

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 1, THE HERALD, February, 1955

*Some of our readers will recall that a number of articles in exposition of the Epistle to the Romans were published in this Journal during the years 1929-1933.*

*From time to time since, brethren in various parts of the world have urged the resumption of this series. Only recently we were advised that some are contemplating class studies in this Epistle, rightly understanding that in "The Gospel according to Paul" (as the Epistle to the Romans is justly called) the answers are to be found to the many questions now being raised on the important doctrines of justification and sanctification. These brethren urge not only that the series be resumed but also that the earlier articles, many of which are out of print, be republished for their benefit.*

*In adopting these suggestions, which have the unanimous approval of our Directors and Editorial Committee, it will be the writer's thought to condense and summarize some of the earlier articles where this may be possible without weakening the exposition.*

THERE can be no question, as an able expositor has said, that "When the Epistle to the Romans appeared for the first time it was to the church a word in season." Since that time it has played a powerful part in every great spiritual revival the church has known. The Great Reformation owed its birth and development to this Epistle more perhaps than to any other portion of the Bible. "Luther, in his famous preface, says: 'This Epistle is the chief book of the New Testament, the purest gospel. It deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian but to be the subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul. . . . The more time one spends on it, the more precious it becomes and the better it appears.' Melancthon, in order to make it perfect his own, copied it twice with his own hand. It is the book he expounded most frequently in his lectures" (Godet).

Believing that the present time is one to which the teaching of this Epistle is peculiarly suited, this series of articles is purposed in the prayerful hope that they too in their measure may prove to be to the readers of this Journal a word in season.

## Seekers After Righteousness

Let none be discouraged from the study of this Epistle by the fact that it contains things “hard to be understood.” While it is true that the most mature Christian minds will find themselves at times face to face with the unfathomable (“O, the depth!” Rom. 11:33), yet there is milk to be had here for the veriest babe in Christ. On the other hand, let no one for a moment suppose that by intellectually grasping the philosophy of God’s plan presented herein he will have thereby exhausted the Apostle’s intention. No! The prominent idea of the Epistle is the offer of the “righteousness of God” to one who finds himself stripped of his own righteousness. Since this is so, it necessarily follows that the condition of heart likely to profit most from the Apostle’s precepts is that en joined by our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Such will find themselves filled indeed by the blessed assurances found in the Epistle to the Romans.

## Time, Place, and Occasion

Before considering the Epistle itself, it will be helpful in understanding its lessons to have in mind the circumstances under which it came to be written. Without going into disputed questions, it will be enough for our present purpose to note that “The four books of the New Testament known as Letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians are allowed by practically all critics, including some of the most ‘destructive,’ to be genuine productions of the Apostle Paul. . . . The date generally assigned to the Roman Letter is 58 A.D. (*Weymouth*).

One expositor, H.C.G. Moule, whose scholarly writings contain a large measure of the spirit of devotion to our Savior, has arranged such data as are available in an interesting way and presents a beautiful word picture of the Apostle and the conditions under which he wrote. It cannot fail to greatly assist us as we approach the study of this Epistle in the same spirit. We quote:

“It is the month of February in the year of Christ 58. In a room in the house of Gaius, a wealthy Corinthian Christian, Paul the Apostle addressed himself to write

to the converts of the mission at Rome. Tertius, his amanuensis, is at his side.

“The great world meanwhile is rolling on its way. It is the fourth year of Nero. He is consul the third time, with Valerius Messala for his colleague. Pop paea has lately caught the unworthy prince in the net of her bad influence. Domitius Corbulo has just resumed the war with Parthia and prepared to penetrate the highlands of Armenia. In a few weeks, in the full spring, an Egyptian impostor is about to in flame Jerusalem with his Messianic claim. He will lead four thousand fanatics into the desert and return to the city with a host of thirty thousand men, only to be totally routed by the legionaries of Felix.

“The Apostle is about to close his three months’ stay at Corinth. He has heard of plots against his life and will in prudence decline the more direct route from Cenchrea by sea and strike northward for Philippi and thence over the Aegaeon to Troas. He must visit Jerusalem before June if possible for he has by him the Greek collections to deliver to the poor converts there. Then in the vista of his further movements he sees Rome; with a certain apprehension yet with longing hope he thinks about life and witness there.

“Phoebe, a Greek Christian woman is about to visit the city. He must commend this ministrant of the mission at Cenchrea to the Roman brethren. A deliberate letter to them is suggested by this personal need.

“His thoughts have long gravitated to the City of the World. At Ephesus not many months before he had ‘purposed in the spirit’ to visit Jerusalem; with an emphasis his biographer remembered he had said, ‘I must also see Rome’ (Acts 19:21). In the sense of a Divine decree his ‘I *must*’ had written this journey down in the plan of his life. He was assured too by circumstantial and perhaps by supernatural signs that he had ‘now no more place in these parts’ (Rom. 15:23), that is in the eastern Roman world where all his labor hitherto had been spent. The Lord in former days had shut Paul up to a track which led him through Asia Minor to the Aegaeon and across the Aegaeon to Europe (Acts 16). Now he prepared to guide him by paths which his servant knew not: from Eastern Europe to Western, and before all things to the City.

## Prayer for Others Deepens Our Interest in Them

“Amongst these providential preparations was a growing occupation of the Apostle’s thought with persons and interests in the Christian circle there. Here was Phoebe, about to take ship for Italy. In the great Capital the beloved and faithful Aquila and Prisca were now resident again, no longer excluded by the Claudian edict. We may fairly conclude they were already the central influence in the mission. Their first days dated perhaps from the Pentecost itself, when Roman ‘strangers’ saw and heard the wonders and message of that hour (Acts 2:10). At Rome other believers personally known to Paul lived, drawn by unrecorded circumstances to the Center of the World. His ‘well beloved’ Epaenetus was there; Mary who had at time tried hard to help him; Andronicus and Junias and Herodian, his relatives; Amphias and Stachys, men very dear to him; Urbanus, who had worked for Christ at his side; Rufus, no common Christian in his esteem; Rufus’ mother, who had once watched over Paul with a mother’s love. All these rise before him as he thinks of Phoebe and

her arrival and the faces and hands that at his appeal would welcome her in the Lord. . . . “Besides, he has been hearing about the actual state of that all important mission. As ‘all roads led to Rome,’ so all roads led from Rome. There were Christian travelers everywhere who could tell him how the Gospel fared among the metropolitan brethren (1:8). As he heard of them so he prayed for them, ‘without ceasing’ (1:9). He made request for himself too, now definitely and urgently that his way might be opened to visit them at last.

“Praying for others, if the prayer is prayer indeed and is based to some extent on knowledge, is a sure way to deepen our interest in them and our sympathetic insight into their hearts and conditions. From the human side nothing more than these tidings and these prayers was needed to draw from St. Paul a written message to be placed in Phoebe’s care. From this same human side again, when he once addressed himself to write, there were circumstances of thought and action that would naturally give direction to his message.

## Sound Doctrine Important

“He stood amidst circumstances most significant and suggestive in matter of Christian *truth*. Quite recently his Judaist rivals had invaded the congregations of Galatia and had led the impulsive converts there to quit what seemed their firm grasp on the truth of justification by faith only. To St. Paul this was no mere battle of abstract definitions, nor again was it a matter of merely local importance. The success of the alien teachers in Galatia showed him that the same specious mischiefs might win their way more or less quickly anywhere. What would such success mean? It would mean the loss of the joy of the Lord and the strength of that joy in the misguided churches. Justification by faith meant nothing less than *Christ all in all*, literally all in all for sinful man’s pardon and acceptance. It meant a profound simplicity of personal reliance altogether upon him before the fiery holiness of eternal Law. It meant an intense and unanxious look out and up from the virtues and the guilt of man to the mighty merits of the Savior. The foundation fact of salvation secured that the process should be from its beginning not humanitarian but Divine. To discredit *that* would not merely disturb the order of a missionary community. It would hurt the vitals of the Christian soul, tingeing with impure elements the mountain springs of the peace of God. Fresh as he was now from combating this evil in Galatia, St. Paul would be sure to have it in his thoughts when he turned to Rome. It was only too certain that there his active adversaries would do their worst; probably they were at work already.

## Christian Conduct of Equal Importance

“Then, he had been engaged also with the problems of Christian *life* in the mission at Corinth. There the main trouble was less of creed than of conduct. In the Corinthian Epistles we find no great traces of an energetic heretical propaganda but rather a bias in the converts towards a strange license of temper and life. Perhaps this was even accentuated by a popular logical assent to the truth of justification *taken alone*, isolated from other concurrent truths, tempting the Corinthian to dream that he might ‘continue in sin that grace might abound.’ If such were his state of spiritual thought, he would encounter (by his own fault) a positive moral danger in the supernatural

‘gifts,’ which at Corinth about that time seem to have appeared with quite abnormal power. An antinonian theory in the presence of such exaltations would lead the man easily to the conception that he was too free and too rich in the supernatural order to be the servant of common duties and even of common morals. Thus the Apostle’s soul would be full of the need of expounding to its depths the vital harmony of the Lord’s work **for** the believer and the Lord’s work **in** him: the coordination of a free acceptance with both the precept and the possibility of holiness. He must show once for all how the justified are bound to be pure and humble and how they can be so, and what forms of practical dutifulness their life must take. He must make it clear forever that the Ransom which releases also purchases; that the Lord’s freeman is the Lord’s property; that the death of the Cross, reckoned as the death of the justified sinner, directly leads to his living union with the Risen One, including a union of will with will. Thus the Christian life if true to itself **must** be a life of loyalty to every obligation, every relation constituted in God’s providence among men. The Christian who is not attentive to others, even where their mere prejudices and mistakes are in question, is a Christian who is not a scrupulously loyal citizen recognizing civil order as the will of God. So is the Christian who in any respect claims to live as he pleases instead of as the bond servant of his Redeemer should live.

### **The Mystery of Jewish Unbelief**

“Another question had been pressing the Apostle’s mind for years and recently with a special weight. It was the mystery of Jewish unbelief. Who can estimate the pain and greatness of that mystery in the mind of St. Paul. His own conversion taught him patience with his old associates while it must have filled him also with some eager hopes for them. Every deep and self evidencing manifestation of God in a man’s soul suggests to him naturally the thought of the glorious things possible in the souls of others. Why should not the leading Pharisee, now converted, be the signal and the means of the conversion of the Sanhedrin and of the people? But the hard mystery of sin crossed such paths of expectation, and more and more so as the years went on. Judaism outside the church was stubborn and energetically hostile. And within the church, sad and ominous fact, it crept in

underground and sprung up in an embittered position to the central truths. What did all this mean? Where would it end? Had collective Israel sinned beyond pardon and repentance? Had God cast off his people? Did the conduct of these troublers of Galatia, these fiery rioters before the tribunal of Galileo at Corinth mean that all was over for the race of Abraham? The question was agony to Paul; he sought his Lord's answer as a thing without which he could not live. That answer was full in his soul when he meditated his letter to Rome and thought of the Judaists there, and also of the loving Jewish friends of his heart there who would read his message when it came.

### **The Apostle Was God's Pen**

“Thus we venture to describe the possible outward and inward conditions under which the Epistle to the Romans was conceived and written. Well do we recollect that our account is conjectural. But the Epistle's wonderful fullness of outline and detail gives such conjectures more than a shadow for basis. Whatever the Writer saw around him or felt within him, we do not forget that the Epistle was infinitely more than the result of Paul's mind and life; it was and is an oracle of God, a scripture, a revelation of eternal facts and principles by which to live and die. As such we approach it . . . ; not only to analyze or explain but to submit and to believe, taking it as not Pauline only but Divine. But then, it is not the less therefore Pauline. This means that both the thought and the circumstances of St. Paul are to be traced and felt in it as truly and as naturally as if we had before us the letter of an Augustine or a Luther or a Pascal. He who chose the writers of the Holy Scriptures, many men scattered over many ages, used them each in his surroundings and in his character, yet so as to harmonize them all in the Book that while many is one. He used them with the sovereign skill of Deity. And that skillful use meant that he used their whole circumstances, which he had ordered. They were in deed his amanuenses; nay, I fear not to say they were his pens. But he is such that he can manipulate as his facile implement no mere piece of mechanism, which however subtle and powerful is mechanism still and can never truly cause anything. He can take a human personality made in his own image pregnant, formative, causative in all its living thought, sensibil-

ity, and will and can throw it freely upon its task of thinking and expression. And behold! The product will be His: his matter, his thought, his exposition, his Word, 'living and abiding for ever.'

"Thus we enter in spirit the Corinthian citizen's house in . . . the early Greek spring and find our way invisible, unheard to where Tertius sits with his reed pen and strips of papyrus. Paul is prepared to give him word by word, sentence by sentence this immortal message. Perhaps the corner of the room is heaped with . . . the implements of the tentmaker. But the Apostle is now the guest of Gaius, . . . 'the host of the whole church,' so we may rather think that for the time this manual toil is intermitted. Do we seem to see the form and face of him who is about to dictate? The mist of time is in our eyes; but we may credibly report that we find a small and much emaciated frame, a face remarkable for its arched brows, wide forehead, and the expressive mobility of the lips. We trace in looks, in manner and tone of utterance, and even in unconscious attitude and action tokens of a mind rich in every faculty; a nature equally strong in energy and in sympathy, made to govern and to win, to will and to love. The man is great and wonderful; a master soul: subtle, wise, and strong. Yet he draws us with pathetic force to his heart, as one who asks and will repay affection.

"As we look on his face we think with awe and gladness that with those same thought tired eyes . . . he has literally seen only twenty years ago, so he will quietly assure us, the risen and glorified JESUS. His work during those twenty years, his innumerable sufferings, above all his spirit of perfect mental and moral sanity (yet of supernatural peace and love) all make his assurance absolutely trustworthy. He is a transfigured man since that sight of Jesus Christ who now 'dwells in his heart by faith' and uses him as the vehicle of his will and work. And now listen. The Lord is speaking through his servant. The scribe is busy with his pen as the message of Christ is uttered through the soul and from the lips of Paul."



# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 2, THE HERALD, March, 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. -- Romans 1:1*

## The Power of St. Paul's Life

EVEN if the Apostle had not been led to commence his Epistle with the words above, we should nevertheless have felt constrained to devote this "half hour" to a brief review of his life. For it will be found that the key to a proper grasp of the Epistle's teachings lies in the life experiences of its author. As Godet has well said: "St. Paul's other Epistles are fragments of his life; here we have his life itself."

It is well known that abstract truth discussed from an academic standpoint might result in very exact theology but only "truth through personality" gets very far in the remolding of lives. One whose life is not in harmony with his teachings, even though his theology might be excellent, is apt to remind us of sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. So also will another who speaking beyond his depth talks parrot fashion of things of which he little knows the meaning. But when one has had written in his own life and experience the truths the Apostle brings to our attention in this Epistle, he suggests to us the spirit and power of God. Thus it is that while truth written with merely pen and ink may mean much, truth written in the lives of men and women means much more. Once it was that God wrote his law on tables of stone; in a day not far distant, if we understand the signs of the times correctly, the writing is to be done in the hearts of the people with gloriously different results. Jesus himself not only preached important truths he personified truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

So in our Epistle. When the Apostle appeared before men he narrated the outward facts of his conversion (Acts 22:6-11; 26:12-18). He told them of the light he had seen above the brightness of the noonday sun; he mentioned the voice he had heard speaking with him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" But here, in

Romans, we find the inner life of the Apostle laid bare--lived over again for us and brought before our mind's eye in a word picture. We have here not merely instructions from the Apostle on how to live the Christ life; we have a cross section of life as he lived it, which is of still more value to us. It is of course not possible, but if we could without violating confidence "listen in" on the private prayers of one who walks close to the Lord, it would mean infinitely more to us than any discourse such an one might give us on "How to pray." But in this Epistle we may actually "listen in" to the heart struggles of the Apostle as he grapples for himself with the problems that for ages had baffled mankind. Here we see this great seeker after righteousness discovering through personal experience how God could be "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." We are given an opportunity to see how the Apostle became a "new creature" and how that "new creature" grew. Here we have his thought processes and may see not alone the happy conclusions he reached but, what is of equal importance, how he reached them. For example, when he bears witness as he does to Israel that they have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge, the mere statement of this fact might leave us measurably unmoved. However, when we realize that he is speaking of the zeal he himself used to have, we begin to understand his earnestness and his words take on a new significance. When he discusses the believer's baptism and likens it to a burial of the old life now to be reckoned dead, we find ourselves admitting that the picture is well drawn and the doctrine sound. But as the thought comes to us that the writer is one who has given proof after proof that he himself had died and that his life since then had been hidden with Christ in God; that he personally had been crucified with Christ and that what life he lived henceforth was as though Christ lived in his stead, we find ourselves occupied more with him than with his argument, masterly though it be. His words backed by his life catch fire in our hearts, causing us to long to share his rich experiences of fellowship with the Master and to determine that by God's grace we will so do, cost what it may (Col. 3:3; Gal. 2:20). Sailer has said: "O Christianity, had thy one work been to produce a St. Paul, that alone should have rendered thee dear to the coldest reason." Let us then review his life experiences. We shall find that not only was he "in the truth" but what was of far greater importance *the*

*truth was in him*, and it is this which makes the Epistle pulsate with the throb of life.

### **Saul, Afterward Called Paul**

He tells us he was born at Tarsus in Cilicia, on the confines of Syria and Asia Minor (Acts 21:39; 22:3). He was of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5). The following account of his early life and conversion is taken from Godet, to whom we feel greatly indebted: "His parents belonged to the sect of the Pharisees; compare his declaration before the assembled Sanhedrin: 'I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee' (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5). They possessed, though how it became theirs we know not, the right of Roman citizens, which tends perhaps to claim for them a somewhat higher social position than belonged to the Jews settled in Gentile countries. The influence which this sort of dignity exercised on his apostolic career can be seen clearly in various passages of Paul's ministry (comp. Acts 16:37 et seq., 22:25-29; 23:27).

"Perhaps he was destined early to the office of Rabbin. His rare faculties naturally qualified him for this function so highly honored in Israel. There is connected with the choice of this career a circumstance which was not without value in the exercise of his apostolical ministry. According to Jewish custom, the Rabbins required to be in a position to gain their livelihood by means of some manual occupation. This was looked upon as a guarantee of independence and a preservative from sin. The received maxim ran thus: 'The study of the law is good, provided it be associated with a trade. . . . Otherwise, it is useless and even hurtful.' Saul's parents chose a trade for him that was probably connected with the circumstances of the country where they dwelt, that of *tentmaker* (Acts 28:3). The term denoted the art of making a coarse cloth woven from the hair of the Cilician goats, and used in preference to every other kind in the making of tents. The term used in the Book of the Acts thus denotes the work of weaving rather than tailoring. . . .

### **Saul's Early Training**

"He went through his Rabbinical studies at the school of the prudent and moderate Gamaliel, the grandson of the famous Hillel. 'Taught,' says Paul, 'at the feet of

Gamaliel according to the perfect manner of the law of our fathers' (Acts 23:3). Gamaliel, according to the Talmud, knew Greek literature better than any other doctor of the law. His reputation for orthodoxy nevertheless remained unquestioned. Facts will prove that the young disciple did not fail to appropriate the spirit of wisdom and lofty prudence which distinguished this eminent man. At his school Saul became one of the most fervent zealots for the law of Moses. And practice with him kept pace with theory. He strove to surpass all his fellow disciples in fulfilling the traditional prescriptions. This is the testimony he gives of himself (see Gal. 1:14; Phil 3:6). The program of moral life traced by the law and elaborated by Pharisaical teaching was an ideal ever present to his mind, and on the realization of which were concentrated all the powers of his will. He resembled that young man who asked Jesus 'by the doing of what work' he could obtain eternal life. To realize the law perfectly and to merit the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven by the righteousness thus acquired was his highest aspiration. Perhaps there was added to this ambition another less pure, the ambition of being able to contemplate himself in the mirror of his conscience with unmixed satisfaction. Who knows whether he did not flatter himself that he might thus gain the admiration of his superiors and so reach the highest dignities of the Rabbinical hierarchy? If pride had not clung like a gnawing worm to the very roots of his righteousness, the fruit of the tree could not have been so bitter; and the catastrophe which overturned it would be inexplicable. Indeed, it is his own experience Paul describes when he says, in speaking of Israel: 'I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God' [that which God offers to the world in Jesus Christ] (Rom. 10:2,3).

"Saul had reached the age which qualified him for entering on public duties, at his thirtieth year. Distinguished above all his fellow disciples by his fanatical zeal for the Jewish religion in its Pharisaic form and by his hatred to the new doctrine, which seemed to him only a colossal imposture, he was charged by the authorities of his nation to prosecute the adherents of the Nazarene sect and to root it out if possible. After

having played a part in the murder of Stephen and persecuted the believers at Jerusalem, he set out for Damascus, the capital of Syria, with letters from the Sanhedrin that authorized him to fill the same office of inquisitor in the synagogues of that city. We have reached the fact of his conversion.

### **His Conversation**

“In the midst of his Pharisaical fanaticism Saul did not enjoy peace. In chapter 6 of the Epistle to the Romans he has unveiled the secret of his inner life at this period. Sincere as his efforts were to realize the ideal of righteousness traced by the law, he discovered an enemy within him which made sport of his best resolutions, namely lust. ‘I knew not sin but by the law; for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.’ And thus he made the most important discovery of his life, expressed in these words: ‘By the law is the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20). The painful feeling of his powerlessness to realize virtue was, if I may so call it, the negative preparation for the crisis which transformed his life. His soul, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, found the attempt vain to nourish itself with its own works; it did not succeed in satisfying itself.

“Another circumstance, fitted to prepare for the change in a more positive way, occurred at this period. An inactive witness of Stephen’s martyrdom, Saul could calmly contemplate the bloody scene--see the brow of the martyr irradiated with heavenly brightness and hear his invocation addressed to the glorified Son of Man, in which was revealed the secret of his love and triumphant hope. His soul was no doubt deeply pierced in that hour; and it was with the view of cicatrizing this wound that he set himself with redoubled violence to the work of destruction he had undertaken. ‘The hour shall come,’ Jesus had said to his Apostles, ‘in which whosoever shall kill you will think that he renders God worship.’ It was really with this thought that the young persecutor raged against the Christians. Nothing but an immediate interposition on the part of him whom he was thus persecuting could arrest this charger in his full career, whom the sharp prickings by which he felt himself inwardly urged only served to irritate the more.

## His Damascus Experience -- Death and Resurrection

“With Saul’s conversion a supreme hour struck in the history of humanity. If, as Renan justly says, there came with the birth of Jesus the moment when ‘the capital event in the history of the world was about to be accomplished, the revolution whereby the noblest portions of humanity were to pass from paganism to a religion founded on the Divine unity,’ the conversion of Paul was the means whereby God took possession of the man who was to be his instrument in bringing about this unparalleled revolution.

“The moment had come when the Divine covenant, established in Abraham with a single family, was to extend to the whole world and embrace as God had promised to the Patriarch *all the families of the earth*. . . . But there was needed an exceptional agent for this extraordinary work. The appearing of Jesus had paved the way for it but had not yet been able to accomplish it. The twelve Palestinian Apostles were not fitted for such a task. We have found in studying Paul’s origin and character that he was the man specially designed and prepared beforehand. And unless we are to regard the work he accomplished, which Renan calls the ‘capital event in the history of the world’ as accidental, we must consider the act whereby he was enrolled in the service of Christ and called to this work as one directly willed of God and worthy of being effected by his immediate interposition. Christ himself, with a strong hand and an arm outstretched when the hour struck, laid hold of the instrument which the Father had chosen for him. These thoughts in their entirety form precisely the contents of the preamble to the Epistle we propose to study (Rom. 1:1-5).

“What passed in the soul of Saul during the three days which followed this violent disturbance he tells us himself in the beginning of Romans 6. This passage in which we hear the immediate echo of the Damascus experience answers our question in two words: a **death** and a **resurrection**. The death was that of the self idolatrous Saul: death to his own righteousness or, what comes to the same thing, to the law. Whether had he been led by his impetuous zeal for the fulfilling of the law? To make war on God and to persecute the Messiah and his true people! Some hidden vice must certainly cleave to a self

righteousness cultivated so carefully and which led him to a result so monstrous. That vice he now discerned clearly. In wishing to establish his own righteousness, it was not God, it was himself whom he had sought to glorify. The object of his adoration was his **ego**, which by his struggles and victories he hoped to raise to moral perfection with the view of being able to say in the end: Behold this great Babylon which I have built! The disquietude that had followed him on this path and driven him to a blind and bloody fanaticism was no longer a mystery to him. The truth of that declaration of scripture, which he had till now only applied to the Gentiles, was palpable in his own case. 'There is not a just man, no, not one' (Rom. 3:10). The great fact of the corruption and condemnation of the race, even in the best of its representatives, had acquired for him the evidence of a personal experience. This was to him that death which he afterwards described in the terms: 'I through the law am dead to the law' (Gal. 2:19).

"But, simultaneously with this death, there was wrought in him a resurrection. A justified Saul appeared in the sphere of his consciousness in place of the condemned Saul and, by the working of the spirit, this Saul became a *new creature* in Christ. Such is the forcible expression used by Paul himself to designate the radical change that passed within him (2 Cor. 5:17).

### How He Regarded His Baptism

"Accustomed as he was to the Levitical sacrifices demanded by the law for every violation of legal ordinances, Saul had no sooner experienced sin within him in all its gravity, and with all its consequences of condemnation and death, than he must also have felt the need of a more efficacious expiation than that which the blood of animal victims can procure. The bloody death of Jesus, who in his glory as the Christ had just manifested himself to him, then presented it self to his view in its true light. Instead of seeing in it as the justly deserved punishment of a false Christ, as hitherto, he recognized in it the great expiatory sacrifice offered by God himself to wash away the sin of the world and his own. The portrait of the Servant of Jehovah drawn by Isaiah of that unique person on whom God lays the iniquity of all . . . he now understood to whom he must apply it. Already the

interpretations in the vulgar tongue which accompanied the reading of the Old Testament in the synagogues, and which were afterwards preserved in our *Targums*, referred such passages to the Messiah. In Saul's case the veil fell; the cross was transfigured before him into the instrument of the world's salvation. The resurrection of Jesus, which had become a palpable fact since the Lord had appeared to him bodily, was henceforth the proclamation made by God himself of the justification of humanity, the monument of the complete amnesty offered to our sinful world. 'My *righteous* Servant *shall justify* many,' were the words of Isaiah after having described the resurrection of the Servant of Jehovah as the sequel of his voluntary immolation. Saul now contemplated with wonder and adoration the fulfillment of this promise, the accomplishment of this work. The new righteousness was before him as a free gift of God in Jesus Christ. There was nothing to be added to it. It was enough to accept and rest on it in order to possess the blessing he had pursued through so many labors and sacrifices: peace with God.

"He entered joyfully into the simple part of one accepting, believing. Dead and condemned in the death of the Messiah, he lived again justified in his risen person. It was on this revelation, received during the three days at Damascus, that Saul lived till his last breath.

"One can understand how, in this state of soul and as the result of this inward illumination, he regarded the baptism in the name of Jesus which Ananias administered to him. If he has presented in Romans 6 this ceremony under the image of death, burial, and resurrection through the participation of faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, he has in so expressing himself only applied to all Christians his own experience in his baptism at Damascus.

### **Reached the End of Mosaic Discipline**

"To the grace of justification, of which this ceremony was to him the assured seal, there was added that of regeneration by the creative operation of the Spirit, who transformed his reconciled heart and produced a new life within it. All the energy of his love turned to that Christ who had become his substitute, guilty in order to become the author of his righteousness, and to the God who had bestowed on him this unspeakable



gift. Thus there was laid within him the principle of true holiness. What had been impossible for him till then, self-mptying and life for God, was at length wrought in his at once humble and joyful heart. Jesus, who had been his substitute on the cross in order to become his righteousness, was easily substituted for himself in his heart in order to become the object of his life. The free obedience he had vainly sought to accomplish under the yoke of the law became in his grateful heart, through the Spirit of Christ, a holy reality. And he could henceforth measure the full distance between the state of a slave and that of a child of God.

“From this experience there could not but spring up a new light on the true character of the institutions of the law. He had been accustomed to regard the law of Moses as the indispensable agent of the world’s salvation; it seemed to him destined to become the standard of life for the whole race, as it had been for the life of Israel. But now, after the experience that he had just made of the powerlessness of this system to justify and sanctify man, the work of Moses appeared in all its insufficiency. He still saw in it a pedagogical institution, but one merely temporary. With the Messiah, who realized all that he had expected from the law, the end of the Mosaic discipline was reached. ‘Ye are complete in Christ’ (Col. 2:10). What avails henceforth that which was only the *shadow* of the dispensation of Christ? For him it could no longer avail anything (Col. 2:16, 17).

“And who, then, was He in whose person and work there was thus given to Him the fullness of God’s gifts without the help of the law? A mere man? Saul remembers that the Jesus who was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin was so condemned as a blasphemer for having declared himself the Son of God. This affirmation had hitherto seemed to him the height of impiety and imposture. Now the same affirmation, taken with the view of the sovereign majesty of him whom he beheld on the way to Damascus, stamps this being with a Divine seal and makes him bend the knee before his sacred person. He no longer sees in the Messiah merely a son of David but the Son of God.

## The Light of Pentecost Also Upon Him

“With this change in his conception of the Christ there is connected another not less decisive change in his conception of the Messiah’s work. So long as Paul had seen nothing more in the Messiah than the son of David, he had understood his work as the glorification of Israel only and the extension of the discipline of the law to the whole world. But from the time that God had revealed to him in the person of this son of David according to the flesh the appearing of a Divine being, his own son, his view of the Messiah’s work brew with that of his person (Rom. 1:2,3). The son of David might belong to Israel only, but the Son of God could not have come here below save to be the Savior and Lord of all that is called man. Were not all human distinctions effaced before such a messenger? Paul himself has indicated this result in those striking words of the Epistle to the Galatians: ‘When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, to *reveal his Son* in me, *that I might preach him among the heathen*. . . .’(1:16). His Son. The heathen. These two notions were necessarily correlative! The revelation of the one must accompany that of the other. This relation between the divinity of Christ and the universality of his kingdom is the key to the preamble of the Epistle to the Romans.

“The powerlessness of the discipline of the law to save man, the freeness of salvation, the end of the Mosaic economy through the advent of the Messianic salvation, the divinity of the Messiah, the universal destination of his work--all these elements of Paul’s new religious conception of *his gospel*, to quote the words twice used in our Epistle (2:16; 16:25), were thus involved in the very fact of his conversion. They became more or less directly disentangled as objects of consciousness in that internal evolution that took place under the light of the Spirit during the three days following the decisive event. What the light of Pentecost had been to the Twelve as the sequel of the contemplation of Jesus on the earth, which they had enjoyed for three years, the illumination of those three days following the sudden contemplation of the glorified Lord was to St. Paul.”

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 3, THE HERALD, April, 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to an Apostle.*

--Romans 1:1

IN THE last Meditations we began a review of the life experiences of St. Paul. At that time we considered to some extent his early life and conversion and noted the providential circumstances that led him to become "a servant of Jesus Christ."

In the words of another ". . . he is indeed '*Jesus Christ's bondservant*'; not his ally merely or his subject or his friend. Recently, writing to the Galatian converts, he has been vindicating the glorious liberty of the Christian, set free at once from 'the curse of the law' and from the mastery of self. [Those formerly under the Law Covenant from its "curse" and all from the mastery of self.] But there too, at the close (6:17), he has dwelt on his own sacred bondage; 'the brand of his Master, Jesus.' The liberty of the Gospel is the silver side of the same shield whose side of gold is an unconditional vassalage to the liberating Lord. Our freedom is 'in the Lord' alone; and to be 'in the Lord' is to belong to him, as wholly as a healthy hand belongs, in its freedom, to the physical centre of life and will. To be a bondservant is terrible in the abstract. To be 'Jesus Christ's bond servant' is Paradise in the concrete. Self surrender taken alone is a plunge into a cold void. When it is surrender to 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20), it is the bright homecoming of the soul to the seat and sphere of life and power" (Moule).

## **A Witness of Christ's Resurrection**

The particular form of service to which he has been called, he tells us, is that of an apostle. It is a rare commission, and we could well pause to give it a larger place in our meditations here. However, we must content ourselves at this time with noting that the Eleven and Paul were our Lord's chosen witnesses of his resurrection (John 15:17; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8, 22). Their general commission did not greatly dif

fer from that of the other disciples nor from our own, which we understand is to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the meek (Isa. 61:1,2; Matt. 10:5-7; Luke 4:17-21; 10:1-17). But their special mission was not of *witnessing*. Among the many things concerning Jesus to which they were to bear faithful testimony, the most important of all was the fact of his resurrection. A very little reflection is sufficient to enable us to grasp the significance of this.

Let us suppose for a moment that the Gospel message had come to us complete in every detail except in this one particular, namely that no mention was made of our Lord's resurrection or the testimony concerning it was wavering and unreliable. In that case where would our hopes be today? What would be our hope of life beyond the grave? Our hope would be the same as that of those two disciples on the way to Emmaus before they knew that Jesus had been raised from the dead (Luke 24:13-35). Their hopes were buried in his grave. They *had* trusted in Jesus and had entertained high hopes but now, since Jesus had died, they were sad, their hopes having withered (v. 17). How different with them when the fact of his resurrection was made known. What joy displaced their dejection! It became true of them then as it has for us who have believed since. They and we have been begotten again unto a hope of life by his resurrection (1 Peter 1:3). Because he lives we have grounds for hoping that we shall live also (John 14:19). In his resurrection lies our assurance (Acts 17:31).

But while it is our privilege today to let Jesus Christ have full sway in our lives, to let him be indeed our Lord, while it is our joy to make humble and glad confession of this fact, and while in our hearts we may believe the testimony of the Apostles that he was raised from the dead and in this lies our salvation (Rom. 10:9, 10), this does not constitute us witnesses of but merely believers in his resurrection. Blessed indeed are we who not having seen, have yet believed (John 20:29). It remains true that the testimony of these Twelve Foundations is that on which we with the rest of the church depend (Rev. 24:14; Eph. 2:20-22).

It is an interesting study and by no means unrelated to our subject to trace in the Acts of the Apostles how they proceeded to carry out their commission. Our Lord had said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in

Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). But first they were to receive “power.” “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem,” was his word, “until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Accordingly we find them waiting at Jerusalem in prayer and supplication until they had received the promise of the Father (Acts 1:14). Then commenced the work of witnessing, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). One cannot but be impressed with the prominence given to the *resurrection of Jesus* in this their first witness, given under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit:

*Men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth . . . ye by wicked hands have crucified and slain: **whom God raised up**, having loosed the pains [grip, Fenton] of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).*

***This Jesus hath God raised up**, whereof we all are witnesses (Acts 2:32).*

*Ye . . . killed the Prince of life, **whom God hath raised from the dead**; whereof we are witnesses (Acts 3:15).*

*They taught the people, and **preached through Jesus the resurrection** from the dead (Acts 4:2).*

*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, **whom God raised from the dead**, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole (Acts 4:10).*

***The God of our fathers raised up Jesus**, whom ye slew (Acts 4:33).*

But soon a crisis came, and with the martyrdom of Stephen commenced “a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). This had the effect of extending the **witness** throughout those regions (see Acts 8:14, 25).

## **The Apostle to the Gentiles**

So far the sacred historian has recorded the witness of the Apostles given “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria,” but what of the third and by far the greatest part of their commission: carrying their witness to “the uttermost part of the earth”? Would not this involve witnessing to the despised Gentiles? Up to this time, even by those “which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen,” the word had been preached “to none but unto Jews only”

(Acts 11:19). That the “unsearchable riches of Christ” should be preached to the Gentiles, that the latter were to share equally with the Jews in the blessings of the Gospel was wholly foreign to the Apostles’ conception. A tremendous revolution of thought would be necessary ere they could proceed with their witness. This was brought about by means of a vision granted to the Apostle Peter. Therein he learned “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). His subsequent experience with Cornelius convinced him “that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him (Acts. 10:34,35). It is not without deep interest that in this extension of the witness to the Gentiles we note the same prominence given to the *resurrection of Jesus*.

*We are witnesses of all things which he [Jesus] did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom they slew and hanged on a tree: **him God raised up** the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after **he rose from the dead** (Acts 10:39-41).*

But while to the Apostle Peter was thus granted the privilege of extending the Gospel invitation to the Gentiles, as he had previously on the day of Pentecost, God had in preparation to the Jews a special agent whom he was about to call to this glorious, though difficult, ministry--one who “by the grace of God” was to “labor more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor. 15:10).

### **Have I Not Seen Jesus Christ Our Lord?**

In our previous Meditation we considered the inner experiences of this Apostle as the power of the *risen* Lord was exercised in his heart. It is, however, of the very highest importance that we distinguish the Damascus experience from all the visions with which he was afterwards honored, and which are recorded in the Acts and in the Epistles. We have already noticed that the Apostles were our Lord’s chosen witnesses of his *resurrection* and unless St. Paul had seen the *risen* Christ he could not qualify as a *witness*. “The attempt has been made in modern times to explain in a purely natural way the sudden revolution that passed over the feelings, convictions, and life of Saul,” but as Godet has pointed out, this “transforms the narratives in the Acts into fictitious representations, since, according to this explanation, Saul’s fellow travelers could have

been nothing at all.” “They did not discern the Person who spoke to him, so it is said (Acts 9:7), but they were struck with a brightness surpassing that of ordinary sunlight (22:9; 26:13); they did not hear distinctly the words addressed to him (Acts 22:9), but they heard the sound of a voice (Acts 9:7). . . . It must therefore be admitted that while Saul alone *saw* the Lord and *understood* his words, his fellow travelers observed and heard something extraordinary; and this last particular suffices to prove the objectivity of the appearance.”

Conybeare and Howson have written on this subject very interestingly and instructively as follows: “No journey was ever taken on which so much interest is concentrated as this of St. Paul from Jerusalem to Damascus. It is so critical a passage in history of God’s dealings with man, and we feel it to be so closely bound up with all our best knowledge and best happiness in this life, and with all our hopes for the world to come, that the mind is delighted to dwell upon it, and we are eager to learn all its details.

“If the importance we are intended to attach to particular events in early Christianity is to be measured by the prominence assigned to them in the Sacred Records, we must confess that next after the Passion of our blessed Lord the event to which our serious attention is especially called is the conversion of St. Paul. Besides various allusions to it in his own Epistles, three detailed narratives of the occurrence are found in the Acts. Once it is related by St. Luke (9), twice by the Apostle himself--in his address to his countrymen at Jerusalem (22), in his defense before Agrippa at Caesarea (26).

“In . . . the Acts we are told that it was ‘about noon,’ ‘at mid day’ when the ‘great light’ shone ‘suddenly’ from heaven (22:6, 26:13). And those who have had experience of the glare of a mid day sun in the East will best understand the description of that light, which is said to have been ‘a light above the brightness of the sun shining round about Paul and them that journeyed with him.’ All fell to the ground in terror (26:14) or stood dumb with amazement (9:7). Suddenly surrounded by a light so terrible and incomprehensible, ‘they were afraid.’ ‘They heard not the voice of him that spake to Paul’ (22:9), or if they heard a voice, ‘they saw no man’ (9:7). The whole scene was evidently one of the utmost confusion: and

the accounts are such as to express, in the most striking manner, the bewilderment and alarm of the travelers.

“But while the others were stunned, stupefied and confused, a clear light broke in terribly on the soul of one of those who were prostrated on the ground. A voice spoke articulately to him, which to the rest was a sound mysterious and indistinct. He heard what they did not hear. He saw what they did not see. To them the awful sound was without a meaning: he heard the voice of the Son of God. To them it was a bright light which suddenly surrounded them: he saw JESUS, whom he was persecuting. The awful dialogue can be given only in the language of scripture. Yet we may reverentially observe that the words Jesus spoke were ‘in the Hebrew tongue.’ The same language in which during his earthly life he spoke to Peter and to John, to the blind man by the walls of Jericho, to the woman who washed his feet with her tears. The same sacred language was used when he spoke from heaven to his persecutor on earth. And as on earth he had always spoken in parables, so it was now. That voice which had drawn lessons from the lillies that grew in Galilee, and from the birds that flew over the mountain slopes near the Sea of Tiberias was now pleased to call his last Apostle with a figure of the like significance: ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.’ As the ox rebels in vain against the goad of its master and as all its struggles do nought but increase its distress, so is thy rebellion vain against the power of my grace. I have admonished thee by the word of my truth, by the death of my saints, by the voice of thy conscience. Struggle no more against conviction, ‘lest a worse thing come unto thee.’

### **An Apostle by the Will of God**

“It is evident that this revelation was not merely an inward impression made on the mind of Saul during a trance or ecstasy. It was the direct perception of the visible presence of Jesus Christ. This is asserted in various passages, both positively and incidentally. In his first letter to the Corinthians, when he contends for the validity of his own apostleship, his argument is, ‘Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord?’ (1 Cor. 9:1). And when he adduces the evidence for the truth of the resurrection, his argument



is again, 'He was seen . . . by Cephas . . . by James . . . by all the Apostles . . . last of all by me . . . as one born out of due time' (15:8). By Cephas and by James at Jerusalem the reality of Saul's conversion was doubted (Acts 9:26, 27). 'Barnabas brought him to the Apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and had spoken with Him.' And similarly Ananias had said to him at their first meeting in Damascus, 'The Lord hath sent me, even Jesus who appeared to thee in the way as thou comest' (9:17). 'The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldest see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth' (22:14). The very words spoken by the Savior imply the same important truth. He does not say, 'I am the God--the Eternal Word--the Lord of men and angels,' but he says 'I am Jesus' (9:5; 26:15); 'Jesus of Nazareth' (22:8).

"The direct and immediate character of this call, without the intervention of any human agency, is an other point on which St. Paul himself, in the course of his apostolic life, laid the utmost stress; and one it is incumbent on us to notice here. 'A called Apostle, an Apostle by the will of God, an Apostle sent not from men nor by man but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.' These are the phrases under which he described himself in the cases where his authority was in danger of being questioned. No human instrumentality intervened to throw the slightest doubt upon the reality of the communication between Christ himself and the Apostle of the heathen. As he was directly and miraculously called, so was the work to which he was set apart immediately indicated, in which in after years he always gloried: the work of 'preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Unless indeed we are to consider the words he used before Agrippa as a condensed statement of all that was revealed to him, both in his vision on the way and afterwards by Ananias in the city: '. . . He said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: but rise, and stand upon thy feet; for to this end I have appeared unto thee, to ordain thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things wherein I will appear unto thee. And thee have I chosen from the House of Israel, and from among the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may

receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among the sanctified, by faith in me.’

“But the tull intimation of all the labors and sufferings that were before him was still reserved. He was told to arise and go into the city, and there is should be told him what it had been ordained that he should do. He arose humbled and subdued and ready to obey whatever might be the will of him who had spoken to him from heaven. When he opened his eyes all was dark around him. The brilliancy of the vision had made him blind. Those who were with him saw, as before, the trees and the sky and the road leading to Damascus. He was in darkness, and they led him by the hand into the city. Saul came into Damascus not as he had expected--to triumph in an enterprise on which his soul was set, to brave all difficulties and dangers, to enter into houses and carry off prisoners to Jerusalem--but he himself passed like a prisoner beneath the gateway and through the colonnades of the street called ‘Straight.’ He saw not the crowd of those who gazed on him; he was led by the hands of others, trembling and helpless to the house of Judas, his dark and solitary lodging.

“Three days the blindness continued. In the history of the world, only one other space of three days’ duration of equal importance can be mentioned. The conflict of Saul’s feelings was so great and his remorse so piercing and deep that during this time he neither ate nor drank. He could have no communion with the Christians, for they had been terrified by the news of his approach. And the unconverted Jews could have no sympathy with his present state of mind. He fasted and prayed in silence. The recollections of his early years, the passages of the ancient scriptures he had never understood, the thoughts of his own cruelty and violence, the memory of the last looks of Stephen all crowded into his mind and made the three days equal to long years of repentance. If we may imagine one feeling above all others to have kept possession of his heart, it would be the feeling suggested by the expostulation of Christ: ‘Why persecutest thou ME?’ This feeling would be attended with thoughts of peace, with hope, and with faith. He waited on God, and in his blindness a vision was granted to him. He seemed to behold one who came in to him, and he knew by revelation that his name was Ananias. It appeared to him that the stranger laid his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

“Ananias came into the house where Saul, faint and exhausted with three days’ abstinence, still remained in darkness. When he laid his hands on Saul’s head, as the vision had foretold, immediately he would be recognized as the messenger of God, even before he spoke: ‘Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit].’ These words were followed, as were the words of Jesus himself when he spoke to the blind, with an instantaneous dissipation of darkness: ‘There fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith’ (9:18). Or, in his own more vivid express: ‘the same hour he looked up on the face of Ananias’ (22:13). It was a face he had never seen before. But the expression of Christian love assured him of reconciliation with God. He learned that ‘the God of his fathers’ had chosen him ‘to know his will, to see that Just One, to hear the voice of his mouth, to be his witness unto all men.’ He was baptized, his body was strengthened with food, and his soul was made strong to ‘suffer great things’ for the name of Jesus and to bear that Name ‘before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.’”

