints."

Much can be said about that. Paul did not want these Christians in Jerusalem, the poor Christians who needed help, to resent the gifts that were coming from the Gentiles in other places. You know,

this is one of the reasons the Gospel is unpopular because it is free. You cannot pay for it. You must acknowledge your poverty spiritually speaking and receive the gift, and our pride does not like us to do this. So there are people who reject the Gospel for no other reason than pride. You tell them to do something to be saved, and they will do it; but if they just have to receive the gift, their pride will not allow them. There is this kind of false pride that sometimes gets into Christians so that even in a time of desperate need they will resent and reject an offering given in love from Christian brothers and sisters. They say, "I don't accept charity." Well, this is not charity.

There is something very significant here. Will you notice the way the Apostle Paul speaks about prayer in the 30th verse? "Strive together" in prayer! One of the reasons we do not pray is because prayer is labor. Prayer is striving. Prayer is work. Prayer is sweat, and there are so many other things easier to do in the Church of JESUS CHRIST than to pray. But the measure of the power of the Church is the measure of our laboring in prayer, our striving in prayer. How long has it been since you worked in prayer? How long has it been since you labored in prayer, since you have striven in prayer? Here is Paul's estimate of prayer, it is the work, and we will not be powerful as a church except GOD raises up men and women who labor in prayer.

Chapter 16 concludes with closing greetings. In the first 16 verses he speaks of individuals, and for this reason I urge you to read and reflect on it at your leisure. It is wonderful to think of the personal friends that Paul had. See how he refers to them. This couple who "stuck out their necks" for him, those who risked their lives. His first converts in Asia. See how he lists them and feel that the team that Paul had laboring with him wherever he went. He was not teaching them; they were together in their labor for JESUS CHRIST. How I covet this for every pastor, this rediscovery of apostolic Christianity, so the pastor does not stand alone as a professional peculiarly committed to do something nobody else will do. Maybe the pastor is weaker than many in the congregation (Paul was less than the least), more desperately in need of prayer and the encouragement and the instruction of people than anyone to whom he speaks. Well, Paul lists his team members who labored with him. It is a beautiful picture.

But there is something else here; as we read these names, we are reading Paul's prayer list, Every day as he prayed he would go through this list of friends; these weren't all, but he would remember his friends. Do you have a prayer list? People for whom you pray regularly? Uphold them at the Throne of Grace? Twenty-nine persons Paul names in 16 verses, and then implies there are many others as he speaks concerning a household, concerning their friends.

In Romans 16:17-20 he warns against divisiveness. He says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Avoid him. That is pretty clear language. How easy it is in our modern 20th century Christianity to walk after the divisive man, heed every word, and whether he documents it or not, whether he speaks the truth or not, we listen, and we believe. Paul is very clear in this instruction, stay away from the divisive person. He closes with greetings from others, and his own kinsmen, Timothy and others and with a beautiful benediction. Thus ends Paul's letter to Rome - his prologue to prison.

~ END OF BOOK ~

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