### Extending the Witness

But while those unacquainted with the scriptures might, if they chose, not find ample proof of his apostleship along the lines above indicated, we who have rejoiced in “his” Gospel find the seal of his apostleship in our hearts and lives. Surely, if any amongst *us* should be found calling into question his apostleship (*whoso readeth, let him understand*), his reply to the Corinthians of his time would come with equal force to such: “If to others I am not an apostle, yet certainly I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Cor. 9:2, *Diaglott*). As the light has shined into our hearts from his inspired writings, we have with James and Cephas and John perceived that Paul was entrusted with the glad tidings for the uncircumcision, even as Peter was for the circumcision; “. . . He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me [Paul] toward the Gentiles. . .” (Gal. 2:8).

With the raising up of this special servant, this Apostle by way of call, the work of witnessing takes

on larger dimensions. Missionary journeys are undertaken, and it is seen that by means of missions the “uttermost part of the earth” must receive its witness of Jesus. Soon the inevitable conflict arises between the fast growing Gentile Christianity and those followers of the Lord formerly under the old Law Covenant. The first council of the Christian church harmonizes this conflict. In the chapters of the Book of the Acts which follow, the religion of Jesus is seen to be unlimited by Mosaic Law. Next, “We are told of perplexing hindrances to the movements of St. Paul and his colleagues, until a supernatural vision solves the problem. St. Paul sees a man of Macedonia who cries, ‘Come over and help us.’ The opening of the Gospel to Europe is the new departure. As the Apostles cross over to Macedonia, the country of the future, the region of infinite progress receives the new religion from the more stationary orient in which it had had its birth. A new stage has been accomplished towards the Christianization of the whole world.

“With this enlargement in the sphere of action is united again an enlargement in the methods of the sacred task. To the missionary journey is now added the missionary epistle and four Pauline epistles find their place in this section of New Testament history. The significance of this stage is immense. It is not merely that the ministry of the written word is added to the ministry of the spoken word; there is enlargement in the conception of Christianity itself. Hitherto evangelization has limited itself to the etymological significance of the word: there has been simply a proclamation of the good tidings of Christ. But the work for which the epistle is to be an instrument is the growing doctrine of Christianity and the realization of that doctrine in church government as well as in Christian life. The church of Thessalonica, looking (like the other churches) for the immediate coming of the Master has been perplexed by the death of some of its members. The *Epistles to the Thessalonians* solve their perplexities with the largeness of the Christian hope. Another church has been entangled in disputes with upholders of the Mosaic Law. The *Epistle to the Galatians* insists on Christian freedom. The succession of missionary epistles embody the gradually developing theology in a series of solutions to the multiplying difficulties of the churches.

“So wide now has become the enlargement in the Apostles’ conception of their work and their methods

that the question at this point is where this embryonic history of world evangelization is to stop. The answer to this question from the standpoint of that age was summed up in one word: Rome. Rome was the center of civilization, the symbol of world unity. Hence in the final section of the Book of Acts a series of strange providences is found to bring the Apostle of the Gentiles to Rome. And before he journeys thither he sends forward his *Epistle to the Romans*. In this is expounded to the metropolis of universal civilization the harmonization of Jewish and Gentile Christianity . . .” (Moulton).

--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 4, THE HERALD, May 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle.--*  
Romans 1:1

THE MORE one ponders the life of the Apostle Paul the more evident it appears that he was indeed a “vessel” chosen by the Lord and that his apostolic career was followed under the guidance of the holy spirit. It is true that he lacked the rich memories of the Eleven, as the holy spirit brought back to their minds those things Jesus had said to them (John 14:26). “He did not, however, set out empty. He possessed the living and glorified Christ, who had just revealed himself in him. He possessed in himself and knew by experience the gratuitous and universal (world wide) salvation, without legal condition, without respect of person, the work of the death of Christ and of his spirit of life. This gospel that he had to preach he had neither received of man nor learned by the teaching of any man; he possessed it ‘by the revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 1:12). That was *his part*, his own lot in the great partition of grace made among the first agents of the preaching of salvation (Eph. 3:2,7), what he called ‘*his gospel*’ . . . in distinction from evangelical preaching in general, which was common to him with other apostles. . . . (Rom. 16:25). Doubtless the illumination by which he was put in posses

sion of that fund on which as an apostle he drew was only gradually produced during those [three] days passed at the Lord's feet. But when he stood up to act, he had sight--physically and spiritually. Like the man born blind he could say: 'I was blind, but now I see.' He was prepared to begin the work for which he had been set apart and to which he was going to devote himself with all the resources 'of Semitic fervor, of Greek agility, and of Roman energy.'

"The seven years (from 37 to 44) that followed his conversion were for St. Paul a time of and trial. Not only did he need them for his confirmation; the church herself at that time was not yet ready to put her hand to the great work of the conversion of the Gentile world. But it was from her the signal had to come. Here there was something else than an individual task.

"This period embraces first three years of preaching by Paul in Damascus and Arabia, second his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion and a somewhat long sojourn at Tarsus, and third the three year's ministry exercised by him in the recently founded Church of Antioch" (Godet).

[NOTE: This writer recognized with other scholars the truth of Lightfoot's statement: "As regards the exact dates in St. Paul's life absolute certainty is unattainable." The dates and periods given, therefore, are to be understood as approximate only.]

## Earliest Preaching

From the moment of his conversion and call to the apostleship there was a readiness in his heart to render glad and immediate obedience to his newly found Lord (Acts 26:19; Gal. 1:16). Consequently he did not seek to mark out a path for himself but sought the leadings of the Lord. He had not far to go to begin to preach Christ. In his unconverted state he had planned to defend the Jews of Damascus against what he **had** though was the God dishonoring teaching of Jesus. Commencing his apostolic labors with these very same Jews, he now pleads with them the cause of the Christ he has learned to love. "Thence he soon extended his labors to the surrounding regions of Arabia. He consecrated three whole years to those remote lands (see Gal. 1:17, 18). The Acts sum up this period in the vague phrase 'many days' (9:23). For the Apostle it doubtless formed a time of mental concentration and personal communion with the Lord, which may be compared with the years which the Apostles passed with their Master during his earthly ministry. But we

are far from seeing in this sojourn a time of external inactivity. The relation between Paul's words (Gal. 1:16) and the following verses does not permit us to doubt that Paul also consecrated these years to preaching. The whole first chapter of the Galatians rests on the idea that Paul did not wait to begin preaching the Gospel until he had conferred on the subject with the Apostles at Jerusalem and received their instructions. On the contrary, he had already entered on his missionary career when for the first time he met with Peter" (Godet).

Returning again from Arabia to Damascus (Gal. 1:17), he by his bold preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27) confounded the Jews in Damasuc, proving that this JESUS is the Christ (Acts 9:22). Thereby he incurred their enmity, and he began to learn something of "how great things he must suffer" for the name of Christ (Acts 9:16). Only by the overruling of the Lord's providence was is life saved. Years afterwards in writing to the church at Corinth he tells them of this, one of the earliest of his "light" (?) afflictions. A whole garrison of soldiers kept the city, purposing to apprehend him (2 Cor. 11:32, 33; 4:17). Luke records that the Jews watched the gates of the city day and night to kill him, but with the cooperation of some faithful disciples, he was taken by night and let down by the wall in a basket and thus made his escape (Acts 9:24, 25).

### **To Jerusalem to See Peter**

"Preserved from destruction at Damascus, he turned his steps toward Jerusalem. His motive for the journey, as he tells us in Galatians, was a desire to become acquainted with Peter. Not that he was ignorant of the Gospel. He expressly tells us that he neither needed nor received any instruction in Christianity from those who were 'Apostles before him.' But he must have heard much from the Christians at Damascus of the Galilean fisherman. Can we wonder that he should desire to see the brother with whom now he was consciously united in the bonds of a common apostleship . . . and who had on earth long been the constant companion of his Lord.

"How changed was everything since he had last traveled this road between Damascus and Jerusalem. If he looked back when the day broke upon that city from which he had escaped under the shelter of night,

as his eye ranged over the fresh gardens and the wide desert, how the remembrance of that first terrible vision would call forth a deep thanksgiving to him who had called him to be a 'partaker of his sufferings.' And what feelings must have attended his approach to Jerusalem. 'He was returning to it from a spiritual captivity (as Ezra had from bodily captivity) and to his renewed mind all things appeared new. What an emotion smote his heart at the first distant view of the temple, that house of sacrifice, that edifice of prophecy. Its sacrifices had been realized, the Lamb of God had been offered; its prophecies had been fulfilled, the Lord had come unto it. [Its **greatest** sacrifice had been realized, the Lamb of God had been offered: its prophecies had been **in part** fulfilled, the Lord had come unto it.] As he approached the gates, he might have trodden the very spot where he had so exultingly assisted in the death of Stephen. He entered them perfectly content, were it God's will, to be dragged out through them to the same fate. He would feel a peculiar tie of brotherhood to that martyr, for he could not be now ignorant that the same Jesus who in such glory had called him had but a little while before appeared in the same glory to assure the expiring Stephen. The ecstatic look and words of the dying saint now came fresh upon his memory with their real meaning. When he entered the city, what deep thoughts were suggested by the haunts of his youth and by the sight of the spots where he had so eagerly sought that knowledge which he had now so eagerly abandoned. What an intolerable burden he had cast off.'

### **"What Things Were Loss to Me"**

"Yet not without grief and awe could he look upon that city of his forefathers over which, he now knew, the judgment of God was impending. And not without sad emotions could one of so tender a nature think of the alienation of those who had once been his warmest associates. The grief of Gamaliel, the indignation of the Pharisees, the fury of the Hellenistic

synagogues, all this he knew was before him. The sanguine hopes, however, springing from his own honest convictions and his fervent zeal to communicate the truth to others predominated his mind. He thought that they would believe as he had believed. He argued thus with himself: they well knew that he



had ‘imprisoned and beaten in every synagogue them that believed in Jesus Christ’; and also that ‘when the blood of His martyr Stephen was shed, he was standing by consenting unto his death and kept the raiment of them that slew him.’ But when they saw the change that had been produced in him and heard the miraculous history he could tell them, they would not refuse to ‘receive his testimony’ [this was the argument used in the trance in the temple (Acts 22:17-21)].

“Thus with fervent zeal and sanguine expectations, ‘he attempted to join himself to the disciples’ of Christ. But, as the Jews hated him, so the Christians suspected him . . . they could not believe he was really a disciple. And then it was that Barnabas, already known to us as a generous contributor of his wealth to the poor (Acts 4:36, 37), came forward again as the ‘Son of Consolation--took him by the hand’ and brought him to the Apostles. . . . When Barnabas related how the Lord Jesus Christ had personally appeared to Saul, had even spoken to him, and how he had boldly maintained the Christian cause in the synagogues of Damascus, then the Apostles laid aside their hesitation. . . . And he was with them, ‘coming in and going out,’ more than forgiven for Christ’s sake, welcomed and beloved as a friend and a brother.

### **Warned of Imminent Danger**

“This first meeting of the fisherman of Bethsaida and the tentmaker of Tarsus the chosen companion of Jesus on earth and the chosen Pharisee who saw Jesus in the heavens; the Apostle of the circumcision and the Apostle of the Gentiles--is passed over in scripture in a few words. The Divine record does not

linger in dramatic description on these passages that a mere human writing would labor to embellish. What took place in the intercourse of these two saints--what was said of Jesus of Nazareth who suffered, died, and was buried; of Jesus, the glorified Lord who had risen and ascended and become ‘head over all things to the church’; what was felt of Christian love and devotion; what was learned under the spirit’s teaching of Christian truth--has not been revealed and cannot be known. The intercourse was full of present comfort and full of great consequences.

“But it did not last long. Fifteen days passed away and the Apostles were compelled to part. The same zeal that had caused his voice to be heard in the Hellenistic synagogues in the persecution against Stephen now led Paul in the same synagogues to declare fearlessly his adherence to Stephen’s cause. The same fury that had caused the murder of Stephen now brought the murderer of Stephen to the verge of assassination. Once more, as at Damascus, the Jews made a conspiracy to put Paul to death; and once more he was rescued by the anxiety of the brethren.

“Reluctantly, and not without a direct intimation from on high, he retired from the work of preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem. As he was praying one day in the temple, it came to pass that he fell into a trance and in his ecstasy he saw Jesus, who spoke to him and said: ‘Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.’ He hesitated to obey the command . . . . But the command was more peremptory than before: ‘Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.’ The scene of his apostolic victories was not to be in Jerusalem. For the third time it was declared to him that the field of his labors was among the Gentiles. This secret revelation to his soul conspired with the outward difficulties of his situation. The care of God gave the highest sanction to the anxiety of the brethren. And he suffered himself to be withdrawn from the Holy City” (Conybeare and Howson).

### **Paul at Tarsus**

The brethren brought him down to Caesarea and sent him forth to Tarsus, his native city; there in the midst of his family, while awaiting new directions from the Lord, he preached the Word in the regions of nearby Syria and Cilicia (Acts 9:30; Gal. 1:21). We may be sure that here in the home of his childhood, exiled from the earthly Jerusalem, he was “diligently occupied in building up the walls of the ‘Jerusalem which is above.’” It is probable too that during this time he had the revelation of unutterable things to which he makes reference in 2 Corinthians 12:1.

“Now at least, if not before, we may be sure that he would come into active intercourse with the heathen philosophers of the place. A few years before in his last residence at Tarsus he was a Jew, not only a Jew but a Pharisee; and he looked on the Gentiles around

him as outcasts from the favor of God. Now he was a Christian, not only a Christian but conscious of his mission as the Apostle of the Gentiles. Therefore he would surely meet the philosophers and prepare to argue with them on their own ground, as afterwards in the 'market' at Athens with 'the Epicurians and the Stoics.' . . . 'How far Paul's arguments had any success in this quarter we cannot even guess; . . . At least he was preparing for the future. In the synagogue we cannot believe that he was silent or unsuccessful. In his own family, we may well imagine that some of those Christian 'kinsmen' whose names are handed down to us--possibly his sister, the playmate of his childhood; his sister's son, who afterwards saved his life--were at this time by his exertions gathered into the fold of Christ" (Rom. 16:17, 11, 21; Acts 23:16 [Conybeare and Howson] ).

### **Antioch--The Missionary Center of the Gentile World**

While the Apostle was thus occupied with the Lord's work in Tarsus and vicinity, the Lord was himself preparing in Antioch another field of action for his "chosen vessel," to which he was about to lead him. Ah! brethren, we who in any sense labor in the Master's vineyard, shall we not take comfort from these words. It is still true that "He goeth before you" (Mark 16:7). He leads the way. It is his work not ours. Never let us doubt but that he will properly supervise all the interests of his own cause. So let us continue to serve the Lord with gladness. Since it is his gracious will, let us labor on together *with* him, rejoicing in the privilege though it bring many tears. Can we doubt but that it is he who has led us thus far and will he not lead us to the end for his own Name's sake. In the case of the Apostle Paul the Lord's leadings came in a personal visit Barnabas made to Tarsus to bring him to Antioch. Hebrew Christians, natives of Cyprus and Cyrene, no doubt rejoiced at the news of the conversion of Cornelius. They proclaimed the Good Tidings to the Greeks (Gentiles) when they were come to Antioch and, as the record reads "The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." C. T. Russell, commenting on this passage, pithily remarks: "*Believing is one thing, and 'turning' every sentiment, hope, ambition, and desire to the Lord is quite another.*" These are

heart seaching words. Have we turned to the Lord in this sense?

“Whatever length of time had elapsed since Paul came from Jerusalem to Tarsus, and however that time was employed by him -- whether he had already founded any of those churches in his native Cilicia (which we read of soon after Acts 15:41); whether (as is highly probable) he had there undergone any of those manifold labors and sufferings recorded by him (2 Cor. 11) but omitted by St. Luke; whether by active intercourse with the Gentiles (study of their literature, traveling, discoursing with the philosophers) he had been making himself acquainted with their opinions and prejudices and so preparing his mind for the work that was before him; whether he had been waiting in silence for the call of God’s providence (praying for guidance from above, reflecting on the condition of the Gentiles and gazing more and more closely on the plan of the world’s redemption--however this may be, it must have been an eventful day when Barnabas, having come across the sea from Seleucia or round by the defiles of Mount Amanus, suddenly appeared in the streets of Tarsus. The last time the two friends met was in Jerusalem. All that they then hoped and probably more than they then thought possible had occurred. ‘God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life’ (11:18). Barnabas had ‘seen the grace of God’ (11:23) with his own eyes at Antioch. Under his own teaching ‘a great multitude’ (11:24) had been ‘added to the Lord.’ But he needed assistance. He needed the presence of one whose wisdom was higher than his own, whose zeal was an example to all and whose peculiar mission had been miraculously declared. Paul recognized the voice of God in the words of Barnabas: and the two friends traveled in all haste to the Syrian metropolis” (Conybeare and Howson).

To quote again from Russell: “Saul--or Paul--was seemingly ready for the opening of this door of service and entered it with his peculiar fervor--yet hum bly, remembering his own unworthiness to preach Christ, whom he had persecuted and slain, representatively, in his disciples. Instead of saying to the intelligent people of Antioch, ‘We must leave you to go and look up some uncivilized peoples, barbarians, cannibals, etc.,’” Barnabas and Paul took a different view of the matter and, seeking the most intelligent auditors they could interest, stayed with them a year after they were

converted--*teaching* them. Alas, that so many now feel that teaching is unnecessary. How the actions of the Apostle Paul agree with his teachings (Eph. 4:11-13).

“ ‘And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.’ Whoever may have started this name it matters not; it is the most fitting title that could be conceived of--followers of Christ. What a pity it is that in modern times it is considered a valuable addition to prefix Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, etc. Surely to all who rightly view the matter, our Master’s name is a sufficient one for all who are his. Let us not only adopt the apostolic simplicity in practice and in doctrine but also in name. We do not belong to Wesley, Luther, Calvin, or any other man; we should show that we are Christ’s, and his alone, by refusing the names of others than the heavenly Bridegroom. Thus, too, we stand where we can have fullest fellowship with all the Lord’s true followers.

“The fruits of the spirit are here shown by the willingness of the Christians at Antioch to contribute to the famine stricken and persecution spoiled brethren at Jerusalem. It was a noble return in temporal matters for the spiritual favors they had received from the believers at Jerusalem, through Barnabas, and Paul, whom he had brought. And this seems always to be true where the Spirit of Christ has operated and dwells richly: each is anxious to serve the other, first with the spiritual and priceless favors and second with temporal favors as opportunity offers” (see 1 Cor. 9:11.”

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 5, THE HERALD, June 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,  
separated unto the Gospel of God, . . . to all that be in Rome,  
beloved of God, called to be saints. -- Romans 1:1,7*

## Separated Unto the Gospel

IF THERE is one thing more than another in the Apostle Paul's life that calls for our respect and admiration and that provokes us in the only way we should ever allow ourselves to be provoked, namely unto love and good works (Heb. 10:24), it is the fact (manifest again and again in the sacred records) that he was in deed and in truth as well as in word *separated* unto the Gospel of God. What that Gospel is, in all the fullness that Paul preached it, we shall see when we come to the study of the Epistle proper. At this time our attention is drawn more especially to the fact that to these Good Tidings of God he was *set apart*.

With him the preaching of the Gospel was not incidental to other matters more important. It was not even one important thing among others that held place in his life. No! it was *the* business of his life to which all else was incidental and to which all else was *held* subservient. And in this--the complete, whole hearted abandonment to the Gospel that from his conversion and call he devoted his life--his strength lay. If when we see him publicly rebuking Peter for dissembling (Gal. 2:11) we find ourselves asking where he got the strength to speak against one whom he dearly loved, we shall know. We shall remember that to the Gospel of God he has been *set apart*; yes, apart from Peter if needs be. And we shall understand how he was able to perform that duty which must have been agony itself to one of so tender a heart.

When we see him on another occasion separating from his close friend over the question of John Mark (Acts 15:37-40) and we are tempted to wonder at his ability to reconcile himself to the absence of one who had proved to be such a son of consolation and com-

fort as had Barnabas, we shall remember what he now tells us and understand. We shall remember that to the Good Tiding of God his life is *devoted*. To the Gospel he has been *set apart*. Not for any consideration can he consent to what may in the slightest degree put its progress in jeopardy. “Such is the sole essential work and purpose of his life. He is *separated to the Gospel of God*; isolated from all other ruling aims to this. In some respects he is the least isolated of men; he is in contact all round with human life. Yet he is ‘*separated*.’ In Christ and for Christ he lives apart from even the worthiest personal ambitions. Richer than ever since he ‘was in Christ’ (16:7), in all that makes man’s nature wealthy, in power to know, to will, to love, he uses all his riches always for ‘this one thing,’ to make men understand ‘the Gospel of God’” (Moule).

### **The Heavenly Calling Comes First**

That we may not lose the practical application of this lesson to our own lives, this writer continues: “Such isolation, be hind a thousand contacts, is the Lord’s call for his true followers still.” And with this we are in hearty agreement. Yet even here it may be well to add a word of caution. As Russell has so wisely observed: “The ‘spirit of a sound mind’ is to govern the Lord’s people in all of their affairs, both temporal and spiritual. . . . With many of us, as the Apostle explains, it is the Lord’s will that we should abide in the vocation in which we were when the message of grace first reached us (1 Cor. 7:20 22). Not all are called to an open, public ministry devoting all of time, talent, effort, and interest to the Gospel message. The majority of the called the Lord evidently intends to instruct as his disciples while they are about their ordinary business, the duties and responsibility of life.

“With these, however, it is necessary that there be a forsaking of boats and fishing tackle, etc., in the heart from the moment that a full consecration is made to the Lord. We cannot serve God and Mammon. We cannot have two objects equally prominent to our attention. The Lord will not have it so with those who are to be his joint heirs in the Kingdom. This class must appreciate the privilege of fellowship in his labor, sufferings, and hopes of glory to such an extent that their hearts will no longer be in the ordinary affairs of life, their ambitions will no longer be for

wealth or name or fame from the world's stand point. All such ambition and hopes we must forsake if we would be his disciples. He must be first, joint heirship with him must be our ambition; otherwise our hearts would not be in a condition that would be pleasing to the Lord or that would be single for his service; we would be of the kind described as double minded, unstable in all our works and ways (James 1:8). Undoubtedly this is a difficulty with a large number of those who have named the name of Christ and professed consecration to him and his service.

### **That We Do Not Look Back**

“It is high time that we learn that we cannot serve God and Mammon and that we choose as between these. If we do not choose the Lord and his service and place these first before our hearts' affections, we will be counted as placing the others first, the inter ests of the natural man; and the Lord's appreciation of us and the reward he will give us will correspond. He has indeed blessings for all the families of the earth, but the special blessing presented in the ex ceeding great and precious promises of glory, honor, immortality are for those who love him supremely, more than they love houses or lands, business or wealth, family or kindred or self.

“Our exhortation to all who have forsaken all to follow the Lord is that we do not look back, that we estimate that we have made the grandest bargain imaginable, that we are in the way for obtaining the grandest price imaginable, together with our Lord in his wonderful work and with the Divine approval.

“This seems to be the thought of the Apostle when he urges us to lay aside every weight and entanglement that we may run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author of our faith, until he shall have become its finisher. Let us as promptly as possible, at the beginning of our Christian experience, settle once for all the matter of surrendering our wills to be followers of the Lamb; let us once for all arrange as wisely as possible our temporal affairs and interests in accordance with the reasonable demands of others respecting the same, and let us then faithfully persevere to the end of the race course.”



### Three Great Missionary Journeys

But to return to the author of our Epistle: In our last Meditation we saw the Lord going before him to Antioch of Syria. He whose interest in his own Gospel of mercy and love never flags or falters had not only prepared with patience and skill a “choice” vessel but had prepared the sphere of influence in which that vessel was to labor “a whole year” (Acts 11:26). For this purpose the Lord had used some brethren whose names have not been preserved to us. All we know of them is that they were men of Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20). Little did these humble followers of Jesus realize the “increase” which should follow their faithful “planting.” Jerusalem had indeed been the cradle of Christianity, but our Lord did not intend that it should also be its grave. And, as the sequel shows, from the testimony which these humble unknown brethren planted in Antioch of Syria, watered as it was by the rich teaching of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas, there arose a new capital of Christianity.

To quote from Godet: “After the martyrdom of Stephen, a number of believers from among the Greek speaking Jews of Jerusalem (the Hellenists), fleeing from the persecution which raged in Palestine, had emigrated to Antioch, the capital of Syria. In their missionary zeal they had overstepped the limit that had been hitherto observed by the preachers of the Gospel and addressed themselves to the Greek population. It was the first time that Christian effort made way for itself among Gentiles properly so called. Divine grace accompanied the decisive step. A numerous and lively church with a majority of Greek converts associated with Christians of Jewish origin arose in the capital of Syria. In the account given of the founding of this important church by the author of the Acts (11:20-24), there is a charm, a fascination, a freshness found only in pictures drawn from nature.

“The Apostles and the church of Jerusalem, taken by surprise, sent Barnabas to the spot to examine more closely this unprecedented movement and to give needed direction. Then Barnabas, remembering Paul, whom he had previously introduced to the Apostles at Jerusalem, went in search of him to Tarsus and brought him to this field of action, worthy as it was of such a laborer. Between the church of Antioch and Paul the Apostle there was formed from that hour a

close union, the magnificent fruit of which was the evangelization of the world.”

### **Never Loses Its Inspiration**

It would be beyond the scope of this series to trace in detail the steps of our Author during the (perhaps 14) years that intervened until he came to pen the immortal chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. Perhaps in the Lord's providence it may be our privilege at another time to meet together in these pages for that purpose--to accompany the Apostle in spirit as he undertakes those three great missionary journeys so marvelously blessed in their results. Familiar as we all must be with the history of this period of the Apostle's life, the story of those eventful years never seems to lose its inspiration in the retelling. If we who today find ourselves living in the closing days of the Gospel Age are sometimes betrayed into a mood of discouragement, we have only to *take time* to review the grand “sowing” time to become animated anew with zeal and courage. Just to read the story of those early days is enough to make the heart beat faster. But our present purpose will have been accomplished if we come to the study of the letter to the Romans with a lively sense not alone of undying gratitude to “our beloved Brother Paul” but also of appreciation of the fact that he was one to whom as unto a faithful steward God entrusted the Gospel. Coming thus we shall find ourselves not merely sitting at the feet of a Master in Israel, though that were enough to elicit our most respectful attention, but we shall find also the spirit of the Lord speaking peace to our souls through Jesus Christ. To Jesus he was faithful unto death and of him in this Epistle he will preach to us in words which notwithstanding all the centuries are yet aflame with all the passionate earnestness of which his heart of loving faithfulness was capable.

### **How Was the Church at Rome Founded?**

Thus far in these Meditations we have sought to picture before our minds the author of Romans. Before examining the Epistle itself it will be proper for us to make inquiry concerning those to whom the letter was addressed. Much has been written by many minds on this question, but it remains true that “The name of the original founder of the Roman church has not been preserved to us by history, nor even celebrated by

tradition. This is a remarkable fact when we consider how soon the church of Rome attained great eminence in the Christian world, both from its numbers and from the influence of its metropolitan rank. Had any of the Apostles laid its foundation the fact could scarcely fail to have been recorded" (Conybeare and Howson).

Barnes has summed up his conclusions as follows: "At what time, or by whom, the Gospel was first preached at Rome has been a matter of controversy.

The Roman Catholic Church has maintained that it was founded by Peter and has thence drawn an argument for their high claims and infallibility. On this subject they make a confident appeal to some of the fathers. There is strong evidence to be derived from this Epistle itself and from the Acts that Paul did not regard Peter as having any such primacy and ascendancy in the Roman Church as are claimed for him by the Papists.

"(1) In this whole Epistle there is no mention of Peter at all. It is not suggested that he had been or was then at Rome. If he had been and the church had been founded by him, it is incredible that Paul did not make mention of that fact. This is the more striking, as it was done in other cases where churches had been founded by other men (see 1 Cor. 1:12-15). Especially is Peter, or Cephas, mentioned repeatedly by the Apostle Paul in his other epistles (1 Cor. 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal. 2:9; 1:18; 2:7, 8, 14). In these places Peter is mentioned in connection with the churches at Corinth and Galatia, yet never there as appealing to his authority but, in regard to the latter, expressly calling it in question. Now, it is incredible that if Peter had been then at Rome and had founded the church there and was regarded as invested with any peculiar authority over it that Paul should never once have even suggested his name.

"(2) It is clear that Peter was not there when Paul wrote this epistle. If he had been, he could not have failed to have sent him a salutation, amidst the numbers that he saluted in the sixteenth chapter.

"(3) In the Acts of the Apostles there is no mention of Peter's having been at Rome, but the presumption from that history is almost conclusive that he had not been. In Acts 12:3, 4 we have an account of his having been imprisoned by Herod Agrippa near the

close of his reign (compare 5:23). This occurred about the third or fourth year of the reign of Claudius, who began to reign A.D. 41. It is altogether improbable that he had been at Rome before this. Claudius had not reigned more than three years, and all the testimony that the fathers give is that Peter came to Rome in his reign.

“(4) Peter was at Jerusalem still in the ninth or tenth year of the reign of Claudius (Acts 16:6, etc.). Nor is there any mention made then of his having been at Rome.

“(5) Paul went to Rome about A.D. 60. There is no mention made then of Peter’s being with him or being there. If he had been, it could hardly have failed of being recorded. Especially is this remarkable when Paul’s meeting with the brethren is expressly mentioned (Acts 28:14, 15) and when it is recorded that he met the Jews and abode with them and spent no less than two years at Rome. If Peter had been there, such a fact could not fail to have been recorded or alluded to, either in the Acts or the Epistle to the Romans.

“(6) The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and the Second Epistle to Timothy were written from Rome during the residence of Paul as a prisoner; and the Epistle to the Hebrews probably also while he was still in Italy. In none of these epistles is there any hint that Peter was then or had been at Rome--a fact that cannot be accounted for if he was regarded as the founder of that Church, and especially if he was then in that city. Yet in those epistles there are the salutations of a number to those churches. In particular Epaphras, Luke the beloved physician (Col. 9:12, 14), and the saints of the household of Caesar are mentioned (Phil. 4:22). Paul expressly affirms that Luke only was with him in 2 Timothy 4:11, a declaration utterly irreconcilable with the supposition that Peter was then at Rome.

“(7) If Peter was ever at Rome therefore, of which indeed there is no reason to doubt, he must have come there after Paul; at what time is unknown. That he was there cannot be doubted without calling in question the truth of all history.

“When or by whom the Gospel was preached first at Rome it is not easy, perhaps not possible, to determine. In the account of the day of Pentecost (Acts

2:10), we find among others that there were present strangers of Rome, and it is not improbable that they carried back the knowledge of Jesus Christ and became the founders of the Roman Church. One design and effect of that miracle was doubtless to spread the knowledge of the Savior among all nations. In the list of persons who are mentioned in Romans 16, it is not improbable that some of those early converts are included and that Paul intended to show honor to their early conversion and zeal in the cause of Christianity. Thus he designated Andronicus and Junia his kinsmen and fellow prisoners (16:7), who were distinguished among the Apostles and had been converted before himself, i.e., before A.D. 34, at least eight years before it was ever pretended that Peter was at Rome. Other persons are mentioned also as distinguished, and it is not improbable that they were as early founders of the Church at Rome (chap. 16:12, 13, etc.).”

### **To All Who in Rome Are God’s Beloved Ones**

“Wonderful collocation, wonderful possibility!” writes Moule. “‘*Beloved ones of God,*’ as close to the eternal heart as it is possible to be, because ‘in the Beloved’; that is one side. ‘*In Rome,*’ in the capital of universal paganism, material power, iron empire, immeasurable worldliness, flagrant and indescribable sin; that is the other side. ‘I know where thou dwellest,’ said the glorified Savior to much tried disciples at a later day; ‘even where Satan has his throne’ (Rev. 11:13). That throne was conspicuously present in the Rome of Nero. Yet faith, hope, and love could breathe there when the Lord ‘called.’ They could much more than breathe. This whole Epistle shows that a deep and developed faith, a glorious hope, and the might love of a holy life were matters of fact in men and women who every day of the year saw the world as it went by in forum and basilica, in Suburra and Velabrum, in slave chambers and in the halls of pleasure where they had to serve or to meet company. The atmosphere of heaven was carried down into that dark pool by the believing souls who were bidden to live there. They lived the heavenly life in Rome. . . . What a deadly air for the regenerate soul--deadly not only in its vice but in its magnificence and in its thought! But nothing is to the Lord Jesus Christ deadly. The soul’s regeneration means not only new ideas and likings but an eternal Presence, the

indwelling of the Life itself. That Life could live at Rome; and therefore *God's beloved ones in Rome* could live there also, while it was his will they should be there. The argument comes *a fortiori* to ourselves."

Shall we not, both writer and reader, take these words to heart? Would the writer prefer other circumstances in which he feels that he could labor better in the service of the Lord? Does the reader chafe sometimes and fret perhaps at his or her lot? Do we think that in almost any other place than our "Rome" we could do better than we do; elsewhere than where we find ourselves our progress in the Christian way would be assured? Let us remember the lilies, how *they* grow; let us remember about them if we forget all else, they do indeed *grow*; let us allow the argument to come *a fortiori* to ourselves. Let us determine that his grace not only can be, nor yet alone that in the days to come it will be, but that *here and now it is sufficient for us*. Thus we shall each in our several spheres of influence prove to be more than conquerors through Christ who strengthens us. Amen.

--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 6, THE HERALD, July 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, . . . to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. -- Romans 1:1, 7*

*Readers of this journal will remember well, and favorably, the extensive Pilgrim ministry undertaken in the United States and Canada by Brother Alex D. Kirkwood of Glasgow, Scotland, during the greater part of 1953. It will be a pleasure to them, therefore, to learn that this Meditation and the one next month are from his pen.*

*Unbeknown to us, it appears that at the time we had decided to resume this series of Meditations, and when as a matter of fact the February "Herald" -- containing No. 1 of the Series, was journeying in the mails across the ocean to his door, Brother Kirkwood was himself mailing to us the results of a study in which he and his associates in Christ had been led to engage in Chapter 9 of our Epistle.*

*When his article reached us our first thought was to reserve it for later (when we come to consider, in sequence, the Apostle's masterly treatment of the subjects discussed in chapter 9). Later considerations, however, inclined us to the belief that an additional advantage might result*

*from its early publication. Evidently, as Brother Kirkwood has remarked in an exchange of correspondence on the matter, we are being confirmed in our conviction that the Lord is continuing to guide us "on both sides of the ocean." We trust, then, as Brother Kirkwood further remarks, that the publication of his article at this time, when the Series is just beginning, may serve to stimulate interest in them and conversely that the Series will help to underline the Lord's message in his article. This he has appropriately captioned: "The Doctrine of Election."--Editorial Comment*

## **The Doctrine of Election**

NO ONE who has visited the Garden of the Gods in Colorado would choose to be there alone at midnight

in the moonlight. Those mammoth pillars and pinnacles of red sandstone rock, fashioned by erosion into fantastic shapes and scattered over the whole vast area, could be so easily worked upon by the imagination as to take on likenesses of things unearthly, weird, and terrifying. It we might compare the Bible to a Garden of God, in which there are representations of him everywhere, in keeping with his character of the "Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth," we might find in one spot a place somewhat suggestive of the Garden of the Gods. To this spot, the ninth chapter of Romans, many -- who having gone and "reasoned high of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate -- have found no end of wandering mazes lost." In the cold moonlight of theological thought and philosophical reasoning, what strange and terrible images of the nature and character of God have been conjured up!

But this is a place where even students of the Bible feel that they want to quicken their pace when passing through. It is not a spot they want to linger in, for the statements of Paul in this chapter do not seem to be such that they can be taken just as they are, without some degree of mental reservation, which is repugnant to the honest mind.

## **Three Doubtful Principles**

The principle of God's love peoples the ages of the Bible with countless lovely forms which make it like a Garden of our God. In this particular chapter, however, Paul seems to enunciate three other principles as belonging to God that suggest to the mind in their outworking such terrible shapes as to be reminiscent rather of the Garden of the Gods. *In the first place,*

Paul seems to say that God's election is not based on any moral considerations of worth; that he is not affected by questions of good and evil in the objects of his choice; that his decisions are wholly arbitrary. In verses 11 to 13, speaking of Rebecca's twin boys, we read: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, . . . it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Then in verse 14, sensing an objection to this arbitrary proceeding, he asks, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" His reply in verse 13 seems rather to make the position not better but worse. It reads: "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

*The second principle* leads us into deeper gloom, for it seems to teach that while God wills arbitrarily to love some and have mercy and compassion on them, others he not only hates, like Esau, but hardens like Pharaoh, so that he can set them up as examples of the greatness of his power and the fierceness of his wrath. We read "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (vs. 17, 18).

In the next verse Paul senses an even deeper objection to this view of God's methods in election, and we might almost be tempted to imagine that he himself was not too comfortable about it because of the way in which he summarily dismisses the question. We read: "Thou wilt say then to me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will" (v. 19)? The question is dismissed thus: "Nay but, O man, who are thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus" (v. 20)?

*The third principle* seems to conduct us into the remotest recesses of the Garden of the Gods. It seems to reveal a God whose sovereign will operates upon humanity as a potter works with clay, making it into the object he desires. Some human vessels God chooses to fashion for honor, others for dishonor. Some are predestined to be vessels of wrath, like Esau and Pharaoh; others, vessels of mercy, like the elect



Church. None can resist his sovereign will, nor go against his predetermined choice. We read: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor? What is God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory" (vs. 21-23).

Combining these three principles, we get a picture of God we cannot recognize and a view of Paul seen nowhere else in his writings. What is the explanation? Can we let the light of day into this Garden of the Gods and see it as a legitimate and worthy section of the Garden of our God? The answer is, Yes. This is accomplished by applying the elementary principle that to understand properly any portion of the Bible one must view it in the light of its context. Strange to say, with regard to this most difficult chapter, this seems to have been seldom done. The writer's attention was directed to and concentrated upon it in the course of a class Bible study on Romans when some months ago chapters 8 and 9 came up for review. A desire to share the blessings enjoyed during a succession of pleasant Sunday morning studies is the reason for presenting this condensed account of our findings.

### **Why Did Paul Write This Chapter?**

Why did Paul write this ninth of Romans? Contrary to the popular assumption, his purpose was unrelated to the idea of setting forth a thesis on the profound mysteries of divine foreknowledge and predestination. His opening words reveal the Paul we know and love and set the keynote to the whole chapter. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the holy spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (vs. 1-3).

Consider the circumstances. Paul had the love for his country and fellow countrymen inherent in all peoples, but intensified by the fact that Israel was God's chosen people dwelling in God's chosen land. Notwithstanding this, he was commissioned by God to be his Apostle to the Gentiles, to carry to them the

Gospel message his own people were rejecting. At every place he visited there were the same sad results. While the Gentiles heard the Word gladly, his kinsmen according to the flesh rejected the Gospel. O, how blind his people were to reject the supreme blessing of the high calling of God that had so thrilled him as he wrote the sublime words of the previous chapter. As he proceeds to state in verses 4 and 5, the high calling was their birthright--they who were Israelites to whom pertained the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the service of God and the promises--to them belonged the fathers and from them as concerning the flesh Christ came.

There was something else, however, that added to the bitterness of the cup of Paul's experiences. Completely ignorant of the true nature of his inner feelings, Paul's countrymen regarded him as a renegade Jew, one who had deliberately chosen to turn from the faith of his fathers, renounce the God-given Law of Moses, and for personal preference live as a Gentile with Gentiles. This accounts for the solemn declaration: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not" (v. 1). There were many, he knew, who would find this hard to believe. Since Paul himself, however, had been in a somewhat similar position, when he persecuted the Church of God, he could understand and sympathize with them.

### Reason for Jewish Opposition

Furthermore, this chapter is written expressly for the purpose of attacking and demolishing the positions occupied by the Jews in their resistance to the Gospel, with the object of helping them to see the truth. Conducted by so able a man as Paul, and one who had intimate, *personal* knowledge of their entrenchments, he was easily able to breach all the defenses and expose the weaknesses of their position. In writing this chapter, Paul must have been going over the same processes of reasoning that had engaged his mind in his own conflict with the Gospel.

Before we can understand the force and direction of Paul's reasoning, we must have an idea of the positions occupied by the Jews in their rejection of the Gospel. Briefly stated, it was somewhat similar to the position of those who today believe in the idea of "once saved always saved." God had made specific promises to Abraham and his seed, had even bound

himself by an oath, and these promises were certain of fulfillment. That they were the recognized family of Abraham was clearly evidenced by the fact that for about fifteen hundred years they alone had been enjoying God's favor under a solemn covenant that he had made with their fathers at Sinai. Since God, as Judge, was absolutely just, they felt as secure about their position as the legal heir does about receiving his father's inheritance. To them this idea that Paul was preaching (about the Gentiles taking over from them), seemed preposterous. In the most solemn way, they were certain God was committed to them as Abraham's legitimate heirs. In this connection we must bear in mind the fact that the truth that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, was a part of the secret made known to Paul himself only by divine revelation. While their blindness was culpable, their violent antagonism to Paul because of his mission to the Gentiles was quite natural. Even the Jewish church at Jerusalem was slow at first to take in the truth.

### Precedent -- Verses 6 to 13

Paul's attack could be said to be a four point one, each supported by an array of scriptures. These are along the lines of (1) precedent, (2) principle, (3) prophecy, and (4) predetermined divine purpose. The first is **precedent**. Provided one can prove his title, the law of inheritance affords the greatest possible security with regard to earthly possessions. On this law, the Jews relied. Their proud boast was, "We be Abraham's seed," "Abraham is our father." To teach that God would pass them by was to charge him with breaking his pledged word to his chosen people, which was clearly impossible. To this Paul replies that the fact that Israel is being rejected and the Gentiles accepted is "not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of

Abraham are they all children; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Being a lineal descendant of Abraham did not in itself prove title to inheritance, for both Ishmael and Esau were sons of Abraham in lineal descent and elder sons at that. Neither of these were acknowledged by God as being in the line of succession. It was quite in line, therefore, with **precedent** that God was at this time rejecting some of

Israel and accepting others: Gentiles who in point of time for entering into the enjoyment of God's favor were, so to speak, the younger.

### Principle -- Verses 14 to 24

The position occupied by natural Israel was open to attack on the ground also of **principle**. The principle was that of God's sovereign right to choose whom he will. It was very important to establish this principle, for Paul was preaching not only salvation from sin through Jesus but, beyond that, the wondrous grace of the High Calling. This was only for those who were called of God as the Bride of his Son. In view of this how impossible was the position that mere blood relationship could entitle them to such a favor and that irrespective of any question of heart condition he was under obligation to accept them.

It is in this section of our subject that the main difficulties associated with this chapter are encountered. Since, in our opinion, these can be overcome only by viewing them against the background of the chapter as a whole, we shall defer further consideration of it until we have dealt with points three and four.

### Prophecy -- Verses 24 to 29

It was in accordance with **precedent** that all of Abraham's seed should not be chosen by God. As Ishmael and Esau were rejected, so **prophecy** showed it would be with natural Israel when, in the fullness of time, the Gospel of the grace of God through the Messiah should be proclaimed to them. Prophecy foretold that only a small number would be accepted and the places of the others taken by Gentiles. Referring to these as vessels of mercy, Paul says, "Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." He then proceeds to show that while the Prophet Hosea foretells of the Gentiles coming into favor the Prophet Isaiah prophecies of God's rejection of all but a remnant of Israel.

Paul writes: "As he saith also in Osee [Hosea], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:25,26 [Hosea

2:23 and 1:10] ). How aptly these words describe what was taking place before the eyes of Paul's Jewish opponents. The aliens and strangers unrecognized by God as his people and unbeloved as such, now received into the bosom of the family as children of the living God.

However, prophecy not only foretold the acceptance of the Gentiles as fellow heirs with Israel but it predicted also the rejection of all but a remnant of Israel in this great crisis of their national history. Paul says: "Esaias [Isaiah] also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: . . . Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrhah" (Isa. 22, 23; 1:9).

This prediction has a first fulfillment at the overthrow of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar when only a remnant was left in the land and only a remnant later returned from Babylon. Its complete fulfillment was now (in Paul's day) being enacted which would culminate when the wrath of God should come upon them to the uttermost. In verse 28 Paul quotes a verse which also has a double fulfillment, having an application to the end of both Jewish and Gospel ages: "For he will finish the work [margin: the account] and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth [the land *Diaglott*]" (from Isa. 28:22). How terrible was the reckoning and how short the space of time when God squared his long account with the Jews, which reached the climax with their rejection of their Messiah. A time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation they brought upon themselves only a few years after the date of Paul's writing. History bears eloquent testimony of the dreadful horrors of A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed.

### **Predetermined Purpose -- Verses 30 to 33**

In verse 30 Paul proceeds to give his final summing up. "What shall we say then?" What is the point of all I have been saying in this chapter? Now note that he does not sum up in terms of lofty abstract and abstruse reasonings on "fixed fate, free will, and foreknowledge absolute." On the contrary his summation is in simple, concrete, and practical terms. All he has

been saying, Paul tells us, adds up to this: “. . . 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. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written [Isaiah 8:14; 28:16], Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

Here we have Paul’s most devastating, final assault on the position occupied by the Jews: as the only legitimate heirs of the promises, God could not pass them by and give the inheritance to others. Not only were **precedent, principle, and prophecy** against this assumption, but through the Prophet Isaiah, God had revealed a **predetermined purpose** to put a stumbling stone in their way for them to fall over and so fail of obtaining the prize. That stumbling stone was no other than Jesus of Nazareth, their Messiah, the headstone of the corner, whom they were rejecting. Do not let them think that God was taken by surprise and disappointed at their attitude towards his Son. It was his deliberate arrangement that their long looked for Messiah should come in such a way that only those right at heart would be able to recognize him and that the proud and self righteous should be offended in him. They did not want a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And so he was despised and rejected of them, and they hid as it were their faces from him. This was not the kind of Messiah they wanted, but it was the kind they needed. Had they but known it, as the remnant did of their own nation who had ears to hear and good and honest hearts to receive the wondrous message of God’s grace, the natural branches would not have had to be broken off the live tree and the wild olive branches grafted in to take their place. -- *A. D. Kirkwood*

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 7, THE HERALD, Aug. Sept., 1955

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,  
separated unto the Gospel of God, . . . to all that be in Rome,  
beloved of God, called to be saints. -- Romans 1:1,7*

ALL THAT we have presented thus far [see Meditation No. 6], which forms the background of this difficult chapter, is simple, plain, and coherent. Everything fits in exactly with Paul's own summing up of the matter in the closing verses. Now let us take up the difficult part of this ninth of Romans and see if the light from a consideration of the context will so dispel the gloom of this Garden of the Gods that we shall be able to see that it really is a part of the Garden of God, thoroughly consistent with the God we know and love and also with the character of this devoted servant of his, our beloved Brother Paul.

## Section 1 -- Love or Hate

Paul's most important line of attack on the position occupied by his Jewish opponents is based on **principle**, the principle of God's sovereign right to elect or select whom he pleases. We touched upon it in going through the whole four lines of attack, but deferred full consideration of it until we had seen the whole context of the chapter. The idea of God's sovereign right of electing whom he chooses pervades the whole chapter more or less, and it is particularly emphasized in verses 11 to 23.

If we think of this along the lines of our metaphor of the Garden of the Gods, there are three areas of difficulty. The first of these is in verses 11 to 23, where Paul seems to say that God's election is not based on any moral consideration, that he is not affected by questions of good or evil in the objects of his choice. In this section Paul makes mention of God's choice of Jacob the younger instead of Esau the elder. Also that this choice was made before the children were born and before they had done good or evil. Notice, however, that Paul does not stress this for the purpose of proving that moral considerations have

no bearing in the matter, but “that the purpose of God according to election might stand, *not of works but of him that calleth.*” We have seen in Paul’s summation that this was the cause of Israel’s failure. “They sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the Law” (vs. 32). Their great fore father Jacob was not elected on the ground of works, since he was chosen before birth. This should be a pointer to them as to how in the present crisis they should act in connection with the offer of the grace of God through the Gospel being preached to them.

Paul might have added what is elsewhere shown: God’s election, while not based on works, is based on the principle of fitness and adaptability to the end he has in view. As natural men there was not much to choose between Esau and Jacob on moral grounds. There was, however, in Jacob the supplanter that which God could work upon and fashion into Israel, a prince with God. This God foresaw. There were no such potentialities in Esau, the man willing to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage.

Another point in this section is the expression in verse 13: “Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.” Note that this is not a quotation from Genesis but from Malachi (1:2,3). God is not said to have loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born but after they had existed as peoples many centuries. The Bible shows how Esau’s descendants--Edom--brought the judgment of God upon themselves by their wickedness. God hated their wickedness. He is often described in the Bible as hating iniquity of all kinds. Paul puts the quotations from Genesis and from Malachi together because they both emphasize God’s choice of the younger in place of the elder, the rightful heir.

## **Section 2 -- Mercy or Wrath**

The second area of difficulty is verses 14 to 18. This section, as we saw in our introduction, seems to teach that God arbitrarily hardens the hearts of those whom he hates (as in the case of Pharaoh) in order that he may set them up as examples of the greatness of his power and the fierceness of his wrath.

In pressing home the principles of God’s sovereign right to choose, Paul in this section bring forward two witnesses. The first is that of Israel (Exod. 33:19) and



the second that of Pharaoh (Exod. 9:1). Both sinned grievously against God. Israel in making the golden calf and Pharaoh in his stubborn defiance of the Almighty. They are equally guilty, Israel in deed more so because of greater knowledge. Yet God chose to have mercy on the one and on the other inflicted such punishment as to make him the classic example of the wrath of God to all future generations.

In the case of Israel's sin, God had proposed to Moses to blot them out and make of him a great nation; Moses interceded for them. God responded, that it was his royal prerogative to ". . . have mercy on whom I will have mercy and compassion on whom I will have compassion." After quoting this proof text, in the next verse (9:16) Paul shows its application to the matter under consideration. "*So then*, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Here again we see how clear it is that Paul is not thinking in abstruse terms of foreknowledge, will, and fate but of the simple fact that Israel was losing the supreme blessing by trying to gain it by their own efforts. The fact was that they were sinners, at the mercy of God, and could not gain the prize of righteousness and life by any effort in willing or running. The Law should have been their schoolmaster to lead them as it had led Paul himself: to Christ, the embodiment and channel of the divine mercy.

But what about Pharaoh? Is it like God to deliberately raise up Pharaoh and harden his heart to make of him a classic example of God's power and wrath? "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (9:17). The idea here suggested is not very attractive: God purposely raising up Pharaoh like a puppet that he might knock him over. Leeser's translation reads: "have allowed thee to remain"; Moffatt's reads: "why I have kept you alive (instead of "have I raised thee up," as given in the Authorized Version). This gives us a much better suggestion of the reason why God permitted Pharaoh to continue his opposition to the Almighty for so long. Using the metaphor of the prize ring, Pharaoh was knocked out in the tenth round when this could easily have been accomplished in the first. The fight was prolonged so that the power of God might be displayed: not merely against Pharaoh but against all

the gods of Egypt, in defiance of whom the various plagues were severally directed. This was not merely for that day and generation but for all future generations until the great Adversary of God --whom Pharaoh represented -- should himself be over thrown.

But what about the question of God hardening Pharaoh's heart? In verse 18 Paul says, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy," as in the case of Israel, "and whom he will he hardeneth," as in the case of Pharaoh. But what was it that hardened Pharaoh's heart but the very mercy of God? He might have been given one opportunity to repent, but Pharaoh was given no less than ten chances. All of which he stubbornly refused. He took advantage of the long suffering of God. We read in Ecclesiastes 8:11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

### Action

We come now to the third and last area of difficulty in verses 19 to 23. This is the one that causes the greatest perplexity. It is not easy to understand verse 19: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" The suggestion of moral irresponsibility behind such questions so far removed from anything Paul has said or implied, would lead us to conclude that he has in mind some captious critic among his Jewish opponents; possibly one whom he has encountered who would try to twist Paul's words so as to confute his argument. An opponent of the Gospel himself at one time, the questions he puts into the mouth of his opponent are almost certainly such as he himself would have asked in the time of his former ignorance. To appreciate the position, we must bear in mind that the Jews understood only the earthly phase of God's kingdom. They interpreted, therefore, the preaching of the Gospel by Paul to the Gentiles as tantamount to the rejection of Israel's rightful position as the earthly seed of Abraham. In view of all the prophecies showing that Jerusalem was to be the world's center of government and Israel the people through whom the blessings would spread to all the Gentile world, this preaching of Paul's that the Gentiles would displace Israel seemed blasphemous.

We can well imagine that if Saul of Tarsus had been confronted with the course of reasoning in this chapter before he saw the light and became Paul the Apostle, he himself would have asked these questions, “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?” The conclusion to be drawn from what you say, he would have continued, is that God first arbitrarily chooses and then adapts his course of procedure, whether in mercy or in wrath, so as to secure the accomplishment of his Will. That being so and Israel being undoubtedly the chosen people to whom he has pledged himself even though they have sinned, they will be the objects of God’s mercy and realize the blessings assured to them in the scriptures. Thus he would have concluded even on your own ground of reasoning that this idea of a mission to the Gentiles to displace the Jews is demonstrated to be false.

Without an understanding of the High Calling, this reasoning is quite sound. Paul goes on in chapters 10 and 11 to show that these earthly promises will be realized by natural Israel in spite of all their transgressions, but first they will be cast off from favor while God proceeds with his purpose of election for the High Calling. The blindness of Israel to the Gospel was due to their self-satisfied pride, which magnified themselves and belittled the majesty and might of God. Paul does not stop to discuss the questions raised in verse 19 at this point but goes on to press home his attack on their position along the lines of the principle of the supreme sovereignty of God and his absolute right of choice. This he does in verses 20 to 24.

#### **Section 4 -- As Clay in the Potter’s Hands**

This section is based on quotations from Isaiah: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God” (29:16; 45:9). In the Jews’ stubborn rejection of the Gospel and violent reaction against the manifest evidence of God’s favor to Gentile believers, they were calling God in question. “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

It is a most remarkable fact that this passage, taken from its context, is advanced to support the very position Paul is assailing. These Jews were resting in

the belief that as the chosen of God they were sure of the inheritance that belonged to Abraham's seed. God was pledged to fulfill his word to them. It could not return to him void. Similarly, it has been taught that the elect of God, foreknown and predestinated as individuals, are being formed by God to the predetermined pattern. It is not of works nor of him that willeth or runneth. The lump for the elect is formed

for the elect and of necessity turns out to pattern. Other lumps are dealt with differently, according to God's design. Once saved as God's elect always saved, would sum up the attitude in both cases.

### **“The Garden of God”**

Viewed against the background of its context, there is nothing whatever in what Paul says here to warrant the assumption that God in his dealings with men ignores their free will and cooperation in the fulfillment of his purposes with regard to them. In Israel's case, it was because they did not respond and cooperate that they were being rejected. Wherever Paul went, he preached the Gospel first to the Jews. But, when they deliberately refused it, who were they to say that God could not from the same lump of humanity in father Adam take a Gentile piece that would respond and cooperate and mold it to the required pattern? They had only themselves to blame if, like Pharaoh, their hearts were hardened because of their unworthy reactions to the mercy and grace of God. The fault was entirely theirs if, in consequence of this rejection by them of the grace of God, they pursued a course of opposition to God, which of necessity could result only in their being molded like Pharaoh into vessel of dishonor and wrath. It was not God but themselves who were responsible for the wrath to the uttermost of A.D. 70 and all the sad history of their sufferings since.

So much were the vessels of wrath responsible for their condition that Paul says here that God endured them with much long suffering. If this chapter were a Garden of the Gods where God's sovereign will so dominated the free will of man that as clay in the hands of the potter he must needs be what God decrees, why should Paul speak of God enduring with much long suffering the vessels of wrath? If they could not help being what they were, there could be no

question of God's enduring with much long suffering what he himself was responsible for.

As for the vessels of mercy, the remnant from Israel and the Gentile believers, they were such because of their acceptance of the proffered mercy of God that the others had rejected. They were being fashioned according to his design for the wondrous glory of the prize of the High Calling by loyally continuing to respond and cooperate with the heavenly Potter. What pleasure could God have in an involuntary obedience and a love that was not spontaneous? "My son, give me thine heart" is his loving entreaty. It gives him a Father's pleasure when we respond to his love by giving him our all in the fullness of self surrender.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, having viewed the formidable difficulties of this ninth chapter of Romans against the background of the chapter as a whole, we have no hesitation in pronouncing this section as a most worthy portion of the Garden of God. Like the Bible as a whole, it is peopled with representations of God thoroughly in keeping with his character of love. This is fully seen when it is borne in mind that God's election does not imply that all the non elect are lost. On the contrary, the elect are selected for the blessing of the non elect. They are the seed of Abraham who are to bless all the families of the earth. When the Kingdom of God is established in the earth all the living and the dead shall be blest. Asleep in death now, all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Lord and come forth, including the Ishmaels, the Esaus, and the Pharaohs. The highway of holiness will be there for them to walk up towards the full attainment of all that was lost at the fall. At the end of the reign of Christ all the willing and obedient will have been recovered from every trace of sin and death. As Genesis tells us of Paradise lost, so Revelation tells us of Paradise restored: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:14).

--A. D. Kirkwood

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 8, THE HERALD, October 1955

*Even as our beloved Brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his Epistles speaking in them of these things.-- 2 Peter 3:15, 16*

*Letters weighty and strong. -- 2 Corinthians 10:10, R.S.V.*

Our last two Meditations were devoted to the consideration of a special article on "The Doctrine of Election" in chapter 9 contributed by Alex D. Kirkwood of Glasgow, Scotland. We now resume our studies at the point where we left them at the close of Meditation No. 5 in the HERALD of June 1955, page 93.

IN OUR previous Meditations we have reviewed to some extent the life of Paul and thought a while on the Christians in Rome to whom he wrote. Now we confess to a spirit of impatience--we trust it is a spirit of "blessed impatience" -- to at once enter "the Cathedral of our Christian faith" as the Epistle to the Romans has been called. Yet as soon as we have entered we shall find ourselves handicapped in ability to adequately appreciate "the majesty of the whole or the finish of its details" unless we have previously taken the time to equip our minds with a view of this Epistle in its relation to the rest of the New Testament, and especially to those other epistles of St. Paul, to which from time to time we shall find it necessary in our study of Romans to make reference.

## Letter Form of New Testament Providential

The mere fact that so much of God's truth has been revealed to us in the form of letters should give us cause for reflection. "Of all the sacred books which the world has seen there is not one which is composed mainly, or at all, of letters, with the single exception of the New Testament. . . . The New Testament is entirely composed of a collection of letters together with five historical books and one Apocalyptic vision. . . . In this, as in all other respects, the ways of God's providence differ from man's expectations. We may thank God that we derive some of the deepest truths of our belief from documents so simple, so individual, so

full of human interest and love. Most of which are written 'in a style the most personal that ever existed.'

"Yes it may perhaps be doubted whether there are ever many persons in an ordinary congregation who if asked to explain what is the special scope and out line, the characteristic meaning and tenor of any one of those deeply important letters would be able to do so with any definiteness. But surely this is necessary for an intelligent acquaintance with 'the oracles of God': a real knowledge of the Bible and reverence for it, a power to read aright. We should know something of its books as well as of those isolated fragments that we call 'texts.' . . .

"As to . . . the epistolary form of the New Testament, it might perhaps strike us as strange that the deepest truths and the highest arguments of our religion should have been conveyed to us in casual letters. For, humanly speaking, casual they were. . . . Every Christian will feel that they were preserved by a special Divine providence, but it is none the less true that their preservation was owing to causes that in ordinary language might be called accidental. Nor, again, were they predetermined letters; they rose for the most part out of the circumstances of the day. . . . And this, so far from being a matter of regret, was a happy circumstance. . . . Christian theology would have been immeasurably less effective if it had been conveyed to the world in canons or articles or liturgies or scholastic treatises.

"The epistolary form of Christian instruction was, then, a providential arrangement, first of all, . . . because that form of writing is essentially unsystematic. . . . The method of the Bible is alien from the spirit of elaborate, technical, all explaining theological systems. . . . The technical terminology, the rigid systematization of Divine mysteries is due to exigencies caused by human error--sometimes even to the pride of human reason--far more than to the initiative set us by the sacred writers" (Farrar).

### **Letter Form Specially Adapted to Individuality of Apostle Paul**

Again, the letter form "permitted of a freedom of expression far more vigorous and far more natural to the Apostle Paul than the regular syllogisms and rounded periods of a formal book. It admitted some

thing of the tenderness and something of the familiarity of personal intercourse. Into no other literary form could have been infused that intensity of feeling . . . that made Luther compare his words to living creatures with hands and feet. A letter is eminently personal, flexible, spontaneous; it is like a 'steno graphed conversation.' It best enabled Paul to be himself and to recall most vividly to the minds of his spiritual children the tender, suffering, inspired, . . . impassioned, humble, uncompromising teacher who, in courage and in trembling, in zeal and weakness, in close reasonings and strong appeals, had first taught them to be imitators of himself and of the Lord. His epistles came fresh and burning from the heart, and therefore they go fresh and burning to the heart. Take away from them the traces of individual feeling, the warmth, the invective, the yearning affection, the vehement denunciations, the bitter sarcasm, the distressed boasting, the rapid interrogatives, the frank colloquialisms, the private details, the impassioned personal appeals--all that has been absurdly called their 'intense egotism'--and they would never have been as they are, next to the psalms of David and for something of the same reason, the dearest treasures of Christian devotion--next to the four Gospels, the most cherished text books of Christian faith. St. Paul was eminently and emphatically a man who had known much life, . . . had seen many cities, and knew the minds of men. He was no narrow scribe, no formalizing Pharisee, no stunted ascetic, no dreaming recluse, no scholastic theologian, no priestly externalist who could suppose that the world depended on the right burning of the two kidneys and the fat. He was a man full of strength and weakness, full of force and fire. He was not a man to mistake words for things or outward scrupulosity for true service or verbal formulae for real knowledge. . . . What can be more free and buoyant and varied than St. Paul's letters? Brilliant, broken, impetuous as the mountain torrent freshly filled; never smooth and calm but on the eve of some great leap; never vehement but to fill some pool of clearest peace; they present everywhere the image of a vigorous joy. Beneath their reasonings and their philosophy there may ever be heard a secret lyric strain of glorious praise, bursting at times into open utterance and asking others to join the chorus. His life was a battle from which in intervals of the good fight his words arose as the song of victory.



## Chronological Order Important to Remember

“For any one who desires to gain a real historical conception of their meaning and of the vast part they play in the development of Christian doctrine, the first thing necessary is to ascertain and remember their chronological order. . . . No one doubts that we best understand the mind, character, and teachings of any author when we study his writings with some reference to the age at which and the order in which he wrote them. Most of all is this desirable in the case of one who was always growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as was St. Paul, whose thoughts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit went on deepening and expanding even to his death. . . .

“Many years of the Apostle’s ministry elapsed before he wrote a single line that has come down to us. He was converted probably about the age of thirty. His first letter (the First to the Thessalonians) was not written until his second great missionary journey when he was forty six years old. All his letters fall into four distinct groups separated roughly by a period of four or five years each and covering a space in his life from the age of forty six to the age of sixty one. Those four groups are the letters of his second missionary journey, namely the two to Thessalonica; those of the third missionary journey, the Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans; those of the first imprisonment at Rome: the four to Philippi, Ephesus, Colosse, and Philemon; and those between his liberation and his martyrdom: the letter to Titus and the two to Timothy, of which the last was written in his last Roman imprisonment and when he was expecting, almost daily, the stroke of death” (Farrar).

*[Note: As is well known, the authorship of the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews is not established. While recognizing it to be “Pauline in its general tone” and its teaching “fundamentally the same as St. Paul’s,” Farrar did not regard it as the work of St. Paul and consequently limits his discussion to the thirteen mentioned.]*

## The Four Groups

The first group is called the *eschatological* epistles: those that bear on the last things; the epistles having to do more especially with the Second Advent of our Lord: Christ’s personal return first *for* his saints and then *with* them.

The second group are St. Paul's four most powerful, most argumentative, most impassioned epistles. They may be characterized as the letter of controversy: controversy with Judaism within and without. The doctrinal and universal importance of these four epistles can hardly be exaggerated. The particular details of the controversy are obsolete. The then "burning questions" have "burnt themselves out." But the principles developed are eternal. In them St. Paul fought out and won for all time the battle of full and free salvation; of faith as against works; of mercy as against sacrifice; of the obsolescence not only of Levitism itself but of the whole sacerdotal spirit. He showed forever that the true worship of the Christian consists in spirituality, not in ceremonialism; in heart service, not in outward ritual; in the religion of the life, not in forms of service; in being, not in doing; in love, not in orthodox formulas or shibboleths. In these letters we have the grandest phase of the struggle of the teachings of the Prophets against the usurpation of the priests; the proofs of the groundlessness and nullity of all those persecuting tyrannies and of all that theological intolerance which springs from the pride and ambition of the human heart.

It was in Rome chained by the wrist to a soldier by day and by night that he wrote his third group of letters. They also are four in number: two to the Philippians, the one to Philemon (dictated by personal affection and special incidents) and the two great *christological* epistles to Ephesus and Colosse (to counteract a dreamy, subtle, incipient heresy) in which he develops and expands in all its splendor the doctrine of the pre-existence, the headship and supremacy of our risen and ascended Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the next four years he wrote his fourth and last group of letters: the three letters to pastors Titus and Timothy. Shortly after the last of these he was put to death. Tradition tells us that he was led out along the Appian Way and there beheaded; to await the crown of righteousness the Lord had promised to give him "at that day." And not to him only but to us also if we "love his appearing."

## Summary

“Such then are the four groups of Epistles: the first two mainly eschatological; the next four mainly controversial; of the next four, two occasional and two christological; the last three pastoral. But, further, every one of these thirteen epistles, of which we have just seen the order, has its own special characteristic, its prominent idea, generally its central passage, often even its dominant word or key note.

“The first group to the Thessalonians were eschatological, the epistles of the Second Advent. The first is characterized by its extreme sweetness; both are eminently full of consolation. The whole idea of the first is to look to Christ as a comfort in tribulation, Maranatha, the Lord is near. The second was written to correct the error that Christ’s coming would be instantaneous and to obviate the neglect of daily earthly duties that sprang from the exciting expectation. Its most characteristic and indeed all but unique section is that in the second chapter about the Apostasy and the Man of Sin.

“The second group is the Anti Judaic group of controversy, written in the great period of distress and conflict. The **First to the Corinthians** is the epistle of church discipline. It decides by great principles the little details of life and worship. Its fundamental idea is Christian unity. Its chief passages are the unparalleled chapters 13 and 15. In one the Apostle develops his magnificent argument for the Resurrection and in the other, like some great poet, ‘with his garland and singing robes about him,’ pours forth his inspired, impassioned paean to the glory of Christian love.

“The **Second to the Corinthians** falls into two main divisions. The key note of the first nine chapters is consolation in sorrow; that of the other chapters is boasting: the boasting of his adversaries that drove him into a ‘boasting’ which would have been abhorrent to him had it not been that his boast was in his infirmities and in the Cross of Christ his Lord. The Epistle is specially marked by its intense emotion. It is full of haunting words: now ‘tribulation,’ now ‘commendation,’ now ‘boast.’ It is the Epistle of personal details. . . .

“In the **Epistle to the Galatians** we find him again in a far different mood. It is the epistle of indignant warning; the only epistle he wrote throughout with his own hand. It is his gage of defiance to the Judaists: his triumphant note of exultation over abrogated ordinances and freedom perfected. Here, more than in all the rest, as Luther said, ‘he speaks mere flames!’

“In the **Epistle to the Romans** the same theme -- justification by faith not works; universality of sin and of grace -- is again developed in its positive rather than its antithetical aspect. The theme is handled doctrinally and systematically: not as in Galatians, with impassioned controversy, but with irresistible logic and calm and sympathetic strength.

“St. Paul had gone through much by the time we come to the third group. It is the christological group. In personal force he was a shattered man. He was calmer, he was sadder, he was yet wiser; he sat thinking and praying in his lonely prison. Yet the key note of **Philippians** is joy. There is one little outburst of anger in it, but its one leading thought -- the leading thought of the poor, suffering prisoner so full of gratitude for the pecuniary help the Philippians had sent to him -- is ‘Rejoice in the Lord alway; again I will say, Rejoice.’

“The key note of the **Epistle to the Colossians** is Christ all in all; Christ Head over all. The magnificent **Epistle to the Ephesians** is rich in many leading thoughts. It is the epistle of the church: the church in Christ; the epistle of the heavenlies; the epistle of the ‘mystery’ and ‘riches’ of the Gospel. Its key note is grace. The letter to **Philemon** is a little satellite and annex to the planet of the Colossians. It is a letter to a private Christian gentleman to ask pardon for a runaway Laodicean slave.

“In the last group, the Pastoral Epistles, again we see a change. The thunderstorms of continuous controversy seem to have rolled far into the distance. The foundations of Christian truths have been laid for ever. St. Paul is writing to **Timothy** and **Titus** how they should guide the churches of Ephesus and Crete. Though here and there we find a grand and pregnant summary of doctrine, the main theme is duty not doctrine, ethics not theology, the holy and wise walk of a Christian pastor in the guidance of the flock.

“Lastly, in the Second to Timothy, we have as it were the last will and testament of Paul. . . . Through it runs the old man’s wailing undertone to his beloved disciple: ‘Come to me’; ‘Come quickly’; ‘Come before winter’; ‘Come and cheer me a little ere I die.’ Yet drowning this low chord of sorrowings the paeon of quenchless hope and undaunted trust as, to the dear but timid racer, he hands the torch of the Gospel which in his own brave grasp no cowardice had hidden, no carelessness had dimmed, no storms had quenched.

“What an inexhaustible treasure have we here! The First and Second to the Thessalonians, of the Second Coming; the First to the Corinthians, of Christian unity and love; the Second, of consolation and a glimpse into the Apostle’s very heart; the Galatians, of Christian liberty; the Romans, of justification by faith; Philippians, of joy in sorrow; Colossians, of Christ all in all; Ephesians, of Christ in his church; Philemon, the Magna Charta of emancipation; the First to Timothy and to Titus, the pastor’s manual; the Second to Timothy, the epistle of courage and exultation and triumph in deep, apparent failure--of victory in the defeat of lonely death. Again I say, what a treasure have we here! May we go to it to learn humility, tolerance, duty, charity, that man is our brother, that God is love, and to learn that Christ died for our worst enemies no less than for ourselves. If we fail to learn such lessons from the Epistles, we might as well shut them up forever. If God will enlighten the eyes of our hearts by his holy spirit, then in deed shall we know his Word; find in it a Urim and Thummim, ardent with precious stones, and every gem of it under the mystic glory, bright with the oracles of God” (Farrar).

--*P. L. Read*

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 9, THE HERALD, November 1955

*Earnestly seek to commend yourself to God as a servant who, because of his straightforward dealing with the word of truth, has no reason to feel any shame. -- 2 Timothy 2:15 (Weymouth)*

AS WE study the Epistle to the Romans can we do so in the confidence that we have the text in the original language and in the exact words in which it proceeded from the Apostle's hands. Further, is the letter as he wrote it correctly reproduced in our English versions?

## Translated from the Greek

“On the title page of the New Testament we are informed that it was translated from the original Greek. We shall endeavor to show that the Epistle was written by Paul in Greek; within limits we will specify, it is preserved as he wrote it in the Greek text used by translators of the Authorized English Version; and that their translation is on the whole correct.

“It might be supposed that a letter to a Roman church would be written in Latin. It is quite certain that it was not. The Latin Fathers never claim their own language as the original of any part of the Bible. Augustine complains that in the early days of the Roman Catholic Church whoever obtained a Greek manuscript and knew anything of Greek undertook a translation; therefore, almost all the Latin copies were different. He adds: ‘But among the interpretations themselves, let the Italic be preferred before others.’ The best was therefore a translation. Such was the variety of the Latin copies that in A.D. 382 Damascus, bishop of Rome, committed to Jerome the task of revision. Jerome published the Gospels in A.D. 384. In his preface he says to Damascus, ‘Thou urgest me to make a new work out of an old one, to sit as arbiter on copies of the Scriptures scattered throughout the world; and, because they vary among themselves, to determine which are they that agree with the Greek truth.’ This proves that the Greek copies were the standard with which the Latin were to be compared.

Moreover, that the Epistle was written not in Latin but in Greek is also put beyond doubt by a comparison of the Greek and Latin manuscripts. In the Latin we constantly find that the same thought is expressed in different ways: in the Greek the variations are nearly all such as would naturally arise from the mistakes of a copyist.

“The use of the Greek language in this letter was justified by its great prevalence in Rome. This is testified by many writers; . . . Most of the early bishops of Rome bear Greek names” (Beet).

### **Three Classes of Documents**

We now ask, To what extent do the Greek texts from which our English versions were translated reproduce the Epistle as Paul wrote it? To answer this question we turn to three classes of witnesses: (1) Greek Manuscripts, (2) Ancient Traditions, (3) Quotations found in writings of Early Christian Fathers.

#### **THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS:**

“The Greek MSS are of two classes: uncials (or majuscules), written in capital letters, and cursives (or minuscules), written in running hand. Roughly speaking the uncials are earlier and the cursives later than A.D. 1000.

“Eleven uncials of this Epistle are known. The most famous manuscripts are these: the MS lately found by Tischendorf in the monastery of Mount Sinai (1844-59) and now preserved at St. Petersburg; the Vatican MS at Rome; and the Alexandrian MS presented in A.D. 1628 by the patriarch of Constantinople to Charles I and now in the King’s Library at the British Museum. The last is supposed to have been written in the fifth and the two others in the fourth century. They are written on beautiful vellum and each forms a thick 4to [sic] volume some 10 to 14 inches square. They have two to four columns of writing on a page. The letters follow each other without any separation into words and there are very few stops. Corrections by later hands are found in all. Each of them contains a large part of the Old Testament and Apocrypha, all in Greek. The Alex. and Vat. MSS contain the greater part, and the Sinai MS the whole of the New Testament.

“Not less interesting is the Ephraim MS in the Imperial Library of Paris. By a strange sacrilege, the writing of the scriptures was erased to make room for the works of Ephraim, a Syrian Father. Fortunately, the erasure was not perfect. By the use of chemicals to restore the defaced writing the whole has been deciphered. It contains important fragments of the Old and New Testaments, including part of this Epistle. It seems to have been written in the fifth century.

“Next in value is the Clermont Ms of the sixth century with Greek and Latin on opposite pages. The others are of later date” (Beet).

“As soon as men began to study these documents a little more attentively, they found three pretty well marked set of texts that appear also, though less prominently in the Gospels: 1. The *Alexandrine* set, represented by the four oldest majuscules, and so called because this text was probably the form used in the churches of Egypt and Alexandria. 2. The *Greco-Latin* set, represented by the four manuscripts that follow in order of date, so designated because it was the text circulating in the churches of the West and because in the manuscripts which have preserved it it is accompanied with a Latin translation. 3. The *Byzantine* set, to which belong the three most recent majuscules and almost the whole of the minuscules, so named because it was the text that had fixed and, so to speak, stereotyped itself in the churches of the Greek empire.

“In case of variation these three sets are either found, each having its own separate reading or combining two against one. Sometimes even the ordinary representatives of one differ from one another and unite with those--or some of those--of another set. And it is not easy to decide to which of those forms of the text the preference should be given.

“Moreover, as the oldest majuscules go back no farther than the fourth century, an interval of 300 years remains between them and the apostolic auto graph. And the question arises whether the text did not undergo alterations more or less important during this long interval. Fortunately, in the two other classes of documents we have the means of filling up this considerable blank.



### **ANCIENT TRANSLATIONS:**

“There are two translations of the New Testament that go back to the end of the second century. By these we ascertain the state of the text at a period much nearer to that when the autographs were still extant. These are the ancient Latin version known as the *Itala*, of which the Vulgate or version received in the Catholic Church is a revision, and the Syriac version called *Peschito*. Not only do these two ancient documents agree as to the substance of the text but their general agreement with the text of our Greek manuscripts proves on the whole the purity of the latter. Of these two versions, the *Itala* represents rather the Greco Latin type and the *Peschito* the Byzantine type. A third and somewhat more recent version, the *Coptic* (Egyptian), exactly reproduces the Alexandrine form” (Godet).

“The Syriac is written in the language called in the New Testament “Hebrew.” There are specimens in Matthew 27:46; Mark 5:41; 7:34; 15:34; Romans 8:15; I Corinthians 16:22. To distinguish it from the tongue of Moses and David we now call it Syriac or Aramaic. It was the mother tongue of Christ and the Apostles. Many manuscripts preserved by scattered Syrian churches have been brought to Europe and examined. The Latin copies are very many and possess interest as being the only form in which the Bible was accessible to the Western Church during the dark ages. Several other versions of less fame have also been examined and compared” (Beet).

### **QUOTATIONS FROM THE FATHERS:**

“But we are in a position to go back even further and to bridge over a good part of the interval that still divides us from the Apostolic text. The means at our command are the quotations from the New Testament in the *writers of the second century*. In 185 Irenaeus frequently quoted the New Testament in his great work. In particular he reproduces numerous passages from our Epistle (about 84 verses). About 150 Justin reproduces textually a long passage from the Epistle to the Romans (3:11 17). About 140 Marcion published his edition of Paul’s Epistles. Tertullian, in his work against this heretic, has reproduced a host of passages from Marcion’s text and especially from that of the Epistle to the Romans. He obviously quoted them as he read them in Marcion’s edition. He says

himself: ‘Whatever the omission which Marcion has contrived to make even in this, the most considerable of the Epistles, suppressing what he liked, the things which he has left are enough for me.’ In this continuous series of quotations, embracing about thirty eight verses, we have the oldest known evidence to a considerable part of the text of our Epistle. Tertullian himself (190 210) has in his works more than a hundred quotations from this letter.

“One writer carries us back, at least for a few verses, to the very age of the Apostle. I mean Clement of Rome, who, about the year 96, addresses an epistle to the Corinthians in which he reproduces textually an entire passage (Rom. 1:28 32). The general integrity of our text is thus firmly established” (Godet).

### Comparative Value of the Texts

In discussing the relative values of these manuscripts in cases where they differ, this eminent scholar says: “As to variations, I do not think it possible to give an *a priori* preference to any of the three texts mentioned above [namely the Alexandrine, the Greco-Latin, and the Byzantine, into which the 11 uncials and most of the cursives are grouped]. . . . Any one who has had long experience in the exegesis of the New Testament will, I think, own three things: 1. That all preference given *a priori* to any one of the three texts is a prejudice; 2. That the sole *external* reason, having some probability in favor of a particular reading, is the agreement of a certain number of documents of *opposite* types; 3. That the only means of reaching a well founded decision is the profound study of the context.”

Tischendorf remarks: “The three great Manuscripts alluded to (Sinaitic, Vatican, and Alexandrian) differ from each other both in age and authority and no one of them can be said to stand so high that its sole verdict is sufficient to silence all contradiction.”

### Variations Insignificant

It is encouraging to learn that scholars who have spent their lives seeking to distinguish the actual words of the inspired writers from the interpolations and errors of copyists are unanimous in their belief that the text on which our Authorized Version is based, particularly insofar as the Epistle to the Ro

mans is concerned, is to be accepted as substantially correct. Beet sums the matter up in these words: “What then is the testimony of these various witnesses? What do they say about the correctness of the text used by our translators? They reveal an immense number of variations in the extant manuscripts of the New Testament and of this Epistle. In almost every verse they appear. But we also find that by careful examination the number is, for practical purposes, greatly reduced. Very many are proved by the overwhelming weight of contrary testimony to be the mere mistakes of copyists. A large proportion of them affect the meaning of the text very slightly or not at all. A frequent variation is ‘Jesus Christ’ and ‘Christ Jesus’; and the same word spelled in different ways. When all these are set aside, the number is reduced within moderate bounds.”

“In conclusion,” says Godet, “it must be said the variations are as insignificant as they are numerous.”

### **Do Our English Translations Fairly Reproduce the Text?**

“One question remains. Do our translations fairly reproduce the text translated? In asking this question we must remember that every translation is imperfect. It is a lens that absorbs and deflects while it transmits the light. This applies especially to languages far removed in time and circumstances. The words do not exactly correspond; phrases correspond still less. Even such common English words as ‘for’ and ‘but’ have no precise equivalents in Greek. In every translation something is lost in accuracy, clearness, and force. And translations often err not merely in failing to give the writer’s full meaning but by putting other thoughts in place of his. We ask then, To what extent do our versions put before us Paul’s thoughts? The variety of translations will answer our question. With the Authorized English Version published in A.D. 1611 may be compared the Roman Catholic Version published at Rheims in A.D. 1582 and the Revised Version published in A.D. 1881. We have here three translations of very different origin. Yet in the main they agree. We find in all the same Epistle, the same arguments, the same truth. The same spirit breathes in all. It is therefore the spirit not of a translator but of the original writer.”

## Suggestions for Bible Study

“Before going to the exposition of the Epistle we may be allowed to urge the great importance of systematic and consecutive study of the Bible. . . . Even a commentary becomes a snare when the reader seeks chiefly to know what the commentator says instead of using it as a help to his own study of the Bible. The commentator is most successful when he writes so that his own words are forgotten and the sacred text only remains in the reader’s mind, but with greater clearness.

“All this implies that the Bible must be not only read devotionally but studied intellectually. Indeed it will be of use to us devotionally chiefly in proportion to the care with which we have previously endeavored to trace its meaning. And this requires mental effort. Those who think that a mere reference to such meditations as these will at once remove the difficulties of the Bible are doomed to well merited disappointment. These notes are written not to render needless but to stimulate and assist the reader’s own thought. A man who has only an English Bible but endeavors with all his powers to grasp its meaning will do better than one who has the best commentary but is too idle to think for himself. The Epistle before us is the result of mental effort and can be understood only by the mental effort of the reader. He who spoke in Paul thought fit to use the Apostle’s intellect as a means of speaking to us. He designs our own powers of thought to be the means by which we shall hear his voice.

“But it must not be thought that to understand the Bible a great or cultivated intellect is needful. An entrance into the sacred chamber is God’s gift. And although he thinks fit to bestow it only upon those who use the powers and opportunities he has given, he will withhold it from none who diligently and perseveringly seek it. Therefore the study of the Bible must be devotional as well as intelligent. For the oracle will be dumb unless the Spirit give to it a living voice. But our study must also be intelligent. To consecrate to God all but our intellect is to keep back a part of that which he claims. . . .

“Through inattention to the exact meaning of Bible words, or rather through the habit of assuming a meaning for these words without any investigation whatever (very common formerly and not yet extinct),

the teaching of the Bible has been greatly obscured and serious confusion and error have resulted. . . .

“We must also endeavor to understand and feel the force of the arguments used by the sacred writers, and especially by Paul. Some have given little attention to this because of their belief in the Apostle’s infallible authority. They accept each assertion as true and care not how it is proved. But by so doing they thwart his purpose. For he seeks to convince his readers by argument; and those who do not understand the argument cannot be convinced by it. And unless we are convinced by Paul’s arguments, we cannot be sure that we correctly understand the assertions they contain. Nor can we reach the great principles which are the groundwork of his teaching” (Beet).

--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 10, THE HERALD, December 1955

*How then can man be justified with God? --Job 25:4*

*The just shall live by faith. -- Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11;  
Hebrews 10:38*

THUS FAR in this series we have sought to profit from the life and example of our author by refreshing our minds with respect to the outstanding incidents of his early years, his conversion, and his apostolic career. We have also made inquiry as to the “saints” in Rome to whom he wrote and have endeavored to place ourselves in their midst. Then, too, we took the time to notice the chronological as well as other relationships that the Epistle to the Romans bears to St. Paul’s other letters and to the remainder of the New Testament. In our last “Meditation” we satisfied ourselves that we may come to the study of our Epistle in the confidence that except for some variations of very minor significance, we have the text as it left the Apostle’s hand. This last conclusion was reached after an examination of the three fold testimony of the Greek Manuscripts, the Ancient Translations, and the Quotations to be found in the

writings of the Christian authors of the second century.

### **A Fourth Witness**

While we listened to these witnesses, a fourth witness stood in silence, waiting to be heard. We refer to the internal evidence afforded by the Epistle itself. We are about to examine that which is satisfying not only to our heads but rejoices our hearts also. Many who know little or nothing of the testimony of the three witnesses previously examined may through diligent study of the Epistle itself recognize that it is a “genuine production” of the Apostle Paul and realize that it is none other than a part of the inspired “word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. This must be accompanied by whole hearted “obedience to the faith” it inculcates, and by a faithful attempt to the best of their ability to practice its precepts.

### **An Affectionate Embracing of the Truth**

We have already had our attention drawn to the necessity of a right attitude of heart in approaching the study of this Epistle (Meditation No. 1) and have noted that it is to those who hunger and thirst after (not information so much as) righteousness that it especially addresses itself. In the words of Thomas Chalmers “there must be an affectionate embracing of truth with the heart; and there must be a knowledge which puffeth not up but humbles and edifies; and there must be a teaching of the Spirit of God. . . . For let it be observed that the wisdom of the New Testament is characterized by moral attributes. It is pure and peaceable and gentle and easy to be entreated, and full of mercy and good fruits and without partiality [or] . . . hypocrisy. Let us not confound the illumination of natural argument with that which warms the heart, as well as informs the understanding--for it is a very truth that the whole demonstration of Christian doctrine may be assented to by him who is not spiritual but carnal.”

As, therefore, we stand on the threshold of the Epistle to the Romans, which the above writer calls “by far the mightiest and closest of those demonstrations” let us, with Moule, renew our determination “not to analyze only or explain but to submit and to believe.” With “our beloved Brother Paul” let us “bow

the knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant us according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14 19).

### **The Epistle’s Broad Outlines**

At the beginning of our study of this Epistle it will be profitable for us if we first seek to grasp its broad outlines and note the divisions into which it logically falls. If in subsequent Meditations we are led to dwell on individual passages and texts, those gems of truth will appear to greater advantage and shine into our hearts with an added luster if we have the outlines of the Epistle well drawn in our mental vision. Let us for the time being imagine ourselves back amongst those beloved ones of God in Rome, hearing the Epistle read for the first time.

The Gospel narratives according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have not yet been written. It is doubtful if we have seen any of the few portions of the New Testament that have been written up to this time. Some of us have been raised in the Old Testament scriptures, although few if any of us actually possess a copy of our own. Others of our number have been brought up in heathen idolatry. All that any of us know of the Gospel has come to us by word of mouth, and that not from an Apostle’s lips. And yet, somehow, in the Lord’s providence the blessed Message has come our way that by simple faith in the precious blood of Jesus we may be saved; and with weak and trembling faith we have believed. Now a letter written by one specially commissioned by our risen Lord himself to strengthen our faith and confirm us in our consecration has been brought to us by Phebe.

### **A Preferred Method of Reading an Epistle**

Of one thing we may be very sure --when that letter arrived it was read and re read. May we suggest to all who are sharing these Meditations with us that at this time we extend our “half hour” to an hour and a

half and re-read the Epistle. Those who are in the habit of reading an epistle at a sitting without stopping will not need to be persuaded to do this now. They know the advantages that accrue from such a habit. For those with whom this will be a first experience there awaits a sense of satisfaction and refreshment not otherwise obtainable. Moreover, as we read, let us do so with the thought in mind of tracing only the outlines of the Epistle, as before suggested, reserving to subsequent occasions the consideration of its details.

It will not be difficult to see that the Epistle consists of three main divisions: **Preface, Exposition of the Gospel, Conclusion.** Discussion of each will be in the above order.

### **PREFACE:**

“Like St. Paul’s other letters, the Epistle to the Romans begins with a *preface* (1:1-15) that includes the address and a thanksgiving and is intended to form the relation between the author and his readers. But in this letter the *address* is more elaborate than usual. This difference arises from the fact that the Apostle did not yet know personally the church to which he was writing. Hence it is that he has strongly emphasized his mission to be the *Apostle of the Gentiles*; for on this rests the *official* bond which justifies the step he is taking (vs. 1-7). The *thanks giving* that follows and is founded on the work already accomplished among them leads him quite naturally to apologize for not yet having taken part in it himself and to express the constant desire he feels of being able soon to exercise his apostleship among them for the confirmation of their faith and his own encouragement and as well for the increase of their church (vs. 8-15).”

### **EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL:**

The Apostle’s exposition of “his” Gospel extends from 1:16 to 15:13. It falls into two main subdivisions: one chiefly doctrinal, the other chiefly practical. The doctrinal portion or that which relates to principles extends from 1:16 to chapter 11. The practical portion is that which seeks to make application to the affairs of every day life of the principles laid down in the doctrinal portion. It begins with the well known passage “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,” (12:1) and ends with the passage of equal dearness to the believer’s heart: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the holy spirit” (15:13).

### **DOCTRINAL PORTION OF GOSPEL EXPOSITION**

In this portion the Apostle gives us four things:

1. A concise statement of his great theme, which he sums up in these words: “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 1:16,17);
2. A discussion of this theme (1:18--5:21);
3. His answer to one important objection or the relation of sanctification to justification (6:1--8:39);
4. His answer to the other important objection or the explanation of Israel’s rejection (9:2--11:36).

“After the full solemn and digressive greeting and thanksgiving” we have seen in the preface, St. Paul passes in a very skillful and yet “in a most natural manner” to the development of his all absorbing subject. “He proposes to show that the salvation of every man, whoever he may be, rests on the righteousness which faith procures; he supports this proposition immediately by a scripture declaration,” namely Habakkuk 2:4.

In the development of this Gospel theme, three leading thoughts appear: (1) the world’s need of such a righteousness, (2) God’s provision to meet that need, (3) “the ruinous work of Adam has been reversed by the healing work of Christ.”

### **The World’s Need**

“Since the necessity of this mode of salvation arises from the universality of sin, which deserves God’s wrath, The Apostle proceeds to prove that all have sinned. Of the sinfulness of the Gentiles he gives a truly fearful picture in the rest of the first chapter; and then [to 3:20] he enters on the proof that the Jews have sinned no less fatally.” Wrath being on all, even on the Jews, the world is in evident need of salvation.

## God's Provision to Meet that Need

“The free and universal *gift* of the righteousness of faith given by God to men” was made possible the Apostle declares “by the expiatory work of Jesus Christ (3:21-26). It is offered to Gentiles as well as Jews in accordance with the principle of Jewish monotheism” (3:27-31). “Aware of the extreme novelty” of these conclusions, he devotes the fourth chapter to show that “this mode of justification is in keeping with the decisive example, that of Abraham.” The first eleven verses of chapter 5 assure the consecrated believer that “whatever may be the tribulations of the present, this righteousness of faith will never fail him.” Even now he has by faith received the atonement (5:11) and is therefore reckoned perfect through Christ, and ultimately he will be saved from wrath (“restored to the proper condition of a son--liberated from sin and from death, which is the manifestation of God's wrath”) through that same faith in the precious blood of Jesus (5:9).

## Adam Versus Christ

“This universal condemnation and this universal justification” are traced in the remaining verses of chapter 5 to Adam and Christ respectively. The Apostle there shows them extending “their opposite influences: the one of condemnation and death and the other of justification and life over all mankind, but in such a way that the saving action of the one in finitely exceeds the destructive action of the other.”

## The Relation of Sanctification to Justification

Having established the principle of righteousness by faith, the Apostle proceeds to meet objections. The evilly disposed mind, *knowing nothing experientially* of the power of the spirit of Christ to war against sin in the consecrated believer will be prone to respond to the matchless grace of God as set forth by the Apostle and may suggest that we may therefore “continue in sin that grace may abound.” While this suggestion will find no place in the heart of one who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the Apostle realizes that such an one will nevertheless be concerned to know if Justification by faith will “be able to found a *rule of holiness* comparable to that which followed from the

Law and without having recourse to the latter. After having excluded the Law as a means of justification are we not obliged to re turn to it when the end in view is to lay a foundation for the moral life of believers”? The answer to this question like the Apostle’s development of the Gospel theme itself contains a discussion of three principal ideas: (1) Justification by faith *contains a principle of holiness*; (2) the Law is no more able to sanctify than to justify; (3) the spirit of Christ *gives victory* over sin.

Every Christian of experience will realize how great the temptation is for us to dwell upon rather than to merely touch the outline of the doctrine now advanced by the Apostle. For while it is undoubtedly implied in the earlier chapters, now, the truth appears in chapters 6--8 in all its sparkling beauty: we are to be delivered not alone from the guilt of sin *but also from its power*. The faith that justifies is not indeed “dead belief but inspiring confidence.” And when we have once believed with the heart, then belief becomes self surrender; self surrender becomes self conquest; self conquest rises into spiritual incorporation with Christ in unity of love and life. This passive union soon passes into an active force: the life in Christ, the life not in the flesh but in the spirit. And thus all true faith is inseparable from works. Justification becomes sanctification. The guilty man becomes the holy man. The wicked man is turned from his wickedness and lives. The leper is cleansed. The prodigal comes home. The soul is saved. Oh! how good is the news of the Gospel. It is a message of peace to all who will receive it. It tells us how we may be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness but that which cometh from God: even the righteousness that begins with the faith of simple trust in God and ends in the faith of union with his spirit and fulfillment of his will.

### **Is There Unrighteousness with God?**

After showing that there is a principle of holiness in the relation to Christ on which Justification by faith rests, the Apostle proceeds to deal with the next objection: “If salvation rests on the righteousness of faith, what becomes of the promises made to the people of Israel who have rejected this righteousness? What becomes of the *divine election* of which this people was the object?”

Again the Apostle makes a threefold reply: (1) God is sovereign Lord of all and nothing can restrict his freedom; (2) in the exercise of this liberty God always acts justly and his rejection of Israel is no exception to this rule; (3) as a matter of fact the rejection of Israel is only partial and merely temporary: not absolute or final and will result in the blessing of all mankind.

What “food for thinking Christians” is contained in chapters 9--11. How clear and convincing are the Apostle’s conclusions! What comfort they contain! If the temptation was great with us to linger lovingly on chapters 6, 7, and 8, what shall we say now, when before our wondering eyes we see him exhausting all the aspects of this question in a discussion “which may be called the masterpiece of the philosophy of history.” In this outline we cannot attempt even to approximately reproduce the details of his argument. We can only rejoice in the knowledge that nothing can hinder the free flow of God’s mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that reverence him. We rejoice further in the fact that his promises are ours and that they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Though the promises to Israel have been up to this time understood to give them an almost exclusive claim to God’s favor, they cannot operate to prevent him from extending his mercy to whom he will. And, while this may seem an astonishingly new doctrine, the Apostle shows that it is nothing more than the proper understanding of their own scriptures.

### **PRACTICAL PORTION OF GOSPEL EXPOSITION**

“Justification by faith, after having been positively established has come forth triumphant from the two trials to which it has been subjected. The question was asked, Could it produce holiness? It has shown that it could and that it was the Law that was itself powerlessness in this respect.” The question was asked, Could this offer be extended to the Gentiles without violating the promises to Israel? It has shown that it could. What yet remains? “One thing only: To show the new principle grappling with the realities of existence and to depict the *life of the believer* who by faith has obtained justification.”

Far from being a “simple appendix” not specially related to what has gone before, this practical portion

of the Epistle “rests not less than the doctrinal portion on the theme formulated in 1:17, ‘the just shall live by faith,’ for it completes the development begun in chapters 6--8 of the words *shall live*.” First the Apostle sketches the consecrated believer’s life in a *general* way in chapters 12 and 13; then he applies the moral principles there established to the *special* circumstances of the Christians in Rome (14:1--15:13).

In the general application four prominent ideas are developed: (1) the consecration with which the believer’s new life in Christ begins (12:1, 2); (2) his life as a member of the church (12:3-21); his life in relation to the State (13:1-10); (4) the goal in view (13:11-14).

“The Apostle lays down as the basis and point of departure for the redeemed life the living sacrifice the believer, touched by the mercies of God, makes of his body in order to do God’s perfect will, which is revealed more and more to his renewed understanding.

“This gift of himself the believer accomplishes in the first place as a *member of the church*, the Body of Christ, by *humility and love*.”

He carries it out in the second place in his relation to the “powers that be” that are permitted to rule “until He come whose right it is”; and he does so in the two forms of *submission* to authorities [except where this would conflict with the Law of Love, which is the Law of Christ] and *justice* to all.”

That which animates and sustains him in all his relations with other members of the church and with the world from which that church has been called out is the glorious hope he has unceasingly before him: “Christ coming again, and with him the day of salvation breaking” -- a day which shall prove to be a day of salvation indeed to those who are found clothed with Christ.

After the application of the principles developed in the first eleven chapters to the general life of the consecrated believer, the Apostle proceeds to make special application to the brethren in Rome. The leading thought is “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not himself” (15:2, 3).

## CONCLUSION:

“This local application, while closing the practical treatise, restores the author and his readers to the midst of the church of Rome; it thus forms the transition to the epistolary conclusion that corresponds to the introduction (1:1-15). From verse 14 the style indeed becomes that of a letter.

“This conclusion treats of five subjects:

(1) After having justified anew the very considerable didactic work he had written them by the commission he has received for the Gentiles, the Apostle reminds the Romans that his apostolic work is now finished in the East. Therefore, he hopes soon to arrive at Rome on his way to Spain (15:14-33). This piece corresponds exactly to the passage in the preface (1:8-15).

(2) He recommends the bearer of his letter to his readers and charges them with greetings for all the members of the church known to him. To these personal salutations he adds greetings to the whole church with which he has been charged by the numerous churches he has recently passed through (16:1-16).

(3) In passing, in a sort of postscript, he invites them to be on their guard against the Judaizing emissaries, who will be sure to make their appearance as soon as they hear of a work of the Lord at Rome (16:17-20).

(4) He transmits the greetings of those who surround him and even lets his secretary Tertius have the word to greet them in his own person, if one may so speak (16:21-24).

(5) He closes with a prayer that corresponds to the desire with which he had opened his letter (1:11). He said there how much he longed to be able to labor for their *strengthening*. He did what he could with this in view by sending them such a letter. But he knows well that his work will not produce its fruit except in so far as God himself will do his part in working by it: ‘Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel.’”  
--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 11, THE HERALD, January 1956

*Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel. -- 2 Timothy 2:8*

*PAUL, A servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures), concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ; to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. -- Romans 1:1 7*

“Often people reading the Bible are not conscious of the extreme listlessness with which they pass along the familiar and oft repeated words of scripture without the impression of their meaning being at all present with the thoughts and how, during the mechanical currency of the verses through their lips, the thinking power is often asleep for whole pass ages. . . .” We may at least for the present therefore be allowed to read over a paragraph first and seek to fasten the import of certain of its particular phrases upon our attention, even though these phrases may have heretofore been regarded as so intelligible that we did not think of bestowing an effort or dwelling one moment upon their signification. Then again be allowed to read the paragraph over again in such extended or paraphrased language as may give us another opportunity of its sense being riveted in our understanding. While securing such clear understanding of the Apostle’s words will be our immediate purpose and may at times seem to be our only one, yet this can never be more than a means to an end. To see only the point of the Apostle’s masterly arguments would indeed well repay us for the “half hours” we may spend together in these pages. But unless they also have the effect of bringing Jesus himself into ever clearer vision as the altogether lovely One, alone

worthy of our heart's devotion [the Father always excepted], we shall fail of our ultimate aim.

“Beyond the sacred page we seek Thee, Lord,  
Our spirits pant for Thee, Thou living Word.”

### **The Address or Greeting**

As we read these seven verses of address or greeting our author uses to commence his letter, we are forcibly reminded of the remarks of R. G. Moulton in discussing the Epistles of St. Paul from the literary standpoint. We quote: “Some writers are obscure through poverty of thought; Paul on the contrary through exuberance. In his writings great ideas, brilliantly worded, come pouring out with a rapidity that leaves appreciative effort lagging behind. Yet this but half describes his exuberance. Paul has a highly relational mind; not content with vivid presentation of a thought, he must guard it in all its aspects and indicate its connection with all other thoughts.” In this passage the interval between the first and seventh verses will therefore read very well in succession: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, . . . . In verse one at the mere mention of the “Gospel” the mind of Paul seems to catch fire. He cannot hurry on to verse seven without pausing in verse two to mention the fact that the Gospel was promised long ago and to state in verse three the subject of it. Then in verse three at the mere mention of our Savior’s name, Paul’s mind seems to burn and blaze with signal intensity. He cannot go on without asserting in this and the next verse that Jesus, the Son of God whom he announces, is not only the Jewish Messiah who died but also the Christian’s Lord who ever liveth. He states in the fifth verse that from Jesus he had received his commission to preach unto all nations and in the sixth verse to instance the people he was addressing as among those nations. “And it is not till after he had completed this circle of deviations but at the same time enriched the whole of its course with the effusions of a mind stored in the truths of revelation that he resumes in the seventh that rectilinear track by which the writer who announced himself in the first verse sends in the seventh his Christian salutations to the correspondents he is addressing.”



## The Gospel Is of God

“*The Gospel*’: word almost too familiar now till the thing is too little understood. What is it? In its native and eternally proper meaning, it is the divine ‘Good Tidings.’ It is the announcement of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior of men, in whom God and man meet with joy.” True it is that that announcement stands in living relation to a bright chain of precepts and solemn warnings. We shall see this amply illustrated in this Epistle. But neither precepts nor warnings are properly *the Gospel*. “The Gospel saves from sin and enables for holy conduct. In itself it is the pure, mere message of redeeming love.”

The Gospel is of God; that is to say, it originated with the Father. He is the Author of it. “God so loved the world. . . .” “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him” (John 3:16; I John 4:9).

## The Gospel Promised Beforehand

Far from evincing a desire to advance something new, the Apostle is at pains to show that “his” Gospel is in entire accord with the Old Testament writings. It was a constant position with him “that he advanced nothing but what was maintained by the best and holiest men of the nation.” “Saying none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22, 23). Though his doctrines might appear to be new, yet he regarded them “as entirely consistent with all that had been declared in the Jewish dispensation; and not only consistent but as actually promised there.” The passages of the Old Testament on which he particularly relied will come before us as we proceed. It is worthy of special notice here, however, that the Apostle had a great respect for the Old Testament. Manifestly he studied it. Nor is he alone in this. Hear the Apostle Peter: “To him [Jesus] give all the Prophets witness” (Acts 10:43). Jesus himself said, “Ye search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). And again, he says “Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me” (5:46).

“The sunrise of Christ was no abrupt, insulated phenomenon, unintelligible because out of relation.

‘Since the world began’ (Luke 1:70), from the dawn of human history, predictive word and manifold preparing work had gone before. . . . ‘The whole east’ heaved with expectations of a Judea world rule about the time when, as a fact, Jesus came. He came, alike to disappoint every merely popular hope and to satisfy at once the concrete details and the spiritual significance of the long forecast. And he sent his messengers out into the world carrying as their text. . . that old and multifold literature which is yet one Book; those ‘holy writings’ (our own Old Testament from end to end) that were to them nothing less than the voice of God. They always put the Lord, in their preaching, in contact with that prediction.” Who else in all history was thus heralded beforehand?

### **Concerning His Son Jesus Christ Our Lord**

Above everything else let us ever remember that the Gospel according to Paul, as the Epistle to the Romans has appropriately been called, has to do with a Person. The sum and substance of “his” Gospel is Jesus. Elsewhere he writes: “I know whom I have believed.” It is one thing to know certain things about Jesus (even though those things be all true) and another thing altogether to know him. The Queen of Sheba had heard a great many things about Solomon, but when she became personally acquainted with him she realized that the half had not been told her. Recently it has been suggested to us to stress still more in these pages the importance of church unity. We doubt if there is a better way to do this than by emphasizing the Personality of Jesus.

### **The Personality of Jesus**

Brethren, let us thank God that our faith is not in a creed, not in a statement of belief, however exact or explicit; not in a document but in a living Being, our blessed Lord Jesus himself, whose personality embraces every grace. In loyalty to Jesus we can all find fellowship and unity. Yea, and if it did but know it, a distracted world could find its life. How true is the saying: “*What* we believe divides us; *whom* we believe unites us.” “I,” said Jesus, “if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” Brethren, let us lift him up *now*, in these difficult days; let him fill our lives. We know that this saying of Jesus will have a grand

fulfillment in the next Age, when all shall have their eyes opened to behold our Lord; when he shall indeed be the desire of all nations. But we cannot wait that time. Our souls are panting to see him lifted up now, and if this cannot yet be in the world, it must be in the church.

“We would see Jesus! for the shadows lengthen

Across this little landscape of our life--

We would see Jesus! our weak faith to strengthen

For the last weariness, the final strife!

“We would see Jesus-- the great Rock Foundation

Whereon our feet were set by sovereign grace;

Not life nor death, with all their agitation

Can thence remove us, if we see His face.”

### The Seed of David

The Apostle next tells us that Jesus *was made* or as the Greek may literally be rendered *became or was born* of the seed of David. “So the New Testament begins (‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David’ [Matt. 1:1]); so it almost closes (‘I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the off spring of David’ [Rev. 22:16] ).” St. Paul in later years recalls the Lord’s physical descent again: “Remember that Jesus Christ, *of the seed of David*, was raised from the dead according to my Gospel.” “The old Apostle in that last passage has entered the shadow of death; he feels with one hand for the rock of history, with the other for the pulse of eternal love. Here was the rock; the Lord of life was the Child of history, Son and Heir of a historical king, and the, as such, the Child of prophecy too. And this against all surface appearances beforehand. The Davidic ‘ground’ (‘He shall grow up before him . . . as a root out of a dry ground’ [Isa. 53:2] ) had seemed to be dry as dust for generations when the Root of endless life sprang up in it.”

## **According to the Flesh . . . According to the Spirit**

What does the Apostle intend us to understand by the expressions “according to the flesh” and “according to the Spirit.” Since their proper understanding is essential to a clear grasp of much of what follows in this Epistle, we may well pause a moment in their consideration. Two preliminary questions present themselves: (1) What is man? and (2) What do the scriptures teach concerning the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **WHAT IS MAN?**

“The Scriptures recognize man as composed of two elements: body and spirit. These two produce soul, sentient being, intelligence, the man himself, the being or soul. The term ‘body’ applies merely to the physical organism. It neither relates to the life that animates nor to the sentient being that is the result of animation. A body is not a man, although there could be no man without a body. The spirit of life is not the man; although there could be no manhood without the spirit of life. The word ‘spirit’ is from the Hebrew word *ruach* in the Old Testament scriptures. Its signification primarily is breath, and hence we have the expression ‘breath of life,’ or ‘spirit of life,’ because the spark of life once started is supported by breathing.

“The words ‘spirit of life’ signify more than breath. They relate to the spark of life itself, without which breath would be an impossibility. This spark of life we receive from our fathers, it being nourished and developed through our mothers. It is quite untrue that the spark of human life is communicated in a miraculous way, any more than is the spark of brute life. The lower animals--the horse, dog, cattle, etc.--are begotten of the males and born of the females of their respective genera in precisely the same manner as the human species is produced, nor does anything in the Bible suggest the contrary. It is purely human invention designed to uphold a false theory that claims Divine interposition in the birth of human offspring.”

## **THE NATURE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

The scriptural teaching concerning our Redeemer is that

(1) he existed as a spirit being before he became flesh;

(2) he underwent a change of nature: the life principle or spirit of life that formerly animated his spirit body was transferred to Mary's womb and "though retaining all the purity and perfection of the pre-existent (spirit) state, the transferred germ of being partook . . . of the nature of the mother (human nature) and was made flesh by being born of a woman."

(3) He was put to death flesh and thereby ceased to exist in any manner or degree on any plane of existence until

(4) he was raised from the dead. He was raised spirit and now enjoys the highest of all natures: Divine.

[NOTE: For an exhaustive discussion of these and related subjects we refer all to the masterly work of Charles T. Russell entitled, "The Atonement between God and Man."]

In the light of the foregoing remarks it will not be difficult to see that the word 'flesh' in our text refers to the physical organism or human body of our Lord. It does not include any reference to the life principle which animated that body. On the other hand, the word "spirit" makes no reference to the spirit nature that was his before he became flesh nor to the Divine nature he now enjoys. It refers altogether to the life principle that animated his human body during the days of his life on earth.

### **Declared the Son of God**

Those who had the inestimable privilege of personal acquaintance with our Lord during the days of his flesh were able to reach the conclusion before his death and resurrection that he was the Son of God. The holiness of that life principle that animated all his conduct clearly marked him out as the holy, harmless, undefiled One separate from sinners. Some men might say that he was John the Baptist, some Elias, others Jeremias or one of the prophets, but when Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am, Simon Peter

answered: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:15,16).

### **The Power of His Resurrection**

All questions as to the holiness of his spirit or his relationship as Son of God were forever settled by his resurrection from the dead. God grant us more and more to know experimentally “what is the exceeding greatness of *his power* to usward who believe according to the working of his mighty power *which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead*” (Eph. 1:19, 20). Jesus had claimed to be God’s Son. The Father honored that claim in the most decisive manner possible by raising him from the dead. Thereby Jesus was declared, determined, marked out, designated, proved to be God’s Son. Moreover his resurrection not only proved him to be God’s Son but proved him also to be holy. “Thou wilt not suffer thine *Holy One* to see corruption” (Acts 2:27). It would surprise us to learn that one who had been unholy had been raised from the dead by the power of the Father. In the case of Jesus, resurrection was the natural corollary of such a life as he had lived. It was morally impossible for him to have remained dead. “Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains [Fenton: grip] of death; because *it was not possible* that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

### **Among All Nations**

“ ‘Among all the nations,’ ‘all the Gentiles.’ The words read easy to us and half unnoticed perhaps as a phrase of routine. Not so to the ex Pharisee who dic tated them here. A few years before he would have held it highly ‘unlawful to keep company with, or come unto, one of another nation’ (Acts 10:2, 8). Now, in Christ, it is as if he had almost forgotten that it had been so. His whole heart in Christ is blent in personal love with hearts belonging to many nations; in spiritual affection he is ready for contact with all hearts.”

### **For His Name’s Sake**

“He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles. . . . I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:15,16). “Paul had indeed come to know that name

and to pass it on was now his very life. He existed only to win for it more insight, more adoration, more love. 'The name' deserved that great soul's entire devotion. Does it not deserve our equally entire devotion now? Our lives shall be transfigured in their measure by taking for their motto also, 'For his Name's sake.'"

"It means so much to me, that, when he came,  
They called him 'JESUS!'; 'Tis a gripping name  
That takes a saving hold on one like me,  
Who lifts new visioned eyes that now would see  
All false lights fade in presence of the true--  
What does it mean to you?"

## Review

Let us briefly review the ground we have covered. "Notice the beauty and symmetry of Paul's opening sentence. It is a crystal arch spanning the fault between the Jew of Tarsus and the Christians at Rome. Paul begins by giving his name: he rises to the dignity of his office and then to the Gospel he proclaims. From the Gospel to ascends to its great subject, to him who is Son of David and Son of God. From this summit of his arch he passes on to the apostleship again and to the nations for whose good he received it. Among these nations he finds the Christians at Rome. He began to build by laying down his own claims; he finishes by acknowledging theirs. The gulf is spanned. Across the waters of national separation Paul has flung an arch whose firmly knit segments are living truths and whose key stone is the . . . Son of God. Over this arch he has tens with words of greeting from his Father and their Father, from his Master and their Master.

"Every word increases the writer's claim upon the attention of his readers. He writes to them as one doing the work of the promised Messiah, who lived at Nazareth and died at Jerusalem. Among the servants of Christ he occupies no mean place; he has been called to the first rank. He has been set apart by God for the proclamation of those joy tidings whose echoes from afar were heard by the ancient prophets and still resound in the words of the sacred books. The Divine mission of the prophets and the sacredness of their writings claim attention for one who announces as

present what they foretold as future. This claim is strengthened by mention of him who is the great matter of the good news. Paul proclaims the advent of a scion of the house to which eternal royalty was promised. The advent of One who by Divine power, by victory over the grave, has been separated from all others as the Son of God. This Son of David and of God is Paul's master and theirs. By his personal call Paul has received the rank of an apostle. The office receives luster from the grandeur of him by whom it was conferred. The purpose of Paul's mission is that men in all nations may obey faith. A further purpose is that the name of Christ, written in these verses in characters so splendid, may be revered and loved by all. Among these nations are Paul's readers. But he does not write to lead them to faith. Christ has already made them his own by a Divine call. They are objects of God's love and men whom God has claimed for himself. Paul desires for them the smile of God and the rest of spirit that only the smile can give. May it come to them from its only source, the common Father and the common Master.

“In these words there is no mere rambling among sacred topics; no running away after some great thought; no mere desire to put Christ's name into every sentence. Everywhere there is order and purpose. In verse 5 we find Paul standing as an apostle on the level upon which he stood in verse 1. But how great an advance he had made. The long foretold Gospel has been important to the man set apart to proclaim it. The Apostle has been into the glory of that presence now irradiates the office received from One so great. He comes forth as an ambassador claiming for his Master the allegiance of all nations.”

We conclude with the following paraphrase: “Paul, a devoted servant of Jesus Christ, an Apostle called by Divine summons as much as any member of the original Twelve, solemnly set apart for the work of delivering God's message of salvation. Paul, so authorized and commissioned, gives greeting to the whole body of Roman Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) who as Christians are special objects of the Divine love, called out of the mass of mankind into the inner society of the church, consecrated by God like Israel of old as his own peculiar people. May the free unmerited favor of God and the peace which comes from reconciliation with him be yours! May God



himself, the heavenly Father, and the Lord Jesus Messiah grant them to you!

“The message which I am commissioned to proclaim is no startling novelty launched upon the world without preparation. Rather it is the direct fulfillment of promises that God had inspired the prophets of Israel to set down in Holy Writ. It relates to none other than his Son, whom it presents in a twofold aspect: on the one hand by physical descent tracing his lineage to David, as the Messiah was to do; on the other hand, in virtue of the holiness inherent in his spirit, visibly designated or declared to be Son of God by the miracle of the resurrection. He, I say, is the sum and substance of my message: Jesus, the Jew’s Messiah and the Christian’s Lord. And it was through him that I, like the rest of the Apostles, received both the general tokens of God’s favor: called to be a Christian and given the special gifts of an Apostle. My duty as an Apostle is among all Gentile peoples and therefore among you too at Rome to win men over to the willing service of loyalty to him. The end to which all my labors are directed is the honor of his holy name.”

--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 12, THE HERALD, February 1956

*From you sounded out the word of the Lord.*

-- I Thessalonians 1:8

GRACE to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Such was the sweet benediction with which the Apostle closed his address in verse 7. To those among the beloved ones of God in Rome who were acquainted with the Old Testament writings. It must have sounded as an echo of those comforting words with which Aaron had been instructed to bless Israel: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be *gracious* unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee *peace*” (Num. 6:

24- 26). The music of those old time words has now mellowed; the awful majesty on high has been revealed by Jesus to be none other than our Father, from whose bosom the Only begotten One came forth. He has revealed that *grace* and *peace* will be multiplied toward us; yea, eternal life itself, as by faith we become ever better acquainted with the Father and himself (2 Peter 1:2; John 17:3; John 1:18). May grace, the active, redeeming love of God in Christ toward us, and peace, the sense of “profound calm and inward quiet which is communicated to the heart by the possession of reconciliation,” be our blessed portion as we attend to the further words of our inspired guide.

### **First, I Thank My God**

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that often times I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also (1:8-15).*

“After greeting the believers at Rome, Paul declares his deep and long cherished interest in them.” The address considered in our last Meditation “had drawn a sort of *official* bond” between himself and them, which he feels the need of turning into a “*heart* relation.” “Many thoughts arise one after another in his mind. He tells us the first but does not arrange the others in order. He pours forth all in one full stream of thought and feeling. Paul’s first thought here, as in nearly all his epistles, is gratitude.” “He has blessed the Roman Christians in the name of the Lord. Now he hastens to tell them how he blessed God for them

and how full his heart is of them. The Gospel is warm all through with life and love; this great message of doctrine and precept is poured from a fountain full of personal affection.”

It is probable that it did not occur to “our beloved Brother Paul” that in addition to the purpose he had in mind, he was here furnishing the church with a sublime illustration of “love rejoicing with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6, *margin*). Yet was not such the case? Here were a group of Christians whose faith had come about independently from his labors. Does he rejoice the less because he had had no part in it? No indeed! He rejoices the more, for to him it is an indication that God is working not only through himself but through other. The feeling he displays is there fore one of thankfulness that in his great mission of spreading the joyful tidings God has provided help from sources unknown to him. “It has sometimes struck us as being one of the saddest fruits of schism in the church, that it has begotten a kind of covetous ness of truth and love. Christians hold their favorite doctrines as a sort of spiritual monopoly; loving truth for the distinction it may give to them, as the miser loves his gold instead of loving it for the blessing and joy it may bring to others when imparted. To find the highest help in communion we must be willing to give all we have without stint and to take from all who have acquired any riches of truth however remote and out of ecclesiastical fellowship with us they may be.” Ah! Paul, once again, we thank God for you and for giving us this lesson in love--all unconsciously perhaps though none the less effectively. God help us ever thus to rejoice with the truth *wherever found*.

### My God

“ ‘My God’; a phrase used in the New Testament only by St. Paul, except that one utterance of *Eli, Eli* by his dying Savior. It is the expression of an indescribable appropriation and reverent intimacy. The believer grudges his God to none; he rejoices with great joy over every soul that finds its wealth in him. But at the center of all joy and love is this--‘my God’; ‘Christ Jesus my Lord’; who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*. Is it selfish? Nay, it is the language of a personality where Christ has dethroned self in his own favor. There reigns now the highest happiness, the happiness that animates and maintains a self

forgetful love of all. This holy intimacy, with its action in thanks and petition is all the while *'through Jesus Christ.'* . . . The man knows God as 'my God' and deals with him as such, never out of that beloved Son who is equally one with the believer and with the Father, no alien medium but the living point of unity."

### **Your Faith Is Spoken Of**

"Your faith" says another "not your verbal disputations, nor your questionings, nor your syllogisms."

"What increases Paul's joy is that not only do they believe themselves but their faith the report of which is spread everywhere, opens a way for the Gospel to other countries." "Go where he will in Asia, in Macedonia, in Achaia, in Illyricum, he meets believing 'strangers from Rome,' with spiritual news from the Capital, announcing, with a glad solemnity, that at the great center of this world the things eternal are proving their power, and that the Roman mission is remarkable for its strength and simplicity of 'faith,' its humble reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, and loving allegiance to him." "Such faith must surely have made itself known by works of faith." Happy, happy Christians, those in Rome to whom Paul wrote. What a glow of holy joy must have been theirs as they listened to these high praises from an inspired Apostle's pen! It must have been to them as a fore taste of that "Well done" only the Master can say; that "Well done" he will yet say to those who over come at last.

### **Giving Praise Worthily**

Another lesson we may learn from the Apostle ere we leave this passage is the propriety of speaking a word of commendation when it is merited. The impression obtains in some quarters that no matter how much we may feel another has merited our love and esteem we should never make any such admission in his presence. To do so, it is held, might have the effect of making him heady, and thus our well intentioned words might prove to be a snare. We would agree that idle words of flattery uttered in insincerity might so prove, but sincere words of appreciation kindly expressed to those who merit them can only inspire to still nobler achievement. One of the deepest thinkers this world has ever produced, whose

writings show a remarkable understanding of and deep reverence for the Word of God, once wrote: “You may sum the duty of your life in the giving of praise worthily and being yourselves worthy of it.”

### Paul's Prayer Life

“For God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you . . . in my prayers.” A few paragraphs back we noted the fact that the faith of these Christians in Rome had come about independently from Paul's labors, and we observed the joy he experienced in their faith, notwithstanding the fact that he had had no part in it. But in another sense from the once we were then considering, Paul had had a very real part in it. He had been “co operating by prayer” (2 Cor. 1:11, *Diaglott*). Usually the first conception one gets of St. Paul is that of a man of almost ceaseless *activity* in the service of the Lord; of one whose first inquiry was “Lord, what wilt thou have me to *do*?” of one who “*labored* more abundantly than they all.” But when we reflect upon the quality of those labors, it becomes at once apparent that they must have been after all merely the outward manifestation of a hidden life of prayer, of which only God was witness. Small wonder that when he heard the report of their faith spreading everywhere, he “first” thanked God. Such a report was God's answer to his own prayers.

“The prayers of St. Paul are a study by themselves. See his own accounts of them to the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, the Thesalonians, and Philemon. Observe their topic; it is almost the growth of grace in the saints, to the Master's glory. Observe now still more their manner; the frequency, the diligence, the resolution that grapples, wrestles with the difficulties of prayer so that in Colossians 2:1 he calls prayer simply ‘a great wrestling.’ Learn here how to deal with God for those for whom you work, shepherd of souls, messenger of the Word, Christian man or woman who in any way is called to help other hearts in Christ.” “It was a remark of General Gordon's that it makes a great difference in our feeling towards a stranger if before we meet him we have prayed for him. And we may with equal truth say that it makes a great difference in the feelings of others towards us if they have reason to believe that we have prayed for them.”

## God . . . Whom I Serve

Scholars tell us that the Greek word here translated “serve” contains at once the thought of adoration and obedience and suggests not ordinary but priestly service. Indeed, Weymouth’s translation reads: “God . . . to whom I render priestly and spiritual service.” We shall meet the word again more than once in this epistle and have opportunity of noting from the contexts this very evident meaning, particularly in that much loved passage: “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” (Rom. 12:1). Your rational religious service (Diaglott); that is to say “service which rationally corresponds to the moral premises contained in the faith you profess.” This priestly service Paul renders to God, he says, “in the gospel of his Son”: in its furtherance, its proclamation, its propagation. Frequently he speaks of the Gospel in this sense: “But ye know the proof of him (Timotheus), that, as a son with the father, he had served with me in the gospel” (Phil. 2:22). More over, St. Paul serves God in that glorious ministry “in his spirit.” The service of the ancient priests might be only outward and mechanical. The preaching of the Gospel was a sacrifice offered to God by Paul with his whole love, will, and mind. “God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

## If the Lord Will

Careful for nothing, persevering in prayer, a lively sense of gratitude at all times welling up in his heart, the Apostle makes his requests known unto God. “In this case his prayers have a very definite direction: he is requesting, if somehow, now at length my way shall be opened, in the will of God, to come to you. It is a quite simple, quite natural petition. His inward harmony with the Lord’s will never excludes the formation and expression of such requests with the reverent ‘if’ of submissive reserve. The ‘indifference’ of mystic pietism, which at least discourages articulate contingent petitions, is unknown to the Apostles; ‘in everything, with thanksgiving, they make

their requests known unto God.’ And they find such expression harmonized in a holy experience with a profound rest ‘*within* this will,’ this ‘sweet, beloved will of God.’” “‘In the will of God’ implies submission. But submission did not prevent earnest, persevering prayer. Paul had a will of his own; and his will was to go to Rome. As yet, God’s will was unknown. And Paul will not act till it becomes evident that what he desires is also the will of God. He also remembers that the opening of a way for him, depends not upon circumstances but upon God.” “Little did he here foresee *how* his way would be opened; that it would lie through the tumult in the temple, the prisons of Jerusalem and Caesarea and the cyclone of the Adrian sea. He had in view a missionary journey to Spain, in which Rome was to be taken by the way.

“‘So God grants prayer, but in his love  
Makes ways and times his own.’”

### **That I May Impart to You Some Spiritual Gift**

“His heart yearns for this Roman visit. We may almost render the Greek of the next clause, *For I am homesick for a sight of you*; he uses the word by which elsewhere he describes Philippian Epaphroditus’ longing to be back at Philippi (Phil. 2:26), and again his own longing to see the son of his heart, Timothy (2 Tim. 1:4). Such is the Gospel that its family affection throws the light of home on even unknown regions where dwell ‘the brethren.’ In this case the longing love however has a purpose most practical: *that I may impart to you some spiritual gift of grace, with a view to your establishment*. The word rendered ‘gift of grace’ is used in some places with a certain special reference to the mysterious ‘Tongues, Interpretations, and Prophecies’ given in the primeval churches (see especially 1 Cor. 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). And we gather from the Acts and the Epistles that these gifts were not . . . made where an Apostle was not there to lay on his hands. But it is not likely that this is the import of this present passage. Elsewhere in the Epistle the word is used with its largest and deepest reference (5:15; 5:16; 6:23): God’s gift of blessing in Christ. The only passage that at all looks the other way is 12:6; that passage implies that the Romans *already* possessed the wonderful working gifts. Here then, so we take it, he means that he pines to

convey to them as his Lord's messenger some new development of spiritual light and joy; to expound 'the Way' to them more perfectly; to open up to them such fuller and deeper insights into the riches of Christ that they, better using their possession of the Lord, might as it were gain new possessions in him and stand more boldly on the glorious certainties they held."

### **He that Watereth Shall Be Watered Also Himself**

"And this [their strengthening] was to be done ministerially, not magisterially. For he goes on to say that the longed for visit would be his gain as well as theirs; that is, *with a view to my concurrent encouragement among you, by our mutual faith, yours and mine together*. Shall we call this a sentence of fine tact, beautifully conciliatory and endearing? Yes, but it is also perfectly sincere. True tact is only the skill of sympathetic love, not the less genuine in its thought because that thought seeks to please and win. He is glad to show himself as his disciples' brotherly friend; but then he first is such and enjoys the character and has continually found and felt his own soul made strong and glad by the witness to the Lord that far less gifted believers bore as he and they talked together. Does not every true teacher know this in his own experience. If we are not merely lecturers on Christianity but witnesses for Christ, we know what it is to hail with deep thanksgivings the 'encouragement' we have had from the lips of those who perhaps believed long after we did and have been far less advantaged outwardly that we have been. . . . 'Mutual faith,' the pregnant phrase of the Apostle, faith residing in each of both parties and owned by each to the other is a might power for Christian 'encouragement' still."

Commenting on this passage another remarks: "Is not the strengthening of others the means of encouraging himself? One shares in the strength which he imparts. The Apostle seems to say that there is in his desire as much holy selfishness as holy zeal. The substitution of the word *encouragement* [AV "comfort"] in speaking of Paul for that of *strengthen* [AV "established"] in speaking of them is significant. In Paul's case the only thing in question is his subjective feeling, which might be a little depressed and would receive a new impulse from the success of his work among them. Compare Acts 28:15: 'When



Paul say [the brethren] he thanked God, and took courage.' . . . It is because they live in this common atmosphere of one and the same faith that they can act and react spiritually, he on them and they on him. What dignity, tact, and grace in these words. The Apostle at once transforms the active part he is obliged to ascribe to himself in the first place into a receptive part. So he ends with the notion which unites these two points of view: reciprocity in the possession of a common moral life!"

### **That I Might Have Some Fruit**

"His readers might ask with some reason how it happened that Paul, having been an apostle for more than twenty years, had not yet found time to come and preach the good news in the Capital of the world." He therefore explains: "Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that often times I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto), that I might have some fruit among you also" (v. 13). In this verse Paul passes "from the spiritual good that he has always desired to do among the believers of Rome to the extension of their church, to which he hopes he may contribute." "He cannot help" giving more and yet more intimation of his loving gravitation towards them; nor yet of his gracious avarice for 'fruit,' result, harvest, and vintage for Christ in the way of helping on Romans, Asiatics, Macedonians, and Achaians to live a fuller life in him. This we may infer from the whole Epistle would be the chief kind of 'fruit' in his view at Rome. But not only this. We shall see him at once go on to anticipate an evangelistic work at Rome, a speaking of the Gospel Message where there would be a temptation to be 'ashamed' of it. Edification of believers may be his main aim, but conversion of pagan souls to God can not possibly be dissociated from it."

"Let his work at Corinth and Ephesus be remembered. Why should he not accomplish a similar work at Rome? . . . This is what he calls *gathering some fruit*. The phrase is as modest as possible. At Corinth and Ephesus he gathered full harvests. At Rome, where the church already exists, he will merely add some hands full of ears to the sheaves already reaped by others."

"In passing we see with instruction that St. Paul made many plans that came to nothing. He tells us this

without apology or misgiving. He claims accordingly no such practical omniscience, actual or possible, as would make his resolutions and forecasts infallible. Tacitly, at least, he wrote '*If the Lord will,*' across them all, unless indeed there came a case where (as when he was guided out of Asia to Macedonia [Acts 16:6-10]) direct intimation was given him: abnormal, supernatural, quite *ab extra*, that such and not such was to be his path."

### **The Glorious Gospel . . . Committed to My Trust**

"But now, he is not only 'homesick' for Rome with a yearning love, he feels his obligation to Rome with a wakeful conscience. *Alike to Greeks and to Barbarians, to wise men and to unthinking I am in debt.* Mankind is on his heart in the sorts and differences of its culture. On the one hand were '*the Greeks*': the peoples possessed in the popular meaning of the word then what we now call 'classical' civilization, including Greek and Roman. An inner circle of these were 'the wise,' the literati, the readers, writers, thinkers in the curriculum of those literatures and philosophies. On the other hand were '*the Barbarians*': tongues and tribes outside the Hellenic pale --Pisidian, Pamphylian, Galatian, Illyrian, and we know not who besides. Then among them or anywhere there were '*the unthinking*': the numberless masses whom the educated despise or forget as utterly untrained in the schools, unversed in the great topics of man and the world--the people of the field, the market, and the kitchen. To the Apostle, because to his Lord, all these were now impartially his claimants, his creditors. He '*owed them*' the Gospel that had been trusted to him for them. Naturally his will might be repelled alike by the frown or smile of the Greek and by the coarse earthiness of the Barbarian. But supernaturally, in Christ, he loved both and scrupulously remembered his duty to both. Such is the true missionary spirit still, in whatever region, under whatever conditions. The Christian man and the Christian church delivered from the world is yet its debtor. 'Woe is to him, to it, if' that debt is not paid, if that Gospel is 'hidden in a napkin.'"

## I Am Ready

“Thus he is ready, and more than ready, to pay his debt to Rome. “So [to render literally] what relates to me is eager, to you too, to the men in Rome, to preach the Gospel. ‘What relates to me’ has an emphasis on ‘me’ as if to say that the hindrance, whatever it is, is not in him but around him. The doors have been shut but the man stands behind them in act to pass in when he may.

“His eagerness is no light heartedness, no carelessness of when or where. This wonderful missionary is too sensitive to facts and ideas, too rich in imagination not to feel the peculiar, nay, the awful greatness of a summons to Rome. He understands culture too well not to feel its possible obstacles. He has seen too much of both the real grandeur and the harsh force of the imperial power in its extension not to feel a genuine awe as he thinks of meeting that power at its gigantic Center. There is in him that which fears Rome. But he is therefore the very man to go there, for he understands the magnitude of the occasion and he will the more deeply retire upon his Lord for peace and power.”

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 13, THE HERALD, April 1956

*See, I am placing on Mount Zion a cornerstone, chosen, and held in honor, and he whose faith rests on him shall never have reason to feel ashamed. -- 1 Peter 2:6, Weymouth*

I AM READY to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Rom. 1:15). With these words the Apostle brought the introduction or preface of his Epistle to a close. As we have meditated on these first fifteen verses, it has been impossible for us not to admire the prudence and delicacy he manifests. Who can doubt that when his letter was read at Rome this introduction, so full of tact, would have given him access to many hearts inclined at starting to be prejudiced against him. How evident it has been to us that the real object of his proposed visit was not that he might have dominion over their faith but that he

might be a helper of their joy (2 Cor. 1:24). Like a true pastor, instead of seeking to lord it over the conscience of the flock he endeavored to associate it with his own.

### **An Unashamed Workman**

Now he is ready to expound “his” Gospel, but before doing so he cannot forbear to tell them his feelings about it. “I am not ashamed of the Gospel,” he affirms as he looks towards Rome. [Note: the words “of Christ” are not found in the oldest manuscripts.] “What is it about this Gospel of God and of his Son that gives occasion for such a word? Why do we find not only here but elsewhere in the New Testament this contemplated possibility that the Christian may be ashamed of . . . [the Gospel] and of his Lord? ‘Who soever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed’ (Luke 9:26). Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord; . . . ‘Nevertheless I am not ashamed’ (2 Tim. 1:8, 12).” Had the Apostle’s mind been filled with the gospel (?) of eternal torment, we could understand how that might have made him hesitant. Indeed, if instead of the gracious message “Good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people,” announced by the angels at the birth of Jesus, Paul’s message had been the message of the Dark Ages (bad tidings of great woe which shall be to most people)--a message still retained in the creeds of most of the sects of Christendom to this day--we would not have been the least surprised to hear him say that he was to a very considerable degree ashamed of “his” gospel, that he always blushed when he mentioned it, and that the real reason of his long delay in visiting Rome was a secret fear that he might not be able to sustain such a message against the learned men in Rome who would be waiting to oppose it. But we know that there is nothing in the Gospel Paul preached of which he could be legitimately ashamed. Why does he not then say here as he does elsewhere not only was he not ashamed of it but rather that he gloried in it (Gal. 6:14). “What is there about this revelation of the heart of eternal love, this record of a life . . . [which is the light of men], of a death as majestic as it is in finitely pathetic, and then of a resurrection out of death to occasion shame? Why in view of this should man be shy to avow his faith and to let it be know that this is

all in all to him, his life, his peace, his strength, his surpassing interest, and occupation?

### **Bought With A Price**

“More than one analysis of the phenomenon, which we all know to be a fact, may be suggested. But for our part we believe that the true solution lies near the words ‘sin,’ ‘pardon,’ ‘self surrender.’ The Gospel reveals the eternal love but under conditions that remind man that he has done his best to forfeit it. It tells him of a peace and strength sublime and heavenly. But in order to receive them it asks him to kneel down . . . and take them unmerited, for nothing. And it reminds him that he thus delivered and endowed is by the same act the property of his deliverer. Only the highest benefit of his nature is secured by his giving himself over to God, but the most inexorable obligation lies on him to do so. He is not his own but bought with a price.

“Such views of the actual relation between man and God (even when they are attended as they are in the Gospel with such indications of man’s true greatness as are found nowhere else) are deeply repellent to the soul that has not yet seen itself and God in the light of truth. And the human being who has gotten that sight and has submitted himself indeed, yet the moment he looks outside the blessed shrine of his own union with his Lord, is tempted to be reticent about a . . . [belief] which he knows once repelled and angered him. Well did Paul remember his old hatred and contempt; and he felt the temptations of that memory when he presented Christ either to the Pharisee or to the Stoic and now particularly when he thought of bearing witness at Rome (Acts 23:11), imperial, overwhelming Rome. But then he looked again from them to Jesus Christ and the temptation was beneath his feet, and the Gospel, everywhere, was upon his lips.”

### **The Gospel Is God’s Saving Power to Every One That Believeth**

And why is it that the Apostle need not be ashamed of the Gospel? “Because,” he tells us, “it is the power of God unto salvation.” To his clear vision “it is the mighty arm of God rescuing the world” from ruin, “and bringing it salvation.” He sees mankind, as it were, “at the bottom of an abyss”; the Gospel “as the

power from above which raises [man] out of it. No one need blush at being the instrument of such a force.”

The Gospel itself is more than an instrument in God’s hands to effect man’s salvation. There is a certain “inherent adaptedness” in it to be so used. “We shall not do wrong if we think of the Gospel as a ‘force’ in the same sense as that in which science has revealed to us the great ‘forces’ of nature. It is a principle operating on a vast and continually enlarging scale and taking effect in a countless number of individuals.” For this reason the true ambassador of Christ rejoices when he hears that the Gospel is being proclaimed, *even though the motives of the individual proclaiming same may be of a questionable character*. “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife . . . What then? . . . Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Phil. 1:15-18).

But while recognizing the suitability of the Gospel to be employed in man’s salvation, the Apostle in the passage before us is not so much drawing our attention to this fact as to the great personality from whom the Gospel derives its power. The Apostle’s conception of the power of the Gospel “only differs from the scientific conception of a force like ‘heat’ or ‘electricity’ in that whereas the man of science is too apt to abstract his conception of force from its origin, St. Paul conceives of it as essentially a mode of personal activity.” Though, therefore, the Gospel might appear to many to be anything but fitted to the end in view (“unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness” [1 Cor. 1:23]), still he knew it to be as a matter of fact not only powerful in itself but also the instrument that had been selected and which was being owned and blessed by the omnipotent God. History down to the present day has shown the power of God’s Word to be “like as a fire . . . and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29). Hearts of adamant have melted under its influence, and the end is not yet by any means. For “in that day,” a day now near at hand, we believe, the sweet message of the “everlasting Gospel” (Rev. 14:6) will continue to prove its efficacy by displacing hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ezek. 11:19). Ultimately the whole earth shall be filled with his glory, and it shall be abundantly demonstrated that “that which the world deems foolish in God is wiser than men’s

wisdom, and that which it deems feeble in God is mightier than men's might" (1 Cor. 1:25, Weymouth).

### **The Gospel Versus Moral Philosophy**

Only those who have themselves experienced the saving power of the Gospel are fully able to realize its superiority over all the various plans and devices of men for the uplift of our race. Not that we would be understood as speaking against any of these. No doubt many, if not all of them, are laudable at least in their intention. But they are lacking in power. Contrast, for example, the Gospel with that which claims to be its chief competitor, namely, moral philosophy. "At the present day those who reject . . . [the Gospel] commonly represent that in advanced civilization it gives place naturally to moral philosophy. Their belief is that the true and only method of making men good is by philosophy; and that the good influence of . . . [the Gospel] in past ages has been due to the truths of moral philosophy which are blended in it with superstitions which the world in its progress is leaving behind."

### **My Son, Give Me Thine Heart**

Now ignoring the fundamental fact that moral philosophy makes no provision whatever for, and indeed does not even recognize, man's need of "salvation" but speaks only of his "progress" and "development," the point we wish to emphasize is "that philosophy hopes to cure the vices of human nature by working upon the head, and . . . [the Gospel] by educating the heart." While by no means ignoring the intellect, the Gospel nevertheless makes its chief appeal, with all the attraction of a personal love, to the heart, for out of the heart (the centre of the will and affections) are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

"It is the heart and not the brain

That to the highest doth attain."

This difference may be expressed in another way: "Both endeavor to lead men to do what is right, but philosophy undertakes to explain what it is right to do while . . . [the Gospel] undertakes to make men disposed to do it."

## The Cross of Christ

If we would inquire further as to how the Gospel makes this heart appeal, we have only to study the life of him who is the burden of its message. “Why did men gather round him at his call . . . and accept him with unbounded devotion as their legislator and judge?” Was it because of the miracles that attested his messianic character? Or was it “because of the intrinsic beauty and divinity of the great law of love he propounded?” Undoubtedly that law of love “deserved that men should accept it for its intrinsic worth, but men are not commonly so eager to receive the words of wise men nor so unbounded in their gratitude to them. It was neither for his miracles nor for the beauty of his doctrine that Christ was worshiped. Nor was it for his winning personal character nor for the persecutions he endured nor for his martyrdom. It was for the inimitable unity which all these things made when taken together. In other words, it was for this that he whose power and greatness as shown in his miracles were overwhelming denied himself the use of his power, treated it as a slight thing, walked among men as though he were one of them, relieved them in distress, taught them to love each other, bore with undisturbed patience a perpetual hailstorm of calumny. And when his enemies grew more fierce he continued still to endure their attacks in silence until, petrified and bewildered with astonishment, men saw him arrested and put to death with torture, refusing steadfastly to use in his own behalf the power he conceived he held for the benefit of others. It was the combination of greatness and self sacrifice that won their hearts, the mighty powers held under a mighty control, the unspeakable condescension, the *cross of Christ*.

## The Kindling of Enthusiastic Devotion

“By this, and by nothing else, the enthusiasm of a Paul was kindled. The statement rests on no hypothesis or conjecture; his epistles bear testimony to it throughout. The trait of Christ that filled his whole mind was his condescension. The charm of that condescension lay in its being voluntary. The cross of Christ, of which Paul so often speaks as the only thing he found worth glorying in, as that in comparison with which everything in the world was as *dung*, was the voluntary submission to death of one who had the



power to escape death; this he says in express words. And what Paul constantly repeats in impassioned language the other apostles echo. Christ's voluntary surrender of power is their favorite subject, the humiliation implied in his whole life and crowned by his death. This sacrifice, which they regard as made for *them*, demands to be required, in their opinion, by an absolute devotion on their part to Christ. Beyond controversy such was their feeling, and this feeling was the ground of [their] obedience," and not their obedience only but their enthusiasm and devotion.

### **If Any Man Will Come After Me**

"He laid men under an immense obligation. He convinced them that he was a person of altogether transcendent greatness, one who needed nothing at their hands, one whom it was impossible to benefit by conferring riches or fame or dominion upon him; and that being so great, he had devoted himself of mere benevolence to their good. He showed them that for their sakes he lived a hard and laborious life and exposed himself to the utmost malice of powerful men. They saw him hungry, though they believed him able to turn stones into bread; they saw his royal pretensions spurned, though they believed that he could in a moment take into his hand all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; they saw his life in danger; they saw him at last expire in agonies, though they believed that had he so willed it no danger could harm him and that had he thrown himself from the topmost pinnacle of the temple he would have been softly received in the arms of ministering angels. Witnessing his sufferings and convinced by the miracles they saw him work that they were voluntarily endured, men's hearts were touched.

Pity for weakness blending strangely with wondering admiration of unlimited power an agitation of gratitude, sympathy, and astonishment sprang up in them such as nothing else could ever excite. When turning from his deeds to his words, *they found this very self denial that had guided his own life prescribed as the principle which should guide theirs*, gratitude broke forth in joyful obedience, self denial produced self denial, and the Law and the Law Giver together were enshrined in their inmost hearts for inseparable veneration."

## The Influence of Christ

Such was the effect on his contemporaries of the influence of Christ. “A few raw, unspiritual, uninspiring men were admitted to the inner circle of his friendship. The change began at once. Day by day we can almost see the first disciples grow. First there steals over them the faintest adumbration of his character; and occasionally, very occasionally, they do a thing or say a thing that they could not have done or said had they not been living there. Slowly the spell of his life deepens. Reach after reach of their nature is overtaken, thawed, subjugated, sanctified. Their manners soften, their words become more gentle, their conduct more unselfish. As swallows who have found a summer, as frozen buds the spring, their starved humanity bursts into a fuller life. They do not know how it is, but they are different men. One day they find themselves like their Master, going about doing good. To themselves it is unaccountable, but they cannot do otherwise. They were not told to do it, it came to them to do it. But the people who watch them know well how to account for it-- ‘They have been,’ they whisper, ‘with Jesus.’ Already even the mark and seal of his character is upon them-- ‘They had been with Jesus.’ Unparalleled phenomenon, that these poor fishermen should remind other men of Christ! Stupendous victory and mystery of regeneration that mortal men should suggest to the world *God!*

“There is something almost melting in the way his contemporaries, and John especially, speak of the influence of Christ. John himself lived in daily wonder at him; he was overpowered, overawed, entranced, transfigured. To his mind it was impossible for any one to come under this influence and ever be the same again. ‘Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not,’ he said. [Note: See Question Box in March 1956 “Herald,” page 47.] It was inconceivable that he should sin, as inconceivable as that ice should live in a burning sun or darkness coexist with noon. . . . Sin was abashed in this Presence. Its roots withered. Its sway and victory were forever at an end.

## Confronting Men With the Living Christ

“But these were his contemporaries. It was easy for them to be influenced by him, for they were every day and all the day together.” But how can we be influenced by him whom we have never seen? “How

can this stupendous result be produced by a Memory, by the scantiest of all Biographies, by One who lived . . . [and died nineteen hundred] years ago?"

How can modern men today secure for themselves the influence of Christ in their lives? The answer is that he not only lived and died nineteen hundred years ago, but he was also raised from the dead a spirit being. The purpose of the Gospel, and in this lies the secret of its power, is not only to recount the story of the Savior's earthly life and death -- wondrous though it be -- *but through the power of the holy spirit to put men in personal touch with the risen Christ, to confront men everywhere with their living Lord.*

Brethren, Jesus has not changed; he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Gospel has lost none of its old time power. The privilege of its service is as precious as ever. Shall we not each for himself make an end of our guesses, our speculations, our fine spun theories, and our fanciful interpretations? "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream." We who have God's Word let us speak his word faithfully. *Let us not spend undue time, even, in refuting the dreamers' dreams,* for "what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:28). Rather, let us devote our lives to the Gospel. To us it has been entrusted in a day when it is comparatively easy to live in its defense, when it is, strangely enough, comparatively easy to let it slip. Shall we not keep it in all the simplicity of its apostolic purity, not alone in doctrine, not in word only but in deed and in truth. So doing, we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us (1 Tim. 4:16).

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 14, THE HERALD, June 1956

*Their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord. -- Isaiah 54:17*

HAVING expressed his feelings with regard to the Gospel (that Gospel he loved so dearly that elsewhere he writes “though we or an angel from heaven preach any other, let him be accursed, . . .” [Gal. 1:8] ) the Apostle proceeds to its fundamental theme, which he intends to unfold. Though many are ashamed of the Gospel, he has said that he is not, for he knows it to be “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Even his words, “To the Jew first and also to the Greek,” are not without their deep significance, for they suggest at once his recognition of the special covenant relationship that “for the fathers’ sakes” (Rom. 11:28) the Jewish nation had enjoyed, as well as the fact that now a new era had dawned in which favor would no longer be to them only but would be world wide. Having thus in two lines indicated the source of the Gospel (God), its effect (salvation), its condition (faith), and its universality (to Jew and Greek), he proceeds to sum up its essence. “Therein” he says, “is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (1:17).

## **The Righteousness of God . . . from Faith**

To understand the meaning of the individual words in this text it is necessary only to study their derivation and usage. To understand the meaning of the theme itself, however, which is contained in the phrase made up of those individual words, is another matter. Undoubtedly it is best appreciated by those who study it in the light of the Apostle’s personal experience. This we have to some extent considered in our previous meditations (see especially No. 2).

## **In the Light of His Experience:**

“There are men of whom it is especially true that their teaching is the outcome of their own personal experience. If a man’s teaching is to have any real force, this must be in a measure true in any case. But in some men the personal experience has set an exceptionally strong impress upon the intellectual convictions and so upon the teaching. Such an one was St. Paul. His intellectual theory is on fire with the emotions bred of a personal experience, both bitter and sweet, but always intense. And if there is professedly more of autobiography in the Epistle to the Galatians, yet in fact we know St. Paul’s interior life, both before and after his ‘conversion,’ so far as we know it at all, mainly through the generalized account of it in the Epistle to the Romans. For the doctrine of justification by faith not by works of the law developed in this Epistle is the record of his personal experience reduced to a general principle. St. Paul had on the lines of his Pharisaic education in the first half of his life zealously sought to be justified by works and had found out his mistake.

## **Justification by Works--What Is It?**

“What is the real meaning of the phrase ‘justification by works’? Ordinarily we find it natural to appropriate St. James’ ‘common sense’ language about justification rather than St. Paul’s and say that faith is surely of no moral value without works or good actions and that we can be justified by nothing else except our conduct. Or if the Pharisees are pointed to with their rigid ecclesiastical observances as types of men seeking to be justified before God by the merits of their works, then in this sense of works we feel that the idea of justification by such means, apart from deeper moral effort, is one that has passed out of our horizon. Yet if we get to the moral essence of the Pharisaic idea, we may still find it lying very close at hand to us, even though we do not know what a phylactery means and are at a safe distance from fasting twice in a week or giving tithes of all that we acquire.”

## Phariseism As It Exists Today

Most people have a strong sense of respectability. In every walk of life men have a code of duty and honor that they are at pains to observe, and they “make really great sacrifices to fulfill the requirements of their respective codes. Their conscience requires this of them, and they would be miserable in falling short of it. But their conscience is also limited to it. They resent the claim of a progressive morality. *Conscientious within the region of the traditional and the expected, they are often almost impenetrable to light from beyond.* They are nervously afraid of the very idea of subjecting their life to a fundamental revision in the light of Christ’s claim or to the idea of surrender to the Divine light wherever it may lead. But this frame of mind--conscientiousness within a limited and well established area accepted by public opinion, coupled with resentment at whatever more complete and diviner claim may interfere to disconcert one’s self satisfaction and bid one begin afresh on a truer basis, is that very attempt to be justified by works which appeared in the case of the Pharisees, only dressed in very different guise to that in which the conditions of modern life clothe it.

*“It is the characteristic of the Pharisaic attitude that a man holds by a strict code enforced by the public opinion of his church or circle; a code which he diligently and even painfully obeys. But it is characteristic of this attitude also that it resents new light. Thus the Pharisees resented the Christ when renewing the voice of the old prophets, without respect of persons, he exposed the moral weaknesses of these religious leaders and bade them in effect begin again and think afresh what God’s will really meant. They resented and rejected the Christ because he made the unlimited Divine claim upon them: he spoke to them as God to the human soul and not as the representative of ‘the tradition.’ ‘Seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God’ (Rom. 10:3).”*

## **In Christ's Teaching Paul's Restless Heart Finds Repose**

In such an atmosphere--a "mixture of subservience and independence, of religious humility and human pride, Saul of Tarsus had been brought up 'at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem.'"

"Meanwhile, he was becoming conscious of the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ. Under what conditions that claim began to confront him we do not know. *But he must have known in the period before his conversion that the severest attack on the spiritual position of the Pharisees ever delivered had been delivered by him who claimed to be the Christ* and that the Pharisees in consequence had thrown all their influence into the rejection of his claim. If they had not been the most direct instruments of his death they had encouraged and sanctioned it. Thus the more dissatisfied he became in his own conscience, the more zealous he grew for the Pharisaic position and the more fanatical, therefore, against the followers of the crucified Jesus. At what point it began to dawn upon his conscience that perhaps Jesus was right and not the Pharisees, that perhaps it was in his teaching that his own restless heart was to find repose, we can only wonder. *He certainly passed through some struggle such as this dawning consciousness would involve.* 'It was hard for him to kick against the goad' (Acts 26:14). At last and at a definite moment God 'triumphed over him' in Christ, and he gave his allegiance to Jesus as the Christ on the road to Damascus.

"Hitherto he had stood on the basis that pride in his religious position gave him and had sought starting thence to erect the spiritual fabric of a life acceptable to God. But the more he had known of God and the more he had struggled the less satisfied he had become. God seemed to be in no other attitude towards him than that of a dissatisfied taskmaster. Now he had surrendered into God's hands. He had no position of his own to maintain. He had put himself in God's hands. In his sight he was content to be treated as a sinner, just like one of the Gentiles: to be forgiven of his pure and unmerited love . . . endued with a spiritual power for which he could take no credit to himself, for it was simply a gift. Once more he had henceforth no prejudices and recognized no limitation

on what he might be required to bear or do. His life was handed over to be controlled from above.

*“Thus when St. Paul sets justification by faith and faith only in opposition to justification by works of the Law, he is contrasting two different attitudes towards God and duty, which in the two halves of his own sharply sundered life he had himself conspicuously represented. The contrast may be expressed in four ways.*

### **Faith, Pregnant with Good Works, Justifies Before They Are Brought Forth:**

“1. The man under the Law of works is mainly concerned about external conduct and observances: the making clean of the outside of the cup and the platter; the man of faith is concerned almost altogether with the relation of his heart to God at the springs of action. Faith is a disposition of the heart which indeed results in a certain kind of outward conduct but which has its value already, prior to the outward conduct, because of what it inwardly is. Faith, as Calvin said, pregnant with good works justifies before they are brought forth. . . .

### **Justification by Faith World Wide in Scope:**

“2. Inasmuch as ‘the Law’ was a *national* thing, so ‘works of the Law’ were supposed means of justification *confined to Israel* and an occasion of contempt for other nations. Faith, on the other hand, the mere capacity to feel our own wants and to take God at his word, is a *universal* quality and *belongs, or may belong to all men*. Thus justification by faith is opposed to justification by works of the Law, as the universal to the merely Jewish, and in this aspect the contrast occupies a great place in St. Paul’s thought and teaching.

### **Independence or Dependence, Which?**

“3. But it is not in the things it is occupied about, or in the range of its activity, that faith is most centrally contrasted with works. It is in the attitude of man towards God which it represents. The ‘worker’ for justification always retains his own independence towards God. He works upon the basis of a definite covenant by which God is bound as well as himself. He has the right to resent additional claims. Faith, on the other hand, means an entire abandonment of in



dependence. It is self committal, self surrender. 'I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day' (2 Tim. 1:12). The man of faith throws all the responsibility for life on God and says simply and continually, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'

"It is of the utmost importance to notice that this is the only attitude of man towards God that corresponds with the ultimate facts of human nature as science and philosophy are bound to represent them. Man is, in fact, an absolutely dependent being, physically and spiritually. *His virtue must lie not in originativeness but in correspondence.* Supposing him a free agent in God's universe, his freedom can consist only in a power to correspond with Divine forces and laws intelligently and voluntarily; or on the other hand to disturb the Divine order of creation in a measure by willfulness and sin. Now faith is simply the faculty of loving correspondence with God. 'Justification by faith' is the only conception of justification possible in the light of the root facts of human nature. But of course the practical appeal of this conclusion to the heart and will is immensely increased if men can be shown to have acted as if they were independent and have found it a failure; if life lived in independence of God with God as it were withdrawn from the actual scene of life to its far off horizon is found to have resulted in havoc, weakness, and despair. So, in fact, St. Paul's doctrine of the true means of justification is based on an appeal not so much to the ultimate constitution of our human nature as to the experienced results of our independence of God, to the facts of sin, whether among Gentiles or Jews.

### **After This Manner Therefore Pray Ye: Our Father**

"4. Finally, the principle of justification by faith is contrasted with that of justification by works of the Law in the view which it involves of the character of God. The Law, as St. Paul interprets it, views God as a lord and taskmaster. Faith presents him as the Father of our spirits, always waiting upon us with his eternal, unchangeable love: bearing with us; dealing with us even on a false basis we have forced upon him by our sins in order to bring us to a recognition of the true; anyway acting or withholding action if by any

means we can be won to recognize his true character and our true life.

### **The Faith of the Christian Is the Faith of Abraham**

“In what has just been said justifying faith has been treated as if it were simply, as it is really, faith in God; whereas in St. Paul’s language the object of justifying faith is constantly ‘*Jesus.*’ (Cf. iii. 22, 26, etc.) The explanation of this is that God in Jesus Christ has manifested his character as Father and has come near to men, ‘reconciling the world unto himself’ by the atonement wrought through his Son and giving conspicuous evidence of his saving power by raising him from the dead (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus, if Jesus is the proximate object of justifying faith, *it is Jesus as manifesting the Father* and St. Peter is strictly interpreting St. Paul when he represents the object of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection in the phrase, ‘that your faith and hope might be *in God*’ (1 Peter 1:21). *The faith of the Christian is the old faith of Abraham and Habakkuk, the faith in the Lord Jehovah* only now made manifest in a new and more complete manner, in a more intimate relation to human life, and with a more winning appeal to the human heart.”  
-- P.L. Read

## **Half Hour Meditations on Romans**

No. 15, THE HERALD, August 1956

*For therein [in the Gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith. --  
Romans 1:17*

IN OUR last meditation we noted that the fundamental theme of our Epistle is concisely stated in the text above quoted and that it may be best appreciated by those who study it in the light of the Apostle’s personal experience. We recalled the fact that “St. Paul had, on the lines of his Pharisaic education in the first half of his life, zealously sought to be justified by works and had found out his mistake.” Remembering this, we were prepared to find that “his” Gospel has to

do with another method of securing justification. This other method, which he presents in striking contrast to the “works of the law,” he declares to have originated with God and to be available to all on the one condition of faith.

### Righteousness of God

Let us now examine the text in more detail. In verse sixteen he has said that the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Now he is concerned to explain how this power operates. Such is the object of verse 17. It does so by making known to the believer, by *revealing* to him, a righteousness that has God for its author. The reader will observe that we are here interpreting the phrase “righteousness of God” to mean righteousness which has God for its author. While it is true that the expression “righteousness of God” does in some places denote an attribute of God (e.g. 3:5, 26), it cannot do so here. The righteousness of God here mentioned is stated to be revealed in the Gospel. The word translated *revealed* denotes “the act whereby a thing hitherto veiled now bursts into the light.” Now the fact that God is righteous came to light, or was revealed, not in the Gospel but long before; while it would be true to say that this attribute of God *may be seen* in the Gospel, it would not be exact to say that it was *revealed* there. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that the Apostle offers the fact that the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God as a sufficient explanation of his previous statement that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Now even if it were true that righteousness, considered as an attribute of God, is revealed in the Gospel (which we have shown is not the case), such a revelation would constitute no explanation of how the Gospel operates unto the believer’s salvation. But when to one who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness there is revealed in the Gospel (not an attribute of God, but) a way whereby he may himself become righteous, such a message laid hold of by faith proves to be the mighty energy of God operating unto that one’s salvation. The same expression is used for a righteousness the Apostle desired to person ally secure in the stead of the righteousness (?) that he otherwise possessed: “Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss 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*” (Phil. 3:9; so also in Rom. 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21). “In these passages righteousness of God is a state in which God’s approval is enjoyed and is God’s gift to them that believe. And these passages are so similar in thought to the words before us and this sense agrees so well with the context that we accept it here. The Jews had long sought conformity to God’s will and the rewards of his favor by attempts to keep the Mosaic law, which says ‘Do this and live.’ In the Gospel, God proclaims a new law [the law of faith, Rom. 3:27] ‘Believe and live.’ By this proclamation he bestows righteousness as a gift [the gift of righteousness, Rom. 5:17] apart from all human effort upon all that believe. Believers conform to the new law and have therefore the approbation of the Judge. They have a righteousness of God or a righteousness from God.”

### From Faith

The words “from faith” have been interpreted in various ways. Most frequently they have been associated with the words “to faith” that follow, thus making the phrase “from faith to faith.” This phrase has been thought to signify the idea of progress that takes place in faith itself. Indeed with this sense in mind the Greek has been actually translated “from faith on to faith.” “This progress has been applied by some of the early Christian Fathers to the transition from faith in the Old Testament to faith as it exists in the New. But there is nothing here to indicate a comparison between the old and the new dispensations. The Reformers have taken the progress of faith to be in the heart of the individual believer. His faith, weak at first, grows stronger and stronger.” That the believer’s faith does actually progress in this way there can be no question in the mind of an experienced Christian, but “this idea is utterly out of place in the context. A notion so special and secondary as that of the progress which takes place in faith is inappropriate in a summary which admits only of the fundamental ideas being indicated. It would even be opposed to the Apostle’s aim to connect the attainment of righteousness with this objective progress of the believer in faith.” Now the Greek word here translated “from” (strictly “out of”), rendered in the Diaglott by means of the preposition “by,” expresses origin and can refer only to the

righteousness previously mentioned. Such righteousness is from, out of, by, originates in faith. We submit, therefore, that the Apostle's thought may be best understood by sub joining the words "from faith" to the phrase "righteousness of God." With this change the text would read: "For therein is the righteousness of God from faith revealed to faith." By the complete expression "righteousness of God from faith" thus obtained, we understand the Apostle to mean that in the Gospel there is revealed a gift of righteousness, which righteousness has its origin in faith, and that this gift is of God. We are led to this sense also by the parallel expression to which we have already referred: "The righteousness which is of God *by faith*" (Phil. 3:9), as well as "The righteousness of God which is *by faith*" (Rom. 3:22).

### Therein Is Revealed . . . to Faith

We have seen that the Apostle well understands that the first essential to salvation must be a righteousness that may be possible for man to secure as a gift. He has found from the fruitless years spent prior to his conversion in an effort to establish his own righteousness, and knowing also that salvation is not to be secured apart from righteousness, that to merit same is an impossibility. We have seen too that this greatly needed gift of a faith righteousness, or a righteousness by faith, he declares to be revealed in the Gospel. Yet he does not say that it is revealed in the Gospel to all. It is revealed only to *faith*: to every one who exercises faith. It is interesting and significant to notice in this connection that the Greek word translated "revealed" is in the present tense: "Therein is being revealed." It was revealed to some at the time the Gospel was first preached. The Gospel has been continuously revealing the gift to others since. It is by the proclamation of the Gospel that the gift of a faith righteousness is daily being revealed *to faith*: to believers. To those who hear the Gospel and who believe it not there is no revelation of the gift. It is still veiled to them.

In this connection it is not difficult to identify the spirit that was upon Isaiah with the spirit that controlled St. Paul's ministry when we see the former moved to prophetically inquire, "Who hath *believed* our report (Isa. 53:1). Many heard the Apostle's preaching but not all who heard believed. "To whom

is the arm of the Lord *revealed*”? the Prophet inquired further. The Apostle declares that the arm of the Lord stretched out to accomplish their salvation is revealed in the Gospel *to faith*, to believers. “But if indeed our glad tidings be veiled, they have been veiled to those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 4:3, Diaglott).

### How Does Faith Come?

In Romans 10:14 the Apostle inquires: “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Here the purpose of his question is undoubtedly to make the impression that they could do neither and to clearly show that after the facts of the Gospel exist the order is *preaching, hearing, believing*. Then in that well known seventeenth verse he sums up the matter: “So then, *faith cometh by hearing*, and hearing by the word of God.” In our Lord’s prayer to his Father he said: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall *believe on me through their word*” (John 17:20). Observe, he prayed for them who should believe on him through the words of the Apostles; and as he required them to preach the Gospel, the people were expected to *believe* in him *by hearing* the Gospel the Apostles were required to preach. In keeping with this arrangement, Peter preached to the Pentecostians and “when they *heard* this they were pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). *So their faith came by hearing*. The faith of the Gentiles came in the same way, for Peter said, “Brethren ye know that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth *should hear* the word of the Gospel, *and believe*” (Acts 15:7). Luke further tells us that “many of the Corinthians *hearing believed*” (Acts 18:8). “It came to pass in Iconium, that they [Paul and Barnabas] went together into the synagogue of the Jews, and *so spake*, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks *believed*” (Acts 14:1).

### Is Faith the Gift of God?

Many well meaning Christians who recognize the force of the scriptures mentioned in the preceding paragraph hesitate to accept them in the sense suggested for the reason that this view of faith seems to them to teach that the man who exercises faith does thereby in some way merit salvation, at least in part.

They reason that if the testimony only is of God and the belief of that testimony is of man and this results in his salvation, it would appear that his salvation under such circumstances could not be entirely of God's grace. Man himself has contributed some thing. He has contributed faith and thereby partly earned the salvation brought him. But a man may be said to be maintained by his hands and nourished by his mouth when in reality it is his food and drink which sustains him. So the Gospel, yea Christ the sum and substance of that Gospel, is our food and drink and is received by faith, the "hand of the heart." Faith has absolutely nothing to do with earning the gift of God, the water and bread of God; it has all to do with taking it.

One very much misunderstood text respecting faith is found in Ephesians: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (2:8). Is faith the thing here said to be the gift of God? No! What is here said to be the gift of God is salvation. "The erroneous thought given by many is that faith is not our own faith, nor of our own volition, but an impartation, a gift from God. Of course in one sense every gift and blessing we enjoy is indirectly if not directly from God; 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights' (James 1:17). But we believe the proper understanding of the Apostle's words is this: It is of God's grace and not of personal merit on our part that salvation is offered to us. Although that salvation is offered to us as a *reward of faith* (including true faith's obedience) yet we can not even boast respecting our faith as though it merited the Lord's favor, for our faith is the indirect result of Divine providence also. There are millions of others in the world who might exercise just as much faith as we if they had been favored of God with as much light, intelligence, knowledge as a basis of faith. Hence, our faith is not to be credited as a meritorious condition but we are to be thankful to God for it, for the circumstances and conditions that have made it possible for us to exercise faith are of his grace."

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 16, THE HERALD, October 1956

*And though I have all faith . . . and have not love, I am  
nothing.* -- 1 Corinthians 13:2

THUS far in our consideration of "his" gospel theme, as it is summarized in the seventeenth verse of chapter one of our epistle, one point has stood out with marked emphasis: The Gospel is not a revised statement of what God requires from man but is the glorious news concerning what God has done and is doing and will do for man. On this point an able writer has remarked:

"I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian church has ever suffered has been the effort of men to earn rather than to receive their salvation. And the reason preaching is so ineffectual is that it calls on men oftener to work for God than to behold God working for them. If for every rebuke we utter of men's vices, we were to put forth a claim upon their hearts--if for every assertion of God's demands from them, we could substitute a display of his kindness to them--if side by side with every warning of death, we could exhibit proofs and promises of . . . [eternal life]--if in fine instead of assuming the being of an awful Deity (which men are always unwilling, sometimes unable to conceive, though they dare not deny) we were to show them a near, visible, inevitable but all beneficent Deity, whose presence makes the earth itself a heaven, I think there would be fewer deaf children sitting in the market place."

We have seen, too, that the faith which receives this gift from God is in the Apostle's usage of that term not credulity nor superstition nor yet the blind acceptance of something contrary to reason but intelligent belief. "Faith is produced by testimony, [and] . . . as far as testimony goes, faith may go; but where the testimony stops, faith must and will stop. The testimony concerning Jesus tells us that he was born of Mary in Bethlehem--was baptized of John in Jordan and commenced his ministry in the hill



country of Galilee--was crucified on Calvary, and was buried in Joseph's new tomb. Now, suppose the testimony had stopped at this point. How much faith would any person have had today in his *resurrection, ascension, and glorification*? Just none at all. As far as testimony goes, faith may go, but no further; all beyond is mere speculative opinion. Our faith may be strengthened or weakened by increasing or weakening the testimony. We have faith in the testimony of men, and we have faith in the testimony of God, . . . [and] our faith in the testimony of God is as much stronger than our faith in the testimony of men as we regard God superior to man and his testimony more reliable than that of man. This difference--no more, no less. 'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.'"

### With the Heart Man Believeth

We have said that faith is belief, and indeed "*faith and belief* represent the same Greek and the same Hebrew word. Their meaning in the Bible is therefore absolutely the same." Yet none should make the mistake of supposing that faith, in St. Paul's mind, is "a bare holding either the atoning work of Christ or any other truths of revelation for true; it is a loving and soul constraining self surrender to them, so that they are grasped by the moral no less than by the intellectual man." "Faith is an act partly of the intelligence and partly of the will." "This faith must be in us, as something personal and living before we can bring forth the external fruits and works of righteousness. Our faith may be in our creed, that half way house between the Bible and the heart; it may be in our intellect, that mid station between the mind of God and the will of man. But this is not enough. A creed religion is apt to be disputatious, busy with mere dogmatic moralities, defending nice distinctions, and hovering forever over sectarian issues. Intellectual religion is speculative, toiling at definitions and exhausting its energies on logical inferences. And if one's piety stops at either one of these stations--at the intellect or the creed--that man's religion is vain. 'If these things be *in you*.'

"Our faith must come to us through the brain indeed. But it cannot stop there. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' The mind takes the truth from the Scriptures, weighs it, per chance, in the

scales of some tried and standard confession and then distills it into the heart, its richest essence, its finest life, condensed and deposited there. And nothing can evolve from itself a holy, self-denying, and truly benevolent life like this. A germ of faith will make a giant in activity. That faith be in us rather than external to us is of the very highest importance then. You know the difference between an opinion and a conviction. The one is what we think; the other is what we are. Our opinions may sit lightly on us, but our convictions are the iron in our blood that make the very strength and stalwartness of our manhood. And faith as an active grace is simply Christian conviction. It is what we believe and feel and are upon Divine questions and promises. And it is the only thing that can give a rooted strength and stability to our Christian life.” The mere intellectual appreciation that is divorced from all will and love profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). No one will deny that the devils have a right belief in the existence of God. They believe but wish the facts were otherwise. Faith on the contrary is the substance of things “*hoped for.*”

“If we believe that God is what his name implies, the Self-existing One, the all-powerful, all-wise, all-just and all-loving Creator and if we believe that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him, the effect will be that we will *seek* him--seek to know and to understand his Word. And knowing and understanding his Word we will have confidence in it. And having confidence in it we will direct our course in life accordingly.”

### **What Is the Active Principle of Faith?**

The question naturally arises as to the reason God has set such a premium on faith. Why does he justify by faith rather than by one of the other graces? Why not by fortitude, patience, meekness, gentleness, humility; above all, why not by love? What is there in faith that gives it such value in God's sight?

We answer that faith is the fertile soil in which all other graces must have their root if they are to grow to maturity. The wise man has said that as a man “thinketh [believeth] in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). If therefore in our hearts we have true faith, the manifestation of all the other graces will appear in our conduct. Our lives will be (or become) characterized by fortitude, patience, meekness, gentleness, humility,

love, etc. If we have in our hearts a living faith, we have in us the root of all the other graces; we have in us that which is already pregnant with them and will in due time under the guidance and by the power of the holy spirit produce them all. Whereas, if it were possible for our Christian life to begin with any one of them, even love, or with all of them together, without their root of faith being in us they would be without hope of reaching maturity. They must inevitably wither when subjected to a sufficiently strong test.

### **Furnish In Your Faith . . . Love**

The Apostle Peter brings this to our attention in his Second Epistle (1:5-8). There he shows the rounded out, well balanced condition in which a true Christian character matures. We are not to first mature faith and then to our matured faith add fortitude and then to matured fortitude add knowledge, etc. Weymouth's translation shows that we are to manifest *along with* our faith fortitude and knowledge, etc. He also tells in a footnote that the word translated "along with" is literally "in." From this it would appear that these graces are none other than the very ingredients of faith. Another able writer observes in this connection: "It is not simply *add*. The word is a much more vital one. Rather it is *furnish in* your faith virtue and in your virtue knowledge and *in* your knowledge temperance. *Let your faith be so prolific* that out of it may be evolved the whole continuous and unfolding system of spiritual virtues. If these things be in you and abound, they will make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The inner and ever expanding life of faith will appear in the outward fruits and actions of piety, thus advancing you towards the perfect knowledge of Christ and full conformity to his character."

As further bearing on the fact that faith is the root of the other graces, we note the "fine touch of spiritual wisdom that appears in the disciples' answer to the Lord when he instructed them in regard to the duty of forgiveness: 'If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying I repent, thou shalt forgive him.' Exceeding strain is this to put upon our patience [and to put upon our love]--offense crowding on offense, and injury treading on injury, till it has grown to a

sevenfold affront. 'Lord teach us *patience*, train us in the secret of thy Divine *forbearance*,' do they ask? No! [Do they plead, 'Lord, increase our *love*?'] No! 'The Apostles said unto the Lord: Increase our *faith*.' They asked that the *root* might be strengthened, to brace the tree for such trial and resistance." "Do we stop to think when we are taxed with some extraordinary service that the surest way to be fit for it is to have our *faith* strengthened; that we must *believe* more if we would be able to do more?"

While therefore it is possible and doubtless for clarity of thought desirable to separate faith from love in our ideas, it should ever be remembered that they are inseparable in fact. If it were possible for one to have a living faith and not to have love, we would expect to see some examples in the Bible. We find on the contrary that the faith which justifies is never "represented as the ground of acceptance with God without the right conduct which is its natural sequence." It was not faith as expounded and exemplified by his antinomian followers that St. James condemned as dead. While "it is faith alone which justifies yet the faith that justifies is not alone, just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth yet it is . . . always conjoined with light." The only faith recognized by St. Paul as worthy of the name is that in which love is its active principle, or to use his own words: "Faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6).

### **Works and Good Works Distinguished**

St. Paul says we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28). St. James tells us that by works a man is justified and not by faith only (James 2:24). How are these apparently inconsistent statements to be reconciled? We say apparently inconsistent for we are persuaded and will endeavor to show that no real inconsistency exists.

First we inquire: When St. Paul says we are justified by faith without deeds or works, to what works does he refer? The answer, as all will agree, is works of or done under the Law, the Law of Moses. St. James, however, in speaking of works refers to works of faith, to good and acceptable works. Now St. Paul "never calls those works which he says do not justify 'good works' but simply 'works': works of the Law, 'deeds of the Law,' 'dead works.'" These have nothing to do with the works of faith. Of these St.

Paul elsewhere speaks, “and by a remarkable contrast he calls them again and again ‘good works.’ For instance: ‘By grace are ye saved through faith . . . not of *works*, lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *good works*.’ This surely is a most pointed intimation that the works that do not justify and not good, or in other words are works *before* justification. As to whether works after that are good, whether they justify or not, he does not decide so expressly as St. James, the error he had to resist leading him another way. Against the Judaizing teachers he only says that our works must begin, continue, and end in faith.

“But to proceed: he speaks elsewhere of ‘abounding in every *good work*,’ of being ‘adorned with *good works*,’ of being ‘well reported of for *good works*,’ ‘diligently following every *good work*,’ of ‘the *good works* of some being open beforehand,’ of being ‘prepared unto every *good work*,’ of being ‘thoroughly furnished unto all *good works*,’ of being ‘a pattern of *good works*,’ of being ‘zealous of *good works*,’ of being ‘ready to every *good work*,’ of being ‘careful to maintain *good works*,’ of ‘providing unto love and *good works*,’ and of being ‘made perfect in every *good work*.’ [See Eph. 2:8 10; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1,8, 14; Heb. 10:24; 13:21.] Now surely this is very remarkable. St. James, though he means good works, drops the epithet and only says works! Why does St. Paul not do the same? Why is he always careful to add the word *good*, except that he had also to do with a sort of works with which St. James had not to do--that the word *works* was already appropriated by him to those of the Law and therefore that the epithet *good* was necessary,” lest works of faith should be confused with them? We see then that St. Paul, while conclusively showing that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the Law is far from asserting thereby that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the Gospel. He does not deny what St. James affirms: that by works (the good works by which faith is made perfect) a man is justified and not by faith only.

## I Know Thy Works

“The world is full of works which have no root or nourishment in faith. They are useful and zealous and well directed, but they are not necessarily the outcome of a holy heart. Charity has come to be fashionable, and men and women conform to its demands to be in style. Good [?] works are the assessment society makes on those who are prosperous and many practice them to maintain their credit in polite circles. Benevolence has assumed the character of a joint stock enterprise by which one part of the public relieves the needs of the other. So in fairs and concerts . . . people will eke out their shares and get their dividends of entertainment and pleasure. But there is nothing of humble, self denying, sanctified well doing in all this. These are the ‘dead works’ spoken of in Scripture--such as have no root in faith and love to God. For whatever is separated from its source be comes dead. Sunder a branch from the tree and it dies, though its form and substance remain unchanged. Sunder the best and most approved Christian service from its relation to Christ and it becomes dead works. It is equally true that apart from Christ we cannot be what God requires. ‘Without Me’--that is, apart from and separated from Me--‘ye can do nothing,’ says Christ. It is not the whole question, then, whether our works are manly but whether they are also godly; whether they are human but whether they are also Divine; whether they command the praise of men but whether men beholding them ‘shall glorify your Father which is in heaven.’

## Repentance from Dead Works

And, to show how radical these directions are, you remember that the scripture speaks of “*repentance* from dead works.” We are to be sorry that we have sinned but also that we have been deceiving men and dishonoring God with the semblance of well doing when the enduring root and vital principle have been wanting. The works of righteousness cannot be taken on. The externals of Christianity are absolutely worthless . . . unless they are the outcome of what is radically and divinely internal. And if there is one thing we ought to be afraid of in these days of prevailing religious activity, it is that we may be overlaid with the outward forms of Christianity before

we have been inlaid with its precious virtues. The danger is with us all, not so much that we shall become inactive as that our activity shall become uncoupled from our personal faith. By our associations and fellowships we may be so geared into the great prevailing movements that we shall move without our will; *our activity kept up while our spirituality declines; our public testimony growing loud while our closet cries are growing silent. "Whoso readeth let him understand."*  
--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 17, THE HERALD, November 1956

*He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness -- Isaiah 61:10*

HAVING in our previous meditations reviewed in a general way what St. Paul means by righteousness (or justification) by faith, more particularly as opposed to righteousness by works of the Law, we are in a position to consider a number of questions vitally related to his Gospel theme: questions of great influence in the history of the Church that have lost none of their interest to us who have remained to these closing days of her career. For example, when the Apostle says that a gift of righteousness is revealed in the Gospel, which righteousness has its origin in faith and that this gift is of God (Rom. 1:17) what does he mean. (1) Does he mean that righteousness is communicated to us or merely imputed to us? In other words, are we made righteous or merely reckoned righteous. If the latter, (2) how can God reckon us as being what we as a matter of fact are not? And (3) what is the relationship justification bears to sanctification? Are these two stages of which the first is over before the second can begin?

Regular readers of this journal will bear us witness that it has been our constant endeavor to avoid foolish and unlearned questions, knowing that they do gender strife (2 Tim. 2:23). However, when in the course of orderly, consecutive examination of an epistle we are

confronted with certain doctrines or teachings which may arouse controversy, we do not feel that this fact should deter us from presenting as best we may our understanding of the subjects brought before us by the apostolic writer. To shrink from the discussion of certain doctrines merely because they have been subjects of controversy in the past or may be so in the future and to allow such considerations to weigh with us beyond their proper limits, we believe would render us negligent in our duty. Our faithful Apostle shunned not to declare all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27). In what we trust is a proper spirit of humility and in a spirit of loving consideration of the thoughts of others who may differ with us, we therefore propose to take up consideration of these questions in this "half hour." May we not do so in the full confidence that the nearer we approach the truth in their solution and their practical application to the affairs of everyday life the closer shall we be drawn to our Lord, who is himself the Truth and prayed the Father that by the truth we might be sanctified.

### Righteousness Imputed

The answers to these questions, then, appear to us to be connected with one another. To begin with, justification is a judicial or (as it is called) forensic word: a word derived from processes of law. When a judge *declares* a man to be "not guilty," he does not thereby *make* him "not guilty." Though *declared* not guilty the man may as a matter of fact be guilty. Moreover, some men have been *declared* guilty who later were proved to be innocent. No scholar will dispute this forensic use of the word "justification" in the Bible. It expresses the *verdict* of acquittal and establishes a man's status in the eyes of the law. Thus God justifies whenever he refuses to condemn--when he ignores whatever may have been our sins. And he declares his willingness to do this simply because a man believes in Jesus Christ. Let a man believe or take God in Jesus Christ at his gracious word and the value of this act of trust or allegiance is such that God reckons it for righteousness and admits a man into his fellowship, as if he were already fit for such fellowship in his actual habits and conduct. There is imputation here, but it is the right sort of imputation. ***It is dealing with us not as we are, nor exactly as we are not, but as we are becoming in virtue of the new attachment under which our life has passed.*** Faith,



then, is reckoned for righteousness because it puts us upon the right basis and in the right relation to God. Therefore, it is a root out of which, *provided it continues to subsist*, all righteousness can healthily grow. Whereas, the most brilliant efforts or works on a wrong basis may have neither sound root *nor principle of progress* in them. To believe in Jesus is to have the root of the matter in one self. Therefore, when a man first believes, God can ignore all his previous life and deal with him simply on the new basis, in hope.

### Justification May Lapse

This preliminary acquittal or acceptance (some times spoken of as tentative) is of course provisional. As the servant in the parable who had been forgiven his debts found them rolled back upon him when he behaved in a manner utterly inconsistent with the position of a forgiven man (Matt. 18:23-35), so our preliminary justification may be promptly canceled by our future conduct if we behave as one who has forgotten the cleansing from his old sins (2 Peter 1:9). After he has been welcomed home, the prodigal son *may* go back again to the far country. “This reckoned justification, or justification by faith, holds good so long as the faith continues and is backed by endeavors to do the Lord’s will. (If faith and obedience cease, at once the justification ceases to be imputed.)” [S.S. Vol. 6, p. 103.]

### Justification Merges Into Sanctification

Simple reliance on the merits of Christ, however, and acceptance of forgiveness at his hands and for his sake is a profound movement of the heart that involves much more than might at first appear. “With the heart,” not merely with the head, “man believeth” (Rom. 10:9, 10). Those who isolate this mere reliance on another’s merits [the merits of Christ] and set it apart from all deeper movement of will or love, and have it and it only concerned with our justification, are hopelessly wrong and unlike St. Paul. To St. Paul even the first movement of faith is a surrender of independence and a recognition in intellect, and much more in will, of the lordship of Jesus. It is in other words a change of allegiance, and this is the important thing about it. The absolved man finds himself embarked on a new service, inevitably *and without*

*any fresh act. If he does not find this, he is not a man of faith at all and is therefore not justified in any sense of the word. With St. Paul the faith which justifies is always inseparable from hope.* It is the basis of things *hoped for* (Heb. 11:1). It is faith *which worketh by love* (Gal. 5:6). Though it shows itself first as the mere acceptance of an undeserved boon from the Divine bounty, faith is so deep a principle that it involves such hanging upon God as necessarily enlists the *will* to choose and serve him, the *intellect* to know and worship him with a growing perception as he is revealed in Jesus, and the *affections* to desire and love him.

We see therefore that by his death on Calvary's cross our Lord performed a work *for* us that constitutes the basis of our righteousness or justification. And in his risen and glorified condition he is carrying on today a no less important work *in* us. If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the *death* of his Son, much more being reconciled, says the Apostle, we shall be saved by his *life* (his resurrection life) [Rom. 5:10].

### Righteousness Imparted

Undoubtedly, it is a blessed experience to have the peace with God that comes from being justified by faith, but a true lover of righteousness could never be satisfied with an imputed or reckoned righteousness only. His ardent desire is to be saved not only from the guilt and punishment of sin but also from its power. The words of the psalmist express the sentiment of the true believer's heart: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness" (Psa. 17:15). And he will not be satisfied until then.

By faith in Christ's work *for* us, righteousness is *imputed* to us. As by his Spirit Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, righteousness begins to be *imparted* to us, praise be to God. The Christ spirit or Christ mind *in* us, therefore, is indeed the *hope of glory*. Though our outward man perish, the inward man is renewed. Is it asked, When? Daily, replies the Apostle. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed, *day by day*" (2 Cor. 4:16). Under the gracious influence of the spirit of Christ, that blessed promise of the Father, we are to be no longer conformed to the spirit of this Age. We are to be transformed day by day by the renewing of our minds

(Rom. 12:2). Concerning Christ's work *for* us, the all sufficient ground of our acceptance with God, our Lord cried from the cross, "It is finished." In regard to Christ's work *in* us, the Apostle writes. "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

"Faith justification does not cease as the sanctification work progresses. It continues with us . . . covering us . . . from all the weaknesses and imperfection of word, thought, and deed that are ours through heredity (not willful). It continues thus to cover the Lord's people as new creatures even to the end of their journey--through all the testings and trials necessary to them as candidates for, and probationary members of, the New Creation. . . . We will need this justification, and it will continue to be our robe so long as we abide in Christ and are still in the flesh; but it will cease completely when our trial ends in our acceptance as overcomers and we are granted a share in the First Resurrection. As the Apostle explains--it is sown in corruption, dishonor and weakness, but it will be raised in incorruption, in power, in glory, in full likeness to our Lord, the Quickening Spirit, who is the express image of the Father's person. When that perfection shall have been attained, there will no longer be a necessity for an imputed righteousness, because we will then be actually righteous, actually perfect." [S. S., Vol. VI, p. 104.]

## **Conclusion**

In the light of the foregoing discussion, our conclusions on the three questions before us may be briefly summarized as follows: (1) When a man is justified by faith, righteousness is not communicated to him but is imputed to him. He is not made righteous but reckoned righteous. (2) In imputing our faith to us for righteousness, God does not thereby declare that we who are not righteous have become righteous but he thereby undertakes to regard and deal with us as though we had become righteous, extending to us all the privileges that would be ours if we had become righteous. Is it asked, How can he do this justly? We answer: He is able to do so because there is in living faith an active principle of love, the tendency of which is ever towards righteousness. It is this tendency or inclination towards righteousness, inherent in living

faith, that enables God without violating the principle of justice to fellowship with imperfect men of faith as though they were perfect (or righteous).

(3) It seems to us that it conduces to clearness of thought to distinguish justification by faith from sanctification. The Reformers distinguished between them; so also did the late pastor, Charles Russell, Justification is correctly understood as preliminary to sanctification; justification meaning righteousness instantaneously imputed; sanctification meaning righteousness gradually imparted. On the whole, St. Paul does seem to keep the two subjects separate from each other. At the same time we heartily concur in the thought that the matter is “rather one of clear ness of thought and convenience of thinking than anything more material. Although separate, the two subjects run up into each other and are connected by real links. There is an organic unity in the Christian life. Its different parts and functions are no more really separable than the different parts and functions of the human body.” As another has well said: “Justification and sanctification may be distinguished by the student, as are the arterial and nervous systems in the human body; but in the living man they are coincident and inseparable.”

If we were asked to answer all three questions in one brief statement, we believe we could not do bet ter than commend our readers to that choice sentence from still another writer who did not enjoy the light and privileges of our day, be it remembered, but whose words contain the very pith of the matter: “The righteousness wherewith we shall be clothed in the world to come is both perfect and inherent; that whereby we are justified is perfect but not inherent; that whereby we are sanctified inherent but not perfect.”

-- *P. L. Read*

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 18, THE HERALD, January 1957

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" -- Isaiah 53:6*

IN OUR previous meditations we have seen that the Apostle's theme is summarized in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1: "For I am not ashamed of the Good News. It is God's power which is at work for the salvation of every one who believes--the Jew first, and then the Gentile. For in the Good News a righteousness which comes from God is being revealed, depending on faith and tending to produce faith" (Weymouth).

Ere we leave this matchless theme and proceed with the Apostle to its masterly unfolding, which occupies the entire remaining chapters of the Epistle (with the exception of his conclusion in 15:14 to 16:27), we must not fail to mark his quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, "as it is written, The just [righteous] shall live by faith." So convinced is he of the essential unity that prevails between the Old Testament writings and the Gospel he has been commissioned to preach, he cannot announce it without quoting from the Old Testament a passage in its support. This good news from God, revealing to believers salvation resulting from a righteousness arising from faith ("not by works of righteousness which we have done" [Titus 3:5]), far from being a repudiation of the old covenant is in fulfillment of its vital principle: "For the words of Habakkuk may be interpreted to express the central spirit of the Old Testament 'the righteous shall live by faith.'"

## The Just Shall Live By Faith

This quotation from Habakkuk appears three times in the New Testament. Here the emphasis is on righteousness as contrasted with unrighteousness. In Galatians 3:11 the emphasis is on faith as contrasted with works, while in Hebrews 10:38 it is on life, faith being shown to be the principle and power of true life. Indeed, as more than one expositor has noted, this

phrase from Habakkuk may be said to sum up the entire Epistle and suggests the following outline:

*Habakkuk 2:4*      *Romans*  
“The righteous” . . . . . 1:17-3:20  
“by faith” . . . . . 3:21-5:21  
“shall live” . . . . . 6:1-16:26

In the first section (1:17-3:20) the Apostle’s line of argument is very simple. He elucidates four plain propositions: (1) Apart from a faith righteousness the Gentiles are without hope (1:18-32). (2) So also are the Jews (2:1-29). (3) The advantages possessed by the Jew do not exempt him from punishment (3:1-8). And (4) the above three propositions are in harmony with Old Testament scriptures (3:9-20).

It is clear that from verse 18 to the end of chapter 1, St. Paul is describing the miserable state of the *Gentile* world. From the beginning of chapter 2 he addresses a personage who very severely judges the Gentile abominations just described by Paul and who evidently represents a wholly different portion of mankind. At verse 17 he apostrophizes this personage by his name: the *Jew*. And he demonstrates to him that he also is under the burden of wrath.

According to Paul’s usual style, verse 18 contains a summary of all the ideas developed in the following verses. The study of this one verse, therefore, will prove to be an analysis of the whole passage: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18).

“The transition from verse 17 to verse 18 by *for* can only be this: There is a *revelation of righteousness* by the Gospel, because there is a *revelation of wrath* on the whole world. The former is necessary to *save the world* from the consequences of the latter. From the notion of *wrath*, when it is applied to God, we must of course remove all that pollutes human wrath, personal resentment, the moral perturbation which

gives to the manifestation of indignation the character of revenge. In God, who is the living *Good*, wrath appears as the holy disapprobation of evil and the firm resolve to destroy it. But it is false to say, as is often done, that this Divine emotion applies only to the evil and not to the evil doer. In measure as the latter ceases to oppose the evil and voluntarily identifies himself

with it, he himself becomes the object of wrath and all its consequences.” (“Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” [Eph. 5:6] .)

“This manifestation proceeds from *heaven*. *Heaven* here does not denote the atmospheric or stellar heaven; the term is the emblematic expression for the invisible residence of God, the seat of perfect order. From it emanates every manifestation of righteousness on the earth and every victorious struggle of good against evil. The visible heavens: the regularity of the motion of the stars, the lifelike and pure luster of their fires, this whole spectacle has always been to the consciousness of man the sensible representation of *Divine order*. It is from this feeling that the prodigal son exclaims: ‘Father, I have sinned *against heaven* in thy sight.’ Heaven in this sense is thus the avenger of all sacred feelings that are outraged; it is as such that it is mentioned here.”

### Ungodliness and Unrighteousness

Here are two views of sin: *ungodliness* or want of respect for God and *unrighteousness* or offenses against our fellow men. Every sin deserves both of these names. But in some the *ungodliness* is most conspicuous and in others the *unrighteousness*. Another, writing on these words, makes the following luminous comment: “Awful opposites to the ‘two great commandments of the Law.’”

### The Truth Suppressed

The Apostle tells us that the wrath of anger of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness *of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness*. What is the truth to which the Apostle here makes reference and what does the expression “hold the truth” signify? I answer: the truth referred to is the knowledge of God as communicated to the human conscience. This is explained by the Apostle in verses 19 and 20. The meaning of the verb here translated “hold” must be determined by the context. In some passages the evident meaning is “to hold fast” (as for example 1 Co. 15:2): “By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory [if ye hold fast] what I preached unto you.” Or again, Luke 8:15: “That on the good ground are they, which in an honest

and good heart, having heard the word, keep it [hold it fast], and bring forth fruit with patience.” But the word cannot be understood in this sense in the passage before us. “They who hold the truth in unrighteousness, do not hold it for the sake of keeping it in possession, as an article which they valued, and therefore were desirous of retaining in safe and cherished custody.” They hold it down or suppress it. This is its signification in other scriptures (as for example 2 Thess. 2:6,7): “And now ye know what withholdeth [holds back, holds down, or suppresses] that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [holds back, holds down, or suppresses] will let [hold back, hold down, or suppress] until he be taken out of the way.” Here the Apostle alludes to the Roman power “that so confined Anti-christ, as to keep him back--so that he came not out into full manifestation.” It is in this second sense that men hold the truth in unrighteousness. St. Paul proves in verse 19 that the Gentiles had the truth; namely that which may be known of God. This truth was given them to mold their thought and life. They preferred unrighteousness and thus held back or held down the truth.

### **The World’s Present Accountability**

It is essential to a clear understanding of what the Apostle would teach us in the passage before us that we recognize the sin against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven to be something very different from ignorance or weakness or inherited blemishes. When we come to the consideration of chapter five we shall see the Apostle doing full justice to the fact that it was “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” In that chapter he does not deny but is at pains to affirm that it was “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” Certainly then in the passage before us he is not to be understood as contradicting his argument of chapter five. Neither here nor elsewhere does he teach that Adam’s descendants are individually responsible for the tendency toward sin, which he created in himself and in his unborn race when from the depths of his freedom of choice he drew the decision to act contrary to the command of his Creator. But while none of our race can do perfectly, they could do a great deal better than they do, and it is in proportion as each individual voluntarily resigns himself to the inherited



tendency to evil and does not combat it that he becomes personally responsible and a fit subject of the wrath or anger of God.

## Review

Briefly reviewing what we have seen in our analysis of this verse (1:18), we have found it to contain three principal ideas: (1) The Gentiles knew the truth. (2) They repelled it. (3) For this sin the wrath of God is displayed against them. The *truth* is explained in verses 19 and 20; it is God's revelation to the conscience of the Gentiles.

The notion: *to repress* the truth, is explained in verses 21 23 (and 25); these are the voluntary errors of paganism.

The idea of the *revelation of Divine wrath* is developed in verses 24 27; these are the unnatural enormities to which God has given up the Gentiles and by which he has avenged his outraged honor.

All the notions of verse 18 are thus resumed and developed in their logical order, verses 19 27; such is the first cycle (*ungodliness*). They are resumed and developed a second time in the same order but under another aspect (unrighteousness) in verses 28 32. Finally it seems that St. Paul regards the monstrous degradation of pagan populations, which he describes in verses 24 27 and 29 32, not as a purely natural consequence of their sin but as a solemn intervention of God's justice in the history of mankind, an intervention which he designates by the term *to give over*.

The word translated *gave them up* "does not signify that God *impelled* them to evil to punish the evil they had already committed. The holiness of God is opposed to such a sense and *to give over* is not to *impel*. On the other hand, it is impossible to stop short at the idea of a simple *permission* [and to understand the Apostle to mean that] God let them give themselves over to evil. God was not purely passive in the terrible development of Gentile corruption. [Is it asked:] Wherein did his action consist? [We answer:] he positively withdrew his hand; he ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river. This is the meaning of the term used by the Apostle: 'He suffered the Gentiles to walk in their own way' (Acts

14:16).’ . . . It is not a case of simple abstention, it is the positive withdrawal of a force.”

### Conclusion

Since this revolting and melancholy picture of the Gentile world presented by the Apostle was a true representation, all must admit that the Apostle has established his proposition that apart from a faith righteousness (justification by faith) the Gentiles are without hope. “It will be remembered that in these charges the Apostle speaks of the enlightened and refined nations of antiquity; and especially that he speaks of the Romans at the very height of their power, intelligence, and splendor. The experiment whether man could save himself by his own works had been fairly made. After all that their greatest philosophers could do, this was the result; and it is clear that there was need of some better plan than this. More profound . . . philosophers than had arisen, the pagan world could not hope to see; more refinement and civilization than then existed, the world could not expect to behold under heathenism. At this time, when the experiment had been made for four thousand years and when the inefficacy of all human means (even under the most favorable circumstances) to reform mankind had been tried, the *Gospel* was preached to men. It disclosed *another* plan; and its effects were seen at once throughout the most abandoned states and cities of the ancient world.” As the Apostle in another place said: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making men tion of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ . . . *knowing . . . how ye turned to God from idols*” (1 Thess. 1:2, 3, 9).

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 19, THE HERALD, February 1957

*God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him”*  
-- Acts 10:34,35

IN THIS “half hour” we commence the consideration of chapter two of our Epistle. It is plain that throughout the whole of this chapter the Apostle has the Jew in view. However, it will be a most difficult, a most delicate, task to prove to the elect people that in the sight of God they are as much in need as the Gentiles whose degradation he has just described. And so he proceeds cautiously. At first he expresses his thought abstractly: “Thou who judgest, whoso-ever thou art.” The true name of this collective personage, whose portrait St. Paul proceeds to draw, will be pronounced later in verse 17: “Now if thou Jew.” Meanwhile he says many things that are as much for the Gentile sinner as for the Jew.

## Judge Not That Ye Be Not Judged

As we proceed with the study of this chapter, we shall see that in the first sixteen verses the Apostle lays down the principle of God’s true or impartial judgment. In the remainder of the chapter he applies this principle directly to the Jew. Moreover, as in the “Gentile” passage (1:18-32), we found the Apostle stating in condensed form in verse 18 all of the ideas developed in the remaining verses of that chapter, so now in this “Jewish” chapter he condenses in the first two verses the theme he will unfold in those which follow.

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things” (2:1,2).

“Therefore,” the opening word, would seem to be logically connected with the closing verse of chapter

one. There we saw that “with all the blindness which the Apostle charges on the . . . [Gentiles], and with all the dislike of retaining God in their knowledge which he ascribes to them, there was still one particular of this knowledge which they did retain. They still knew as much of God’s judgment as to be conscious that what they were doing , in the sinfulness and reprobacy of their minds, was worthy of death.” Moreover, it was there said of the people who committed things worthy of death, “that they not only did the same, but had pleasure in them that did them. This last marks a higher and a more formed depravity than the direct commission of that which is evil. To be hurried along by the violence of passion into some deed of licentiousness may consist with a state of mind that feels its own degradation and mourns over the infirmity of its purposes. But to look with connivance and delight on the sin of others--to have pleasure in their companionship--and to spirit them on in the ways of disobedience, after perhaps the urgency which prompted his own career of it had abated; this argues not the subjection of one faculty to another but the subjection of the whole man to sin.” If then to sin while applauding the sin of others is to aggravate the crime, would not men be still more inexcusable if they joined in the sin which in others they condemned? Most surely. “In the former case there is at least agreement between thought and action--the man *does* what he expressly *approves*--while in the second there is an internal contradiction and a flagrant hypocrisy.” “*Therefore,*” argues the Apostle, “thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest . . . for thou that judgest doest the same things.” Yes, whosoever thou art, “what ever name thou bearest, were it even the glorious name of Jew. Paul does not say this, but it is his meaning.”

### Natural Religion

Coming now to verse two the question arises: To whom does the Apostle refer when he says “We are sure.” Since the Epistle is written to the Christians in Rome, some say that they are referred to. “We, Christians, are sure.” But a statement concerning knowledge possessed by Christians would avail nothing against the Jewish point of view that St. Paul is here combating. Others say that the reference is to the Jews themselves. “We, Jews, are sure.” But it was precisely the Jewish conscience the Apostle was

seeking to convince on this subject. To our understanding the Apostle is referring neither to Christians nor Jews as a class nor yet to the Gentiles but is referring to every child of Adam. The matter in question, namely that “the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things” is a truth “inscribed on the human conscience as such, and which plain common sense, free from prejudices, compels us to own.” It is as though he had said: “Now every one knows, or every one is sure that,” etc. And what is it that every one knows? It is what has commonly been called “natural religion,” that is to say, practically, “it is the religion that appeals straight off to the conscience of almost all honest and civilized men. It is ‘natural religion’ to believe that God will judge men with absolute power and insight and *impartiality* according to their *conduct* and *characters*; that there can be no ‘making believe,’ no substitute for a good character, no escaping with a bad one. The Prophets are full of this principle. Our Lord reasserts it.” It is emphasized by the Apostles. Now we *know*, we are sure, every one is, that the sentence God pronounces on every man is agreeable to truth. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” “There would be no more truth in the universe if there were none in the judgment of God; and there would be none in the judgment of God if, to be absolved ourselves, it were enough to condemn others.” The words “according to truth” have sometimes been explained “in the sense of *really*; ‘that there is really a judgment of God against those who . . . .’” But what the Jews disputed was not the *fact* of judgment; it was its *impartiality*--that is to say its truth. They could not get rid of the idea that in that day [the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (v.5) ] they would enjoy certain immunities due to their purer creed and the greatly higher position they held than that of other nations.”

### **Greater Light Brings Increased Responsibilities**

Now St. Paul “recognizes that primacy which in the history of Redemption is really . . . [theirs]. It is the primacy of the race chosen to be the organ of revelation and the birth place of . . . [Messiah]. It was given sovereignly, ‘not according to the works’ or to the numbers of the nation but according to the unknown conditions in the mind of God. It carried

with its genuine and splendid advantages. It even gave the individual righteous Jew (so surely the language of verse 10 implies) a certain special welcome to his Master's 'Well done, good and faithful'; not to the disadvantage in the least degree of the individual righteous 'Greek,' but just such as may be illustrated in a circle of ardent and impartial friendship, where in one instance or another, kinship added to friendship makes attachment not more intimate but more interesting. Yes, the Jew has indeed his priority, his primacy, limited and qualified in many directions but real and permanent in its place; this Epistle is the great charter of it in the Christian scriptures (see chapter 11). But whatever the place of it is, it has no place whatever in the question of the sinfulness of sin, unless indeed to make guilt deeper where light has been greater. The Jew has a great historical position in the Plan of God. He has been accorded as it were an official nearness to God in the working out of the world's redemption. But he is not one whit the less for this a poor sinner, fallen and guilty. He is not one moment for this to excuse but all the more to condemn himself. He is the last person in the world to judge others. Wherever God had placed him in history he is to place himself, in repentance and faith, least and lowest at the foot of the cross.

“What was and is true of the chosen nation is now and for ever true, by a deep moral parity, of all communities and of all persons who are in any sense privileged or advantaged by circumstance. It is true, solemnly and formidably true, of the Christian church and of the Christian family and of the Christian man.” It is especially true of those who have been privileged to enjoy the light of “Present Truth.” Let us not fail to take home to our own hearts, and to make personal application to our own lives, the lessons the Apostle here would teach. Does there not lie in the moral failure of the Jew a much needed warning to us of today against censoriousness? Let us ask ourselves: Does not “judging” and unkind, not to say unfair, criticism of others still find a place in our ordinary conversation? “It is of the utmost consequence that before we judge others, we should have judged ourselves. And to have done so truthfully has a tendency to make us charitable in our estimate of others, because we are deeply conscious of our own need of merciful and lenient consideration.”

Again, is there a tendency with us to spiritual pride as with the Jew of old there was to religious pride? Does the impression gain ground with us at times that because of the great privileges we have received and the knowledge of God's great Plan we have enjoyed; because of the scriptural purity of our theory of salvation and the close association we have had with the "Truth" movement; because of the patient courage under contempt and exclusion of the little group with which we may be associated, which some call our denomination or sect but which is to us indeed our Church; because we have successfully stood the tests of recent years; because of our loyalty to order; because we have stood for liberty and continue to be loyal to its principle; because of these things, therefore, no matter what happens, it will be well with us in "that day." If so, let us beware. Let us "Think not to say within ourselves, 'We have Abraham to our Father'; for . . . God is able of these stones to raise up seed unto Abraham." For us there is only one altogether safe "glorying." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."  
--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 20, THE HERALD, March 1957

*God . . . commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness. -- Acts 17:30, 31*

WHILE all would admit the general principle stated in the verse we have last considered (Rom 2:2), namely that the judgment of God is according to truth (or without partiality) against them (whosoever *they* are) who commit evil, yet St. Paul knew that there were men who secretly cherished a hope of escape from punishment. While the context shows that he has in mind the Jew, yet his argument "applies to any, whether Jews or Gentiles, who while continuing in sin hope to escape because of the special kindness of God. To show the worthlessness of this hope Paul brings it out and looks at it in the light of day. By a pointed question he ruthlessly tears the darling thought from

the thinker's breast, and exposes it in its naked absurdity to the view of all."

As another has paraphrased verse 3: *Now is this your calculation, O man, you who judge those who practice such things, and do them yourself, that you will escape God's judgment?* Do you surmise that some by way of privilege and indulgence will be kept open for you? Or in the words of yet another: "How can any man, who is guilty of the same wickedness, which he judges will exclude others from mercy, be so foolish as to reckon that whatever becomes of them, he shall escape the judgment of an infinitely holy and righteous God?" Surely a false calculation, this. Yet it apparently is the explanation of the sense of security which the Jew felt and maintained. Not, be it noted, that he would stand *acquitted* at God's tribunal, but that on account of his unique position he would escape the just *punishment* his sins merited! But "perhaps this false calculation proceeds from a moral fact hidden in the depths of the heart? St. Paul drags it to light in what follows."

### **The Riches of His Goodness**

***Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?***  
**Verse 4.**

"Is there something even worse than an illusion; is there contempt? The case then would be more than foolish, it would be impious"--such seems to be the Apostle's meaning. "The *riches of goodness*, of which the Apostle speaks, embrace all God's benefits to Israel in the past: that special election, those consecutive revelations, that constant care, finally, the sending of the Messiah, all that constituted the privileged position which Israel had enjoyed for so many centuries."

"The conduct of Jehovah towards his ancient people had also, through their entire history, been marked, in an astonishing degree, by '*forbearance and long suffering*.' 'Remember, and forget not,' said Moses to the Israelites when they were about to enter on the land of promise, 'how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the



Lord' (Deut. 9:7). And such, ever after, was their character, with few material or long continued changes to the better. “

“From that time forward, their history presents a humbling and affecting scene of ingratitude and rebellion on their part, and of patience and unmerited kindness on the part of God. Amidst all their multiplied provocations, he continued to warn, to threaten, to expostulate; sending to them, for these ends, ‘all His servants, the prophets,’ with messages of faithful reproof and of compassionate entreaty, rising up early and sending them; still staying the arm of vengeance, and ‘in wrath remembering mercy.’ He corrected them, indeed at times, when repeated expostulation was in vain; but always ‘waited to be gracious’; readily forgave their iniquity, and ‘turned from the fierceness of his anger.’ It was ‘of the Lord’s mercies that they were not consumed.’

“Further: the very period at which Paul now wrote was itself an interval of singular ‘forbearance.’ They had despised, rejected, and crucified the Prince of Life; and they still continued to shut their eyes to the clearest light, and to harden their hearts against him. He had fulfilled filled his declaration made to them when he was upon earth: ‘Behold I send you prophets and wise men and scribes’; and his message by these ambassadors was a message of grace and of pardon--and they had sadly verified his prediction--‘some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city’ (Matt. 23:34).“

“‘The riches of Divine goodness and forbearance and long suffering’ now, above all other periods, so signally displayed towards them, ought to have ‘led them to repentance.’ Filled with shame and remorse, and covered with confusion of face, on account of their past ingratitude and perverseness of heart, they should have returned unto the Lord from whom they had revolted adopting the words of penitence and humiliation, which the prophet long ago dictated to them: ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips’ (Hosea 14:2, R.V.). Such ought always to have been the effect of Divine patience. But, instead of this, generally speaking, what had it been of old and what was it now? ‘Because sentence against an evil

work was not speedily executed, their hearts were fully set in them to do evil' (Eccl. 8:11).

“They *‘despised* the riches of goodness and forbearance and long suffering of God, not *knowing’ not considering, acting as if they were ignorant*, ‘that the goodness of God leadeth’ all who are partakers of it ‘to repentance’; that this is its proper tendency, and ought to be its invariable effect. All this was calculated in a fearful degree to augment their guilt. Their misimprovement and contempt of the special and distinguishing kindness of God to them gave a peculiar enormity to their wickedness, above that of any heathen nation on the earth. This is, in very alarming terms, represented to them, and through them to us, in verse 5.”

### **A Treasure (?) of Wrath**

***But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. -- Verse 5***

“ ‘ As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel’ (Ezek. 33:22)? Such was the language of the long suffering and forbearance of God toward his chosen people. But instead of listening to his voice, trembling at the warning and embracing the merciful invitation, thus improving the space given them for repentance, they employed it in accumulating the load of their guilt and of the Divine displeasure; ‘treasuring up for themselves wrath’; filling up the measure of their iniquity.”

“There is an evident correlation between the phrase *‘riches of goodness’* and the Greek word [translated] *‘to treasure up.’* The latter word, as well as the dative (of favor!) *‘for thyself,’* have certainly a tinge of irony. What an enriching is that! Wrath is here denounced on the Jews as it had been on the Gentiles (1:18). The two passages are parallel; there is only this difference between them: among the Gentiles the thunderbolt has already fallen, while the storm is still gathering for the Jews. The time when it will burst on them is called *‘the day of wrath.’* In this phrase two ideas are combined: the great national catastrophe

which had been predicted by John the Baptist and by Jesus and the final judgment of the guilty taken individually at the last day.”

**[NOTE: In reference to the national catastrophe, the Baptist had said: “Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:10); and our Lord had said: “From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation” (Luke 11:51).]**

It is to be noted ere we leave this verse, that in referring to the day of wrath as a day of *revelation* of the righteous judgment of God, the Apostle thereby indicates that righteous judgment, or wrath, was still veiled so far as the Jews were concerned, in contrast to the wrath on the Gentiles which we have seen was already revealed (1:18), but that then, in the day of wrath, it would be revealed in relation to the Jews also. “In the special favors conferred on the Jews, and continued in their possession, notwithstanding their many and aggravated sins, there was an appearance of want of equity in the Divine administration. And, indeed, the personal prosperity of the wicked presents, in every instance, a similar appearance and has sometimes proved a temptation to the true . . . [worshippers] of God to doubt and question a superintending providence.” [“Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (Mal. 3:15).] “There has appeared to them a mysterious strangeness in this part of the Divine administration, which they have at times felt in a painful degree their incompetence to explain. They have been tempted, with tears of wondering solicitude to exclaim: ‘How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High’ (Psa. 73:11)? But that day shall reveal His righteousness . . . . The Apostle enlarges on this important truth in the following verses, from the sixth to the sixteenth inclusive, applying it to the situation and character of both Jews and Gentiles.”

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

-- No. 20, Page 6

## “Whatsoever a Man Soweth, That Shall He Also Reap”

*Who will render to every man according to his deeds. -- Verse 6*

These words, the truth of which would be admitted by all, are intended to prove the point St. Paul has just made; namely, that the judgment of the great Day will be righteous. While in this life the justice of God's judgment does not always appear, in that day it will be revealed to all. His words, which would appeal to the moral sense of all, would come with added force to the Jew, for they are a direct quotation from the Psalms (62:12), and moreover reflect the sense of many other passages in the Old Testament scriptures.

“The word [translated] *deeds* is sometimes applied to external conduct [only]. But it is plain that this is not its meaning here. It denotes everything connected with conduct, including the acts of the mind, the motives, the principles, as well as the mere external act. Our word *character* more aptly expresses it than any single word.”

Some have difficulty in reconciling the “rendering to every man according to his *deeds*” with the doctrine of “justification by *faith*.” Rightly understood, however, the passage is seen to be not inconsistent with the main theme of the Epistle. The Apostle will be ready enough to expound “his” Gospel of a “faith righteousness” in due time. Mean while, and in order that it may be expounded all the better in its proper place, he endeavors to show the Jew, as he has already shown the Gentile, his great need of it. Without a “righteousness by faith” where will his Jewish reader be in the great Day? in the day when God will render to every man according to his works? This is the question he is seeking to press upon the conscience of his hearer.

## Incorruptible Glory and Honor

*To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God.” -- Verses 7-11*

Realizing that “immortality” is an attribute of the Divine nature only, to which only the church of the Gospel Age has been called, some have been led to

suppose that, for reasons not apparent, the Apostle in the above words makes reference to the high calling of the Church. These seekers after “glory and honor and immortality” according to this interpretation must be the Church. Apart from the word “immortality,” however, there is nothing in the con text to lead any one to suppose that the Apostle is referring to the Church and its reward.

The difficulty disappears when we learn that the word translated immortality is *aphtharsia*, and means incorruptibility, not immortality. The Greek for immortality is *athanasia*. It appears only three times in the New Testament and is found in I Corinthians 15: 53, 54 and in I Timothy 6:16. It signifies deathlessness and is properly translated immortality. In each of the three places in which it occurs, *athanasia* refers to sentient being, whereas this is not always the case with *aphtharsia*.

*Athanasia* not only refers only to sentient beings, but in each instance refers to the *life principle* by which their organisms are animated.

*Aphtharsia*, on the contrary, in those instances in which it is applied to sentient being does not refer to the life principle but to either their organisms or characters. For example, in Romans 1:23, the Apostle may be referring to the fact that the organism or body of Jehovah is incapable of decay; or he may be referring (and it is our thought that he is referring) to the fact that the moral worth (the character) of Jehovah is of such excellent quality as to be impossible to corrupt. In any case the Apostle is not referring to God’s deathlessness; had he desired to do so, he would have used the word *athanasia*.

*Aphtharsia* while sometimes referring to sentient beings does not always do so but in several instances refers to inanimate things, such as the Christian's crown (I Cor. 9:25), his inheritance (I Peter 1:4), the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit (I Peter 3:4), the quality of love possessed by believers still in the flesh (Eph. 6:24), etc. It is possible, gloriously possible, for believers here and now to love our Lord Jesus (yes, and each other too) with incorruptness, but all can see that the word *immortality* would be quite out of place in this connection.

### **The Church to be Both Incorruptible and Immortal**

In one celebrated passage the Apostle uses both words: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption {*aphtharsia*} and this mortal must put on immortality {*athanasia*}. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption {*aphtharsia*}, and this mortal shall have put on immortality {*athanasia*}, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:53,54). If the word *incorruption* meant precisely the same as the word *immortality*, the Apostle would be multiplying words to no purpose. On the contrary we understand him to be distinguishing between them. It is as though he were to say: "When this organism, which is capable of decay, gives place to one that is not, and when this life principle, which is one that is sustained, gives place to one that is inherent, then shall be brought to pass, . . ." etc.

### **Let Us by Patient Continuance in Well Doing Seek a Character Incorruptible**

With these distinctions in mind, and giving consideration also to the context, we are led to the following conclusions with regard to Romans 2:7:

(1) The word *immortality* in the *Authorized Version* is more properly translated "incorruptibility." -- *Diaglott*.

(2) Since *aphtharsia* and not *athanasia* is the word used the Apostle cannot be referring to the *life principle* which animates the organisms of Divine beings.

(3) While *aphtharsia* never refers to a life principle inherent or sustained, but sometimes refers to the organism of a living being, it does not always

do even this but in several instances refers to inanimate things. One eminent expositor suggests that the context in which this verse appears seems to require that the word be regarded as an adjective employed to qualify the nouns “glory and honor,” making the phrase read “incorruptible glory and honor.”

As a paraphrase, this suggestion seems not unreasonable, although the fact that the noun (incorruptibility) and not the adjective (incorruptible) is used it is not in its favor as a literal translation. However, the essential thought would not be very different if, as we have seen is permissible, we regard the incorruptibility sought by patient continuance in well doing to be an incorruptibility of character. It is certainly true that some men seek glory and honor from each other (John 5:44). Such glory and honor is capable of and soon experiences decay. Other men, by patient continuance in well doing, may be said to seek the glory and honor that is incorruptible, incapable of decay; or, if the other view be taken, they may be said to seek glory and honor and a third thing, namely, a crystallized character incapable of corruption. Surely such a character will be the possession of all, on whatever plane of existence, who are counted worthy of eternal life. Ultimately, if they persist in such seeking, they will either in this life or the next meet with the Gospel and receive the grace necessary to embrace it. By embracing the gracious provisions of the Gospel, they will secure the glory and honor they sought (or, if we take the other view, they will secure the glory and honor and the incorruptible character they sought). They will also receive eternal life. It is true that some of these (the faithful overcomers of the Gospel Age, the Little Flock, the Church) will receive eternal life on the highest plane of existence, namely, the Divine plane. Such will, indeed, be possessors of immortality. This, however, is our opinion, is entirely outside the scope of the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Romans.

### **Works of Faith to be Rewarded**

The thought then of the Apostle enunciated in verse six seems to be established. The principle of God’s judgment is clear and simple. He will render to every

man his due by no fictitious standard (such as birth or status) but strictly *according to what he has done*. To those who by a steady persistence in a life work of good strive for the deathless glories of the Messianic Kingdom, he will give that for which they strive, namely eternal life. But to those mutinous spirits who are disloyal to the right and loyal only to unrighteousness, for such there is in store anger and fury, galling, nay crushing, pain: for every human being they are in store, who carries out to the end his course of evil, whether he be Jew or whether he be Gentile--the Jew again having precedence. On the other hand the communicated glory of the Divine Presence, the approval of God, and the bliss of reconciliation with him await the man who labors on at that which is good -- be he Jew or Gentile; here too, the Jew having precedence, but only precedence; for God regards no distinctions of race.--P.L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 21, THE HERALD, April 1957

*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* -- James 1:22

THUS FAR in our meditations we have seen that just as in chapter one the Apostle showed that apart from "his" Gospel of a faith righteousness the Gentiles were without hope of salvation, so in chapter two he seeks to demonstrate that the condition of the Jews is equally hopeless. With the Jews, however, we saw that he found it necessary, on account of their deep rooted prejudices, to proceed with the utmost caution. For a while he speaks covertly, not stating expressly that he has the Jew in mind, so that the Jew might the more calmly attend to his reasoning (2:1 to 16). As we considered the first verses of chapter 2 (1-11), we noted that the Apostle very skillfully sought to turn the mind of the Jew away from his present privileges and advantages to the future day of judgment (vs. 5). In that day, the Apostle was at pains to observe, the principle of God's true, righteous or impartial judgment will be abundantly demonstrated. He will then render to every man with out exception according



to his deeds (vs. 6). Again he has emphasized the fact that “there is no respect of persons with God” (vs. 11). This principle is one frequently asserted in the Old Testament, and therefore it would be difficult for a Jew to dispute it. “The Lord your God . . . regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward” (Deut. 10:17). “There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts” (2 Chron. 19:7). See also 1 Samuel 16:7 as well as Job 34:19 and other passages of similar import. But in the mind of the Jew the question would undoubtedly arise, Is not the fact of the law being given to some and not to others incompatible with this principle of Divine impartiality and therefore, since we Jews have been so highly favored as to have been given the law, does this not afford us satisfactory grounds for assurance that “in that day,” apart from all other considerations, it will be well with us? It is with this question that the Apostle proceeds to deal in the passage that follows.

### **Not Ceremonial but Moral Law**

“For as many as shall have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as shall have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another;) in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel” (Rom. 2:12-16).

In studying this passage it will be seen that verses 13 to 15 are to be considered as a parenthesis, in explanation and vindication of the assertions contained in verse 12, and that verse 16 should be read in connection with verse 12.

“Manifestly *‘the law’* in this passage means not the ceremonial law of Israel but the revealed moral law given to Israel, above all in the Decalogue. This appears from the language of verse 15, which would be meaningless if the reference were to special ordinances of worship. The Gentiles could not ‘show the work of’ *that* kind of ‘law written in their hearts’;

what they showed was . . . a ‘work’ related to the revealed claims of God and man on the will and life.”

The main import of this passage is plain. It is in confirmation or explanation of what has just been said in verse 11, namely that “there is no respect of persons with God.” “The Jew, who is primarily in the Apostle’s thought, is reminded that his possession of the Law, that is to say of the one *specially revealed* code . . . of morals, is no recommendatory privilege but a sacred responsibility. The Gentile meanwhile is shown, in passing, but with gravest purpose, to be by no means exempted from accountability simply for his lack of a revealed perceptive code. He possesses, as man, that moral consciousness with out which the revealed code itself would be futile, for it would correspond to nothing. Made in the image of God, he has the mysterious sense which sees, feels, handles moral obligation. He is aware of the fact of duty. Not living up to what he is thus aware of, he is guilty.”

### Law Written in the Heart

Coming now to a closer examination of the passage, we first note that in the opening words of verse 12, the Apostle speaks of some who have sinned *without law*. But later in this very Epistle he tells us that “where no law is there is no transgression” (4:15), and again, “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (5:13). How shall we understand the passage before us consistently with these later expressions? We answer: If those of whom he speaks in verse 12, which verse 14 shows are the Gentiles, had *no law at all*, it would have been quite impossible to have reconciled these statements. The inconsistency would have been not apparent merely, but real. But the phrase “without law” means *not without any law but without the written law*, without the revealed moral law possessed exclusively by Israel.

“It is a mistake to suppose that laws must be writ ten externally--upon paper, stone, etc.--and not to realize that a still higher form of writing the Divine law would be in the creation of man so in harmony with the principles of righteousness that it would be proper to say that the Divine law--an appreciation of right and wrong--was written in the perfect organism. In this manner God’s law is written in his own being and in that of all the angelic hosts, and thus also, the

Divine law was written in the very constitution of Adam and Eve. . . .

“As we look about us today we find that the world in general has lost to a considerable extent this original likeness of God in which our first parents were created—they have lost much more than intuitive appreciation of right and wrong. The Divine law, once clearly and distinctively implanted in the human nature, has been in a very large measure effaced during the past six thousand years of the ‘reign of sin and death,’ . . . Nevertheless, even amongst the most degraded peoples of the heathen world, we frequently find elements of conscience and certain more or less crude conceptions of right and wrong. These are the warped and twisted remnants of the original law of man’s being, in harmony with which he was originally created an ‘image of God,’ . . . remnants of the original law, fragmentary proofs that it was once innate in humanity.”

### **Neither Jew Nor Gentile Just Before God**

The argument of the Apostle then is clear. The Jew is not the only one in possession of a law from God; the Gentile also possesses God’s law; written not on tables of stone but inscribed on his heart; sadly defaced and corrupted, it is true, but not entirely obliterated, and moreover a law which is not only there but is heard, as is evidenced by his attempts from time to time to comply with its dictates. If possession of a law and the hearing of it were enough to justify before God, the Gentiles may make equal claim with the Jews. But no law, human or Divine, is ever for a moment satisfied with applause, with approbation. It demands always and inexorably obedience. “Not hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (vs. 13).

No one will make the mistake of supposing that St. Paul is affirming in this verse that any one, Jew or Gentile, will actually be justified by keeping the law, nor will they suppose that when in the next verse he says that “the Gentiles . . . do by nature the things contained in the law,” they as a class or any one of them individually ever did or could obey its every requirement. To so understand these verses would be in contradiction of his conclusion that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight”

(3:20). In the passage before us he is merely laying down or illustrating a principle, not relating a historical fact. He is saying neither more nor less than that the Gentiles may have the same kind of claim to be actually justified before God as the Jews; but as a matter of fact neither Jew nor Gentile has any claim at all to justification, since both have violated the law under which they have lived.

### Shall Have Sinned

It is interesting to notice that the verb translated “sinned” that appears twice in verse 12 is in what is known as the aorist tense and is thus preferably translated “shall have sinned.” By the use of this tense the Apostle carries our mind away from the present “to the point of time when the result of human life appears as a completed fact.”

Is it asked, When will the result of human life appear as a completed fact? We answer: There are some who have full light and opportunity in this life; in their case it will appear at its close. No further light or opportunity will be necessary or possible to demonstrate their heart condition. But many do not obtain full light and opportunity in this life. Many go into the grave not having once heard the name of Jesus, and many who have heard his name have had it mixed with so much confusion and error as to have received no clear understanding of the gracious message with which it is associated. Yet the Bible makes it plain that Jesus, the true Light, is in due time to light every man that cometh into the world (John 1:9); 1 Tim. 2:6). It is obvious, therefore, that before the result of *such* lives can appear as completed facts, they must be brought forth from the grave, even as our Lord declares: “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves . . . shall come forth” (John 5:28, 29).

The expression “as many as shall have sinned” is therefore to be understood as applying to those only who in the face of full light and opportunity shall be found to have persisted in sin. Those who in this life or the next embrace the gracious provisions of the Gospel will find it producing its proper fruit of holiness in their lives. To these sin will not be imputed; they will not perish, but on the contrary receive ever lasting life.

## Shall Also Perish

We are happy in the thought that all of our readers are fully informed as to the meaning of the word “perish”; that it means annihilation or cessation of being and that they no longer associate with the death penalty for sin any thought of eternal torment. How strange it now seems to us that we could ever have believed, in even a vague way, that eternal torment was a part of the Plan of our just and wise and loving Creator. Truly men

“ . . . magnify his vengeance  
With a zeal he will not own.”

But since it is true of most, if not all, of us that we did once so believe, and since we now realize how far from the truth this evil doctrine of eternal torment is and when we remember how patiently the Lord has dealt with us in bringing us out of such darkness into his marvelous light, will not such memories make us, in turn, very patient and gentle and kind toward others who may seem to us to be a little slow in learning the lessons we now see plainly. A truth that yesterday I did not know, that only this morning I grasped, why must my brother see it this afternoon on my faulty presentation of it? May it not be that God will show it to him by an abler servant on the morrow? Perhaps too he will by then be the better prepared to receive it. Meantime let love and patience have their perfect work.

In closing our discussion of these five verses, we note that according to Paul’s Gospel it is by Jesus Christ that God will judge the secrets of men in that day (vs. 16). It was of course no new doctrine to the Jew that God would judge the world nor yet that he would judge it through Messiah, but that Jesus was Messiah and that God would judge the world through him was a “hard saying” for them. Yet it was a doctrine to which “his” Gospel habitually bore witness. Was he not indeed a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus not only before the Gentiles and their kings but also before the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). And with what singular fitness does he mention the name of Jesus here! “It was the name trampled by the Pharisee, yet the name of him who was to judge him in the great day.”

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No 22, THE HERALD, May June 1957

*Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our  
Father. -- Matthew 3:9*

*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of  
Abraham. -- John 8:39*

IN THE first sixteen verses of chapter two of our Epistle we have seen that the Apostle has established the principle of God's true or impartial judgment. No claim of privilege will be admitted in "the day." While throughout these verses he has had the Jew especially in mind, yet he has expressed himself only in a general and more or less abstract way, and much of what he has said might be understood to apply as well to the Gentile as to the Jew. Now, however, he is ready to address himself directly to the latter, and in verse 17 he designates him by name. "Yet he still proceeds with the utmost caution; for he knows that he is giving a shock to inveterate prejudices, prejudices which he long shared himself."

*Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and  
makest thy boast of God (vs. 17).*

"The general appellation of *Jew* was given to those of the nation of Israel who returned from the Babylonish captivity, because Judah was the principal tribe and those of the people belonging to the other tribes who then came back to the land of their fathers were considered as attaching themselves to it."

## Steps in Self Exaltation

" 'Thou *art called* a Jew.' By this name the person addressed was distinguished as a member of the national community of Israel; a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh; while yet he was only a Jew *outwardly*, and not in the higher and more important sense assigned to the appellation in the conclusion of the chapter; where it includes internal spiritual qualities, of which he who is here addressed was utterly destitute."

“*And retest in the law.*” In reference to their confidence in the law, our Lord himself had said to them: “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, *in whom ye trust*” (John 5:45).

“*And makest they boast of God.*” David made his boast *in* God (Psa. 34:2); the Jews boasted of him as *their* God, the God who had chosen their nation to be a peculiar people to himself. “The Jews boasted of this as their exclusive honor; without understanding the great purpose of God in conferring the distinction -- the glory of his own name, and the gradual ripening of his designs of mercy to the world at large. ‘Their glorying was not good’: for pride was the source from which it sprang. Instead of cherishing a humble sense of unmerited privilege, they gloried in their privileges, as if they had been rights; or as if to honor and distinguish *them* had been the sole end for which they had been bestowed. The false and foolish confidence, which, in spite of conscious wickedness, the Jews were wont to place in the privilege here particularized is strikingly illustrated by some of the ancient prophets. . . . ‘Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Is rael, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. . . . The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: *yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field*’ (Micah 3:8-12).”

It is instructive to notice the gradation in the self exaltation of the Jew, which the Apostle traces in these three words: Jew, Law, and God. First the Jew recalls the name he bears, doubtless remembering with pride the etymology of that word: *Jehoudah*, the praised one. But the Jew possesses more than a glorious name; he has in his hands a real gift--the *law*. Here is a manifest sign of the Divine favor on which he may consequently *rest*. From the law his thoughts rise to its great Author, *God*, and the remembrance that the Almighty is his God fills him with *exulting*.

*And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law* (vs. 18).

By possessing and studying the law, the Jew next claims that he knows God’s will--that which men of no other nation know. Moreover, he is thereby able to

distinguish between things that differ. He can discern and appreciate the most delicate shades of moral life. Amid the mistaken judgments of others he has an infallible standard by which he can determine and approve that which is truly good. But while the Jew gloried in the understanding he had, by peculiar revelation of God's "excellent" will, he failed to accomplish that will in his life. His glorying was in terms of self congratulation, professed approbation of the law, ill supported as the profession was not by any consistency of conduct.

In his knowledge of the Divine will he boasted and was proudly "confident," despising others. This supercilious self sufficiency is expressed in the next two verses.

### Blind Leaders of the Blind

*And are 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* (vss. 19, 20).

Here with a slight touch of ridicule is "set forth the moral treatment to which the Jew, as the born physician of mankind, subjects his patients, the Gentiles to their complete cure. The term '*art confident*' describes his pretentious assurance. And first he takes the poor Gentile by the hand as one does a *blind man*, offering to *guide* him; then he opens his eyes, dissipating his *darkness* by the *light* of revelation; then he *rears* him as one would bring up a being yet *without reason*; finally when through all this care he has come to the stage of the little child (who cannot speak--this was the term used by the Jews to designate proselytes) he initiates him into the full knowledge of the truth by becoming his *teacher*."

In these verses the language employed by the Apostle expresses what the Jews thought of themselves rather than what they really did: their boasted capabilities rather than their active endeavors. We are not to suppose that prompted by benevolent compassion and animated by humble and fervent zeal they exerted themselves in conducting blindness, enlightening obscurity, etc. Ah, no! This was their duty; but the duty, as will always be the case when pride has usurped the place of humility, was sadly neglected. Feeling their own superiority and fond of its display,



the sentiment with which they looked upon others was not beneficent compassion but negligent disdain.

It will be noted that in the end of verse 20 the Jew is said to have in the law the form of knowledge and truth. But to be acquainted with the law without understanding its proper meaning was in reality to be destitute of the “knowledge” it contained, ignorant of the “truth” concealed under it. The *form* of knowledge and of the truth the Jews possessed in the law was highly valuable; it was the precise *sketch, the exact outline, the correct delineation* of the eternal realities. It contained “a *shadow of good things to come*” (Heb. 10:1). But its value arose from its revealing, although with comparative indistinctness, the reality. Now the Jews with all their boasted pretensions to teach others had yet to teach themselves.

***Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself*** (vs. 21).

In this passage the Jew is not blamed for teaching others but for not practicing what he taught. To teach one's self is to practice what we teach; to teach others and not practice ourselves is hypocrisy. Well did St. Paul realize this : “I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away” (1 Cor. 9:27). At the same time St. Paul wrote that the Jews were not only ignorant but in *criminal ignorance* of “the truth.” “If ye were blind,” our Lord had said, “ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:41). They had refused, and persisted in refusing, the plainest and most impressive instructions as to the genuine meaning of their law, presented before their minds in the appearance, character, history, and work of Jesus. “They shut their eyes against the clearest light; and while with vain self sufficiency they said ‘we see,’ remained in affecting ignorance of what the law contained; and though possessing ‘the form of knowledge and truth,’ they rested, after all, in error and falsehood. They were ‘the blind people’ spoken of by the prophet ‘who had eyes, and the deaf who had ears.’”

## Physician Heal 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” (vs. 21, 22)?*

“The specially revealed law on which the Jew re lied, which it is his boast to have received from God and in virtue of which he could rightly claim to have a knowledge of Divine things that other men had not, and to be the teacher of nations, the interpreter to other men of the Divine will--this law finds its first application to those themselves to whom it is given. How can they preach the commandments, whether it be the eighth or the seventh or the second that is in question, so long as they have so bad a reputation for keeping them? They cannot deny that as of old, so now, their moral conduct causes the heathen to blaspheme their religion instead of being drawn towards it.”

The particular moral defects which St. Paul here attributes to the religious Jew are surprisingly grave: theft, adultery, and temple robbery. Yet what he says is not without confirmation from other sources. “Avarice was a notorious sin of the Jews. Our Lord accuses the scribes of ‘devouring widows’ houses’ under the cloak of religion and denounces the Pharisees also for leaving their outwardly purified cups and platters inwardly full of ‘extortion’ (Matt. 23:14, 25). It is only a subtler form of theft that he alludes to when he denounces them for sanctioning the practice of dedicating property as a ‘*corban*’ to the purposes of religion in order to evade the righteous claims of parents” (Mark 7:11).

Of adultery they were notoriously guilty. “Even the Talmud accuses some of the most celebrated rabbis of this vice.” The prophets denounced it in the strongest terms (see Jer. 7:9; 9:2; Hosea 7:4). “Down to the period of the Captivity, the Prophets could also denounce the people because they were constantly false to Jehovah in matters of worship as well as of morality. After the Captivity, however, the tendency to idolatry is gone forever.” But in order to separate the Jews as completely as possible from idolatry, God had commanded them to look upon everything belonging in any way to idols as utterly hateful and disgusting. They were not to bring into their houses anything

pertaining to false gods. “The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire; thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it; but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing” (Deut. 7:25, 26). Now the man before us professes to share this Divine detestation of idols. Yet he robs temples. “The language of the town clerk at Ephesus in exculpating St. Paul and his company (Acts 19:37), suggests that temple robbery was a not unfamiliar imputation upon Jews. It appears that with all their horror of idols . . . they could not resist the opportunity of appropriating the rich stores of the temples. The religious scribes and Pharisees (though not of course the best of them) were in fact, as a body, truly hypocrites, as our Lord summarily said they were.”

*Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” (vss. 23, 24).*

Departing from the specification of particular commandments, which while teaching they did not practice, the Apostle here brings against them the comprehensive charge of breaking the law in which they gloried.

## Review

That the force and meaning of the Apostle’s words may be the better impressed on our minds, let us read them again, using the translation of another, with its helpful interspersed paraphrase: “But if *you*, you emphatically, the reader or hearer now in view, you who perhaps have excused yourself from considering your own case by this last mention [in vss. 14 and 15] of the responsibility of the non Jewish world; *if you bear the name of Jew*, whether or no you possess the corresponding spiritual reality; and *repose your self upon the law*, as if the possession of that awful revelation of duty was your protection, not your sentence; and *glory in God*, as if he were your private property, the decoration of your national position, whereas the knowledge of him is given you in trust for the world; and *know the Will*, his will, the will

supreme; and put the touchstone to things which differ, like a casuist skilled in moral problems; schooled out of the law, under continuous training . . . by principles and precepts which the law supplies;--(if) you are sure that you yourself, whoever else, are a leader of blind men, a light of those who are in the dark, an educator of the thoughtless, a teacher of beginners, possessing in the law, the outline, the system, of real knowledge and truth, (the outline, indeed, but not the power and life related to it); -- if this is your estimate of your position and capacities, I turn it upon yourself. Think and answer.-- You therefore, your neighbor's teacher, do you not teach yourself? You, who proclaim, Thou shalt not steal, do you steal? You, who say, Thou shalt not commit adultery, do you commit it? You who abominate the idols, affecting to loath their very neighborhood, do you plunder temples, entering the polluted precincts readily enough for purposes at least equally polluting? You who glory in the law, as the palladium of your race, do you, by your violation of the law, disgrace your God? 'For the name of our God is, because of you, railed at among the heathen; as it stands written, in Ezekiel's message (36:20) to the ungodly Israel of the ancient Dispersion--a message true of the Dispersion of the later day (Rom. 2:17 24)."

### A Practical Application

While we note the lesson in its application to the Jew, let us not fail to take it home to ourselves. What if the Apostle, instead of writing nearly two thousand years ago, were writing today and instead of "Behold thou art called a Jew," were to write: "Behold thou art called a Christian; and retest in the Bible and makest thy boast of God." The mere name of Christian can, in itself, be of no more avail, with all the privileges it implies, than the name of Jew. Yet to how many even in these days of special enlightenment, might not the question be emphatically put. "Teachest thou not thyself?" Do you not know the purpose for which the God of all grace has given you the volume of inspired truth and has made accessible to you all the valuable helps to its study? It is to show you the way of salvation. It is that you may more and more realize holiness in your life. It is that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in you. If you miss this, you miss its grand design. You receive the grace of God *in vain*.

"And shall not we of the Christian Dispersion take home also what Ezekiel and St. Paul say about the

blasphemies, the miserable railing at our God, caused by the sins of those who bear his name?" "If with hearts gladdened by a sense of his love we make our boast in God let us beware of ever giving occasion to the Adversary to speak reproachfully or to blaspheme his blessed name. For the sake of the glory of God and of the good of mankind let us make steady, incorruptible consistency our unceasing aim. Our admonitions and instructions will be rejected with indignant scorn, or at best will be neutralized and rendered utterly spiritless and inefficient, if they do not come recommended by a corresponding character." "Ah, let us who name the blessed Name . . . amidst 'the world' which understand not a little of what we ought to be, and watches us so keenly and so legitimately, let us take home this message, sent first to the old inconsistent Israel. Do we, professing godliness, show the mind of Christ in our secular intercourse? Do we, on the whole, give the average 'world' cause to expect that 'a Christian,' as such, is a man to be trusted in business, in friendship? Is the conviction quietly forced upon them that a Christian's temper and tongue are not as other men's? That the Christian habitually lives high above self seeking? That the Christian tradesman faithfully remembers his customers' just interests and is true in all his dealings? That the Christian employee, and the Christian employer, are alike exceptionally mindful of each other's rights and facile about their own? That the Christian's time and his money are to a remarkable degree applied to the good of others for Christ's sake? This is what the members of the Christian society are expected to be by 'the world.' If they are so, God be thanked. If they are not so, who shall weigh the guilt? Who shall adequately estimate the dishonor so done to the blessed Name? And the 'Day' is coming."

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 23, THE HERALD, July August 1957

*We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. --*

Philippians 3:3

*CIRCUMCISION does indeed profit, if you obey the law; but if you are a law breaker, the fact that you have been circumcised counts for nothing. In the same way if an uncircumcised man pays attention to the just requirements of the Law, shall not his lack of circumcision be overlooked, and, although he is a Gentile by birth, if he scrupulously obeys the Law, shall he not sit in judgment upon you who, possessing, as you do, a written Law and circumcision, are yet a Law breaker? For the true Jew is not the man who is simply a Jew outwardly, and true circumcision is not that which is outward and bodily. But the true Jew is one inwardly, and true circumcision is heart circumcision--not literal but spiritual; and such people receive praise not from men, but from God" (Rom. 2:25-29, Weymouth).*

## The Jew Also Without Salvation

As we come now to consider these closing verses of chapter two of our Epistle, it will at once be seen that they are in further elaboration of the principle laid down in verses 1 and 2, namely that God's judgment is according to truth, that is to say, is without partiality. The Jew, to whose conscience chapter two is especially addressed, was ready enough to acquiesce in the Apostle's description of the Gentile world as portrayed in chapter one (18-32), and to concur in his conclusion that apart from a faith righteousness the Gentile was without hope of salvation, but he was quite unprepared to make a similar admission concerning himself. Ready enough to judge others, the mind of the Jew bitterly resented the idea that he himself stood in equal, if not greater, need of redemption. In his judgment of the Gentile world, St. Paul did but repeat, "with more of moral discernment what he would have learned in his Jewish training. But the strict Jews who had taught St. Paul, though some among them must have been good men, ready to enter into the deeply penitential spirit of the psalmists and prophets, do not seem as a rule to have liked to think

of their people as liable to Divine condemnation. They chose to suppose that the Gentile world alone was the area upon which Divine vengeance would light, while the Jews were to appear as the instruments of God's judgments, or at least themselves exempt from them. They had forgotten all the super abundant warnings against such a spirit which the prophets from Amos to John the Baptist had let fall. This frame of mind-- censorious when it looks without, lenient to the point of blindness when it looks within--sometimes appears as almost impossible in the form in which St. Paul here proceeds to attribute it to the Jews. We can hardly believe that any responsible beings could be so blind as St. Paul implies that his pious fellow countrymen were. But it needs only experience to convince us that even in its grosser forms this frame of mind is extraordinarily common in individuals, in nations, and in churches. . . . And in the case of the Jews we have also the witness of our Lord. He represents the Jewish world as honeycombed with hypocrisy of a plain and gross sort. They are to him the very types of the men who behold the mote that is in their brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in their own eye."

### **The Judgment of God Free from Partiality**

St. Paul's witness then is only the same as that of Christ. And in the first 24 verses of chapter two, considered in our previous meditations, we have seen him cutting away any possible ground of confidence the Jew might derive from the thought that he had Abraham to his father. Supported by their own scriptures, he has established the principle that "God's judgment is directed by an absolutely impartial 'truth' or estimate of the facts in their inner reality. If in any particular case of persistent sin his judgment seems to linger, it is not that he has forgotten or will overlook; it is only that he is merciful and forbearing and gives long space for repentance. But, meanwhile, if the opportunity is not taken, if the heart is hard and impenitent, a store is being laid up against the offender in the place of judgment which will break out in the great day in manifested wrath. God's principle of judgment is absolutely free from partiality. There are men who have steadily in view the true aim of human life, its imperishable glory, its final permanent honor, and therefore, preferring eternal to temporal things, patiently go on doing good. They may be Jews

or Greeks, but in either case indifferently, the reward that they have sought will be theirs with the accompaniment of inward peace. There are other men who are contentious, and refusing the leading of the truth, make themselves servants to unrighteousness. They may be Jews or Gentiles, but the Divine wrath, showing itself in outward suffering and inward anguish will be upon them all equally. For God judges men impartially in the light of their opportunities. Those who have the advantage of a revealed law shall be judged and acquitted according as they have not listened to it merely but obeyed it. For a law known and not kept, as far from commending us to God, is but the instrument of our judgment. And those who have not this advantage are yet not without an inward light in the natural moral consciousness of mankind. Those who have sinned against this light shall find nothing else was needed to bring them to their ruin. And those, on the other hand, who by its help keep the moral law in effect, without any assistance from a revealed law, are their own law for themselves. They have the law in its practical result written in their hearts as their conduct shows, and their natural conscience bears its accompanying witness. For conscience, both individual and social, reflecting on all human actions to condemn or, more rarely, to acquit anticipates the final judgment which, as St. Paul continually announces, it will be the office of Jesus the Christ to pass unerringly upon things secret as well as open in the 'day of the Lord.'"

### **The Lord Looketh on the Heart**

But if the possession of the specially revealed Law will avail him nothing, the Jewish objector has yet another secret ground of hope. The word circumcision uncovers it. He bears in his body the sign and seal of the covenant of God. By the express command of God he has been circumcised. But just as the Apostle has shown that the Law cannot bring salvation, so now he will show that circumcision will not save a sinner from God's impartial judgment.

*"For circumcision indeed profits you, if you carry law into practice; in that case circumcision is for you God's seal upon God's own promises to the true sons of Abraham's blood and faith. Are you indeed a practicer of the holy Code whose summary and essence is love to God and to man? Can you look your*



Lord in the face and say--not, 'I have satisfied all thy demands; pay me that thou owest,' but 'thou knowest that I love thee, and therefore, oh, how I love thy law'? Then you are indeed a child of the covenant, through his grace; and the seal of the covenant speaks to you the certainties of its blessing. *But if you are a transgressor of law, your circumcision is turned uncircumcision;* the Divine seal is to you nothing, for you are not the rightful holder of the deed of covenant which it seals. *If therefore the uncircumcision, the Gentile world, in some individual instance, carefully keeps the ordinances of the Law, reverently remembers the love owed to God and to man, shall not his uncircumcision, the uncircumcision of the man supposed, be counted as if circumcision?* Shall he not be treated as a lawful recipient of covenant blessings even though the seal upon the document of promise is, not at all by his fault, missing? *And thus shall not this hereditary uncircumcision, this Gentile born and bred, fulfilling the law of love and duty, judge you, who by means of letter and circumcision are -- law's transgressor,* using as you practically do use the terms, the letter of the covenant and the rite which is its seal, as means to violate its inmost import and claiming in the pride of privilege blessings promised only to self forgetting love? *For not the (Jew) in the visible sphere is a Jew; nor is circumcision in the visible sphere, in the flesh, circumcision. No, but the Jew in the hidden sphere and circumcision of heart, in spirit, not letter; circumcision in the sense of a work on the soul, wrought by God's spirit, not in that of a legal claim supposed to rest upon a routine of prescribed observance. His praise, the praise of such a Jew, the Jew in this hidden sense, thus circumcised in heart, does not come from men, but does come from God. Men may, and very likely will, give him anything but praise; they will not like him the better for his deep divergence from their standard, and from their spirit. But the Lord knows him and loves him and prepares for him his own welcome: 'Well done, good and faith' (vss. 25 29)."*

### **Paul -- A Miracle of Grace**

“Here is a passage far reaching, like the paragraphs that have gone before it. Its immediate bearing needs only brief comment, certainly brief explanation. We need do little more than wonder at the moral miracle of words like these written by one who, a few years

before, was spending the whole energy of his mighty will upon the defense of ultra Judaism. The miracle resides not only in the vastness of the man's change of view but in the manner of it. It is not only that he denounces Pharisaism, *but he denounces it in a tone entirely free from its spirit, which he might easily have carried into the opposite camp.* What he meets it with are the assertions of truth as pure and peaceable as they are eternal; the truths of the supreme and ultimate importance of the right attitude of man's heart towards God and of the inexorable connection between such an attitude and a life of unselfish love towards man. Here is one great instance of that large spiritual phenomenon, the transfiguration of the first followers of the Lord Jesus from what they had been to what under his risen power they became. We see in them men whose convictions and hopes have undergone an incalculable revolution; yet it is a revolution that disorders nothing. Rather, it has taken fanaticism for ever out of their thoughts and purposes. It has softened their whole souls towards man, as well as drawn them into the most practical and affectionate relations with every claim upon them in the world around them.

### **Symbol and Reality Contrasted**

“But the significance of this particular passage is indeed far reaching, permanent, universal. As before so here, the Apostle warns us (not only the Jew of that distant day) against the fatal but easy error of perverting privilege into pride, forgetting that every gift of God is ‘a talent’ with which the man is to trade for his Lord and for his Lord alone. But also, more explicitly here, *he warns us against that subtle tendency of man's heart to substitute, in religion, the outward for the inward, the mechanical for the spiritual, the symbol for the thing.* Who can read this passage without reflections on the privileges and on the seals of membership of the Christian church?” Who may not take warning not to put in the wrong place the sacred ordinances, as sacred as they can be because Divine, of Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Here is St. Paul dealing with circumcision, that primary rite of the Jewish church, of which such high and urgent things are said in the Hebrew scriptures. “But when he has to consider the case of one who has received the physical ordinance apart from the right attitude of soul, he speaks of the ordinance in terms a hasty reader might

think slighting. He does not slight it. He says 'it profits,' and he is soon to say more to that purpose. For him it is nothing less than God's own Seal on God's own Word, assuring the individual, as with a literal touch Divine, that all is true for him as he claims grace in humble faith. But then he contemplates the case of one who by no contempt but by force of circumstance has never received the holy seal yet believes and loves and obeys. And he lays it down that the Lord of the Covenant will honor that man's humble claim as surely as if he brought covenant document ready sealed in his hand. Not that even for him the seal if it may be had will be nothing; it will assuredly be Divine still and will be sought as God's own gift. But the principle remains that the ritual seal and the spiritual reality are separable; and that the greater thing, the thing of absolute and ultimate necessity between the soul and God, is the spiritual reality; and that where that is present, there God accepts.

It was the temptation of Israel of old to put circumcision in the place of faith, love, and holiness instead of in its right place, as the Divine imperial seal upon their covenant. It is the temptation of some Christians now to put Immersion and the Lord's Supper and the time and manner of their administration in the place of spiritual regeneration and communion rather than in their right place as Divine, imperial seals on the covenant that guarantees both to faith and consecration.

Sacred indeed are the outward and visible signs, but the inward and spiritual grace is greater.

-- P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 24

THE HERALD September 1957

*God is not a man, that he should lie; . . . hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"*

-- Number 23:19.

With the close of chapter 2, the Apostle has completed his argument that the case of the Jews, apart from a faith righteousness, is just as hopeless as in chapter 1 he has shown that of the Gentiles to be. Before going further, however, and drawing the obvious conclusions that would follow from his argument, he feels the need of anticipating and answering objections to the truths he has just developed. This he accomplishes in the first eight verses of chapter 3.

## Objections Anticipated and Answered

These eight verses in their details form perhaps one of the most difficult passages in our Epistle, yet their main import is clear enough, and their prayerful study cannot fail to furnish lessons which will be helpful to us not only now but also when we reach the more detailed discussion of the same questions which the Apostle undertakes in chapters 9 to 11. The point of chief difficulty is to determine who the speaker is in each of the verses. Some have supposed that the Apostle is here introducing a dialogue between himself and the Jew, and they assume that it is a Jew who speaks in verses 1, 3, 5, and 7 and that the Apostle in verses 2, 4, 6, and 8 replies. Others, while agreeing in the main with this view, arrange the dialogue in a somewhat different manner. Amongst those who take these views are some concerning whose devotion and scholarship there can be no question.

It must be admitted, however, that the Apostle does not here make use of the formula, "But some one will say." It cannot be denied, therefore, that he "does not formally summon an objector into the area of dispute; and consequently does not formally transfer to the objector's mouth the queries he proposes." And it

would appear to be more in harmony with the Apostle's standpoint to suppose (with many of equal devotion and scholarship to those who take the other views) that the Apostle is simply proposing these questions to himself. By thus anticipating them, he gets the opportunity of meeting and removing them.

It is doubtless true, however, that they had actually been raised against him many times by Jewish objectors in the course of his ministry. To quote from another: "As the Apostle dictates, there rises before his mind a figure often seen by his eyes, the Rabbinic disputant. Keen, subtle, unscrupulous, at once eagerly in earnest, yet ready to use any argument for victory, how often that adversary had crossed his path, in Syria, in Asia Minor, in Macedonia, in Achaia! He is present now to his consciousness, within the quiet house of Gaius; and his questions come thick and fast, following on this urgent appeal [in chapter 2] to his, alas, almost impenetrable conscience."

***What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? -- Verse 1***

The word "then" connects this question with the concluding statements of the previous chapter. It is as if the Apostle were to say: But if indeed it be the case as I have just stated it to be, that it is the Jew inwardly who is the true Jew, and circumcision of the heart the true circumcision; if the virtuous among the Gentiles are as acceptable as any of the Jews, and indeed by their conduct actually condemn those Jews who transgress the Law; there may be some among you who are drawing an erroneous inference, and, notwithstanding the fact that I have gone on record that "circumcision verily profiteth: (2:25), believe that I really deny that it does profit and that I deny that the Jewish nation has any advantage at all over the rest of mankind. And the question may be forcing itself upon the minds of some of you: If the people whom God has *elected* and marked with the *seal* of this election are to be treated exactly the same as the rest of the world, wherein lies their surplus of privilege?

The Apostle answers his own question thus:

***Much every way; chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. -- Verse 2***

## Whose Are the Fathers

“Though the advantage of the Jew does not consist in exemption from judgment, he has an advantage, nevertheless, and it is very great.” “If for example, we consider the Jews as susceptible of blissful influence in a hereditary manner, from the sires of their race, we see that they were highly exalted in privilege; for theirs were the patriarchal fathers--Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom. 9:5). If we consider them as susceptible of blissful influence from ordinances of religion, eminently significant and sublimely typical, we see again that they were peculiarly exalted in privilege, for their ritual of religious service was incomparably superior to that of all surrounding peoples (Rom. 9:4). If we consider them as susceptible of blissful influence from a legislative code of pre eminent moral purity, we see again that they were peculiarly privileged, for the core of their whole legislative system was a singularly pure and complete edition of the moral law (Rom. 9:4). If we consider them as susceptible of blissful influence from the zealous ministrations of faithful, uncorrupted, and incorruptible instructors and reformers, we see again that they were singularly privileged in having had among them a succession of holy and devoted prophets who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. If we consider them as susceptible of blissful influence from a very special Divine providence guiding them, restraining them, constraining them, hedging them round and round in the way of shutting them off from evil, and in the way of shut ting them up to good, surely we must see again that their surplus of privilege was very great. And if we consider it a means of peculiarly blissful influence to have a high ideal presented to the mind, and a lofty aspiration stirred within the heart; then in the exhibition of the Messiah to come, as the ‘Seed’ *par excellence*, that was germinally enclosed in their distinctively Abrahamic ‘seed,’ -- in this exhibition, as forming indeed the very central element of Jewish peculiarities, we see that the Jews enjoyed a privilege that was altogether unrivaled and inestimable. In short, view the subject as we may, the surplus of privilege belonging to the Jews is . . . ‘*much in every respect.*’ “

## To Whom Pertaineth the Promises

Had the Apostle intended to set forth the beneficial religious and moral influence exclusively enjoyed by the Jews in their national, domestic, and individual life, it is evident that he would have had a multitude of things to say. But it is equally clear that he would have been thus diverted from the object of his discussion. And hence he confines himself to establishing the point from which all the rest flows. This he does in the words: *chiefly [or in the first place] because that unto them were committed [or entrusted] the oracles of God.*

“When it is said that the Jews *were entrusted* with these oracles, the expression . . . indicates that it was not for their own benefit alone that the oracles were given to them. The revelation with which they were blessed was intended for wider dissemination. It was a boon for universal man. And they were trustees, for a season, for the behalf of the human race. Nevertheless they were not simply Depositaries in behalf of others. . . . They were not even simply ‘God’s Library keepers.’ . . . They themselves were heirs of the blessing which was confided to their charge. The revelation, with all its gracious and glorious promises, was a Divine message to themselves. And in the possession of it, they enjoyed for themselves an inestimable privilege. It was the Gospel in anticipation. It was the verbal word, mirroring the personal Word. It was the impersonal word of eternal life, mirroring him who is pre eminently, at once the personal Word of God and the Eternal Life of man. It was the glad tidings of salvation through the atonement that was to be. It was all this-- *with an additament*, the additament, namely of an assurance to the Jews that in consequence of the peculiarly intimate relation which the future Messiah was to sustain to their race they would meanwhile be distinguishingly blessed in the enjoyment of anticipative spiritual advantages, and eventually exalted into the dignity of being almoners of God--the dispensers of some of the richest elements of his bounty, to the world at large. They would hence be emphatically--in virtue of such prerogatives--God’s favored people--his national ‘son,’ as well as his national ‘servant,’--his ‘peculiar people.’ In addition to the fundamental promises, relating to the provision of mercy made for men, as men, the *oracles* of the Old Testament are, as a matter of fact, bestrewed, from

beginning to ending, with gems of exceeding great and precious promises relating to the provision of favor made for the Jews, as Jews. God ‘shewed his word [*K’ri*, his words, his oracles] unto Jacob; his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments they [the nations in general] have not known them’ “ ( Psa. 147:19,20).

“To insist upon this immense privilege is altogether to St. Paul’s purpose here. For it is a privilege which evidently carries an awful responsibility with it. What would be the guilt of the soul, of the community, to whom those oracles were--not given as property, but *entrusted*--and who did not do the things they said?”

### **Jewish Privileges Great, Even Though Unimproved**

But a further objection immediately arises:

*For what, if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?--Verse 3*

“It must be evident to every considerate reader that ‘the *faith* of God’ here means God’s *faithfulness*: the same word in the original is, in one passage, translated *fidelity*, and has probably the same meaning in several others (Titus 2:10; Matt. 23:23; Gal. 5:22); and the connection plainly requires this sense in the passage before us.”

The reply to the question is,

*God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar. -- Verse 4*

We have already remarked that some suppose that the words of verse 3 are not spoken by the Apostle in his own person. They imagine that the paragraph is a dialogue--a dialectical debate; and that in this verse it is a Jewish objector who speaks. Such a view, however, fails to take into consideration the significance of the connection which the opening word translated “for” makes with the words of verse 2. Indeed some translate this word “and”; others translate it “but.” To our understanding, however, verse 3 does but continue and vindicate the position which the Apostle has just taken as to the immense privilege enjoyed by the Jewish nation. It is as though he had said: I may well specify the possession of the oracles of God as a high privilege of the Jews--*for*, whatsoever may be the



actual treatment these oracles have received at the hands of my countrymen, the possession of them is nevertheless, when intrinsically considered, an inestimable boon. "They were blessed in having the oracles, and in possessing the multitudinous concomitant advantages attached to the oracles, whether they improved their high privileges or not."

### **In What Did Their Unbelief Consist?**

It has been questioned whether, when the Apostle says, "What if some did not believe?" he referred exclusively to the unbelief which had characterized their past history or whether he referred to their unbelief in and consequent rejection of the Messiah. "The tense of the verb employed by the Apostle shows, as it appears to us, that the lines of his thought were running in the plane of the past--that plane of things which covered the entire period when the Jews, as distinguished from the Gentiles, *were entrusted with the oracles of God*. But, logically, his reference was not confined to this plane. His eye swept, indeed, over the past ages; but it ranged down ward through those ages till it rested on what had been, and was still, transpiring since 'the fullness of the time' had arrived and since that illustrious Person age had appeared, in whom the precious promises of God were 'yea and amen,' and who, in his own grand personality, is the Consummation and the Sum of the oracles of God. What matters it, says the Apostle, though some believed not?--that is--What matters it though many in the bygone ages have lived and died without faith in the true import of the oracles of God and thus without faith in the Great Propitiator? -- And what matters it, though many of their descendants now living are walking in their footsteps, have refused to believe that which is the very Sum and Substance of their own precious Scriptures?--What signifies all this so far as the question of prerogative is concerned?" The possession of those oracles constituted a veritable and inestimable privilege to them, whether they believed in them or not.

### **The Chief Promises Conditional**

Some have supposed that the reason the Apostle is able to affirm that the faithfulness of God will not fail, but that his promises to Israel will be made good to them (not withstanding the unbelief of some), lies in

the fact that there was within “nominal” Israel a secretly elected Israel in whose blessed experiences the promises would be realized. But the Apostle’s affirmation rests on no such grounds. Had he chosen he might have said: “For what if *none* believed?” Although all Israel had proved to be unbelieving, their want of faith would not in the least have evacuated or diminished or dimmed the faithfulness of God. What God had unconditionally promised, that he would unconditionally fulfill; and what was promised only conditionally would wait, with untarnished honor, for its fulfillment on the forthcoming of the condition. Personal enjoyment of the chief blessings exhibited and promised in the oracles is suspended on the condition of *faith*. “When this faith was withheld, the blessings referred to could not be enjoyed; and yet the faithfulness of God in (conditionally) promising them and in (unconditionally) promising the propitiatory ground on which they rested is unimpeached and unimpeachable.”

### Let God Be True

“The Apostle does not, in this place, enter on the formal proof of the consistency of the rejection of the unbelieving Jews with the Divine promise. The main argument by which this consistency is established rests on the distinction between Jews by birth and Jews in spirit, stated in the end of the preceding chapter; between the circumcision of the heart and circumcision in the flesh. To this argument he gives due prominence in the beginning of the ninth chapter; and we shall not now anticipate the illustration of it. In the passage before us he assumes a different ground. He indignantly repels the implied charge against the Divine faithfulness, on account of its obvious and shocking impiety; its flagrant opposition to the necessary and acknowledged character of God. It is as if he had said-- Let what will be the solution of the *seeming* difficulty, *this* assuredly can never be. The immutable veracity of the God of truth must, at all events, be free from impeachment. Let not the suspicion of the contrary be harbored even for an instant. Let not the possibility of it be so much as supposed. Let the very thought be rejected, with shuddering abhorrence, as a thought that should never have been formed. Should the acknowledgment implicate all creatures in falsehood--let God be true.”

“The Apostle confirms his sentiment by a quotation from the fifty first Psalm:--’That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.’ The passage is quoted as it stands in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament. In our English version the words are ‘that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.’”

“Without entering into any discussion of the causes that may have produced the diversities between the Septuagint translation and the original Hebrew, . . . we would remark in general that wherever the New Testament writers make their quotations from the Septuagint we may be sure the *sense* must be the same although the words may be somewhat different. If the writers of the Old and the New Testaments were inspired, this is a necessary inference from their inspiration. At the same time it ought to be observed that such quotations are by no means to be considered as giving an inspired sanction to the translation as a whole from which they are taken; but merely as confirming the correctness with respect to sense of the passage quoted. In the case before us the reader will perceive that the difference is merely verbal. God is addressed in the passage by the penitent psalmist as an offended Sovereign and Judge. For such an One to be ‘clear when he is judged’ is to have his character for righteousness and truth established when his conduct is tried. This amounts, in effect, to much the same thing with his being ‘clear (that is clear of any fault or blame) when he judges’--impartially just in the sentence pronounced by him. While David, in these words, expresses with deep self abasement his personal conviction of the justice of God in visiting his sins with deserved punishment, he at the same time declares a universal truth, applicable in its full extent, to the whole of the Divine procedure. In this light his words are used by the inspired Apostle.” --

P.L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 25, THE HERALD, October 1957

*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Genesis 18:25*  
*He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in*  
*righteousness -- Acts 17:31*

IN OUR consideration of the first four verses of chapter three we were led to the following conclusions: (1) The Jews had a great advantage or surplus of privilege over that enjoyed by the Gentiles.

(2) This advantage may be seen, in the first place, in that to them were entrusted the oracles of God. (See Rom. 9:4,5 for a further display of Jewish privileges.)

(3) Their failure to profit by these privileges did not make them any less real or splendid. And (4) The oracles of God contained a promise of eternal life. Nevertheless, even though every Jew were to perish and none of them were to secure eternal life, it could not be said that God's promises to them had failed, for *they were not unconditional but conditioned on faith and obedience*. They were made not to him who is a Jew outwardly but to him who is a Jew inwardly--to circumcision of the heart not to that of the flesh. (See this argument fully developed in Rom. 9:6-13.)

## Is There Unrighteousness with God?

Instead of now proceeding to discuss other privileges enjoyed by the Jew, the Apostle anticipates and meets a further objection to the points established. *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 (vss. 5,6)?*

When things are placed together, "it often happens that one appears to advantage by the side of another in virtue of the influence of the contrast. It is set off. It is made more striking and conspicuous. This is the meaning of the term [here translated commend]."

God's righteousness, faithfulness, truthfulness is commended, set off, made more conspicuous by the

unrighteousness of men. This is true in relation to the unrighteousness of all men, although the Apostle is concerned just now with contrasting God's righteousness with the unrighteousness of the Jew. Since then man's unrighteousness (the Jew's in this instance) sets off God's righteousness, is it righteous on God's part to judge an act he turns to his own advantage? Such seems to be the objection raised. The expression "What shall we say," indicates a brief voluntary pause in thought. "In using it, the Apostle seems to have stopped for a moment, that he might reweigh the idea or expression that was rushing forward for utterance. It is fitted to lead the reader to collect himself; while it makes him feel his inquisitiveness whetted and also brings him abreast with the Apostle in the conscious exercise of the logical faculty." *But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say?*

In presenting the question "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?" the Apostle says "I speak as a man." It is as though he said: When I ask this question, I am deeply conscious that I am using language that is intrinsically improper when applied to God. But in condescension to human weakness, I transfer to him language which it is customary for men to employ when referring to human relationships. To the question "Is God unrighteous," etc., the Apostle replies "God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" (A more complete discussion appears in Rom. 9:14-18.) The reasoning in this reply has been clearly stated by another thus: "If God's drawing a good result from a bad deed were enough to destroy his right to judge him who committed it, the final judgment would evidently become impossible; for as God is always turning to good the evil which men have devised, every sinner could plead in his defense: My sin has after all served some good end." Or as another suggests: "No final judgment is any longer possible if the beneficial consequences of sin, . . . [Gentile] or Jewish, justify the sinner. This idea is exactly that which is expounded in the two following verses."

## **Sinners to be Punished Notwithstanding the Overruling of Their Sin to God's Praise**

*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” (vss. 7,8).*

“When the Apostle ascribes to the occasion of his life a superabounding of the trueness of God, he does not refer of course to any intrinsic increase of the subjective moral excellence of God. The notion of such an increase would be utterly inconsistent with the inspired man's conceptions of the infinite perfection and independence of God. The overplus referred to is entirely relative to the apprehensions of men and other intelligent creatures.”

The “lie” is most naturally to be explained as representing the false profession of the Jews, by which they claimed to be the people of God, while living in rebellion to him. They said they were Jews and were not but did lie, just as many in nominal spiritual Israel have done since (Rev. 3:9). By contrast with such a “lie,” such untrueness, unfaithfulness to the claims of conscience and of God, the truth of God superabounds to his glory. His holiness blazes forth into brighter conspicuousness against such a dark background.

When the Apostle says, “my” lie, he is speaking representatively. It is as though he were to say: I may well ask the question: How shall God, on the principles mentioned, judge the world? For, let me represent the case of an individual belonging to the vast class of the unbelieving and ungodly. Any such individual might come before the Judge and say to him on his own behalf: I, too, by my lie have contributed to thy glory. And he must be acquitted.

### **Good Ends Do Not Justify Evil Means**

In verse eight the Apostle pushes his refutation to the utmost. “Why not go even further? Why, after annihilating the judgment, not to be thoroughly consequent say further: And let us even furnish God by sinning more freely with richer opportunities of doing good! Will not every sin be a material which he will transform into the pure gold of his glory?”

Why not do evil that good may come, as some slanderously report us to do and as some affirm that we teach?

It will be noted that the Apostle refers to two distinct “allegations which had obtained more or less currency regarding himself and his Christian brethren. The one was a charge against their conduct: the other was a charge in reference to their doctrine. They were (1) calumniously reported to do evil that good might come; and (2) they were represented as directly or indirectly maintaining that it was a right thing, in certain circumstances at least, to do as they were reported to do.”

“It is plain that the charge of untruth was for some reason or another often thrown at St. Paul; we see this in the marked urgency with which from time to time he asserts his truthfulness; ‘The things which I say, behold, before God, I lie not’ (Gal. 1:20); ‘I speak the truth in Christ and lie not’ (Rom. 9:1). Perhaps the manifold sympathies of his heart gave innocent occasion sometimes for the charge. The man who could be ‘all things to all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22), taking with a genuine insight their point of view, and saying things which showed that he took it, would be very likely to be set down by narrower minds as untruthful. And the very boldness of his teaching might give further occasion, equally innocent; as he asserted at different times with equal emphasis, opposite sides of truth. But these somewhat subtle excuses for false witness against this great master of holy sincerity would not be necessary where genuine malice was at work. No man is so truthful that he cannot be charged with falsehood; and no charge is so likely to injure even where it only feigns to strike. And of course the mighty paradox of Justification lent itself easily to the distortions, as well as to the contradictions, of sinners. ‘Let us do evil that good may come,’ no doubt represented the report which prejudice and bigotry would regularly carry away and spread after every discourse and every argument about free forgiveness. It is so still: ‘If this is true, then the worst sinner makes the best saint.’ Things like this have been current sayings since Luther, since Whitefield, and till now.” “We need not anticipate the reply given to such reasoning or rather to such slander, for of reasoning it deserves not the name. The Apostle answers it at large, and in the most impressive and satisfactory

manner in the sixth chapter.” “Here the allusion is too passing to bring this out.”

“Of those who thus slandered not merely the Apostles personally but the truth they preached, the holy cause in which they were engaged, and who, by their ignorant and impious cavils and misrepresentations, encouraged both themselves and others in rejecting the only way of salvation, ‘the damnation was just.’” This does not refer to their final destiny, although doubtless if they persisted in their conduct and failed to repent, it would result in their eventual destruction. The word ‘damnation,’ however, properly signifies judgment, and in this place means that the conduct of those who thus slandered the Apostles and perverted their doctrines was richly deserving of condemnation and punishment. It should be well observed however that “the Apostle does not express himself thus till he has satisfied all the demands of logical discussion.”

“ ‘Whose doom is just.’ What a witness is this to the inalienable truthfulness of the Gospel! This brief, stern utterance absolutely repudiates all apology for means by end; all seeking of even the good of men by the way of saying the thing that is not. Deep and strong, almost from the first, has been the temptation to the Christian man to think otherwise, until we find whole systems of casuistry developed whose aim seems to be to go as near the edge of untruthfulness as possible, if not beyond it, in religion. But the New Testament sweeps the entire idea of the pious fraud away with this short thunder peal, ‘Their doom is just.’ It will hear of no holiness that leaves out truthfulness; no word, no deed, no habit that even with the purest purpose belies the God of reality and veracity.”

### **Our Privileges Too Are Very Great, Let Us Not Fail to Improve Them**

“Notwithstanding its temporary application to the Jewish people, this passage (3:1 8), which will find its complete explanation in chapter 11, has a real and permanent value.”

“In the first place we may observe that the gifts of God, the favors and privileges he bestows, are not the less to be viewed as advantages . . . [because] they are liable to be misimproved, and . . . [because] their



misimprovement aggravates condemnation. We might think, and in one view should think justly, that it would have been better for the unbelieving Jews not to have possessed the 'Oracles of God'; because their guilt would thus have been mitigated. And thus, too, it is with all who now possess the Word of God and the opportunity of hearing the Gospel, . . . [and] who hear and treat the message with scorn and rejection. . . . Yet surely it will never on this account be denied, that to possess the Word of God and to hear the Gospel of God's grace are eminent advantages; in the same manner as the bounties of Providence are 'good things,' although the abuse of them enhances the guilt of their possessors."

### **Let God Be True**

"In the second place, there are some principles that in all our reasonings we ought to assume as fixed--necessarily and immutable true--from the full assurance of which we should never allow our minds to be shaken by any perplexing appearances or by any want of ability on the part of finite and fallible creatures fully to explain every seeming difficulty. Such a principle is 'the righteousness of God.' Deprive him of this perfection and he would cease to be God. Whatever difficulties, then, we may in this respect discover in comparing the ways of his providence with the attributes of his nature, surely it is infinitely more becoming to impute them to the limited and feeble nature of our own faculties than to admit for an instant into our minds the remotest suspicion that there can be 'unrighteousness with God.' We should beware of even for argument's sake allowing our selves to make suppositions injurious to the Divine character." The Apostle himself, as the reader will have observed, seemed to be "in a strait" between the wish to represent correctly the objection he was anticipating and answering and the dread of speaking one really irreverent word. "I speak," he says, "as a man," "as if this question of balanced rights and wrongs were one between man and man, not between man and Eternal God. Such talk, even for argument's sake, is impossible for the regenerate soul except under urgent protest."

"Let God be esteemed true and faithful, whatever consequence may follow. This was a first principle and should be now that God should be believed to be a

God of truth, whatever consequences it might involve. How happy would it be if all men would regard this as a fixed principle, a matter not to be questioned in their hearts or debated about, that God is true to his word! How much doubt and anxiety it would save professing Christians; and how much error it would save among sinners! Amidst all the agitations of the world, all conflicts, debates, and trials it would be a fixed position where every man might find rest, and which would do more than all other things to allay the tempests and smooth the agitated waves of human life.” With the Apostle it was assumed as a first principle in all his reasoning that if a doctrine “implied that God was not faithful, it was of course a false doctrine. . . . What a noble principle is this! . . . And if all men were willing to sacrifice their opinions when they appeared to impinge on the veracity of God; if they started back with instinctive shuddering at the very supposition of such a want of fidelity in him; how soon would it put an end to the boastings of error, to the pride of philosophy, to lofty dictation in religion!”

### **Be Always True to Conscience**

In the third place let us beware of exercising our intellect at the expense of conscience. It is plain that only from such a state of mind could the objections anticipated by St. Paul arise. The maxim of doing evil that good may come, of sinning that grace may abound, St. Paul clearly treats as contemptible when its true character has once been disclosed. “And why? Because it is professedly an explanation of the ways of God with man, which is at the same time an excuse for immorality. . . . And St. Paul shows, by the very contempt with which he treats it, that a man who will play false with his conscience and then proceed to find intellectual justifications is not to be met in the intellectual region at all. He has been condemned already.

“St. Paul then, we find, will not argue with one who reasons at the expense of his conscience; and this is an important principle. When the intellect is acting purely, it must be free and must be dealt with seriously on its own ground. But the conscience must be followed first of all. Its light is clearer than the light of intellect and must be left supreme. Whatever be the bewilderment of my intellect, I am self

condemned, God condemned, if I play false to the moral light. And arguments to the contrary, however clever sounding or philosophical are in fact sophistry.”

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

## No. 26

*THE HERALD, December 1957*

In our previous meditations we have noted that the Apostle has demonstrated that the Jews as well as the Gentiles are fit subjects of God's true or impartial judgment. He has anticipated the objection: "But in that case, what becomes of Jewish privilege?" And he has shown that real and great though it be, it can not hinder their rejection and judgment. He now asks,

*What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. -- Chapter 3, Verse 9.*

### Have We Jews A Defense?

Some diversity of viewpoint has been held as to the meaning of the word which in our *Authorized Version* is translated "are we better (than they)?" One writer, though himself preferring another translation, informs us that "the great body of expositors, both ancient and modern, have supposed that it must mean, *do we excel?*" It is so translated in the *Diaglott*. This writer, however, notes "an insuperable objection to this interpretation of the verb, that it is absolutely without precedent. The verb in the active voice does mean, in the neuter branch of its import, *to excel*. But *it has no such import in the middle voice*. The most learned of those who contend for the interpretation make the admission."

Those who so desire may see the meaning of this word exhaustively considered in the works of eminent

scholars. We content ourselves here with presenting the conclusion of the writer from whom we have above quoted. After an elaborate treatise, in the course of which he shows the word to have been used by ancient writers in the sense of *defense*, and that a loyalty to this sense of the word appears in the works of many expositors, some of whom “sit on the very highest bench of scholarship,” he concludes that “there can be no reasonable room for doubting that the word in the passage before us, means, *Do we put forth pleas in self defense? that is, Do we defend ourselves (before the tribunal of God?)*”

### No, in No Wise

The question, *What then?* with which verse 9 commences most naturally refers to the preceding paragraph, namely, that the advantage possessed by the Jew in his peculiar relations and institutions is *much in every respect*. It is as though the Apostle were to say, Since it is the case that the privileges of the Jew, whatever use or abuse may be made of them, are much in every respect, what then? In maintaining that the prerogative of the Jews is much in every respect, do we Jews thereby bring forth a plea for the justification of our moral state and in defense of our

To this question the Apostle replies: “*No, in no right to everlasting life? wise.*” “In asking this question, and answering it as he does, the Apostle does not mean that there would be none among his countrymen who would be ready to defend themselves in judgment. He means that when he himself speaks in reference to them, and as far as possible in their behalf, and as one of them, he will not, and does not, and cannot speak in the way of defense. He cannot plead, *Not guilty*. He was profoundly convinced that guilt was attaching to himself for his own unrighteousness. And he was equally sure that it was attaching to all his countrymen for theirs. Such is the significance of the Apostle’s identification of himself with the mass of his countrymen when he says ‘we.’ “

The Apostle gives the reason, or at least a reason, why he did not and would not and could not put in pleas for them. It would be utterly inconsistent on his part to attempt any such defense: “*For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.*” The word translated “proved” properly means “charged” or “impeached.” The Apostle is

referring here to his impeachment of the Gentiles in chapter 1, verses 18-32, and of the Jews in chapter 2, verses 1-29. In those passages he not only charged both Gentiles and Jews as being all under sin, but maintained that the Gentiles are “without excuse” (1:20), and the Jews inexcusable” (2:1). “The expression, ‘under sin’ is pictorially significant. By a natural personification -- specially familiar to the mind of our Apostle -- sin is represented as being the lord of the sinner. For the moment that a man commits sin, he makes a slave of himself and is liable for ever afterwards, unless Divine mercy interpose, to be under the lash of retribution.”

### It is Written

The Apostle having stated that he had “charged both Jews and Gentiles with being all under sin,” proceeds to prove that his accusation is in full accord with the Old Testament scriptures.

*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.” -- Verses 10-18*

Here St. Paul groups together into a cluster a number of detached Old Testament statements which attest the legitimacy of his impeachment. “In drawing this picture, which is only a grouping together of strokes of the pencil, made by the hands of psalmists and prophets, he does not certainly mean that each of these characteristics is found equally developed in every man. Some, even the most of them, may remain latent in many men; but they all exist in germ in the selfishness and natural pride of the *ego*, and the least circumstance may cause them to pass into the active state, when the fear [reference] of God does not govern the heart.”

## The Reverence of the Lord is the Principal Part of Wisdom

What a commentary these quotations make on the wise man's counsel: "The reverence of the Lord is the beginning [the principal part] of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). And of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). *There is none that understandeth*, quotes the Apostle. "From the standpoint both of the psalmist and of the Apostle and indeed of all biblical writers, every man is deficient in understanding (see Rom. 1:21,31), who does not apply his intelligence to the things which concern his relations to God--so as to be guided aright in his conduct in reference to God. All the finite objects on which the intelligence may terminate are but intended to be the rounds of a ladder by which the mind may mount up to God. He who does not mount by means of these objects, *does not understand, is not wise*. He has not grasped the realities of things in their true relations. He does not construe aright the lesson which is spread out before him."

In the language of one well known to, and much esteemed and loved by, the readers of this journal: "To render all we have to the Lord's service is not only a reasonable thing, but an offering far too small far less than what we would like to render to him who has manifested such compassion and grace toward us. And we should feel thus, even if there were no rewards attached to . . . a consecration of ourselves. But inasmuch as God has attached great rewards and blessings, we should feel that a refusal to accept would be an indication of non appreciation of Divine mercy and . . . *an indication also of weakness of mind, of judgment, which is unable to balance the trifling and transitory pleasures of self will for a few short years, with an eternity of joy and blessing and glory, in harmony with the Lord.*"

## Corruption in Word and Deed

The careful student will not fail to notice that there is an appreciable method in the arrangement of the Old Testament scriptures which the Apostle groups together here that form such an appallingly accurate picture of human depravity. First the *universality* of sin is affirmed, and the *more general characteristics* of human corruption are mentioned (vss. 10-12). Next the prevalence of sin in speech is specified, both the

coarse as well as the sugared tongue (vss. 13, 14). In the next three verses (15-17), the picture of human depravity manifesting itself in word is completed by the description of the same wickedness *showing itself in deeds*. Finally, in verse 18, the *fountain* from which all this evil of both word and deed flows is specified. The overflow of all this depravity arises from a sad void--the absence of true piety, of that sense of reverence for God which should have filled the human heart.

Such is the conclusion which the Apostle reaches in regard to the whole human race. But the Jew might yet object that many of these Old Testament quotations referred not to them but to the Gentiles. St. Paul foresees this object, and in the next verse, 19, takes care to set it aside so that nothing may impair the sweep of the sentence which God pronounces on the state of mankind.

### To Whom Does the Law Speak?

*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." -- Verse 19*

The point of importance which the Apostle would here emphasize is contained in the words "to them." It is undoubtedly true that many portions of the Old Testament spoke of Gentiles, as for example, in those passages of scripture in which we read of "the burden of Egypt, the burden of Damacus, the burden of Edom, the burden of Nineveh," etc. In such passages there is no question but that the Lord through his prophets is describing the sins and impending punishment of Gentile nations. But even such passages while speaking of Gentiles were spoken to *Israel for their special benefit*. "It is obvious indeed, that the Old Testament, while depicting to the Jews the wickedness of the Gentiles, did not at all mean to embitter them against the latter, *but to put them on their guard against the same sins*, and preserve them from the same judgments; a proof that God say in their hearts the same germs of corruption, and foresaw their inevitable development if the Jews did not remain faithful to him."

When the Apostle says, "we know," he seems to be appealing to the common sense of his readers, who ever they might be, Jews, Gentiles, or Christians. He

is treading on ground which cannot be disputed. It is as though he were to say: “We know every one does, that what things soever the law saith (or contains), and these things especially which I have just quoted, *are spoken to them that are under the law*, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world, *not excepting the Jews*, become liable to pay penalty to God.”

### **That Every Mouth May Be Stopped**

“Oh solemn silence, when at last it comes! The harsh or muffled voices of self defense, of self assertion, are hushed at length. The man, like one of old, when he saw his righteous self in the light of God, ‘lays his hand on his mouth’ (Job 40:4) “ He leaves speech to God and learns at last to listen. What shall he hear? An eternal repudiation? An objurgation, and then a final and exterminating anathema? No, something far other, and better, and more wonderful. But there must first be silence on man’s part if it is to be heard. Hear--and your souls shall live.

“So the great argument pauses, gathered up into an utterance which at once concentrates what has gone before and prepares us for a glorious sequel. Shut thy mouth, O man, and listen now:

***Because by means of works of law there shall be justified no flesh in his presence; for by means of law comes--moral knowledge of sin. -- Verse 20***

--P.L. Read



# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 27, THE HERALD, January 1958

Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins.-- 1  
*John 3:5*

To bring in everlasting righteousness. -- *Daniel 9:24*

*WITH the twentieth verse of chapter 3, the Apostle, we have seen, brought to a close his long argument in proof of the world's need of salvation. The next section extends from 3:21 to 5:11. Therein is expounded God's provision to meet the great need of mankind. The Apostle has shown that the great need of the world, both of Jew and Gentile, is righteousness and that so far from their attaining righteousness by keeping the requirements of law, the moral law possessed by Gentiles only reveals their sinfulness while that same moral law, as expressed in the written law given to Israel, similarly condemns the Jews--for by law (moral law, of course, not ceremonial law) is knowledge of sin (3:20).*

## **Man's Extremity God's Opportunity**

In this section, 3:21 to 5:11, man's extremity is shown to be God's opportunity. The age old question, "How can man be just [righteous] with God" (Job 9:2, R.V.)? is answered. God himself has revealed the way--the only way--in which this can be. It is a way of faith--a righteousness (or justification) by faith.

In the exposition of this section three principal ideas are developed:

- (1) The great fact of history by which justification (or righteousness) by faith is made available for mankind, namely, the ransom sacrifice of Jesus (3:21-26);
- (2) This, God's method of justifying mankind, is not out of harmony with the Law, but as the case of Abraham proves, is in agreement with and is attested by it (3:27--4:25);

(3) Man, justified by faith, has a well grounded hope, not for the present only but for all the future, including the final judgment (5:1 11).

The careful student will have already noted that verse 21 of chapter 3 is directly connected in sense with the seventeenth verse of chapter 1. “In the interval from 1:18 to 3:20, the Apostle has shown that the wrath of God rests on mankind, whence it follows that if the world is not to perish, a Divine manifestation of an opposite kind, and able to overcome the first, is indispensable. It is this new revelation which forms the subject of the following passage.” It is interesting, too, to observe “how rigorously the Apostle adheres to order in his work.” Our readers will remember that when, in chapter 1, he discussed the failure of the Gentiles, he stated in condensed form, in verse 18, all of the ideas developed in the remaining verses of that chapter. They will remember, also, that on turning to a discussion of the Jews, he condensed the theme of chapter 2 in its first two verses. Now, once more, in the passage before us, we find a similar procedure obtaining. Verses 21 and 22 (of chap. 3) contain the theme of the six verses 21 26 as well as of the whole section (3:21--5:11). “Verse 23 once more sums up the thought of the preceding section (1:18--3:20); and verses 24 26 are the development of the subject, the exposition of the new way of justification.”

### **“But Now”**

***But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (3:21).***

“The word translated “But” is strongly adversative; it contrasts the revelation of righteousness with that of wrath.” The wrath of God is revealed from heaven (1:18), but now the righteousness (by faith) of (or from) God is manifested (3:21). “We notice how completely different in tone from the preceding section is the section before us. A moment ago we heard, and our conscience re echoed within us, the thunders of the Law. Suddenly in the midst of our self condemnation the cheerful voice of the Gospel gladdens our ears.”

The word translated “now” has been understood by some to have a logical rather than a temporal import. “Instead of understanding it as having *reference to*

that ‘fullness of the time’ which, in the ongoing of the ages, had just been reached,” they suppose it to have the logical meaning, which it must be admitted it frequently has in the New Testament (as for example, “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” [Rom 7:17; “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you? [I Cor. 14:6] ). Thus understood the word would mean “The situation being such.” But while we fully agree that the Apostle is contrasting the condemnation pronounced by law (v. 20) and the new righteousness acquired without the law (v. 21), yet this does not prevent us from understanding the word “now” to mean “at this time,” that is to say, under the Gospel or New Testament dispensation. This, the temporal, is its usual import; as for example “The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is manifest” (Rom. 16:25,26). This meaning, moreover, is in harmony with the context: “to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness” --Verse 26.

### **Apart from Law**

God’s righteousness has been manifested, says the Apostle, apart from law. In the Authorized Version the phrase is rendered “without the law,” but the Greek does not indicate the article “the,” and scholars tell us that the phrase is better translated “without law” or “apart from law.”

“The law referred to is not merely the law of nature possessed by the Gentiles. Nor is it merely the Jewish law. It is that same law which is spoken of in the preceding verse--through which is knowledge of sin, and by obedience to the works of which no flesh shall be justified.” It is the moral law of God which apprises man of his duty, “whether as explicitly revealed in words to the Jews, or as implicitly without words to the Gentiles all the world over. Such appears to be the reference of the Apostle.”

Again the phrase “without law” or “apart from law” instead of being affixed is, in the Greek, *prefixed to the affirmation, and is so translated in the Revised Version, Emphatic Diaglott, etc.* Rotherham, for example, translates the passage thus: “but, now, apart from law, a righteousness of God has been manifested.” His translation, which is of special value in indicating where the emphasis should be placed, underscores the words “a righteousness of God” but

doubly underscores the phrase “now, apart from law.” As Morrison observes: “This position of the phrase, in the foreground of the affirmation, shows, moreover, that it is intended to bear the burden of a special emphasis. In enunciation it should be betoned. For there is an antithetic reference to the statement of the preceding verse in relation to the moral law: ‘by works of law there shall nobody be justified before God; for through law is recognition of sin.’ But though it is thus in vain for unrighteous men to have recourse to law (the moral law) in order to obtain justification, still their case is not hopeless. Justification may be obtained in another way. ‘But now, apart from law, God’s righteousness has been manifested.’ “

### **The Righteousness of God**

The expression “righteousness of God” in verse 21, is one we have already met (chap. 1:17). The meaning here is the same. In neither place would the phrase appear to denote an attribute of God, but in both the reference seems to be to a righteousness having God for its author, a righteousness which may become, yea, is destined by the favor of God to be come an attribute of man, a righteousness of or from God. Since we have discussed this phrase at some length in the exposition of 1:17, we will not duplicate the matter here. Those who so desire may review the subject in “Meditations No. 15,” **HERALD**, August September, 1956.

### ***Has Been Manifested***

Again, the word “is manifested” reminds us of the word “is revealed” in 1:17. We read there that God’s righteousness is being revealed in the Gospel. Some suppose “that the Apostle had the same idea present to his mind in writing verse 21, chapter 3, and that he, consequently, means that the righteousness ‘has been manifested in the Gospel. So undoubtedly it has, secondarily. Primarily, it was manifested in the career of Christ Jesus: in the events, inner and outer, of his life and death; in what he voluntarily did and voluntarily endured. These events constitute the subject matter of the Gospel; and in them there was exhibited to view the righteousness wrought out and brought in by Christ. God’s righteousness for

unrighteous men was, in these events, manifested in actual fact. It had indeed been 'promised afore' (see chap. 1:2). But though promised, it was 'a mystery' in some respects, 'kept secret since the world began.' It could be only dimly seen. It was obscure. It was veiled. But 'now it is made manifest.' In our authorized English Version the verb is rendered 'is manifested.' . . . But the perfect tense represents the manifestation as a completed historical fact. Such an idea is peculiarly appropriate, when we regard the manifestation as accomplished in the life and death of the Savior. In the expression, again, 'is revealed' as occurring in chapter 1:17, the present tense as appropriately represents the continuous disclosure which is afforded in the enduring and indeed 'everlasting' Gospel."

### **Being Witnessed by the Law and the Prophets**

From the fact that this righteousness for unrighteous men is apart from moral law it must not be supposed that it is in contradiction to the Old Testament revelation. On the contrary it is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. By the expression "the Law and the Prophets" we are evidently to understand the Old Testament scriptures, "the Law" in this case referring to the Pentateuch and "the Prophets" to the remainder of the Old Testament (including the Psalms).

"It is, of course, impossible for us to know what were the particular testimonies which elicited his special attention as his mind flashingly traversed the contents of the Law and the prophets. We need not doubt that he thought of Abraham when he glanced at the Law, for he dwells upon his case in relation to evangelical righteousness in the fourth chapter of this Epistle. We may rest assured too that in turning to the prophets he thought of what David says in the thirty second psalm, for he quotes from that psalm in the same fourth chapter. He would also think of the testimony from Habakkuk, quoted in 1:17, which is indeed the Old Testament fountain head of the Apostle's phase of the New Testament theology. And we may reasonably suppose that his mind took a bird's eye view of all the prominent passages, both in the Law and the Prophets, in which the propitiation of the Messiah or the salvation bound up in that propitiation is referred to. For in all these glorious

passages, the one great and glorious idea is either explicitly exhibited or implicitly suggested, that justification (unattainable as it is through the personal righteousness of unrighteous men) is attainable through that work of the Savior which is, in one of the most gracious of its phases, God's righteousness for the unrighteous. We know that the Apostle was familiar with such passages. On another occasion we read that 'he expounded' to the Roman Jews 'and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening' (Acts 28: 23). In this matter he looked as through the eyes of Christ himself, who, 'beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, expounded unto his disciples in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24: 27). 'These are the things,' said he, 'which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me' (Luke 24:44). And Peter saw as Paul saw. 'To Christ,' says he, 'give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' "(Acts 10:43).

*--P.L. Read*

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 28, THE HERALD, February 1958

*The Lord our righteousness.*—Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16

The “righteousness of [or from] God,” which “now,” “apart from law,” “has been manifested” in the life and death of the Savior; the righteousness which is “attested by the Law and the Prophets,” is still further elaborated by the Apostle. It is even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe (Rom. 3:22).

## Evangelical Righteousness

These words are obviously in explanation of what has just been said in verse 21. The expression “righteousness of God” is capable of more than one meaning, and the Apostle would leave us in no doubt as to which meaning he intends—to which righteousness he refers. His words have been well paraphrased by another thus: “God’s righteousness, I have said, has been manifested. It is true; and an all important truth. *But*, let it be borne in mind that the righteousness of which I speak is not that in the possession of which God himself is righteous; but it is that which he has provided for unrighteous men—that which is to them through faith in Jesus Christ.” This explanatory use of the word “even” may be seen elsewhere in the Scriptures, as for example: “The Gentiles . . . have attained to righteousness, *even* the righteousness which is of faith (Rom. 9:30). “He [Jesus]. . . became obedient unto death, *even* the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

## Through Faith in Jesus

“When the Apostle says, ‘through [or by] faith of Jesus Christ’ . . . he evidently means, ‘through faith *in* Jesus Christ.’ The genitive of the Savior’s complex name is objective. . . . Compare such expressions as . . . ‘the faith *of* the Gospel’ (Phil. 1:27; ‘faith’ or ‘belief of the truth’ (2 Thess. 2:13).” See also James 2:1:

“My brethren, have not the faith *of* our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” In these passages the evident intention of the inspired writers is “faith *in* the Gospel”; “faith, or belief, *in* the truth”; “faith *in* our Lord Jesus Christ.” Some, however, have supposed that in Romans 3:22 the reference is not to faith in Jesus but to faith *possessed by* Jesus, that faith which he maintained even through the ordeal of the crucifixion. There can be no doubt, however, that the faith here spoken of is the same as that referred to in the great theme text of this epistle (1:17), and also in Romans 9:30, quoted above. In neither of these texts is there any mention of Jesus Christ, and consequently there is no room for supposing that the faith referred to is that *possessed by* him.

### Faith Brings Jesus Near

The word “faith” we have already discussed in connection with 1:17. (See Meditations Nos. 15 and 16.) “Its import is nothing recondite; otherwise it would be a term altogether unsuitable for being used in an exhibition of the duty of universal man, uncultured as well as cultured. Faith is such a persuasion or conviction of the mind in reference to things unseen, and so far as direct intuition is concerned, unknown, as supplies the place of vision or envisaging. Its moral power, in its relation to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is resolvable into the peculiarity of its object, and not into any peculiarity in the act. What is needed, consequently, in order to continuous and continuously increasing peace, joy, hope, gratefulness, holiness, and devotedness is that faith be directed continuously and with continuously increasing breadth and depth of range to its glorious Object. He who ‘lives by faith’ in Jesus, is continuously present with Jesus in the most exalted way in which presence can be realized; . . .—in mind, in thought.

And the power of the presence of Jesus . . . is, when the presence becomes to the inner eye intensely self-evidencing and luminous, imperial. It is apparently in virtue of this mighty moral power of faith in Jesus that it has been divinely invested with what is called its justifying function.”



I need thee every hour;  
Stay thou near by;  
Temptations lose their power  
When Thou art nigh.

### Unto All and Upon All

Scholars tell us that “there is some difficulty in determining the correct reading of the clause” which in our Authorized Version is translated “unto all and upon all them that believe.” The phrase “and upon all” is not found in the four oldest Greek manuscripts, yet as we learned in Meditations No. 9, this fact, though of considerable weight, is not necessarily conclusive. In the present case the great body of critics agree that “it seems to be more difficult to account for its admission into the text [of those manuscripts and ancient translations which contain it], if spurious, than for its omission [from those documents which do not contain it], if genuine.” If the genuine text reads: “unto all and upon all them that believe,” it is easy to understand how a copyist could have written “unto all them that believe,” accidentally or (through a failure to distinguish the two thoughts of the Apostle) intentionally omitting the words “and upon all.” On the other hand if the genuine text reads: “unto all them that believe,” it is very unlikely that a copyist would have accidentally interpolated the words “and upon all,” and it is not easy to understand why he should have intentionally done so.

But what then, is the distinction between the phrases “unto all” and “upon all”? Many expositors see no distinction, but believe that the Apostle is merely repeating one idea for the sake of intensity. “I see no difference,” says one, “more than betwixt Aaron’s beard, and the beard of Aaron.”

Yet, as another has observed, the Apostle was “fond of using his prepositions *distinguishingly*,” as for example, in Romans 9:35, “For *of* him and *through* him, and *to* him, are all things.” (Here, surely, he is saying three things, not repeating one thing three times.) “And it should certainly be our very last resort to suppose that his discriminative use the two which are employed in the case before us is unmeaning. There does seem to be an ascent in the thought. And unless it is utterly impossible to work out this climactic idea—in consistency with sobriety, and with the scope of revelation and with the facts of human

experience—we should not fall back upon the idea of mere indiscriminative accumulation.”

### Unto All Men—Upon All Believers

It would be unbecoming in us to express our view of this passage dogmatically, especially in view of the difficulty scholars have experienced in determining the correct reading of the text, yet we cannot but think that they accurately grasp the Apostle’s meaning who understand the words “unto all” to refer to all *men*, and the words, “upon all” to all *believers*. This glorious righteousness of God, which “now,” “apart from law,” “has been manifested”; this righteousness which is “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”; this righteousness which is “by faith in Jesus Christ”—this righteousness is “*unto all*” *men*. The Apostle, we think, does but parallel here a thought that is elsewhere expressed in the Scriptures: Christ “gave himself a ransom for *all*” (1 Tim. 2:6); He “tasted death for *every man*” (Heb. 2:9); “He is the propitiation . . . for the sins of *the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). These expressions would appear to be but other aspects of the idea that the evangelical righteousness of God is *unto all*. The Gospel of God’s grace—which announces the *ransom*, the *death tasting*, the *propitiation*, and the *righteousness* equally—is a message of mercy to “every man that cometh into the world.”

### Justification May Lapse

But while this righteousness is as universal in its invitation as the need for it is universal, its actual possession and enjoyment is limited to them that believe. It is “unto all” in the unlimited offers of the Gospel—it is “upon” them only that believe. It is, moreover, upon them that believe *only while they believe*. (See Meditations No. 17.) “For continuousness of faith is necessary in order to the continuous enjoyment of the blessings that are wrapped up in the Divine, evangelical righteousness. The life must be a ‘life of faith.’ Momentary faith may, indeed, suffice for momentary blessings. More than momentary, and yet temporary, faith may suffice for more than momentary yet temporary blessings. But perpetual faith—faith that is ‘held unto the end’—is needed for perennial life, for everlasting glory.” This evangelical righteousness, this reckoned justification, or

justification by faith, “holds good so long as faith continues and is backed by endeavors to do the Lord’s will. If faith and obedience cease, at once the justification ceases to be imputed.” (S.S. Vol. VI, pg. 103.) “But it remains the fact--of such infinite value and fruitfulness is faith in God, as he has shown himself in Jesus, that when a man first believes--aye, whenever, over and over again, he returns to belief--he is in God’s sight on a new basis, however dark be the background of his previous sins; and he can be dealt with simply on the new basis, according to the movement of the Father’s heart of love which his faith has set free.”

### **There Is No Difference**

*For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. -- Verses 22,23*

The Apostle says “all have sinned, and come short.” He “is not to be understood here as affirming the absurd and manifestly false proposition that there is no diversity in the character of men or in the respective measures of their guilt. It is true also, that we are far from being competent judges of the measures of evil and of guilt in different characters; and that he who searches the hearts and tries the reins, and with whom that which ‘is highly esteemed amongst men’ is so frequently ‘abomination,’ may in many cases see most where we might fancy there was least. But still differences there are--differences in kind and degree. The Apostle does not mean to deny this.” His words must be understood in the light of the subject under discussion. He is speaking of them “that believe” upon whom has come from God a precious “robe of righteousness,” and he tells us “there is no difference” between believing Jews and believing Gentiles so far as this evangelical righteousness of God is concerned. They are both in equal need of it and for both it is equally available. Compare chapter 10:11,12: “For the scripture saith, 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.”

“This principle of indifferentiation in relation to the righteousness of God is applicable to men, not only considered as Jews and Gentiles, but also considered in all possible diversities of physical, intellectual, moral, and social condition. In the matter referred to

there is no difference between sovereigns, for instance, and their meanest subjects; between the cultured and the most uncultured; between the sage and the savages; no difference between the most punctilious Pharisee who observes every ceremony of the church and (gathering up his garments) steps fastidiously aside from every indecency of social life and the most reckless offcasts who 'rough it' on the highways of life, or riot and rot in the lowest of our city dens." -- P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 29, THE HERALD, March 1958

*But now apart from . . . Law a righteousness of [or from] God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all [and upon all] them that believe; for there is no distinction. -- Romans 3:21,22; American R. V.*

THESE TWO verses, as we noted in our last two Meditations form the theme not only of the passage (3:21-26) but of the whole of the second section of our Epistle (3:32-5:11). But before proceeding with the development of this theme, the Apostle first sums up the argument of the previous section (1:18-3:20) by restating the ground on which every human being needs this evangelical righteousness. It is because *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (vs. 23)*.

### **To What Sins Does the Apostle Here Refer? Personal? Adamic? or Both?**

Some have supposed that the reference here is to the first sin of Adam; others think that there is a principal, though not an exclusive reference to that original sin. But whatever the Apostle may have to tell us later as to the manner in which sin entered into the world, he has not yet mentioned Adam or any "weakness of the flesh" we as his children may have fallen heir to. His reference *in the verse before us* is obviously to the fact which he has substantiated in the preceding section (1:18-- 3:20): the fact that all are guilty of actual

*personal* transgressions. This he proved, not by pointing to Adam's transgression but by an appeal to the facts of history. He did not deny, on the contrary he will later (in chap. 5) affirm the fact of Adam's transgression and our inheritance of infirmity from our first parent, but it is important to observe that *his argument as to the necessity for a faith righteousness is not based on this fact*. Up to this verse (3:23) in our Epistle, it must be admitted the Apostle has not argued that since all are children of Adam and have inherited certain sinful tendencies from him, that *therefore* they need this evangelical righteousness, this justification by faith. *His argument for the necessity of a faith righteousness contains no reference to Adam and our inherited blemishes, but rests solely on that personal estate of sins all have willfully committed*. In the Apostle's view it is from these that all need to be justified, *and it is with these, and with these alone, that the whole of the argument of the first section is concerned*. We would urge our readers not to overlook this point but to make special note of it as it will be of material assistance later when we come to chapter four and inquire into Abraham's justification, and seek to ascertain why it was that notwithstanding he was justified by faith he remained *and still remains* under the condemnation passed on Adam and his race, and what he will need in addition to having faith counted unto him for righteousness before he will pass from under the condemnation. It will be helpful also when we come to chapter eight and consider what, in addition to having their faith counted unto them for righteousness, was necessary to the church before the Apostle could triumphantly exclaim "There is therefore now *no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*" (8:1; Amer. R.V.).

### **Believers Though Unrighteous Are Declared Righteous**

Once our lost estate is realized--that we ourselves among the "all" who "have sinned and come short of the glory of God," it will not be difficult for us to see that faith righteousness is not anything that we could procure for ourselves but is a gift bestowed upon believers personally by God himself. It is a Divine act, not a human attainment. Moreover, consecrated believers know by personal experience as well as from scriptural teaching that when God justified them by faith he did not *make* them righteous but *declared*

them righteous or *reckoned* them so. This was our conclusion, it will be recalled, when we considered the matter in Meditation No. 17. “When a man is justified by faith, righteousness is not *communicated* to him but is *imputed* to him; he is not *made* righteous but *reckoned* righteous. In imputing our faith to us for righteousness, God does not thereby declare that we who are not righteous have become righteous, but he thereby undertakes to regard and deal with us as though we had become righteous, extending to us all the privileges that would be ours if we had.” In verse 24 the Apostle sets before us (1) the method, (2) the origin, and (3) the ground of this faith righteousness.

### **The Method of Justification by Faith-- Freely**

To be justified *freely* is to be justified *without any meritorious cause* in us of the blessing bestowed. The same word is used in John 15:25, where instead of being translated “freely” it is translated “without a cause.” Our Lord there says of his enemies, “They hated me without a cause,” by which he evidently means *without a cause* in himself that should have had any tendency to excite their malicious hatred. So here, to be justified *freely* is to be justified *without a cause* in us that could procure such a blessing.

### **The Origin of Justification by Faith -- His Grace**

Scholars have pointed out that the word “his” should be emphasized. It is from *God* that the gift comes down. It is not merely by favor but by *his* favor that believers are justified--declared righteous. “It is God that justifieth” (Rom. 8:23). As another remarks: “The entire expression as the Apostle gives it points us at once to the *efficient* cause (God) and also to the *impulsive* cause (his grace) of the justification of believers.”

### **The Ground of Justification by Faith -- Through the Redemption that Is in Christ Jesus**

The ransom sacrifice of Christ constitutes the meritorious ground not only of the faith righteousness of believers of this Age but also of their deliverance as

well as that of the rest of the human family from Adamic condemnation and death to eternal life in Christ. But the Apostle is not yet ready to discuss that “way of life.” At the proper time and place (see 5:12-21), he will do so adequately, exhaustively in the superb and masterful style with which we are so familiar. But in the present passage he is not discussing that way of *life*, but is discussing the privilege of justification by faith offered to believers of this Gospel Age. True, justification by faith is intended by God to serve as an introduction to that life to those who in this Age consecrate themselves to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. But we believe it will conduce to clarity of thought if we do not attempt to anticipate here a subject which under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Apostle has thought well to postpone to a later chapter.

As we come to examine closely into the text we find that the “ransom sacrifice of Christ” is not mentioned. “What then,” it may be asked, “are we to understand by the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus?” We answer: The word *apolutrosis* here translated “redemption” appears only ten times in the New Testament and not once does it refer to the “ransom” but in each case signifies “deliverance.” True, in every case the deliverance mentioned may be proved to be intimately connected with the work of the Redeemer, with the ransom sacrifice at Calvary, but it is always *deliverance*, the *outcome* of the redemptive work, the *result* of the ransom, *never the ransom itself* that is intended. For that central feature of God’s Plan a different work is used. It appears only three times. Twice it is used to record our Lord’s own words: “The Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom [*lutro anti--a price to correspond*] for many” (Matt. 20:28//Mark 10:45). The third time it is used by our Apostle, only compounded differently: “The man Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom [*anti lutron--a corresponding price*] for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:6). --P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 30

*Being justified (declared righteous--Rotherham) freely by His grace through the redemption (deliverance--Weymouth) that is in Christ Jesus.-- Romans 3:24*

In the March **HERALD** we noted that the word *apolutrosis* here translated “redemption” appears only ten times in the New Testament and that in each case it signifies *deliverance*. (See page 40.) But what is the deliverance to which the Apostle refers? I answer: The context must in each case decide. In Luke 21:28; Romans 8:23, and Ephesians 4:30 the reference is undoubtedly to the final deliverance of the church. In Ephesians 1:14 the reference is to the final deliverance not only of the church but also of the whole of mankind, including the earth, man’s home. In Hebrews 9:15 the reference is to the deliverance granted believing Jews from trans-gressions which took place under their old Law Covenant. In yet another place (Heb. 11:35), the reference is to a deliverance the Ancient Worthies refused, preferring death. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, another instance, the word would seem to apply both to the final deliverance of the church and also to their present justification by faith. We will briefly examine these ten texts in which *apolutrosis* occurs.

(1) **Luke 21:28:** *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption (deliverance) draweth nigh. When the deliverance here spoken of “draweth nigh” then the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand” (vs. 31). “There is no reference here to the ransom or to the conditions precedent to the Church’s deliverance, but merely to the deliverance itself,” namely the final deliverance of the Church.*

(2) **Romans 8:23:** *Even we ourselves (the faithful church) groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption (deliverance) of our Body [the Church, the Body of Christ, which is to be glorified with the Head, in due time]. “Nothing in this statement has the slightest reference to the redemption accomplished at Calvary, the purchase price; it refers*



purely and solely to the deliverance of the Church, which is to be *a part of the result* of the redemption finished at Calvary--the ransom." Again the reference is seen to be *to the final deliverance of the Church*.

(3) **1 Corinthians 1:30:** *Of him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption [deliverance]. "Nothing here has any reference to the redemption price paid at Calvary. The Apostle is speaking, not of what our Lord did for us, but of what he is yet to do for us. . . . He will, in due time, deliver from the bondage of corruption, death, the Church which he purchased with his own blood. The deliverance, not the purchase, is here referred to," and again it is seen to refer to the final deliverance of the Church, although it may here "very properly be applied also to the intermediate and incidental deliverances of the faithful all along the narrow way, culminating in salvation 'to the uttermost' in the glory, honor and immortality of the First Resurrection."*

(4) **Ephesians 1:7:** *He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption [deliverance] through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* Here the word "deliverance" is explained for us. It is the forgiveness of sins, *not, . . . the sin or sins of Adam but our own*. "Thy sins be forgiven thee (Matt. 9:2). Deliverance here, then, refers not to the sacrifice at Calvary but to the reckoning as righteous those who were in fact sinners, or in other words it refers to *the justification by faith of the ungodly*. Thus seen, *the word does not refer to the final but to a present deliverance*.

(5) **Ephesians 1:14:** *Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption [deliverance] of the purchased possession. "The possession which Christ purchased by the sacrifice for sins as man's substitute includes mankind in general, or so many as will accept the favor on the Gospel conditions, as well as the Church, the Bride. The time for the deliverance is in the Millennial Kingdom and the Church is to be delivered first -- 'early in the morning.' But the earth was part of man's original estate and was purchased by the same sacrifice once for all: hence it too is to be delivered from its share of the curse and shall become as the garden of the Lord--Paradise. The purchase is accomplished but the deliverance waits for God's 'due time.' "The word, then, has reference to the final*

*deliverance of both the Church and the rest of the world of mankind, including the earth, man's home.*

(6) **Ephesians 4:30:** "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption [deliverance]" "There is no reference here to the redemption sacrifice finished at Calvary. Yet not until that sacrifice was finished, and its merits presented in the holy of holies, and accepted by the Father, did the Holy Spirit come upon any and seal them as sons of God. But now these who have been sealed are to maintain this spirit of sonship, this begetting of the Divine nature, not to lose it. The sealing of the Holy Spirit is the first-fruit of the Spirit, and is all that is communicated during this present life, for the full measure of the blessing of the Divine nature we must wait until the time appointed of the Father, the 'day of *deliverance*,' the Millennial Day, in which day the Scriptures declare, concerning the Church, the Bride of Christ, 'God shall help her early in the morning.'" (Psa. 46:5.) Whoever loses the Holy Spirit and its seal will have neither part nor lot in the First Resurrection, in the morning of the 'day of [complete] deliverance' from the power of sin and death. In this passage the context again discloses a reference to the *final deliverance of the Church*.

(7) **Colossians 1:14:** *In whom we have redemption [deliverance] through his blood even the forgiveness of sins.* This will be readily seen in a parallel passage in Eph. 1:7, "We believers *already have deliverance*, that is, the forgiveness of our sins, and hence harmony with the Father. The word 'redemption' here has no reference to the sacrifice for sins, but merely to its effect upon us, *setting us free* from our sins. The Apostle, however, does not ignore the sacrifice, but declares that our deliverance from the bondage and control of sin is through the efficacy of our Lord's blood--his death, his sacrifice for sins, the ransom paid." The word then relates, as in Eph. 1:7, not to the final but to a *present deliverance*.

(8) **Hebrews 9:15:** "For this cause he is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption [deliverance] of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." "Once more a faulty rendering partly obscures the meaning; but when the thought is seen to be *deliverance* all is clear." The evident reference is to

the *deliverance already experienced by the believing Jew from transgressions which had taken place under the Old Law Covenant.*

(9) **Hebrews 11:35:** "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance." "This is the one instance in which the translators have properly rendered this word." Obviously it has *reference to a deliverance that could have been accepted by the worthy ones of a previous Age, but in which death was preferred.*

(10) **Romans 3:24:** "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption [deliverance] that is in Christ Jesus." Coming now to this, our text, it should not be difficult, in the light of the foregoing discussion to see that the deliverance here spoken of is akin to that mentioned in Eph. 1:7 and Col. 1:14. It is *a present deliverance*, even the forgiveness of sins. No reference is here made to the great sacrifice for sins, but merely to the present effect upon believers, setting them here and now free from their sins; reckoning as righteous those who in fact are sinners. "The Apostle does not in these words refer to the ransom but merely *to the deliverance which the Lord's people have, now reckonedly*, and by and by prospectively in the resurrection. He is treating the matter from God's standpoint: believers are freely, unconditionally, justified; aside from any works of merit on their part. This is accomplished through the *deliverance* which God has provided in Christ Jesus our Lord."--*Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. V, Page 434.

## CONCLUSION

The thought of the Apostle then seems clear. He is discussing, not Adamic condemnation and death and the way of deliverance therefrom to eternal life through the ransom sacrifice of Christ, but while not ignoring that sacrifice, is, for wise reasons, limiting his discussion to personal willful sins and how by faith, believers may be *here and now forgiven* them, *delivered* from them, *justified* from them--how by *faith they may be declared righteous* by God. And so far as this faith-righteousness is concerned, its method is freely [*without cause* in us (see March "Herald," page 39)], its origin is in God, and its all sufficient ground is *the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus.*--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 31, THE HERALD, May 1958

*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have  
kissed each other. -- Psalm 85:10*

IN our previous Meditations we have seen that the grand theme with which our Epistle is concerned is that age old question: "How can man be just with God" (Job 9:2:25:4). St. Paul well knows, indeed all men intuitively realize, that there can be no such thing as final acceptance with God apart from *personal righteousness*. During the first half of his life the Apostle had zealously sought to *attain* righteousness by "works of law," but in the mercy of God he was brought to realize the impossibility of this; and "his" Gospel has to do with another method of securing righteousness. This other method he declares to have originated with God and to be available to all mankind on the one condition of faith. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," he has told us, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth . . . for therein is being revealed to believers a righteousness from God which has its origin in faith" (Rom. 1:16,17; Free Translation).

Reading rapidly through the Epistle at one sitting to get its broad outlines clearly in mind (see Meditations No. 10) we saw that the manner in which we *obtain* this gift from God (we never could *attain* it) is by its being first **imputed** and then **imparted** to us. We saw too (Meditations No. 17) that while it was imputed to us **instantaneously** on our exercise of faith in God, its impartation is a *gradual process*. Something of the same thought may be seen in the words of Psalm 103:3. Not in its application to fleshly Israel, of course, but to the Gospel Church: "Who *forgiveth* [instantaneously] all thine iniquities; who *healeth* [gradually] all thy diseases."

When, therefore, we are told by the Apostle that "now, apart from law, a righteousness of [or from] God hath been manifested" (Rom. 3:21), such "righteousness of God" should not be limited in our understanding of it to imputed righteousness only; but

within its meaning the thought of imparted righteousness should also be embraced. These *two parts of the one gift* may be spoken of as together constituting our righteousness from God--our *justification*; imputed righteousness being referred to as *justification by faith*; and imparted righteousness being referred to as *sanctification*. While it would not appear to be of greatest importance what **terms** we use to **describe** these favors, provided we possess the substance of the matter in our **life's experience**, yet it will conduce to clearness of thought in our own minds, and perhaps avoid the possibility of confusing the minds of others, if we distinguish between imputed and imparted righteousness and, whenever possible, do so by the use of those terms adopted by the Apostle himself.

His Gospel theme, then, is *justification*: righteousness, both imputed and imparted. But so far as we have yet gone in our study of the Roman letter, he has limited his discussion of this theme to imputed righteousness only--to *justification by faith*. In his development of this part of his theme he first stressed the world's need of it, not by reference to Adam and the condemnation we inherit from him but by an appeal to the facts of history--to the record of the personal, individual sins of men. Showing first the plight of the Gentiles (1:18-32) and of the Jews (2:1-29). After anticipating and answering objections (3:1-8), he summed up his conclusion by declaring that all the world is guilty before God and that by means of works of law no human being shall be declared righteous in God's sight (3:9-20). Then, having in this long interval [1:18-3:20] satisfactorily demonstrated the world's need, he proceeded to show God's provision to meet that need in the bestowal of righteousness to man as a gift (3:21-24). In the verses we are now to consider he will explain how it was possible, on the one condition of faith, for this free and universal gift of righteousness to be given by God to men. It was made possible, he will tell us, by the atonement sacrifice of Christ.

## Brief Summary of Divine Wisdom

*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; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

-- 3: 25,26

These two verses in conjunction with the four which precede are among the most important in the Bible and have been called the very “marrow of theology.” “Almost all expositors seem to have realized with more or less depth of conviction, and with feelings varying according to their illumination and the ratio of their evangelical sympathy with the Apostle, that they had to do here with words of peculiar significance, and with ideas which, in the Apostle’s own judgment, were of transcendent moment. Luther draws attention in the margin of his Bible to the importance of this section. He says, over against verse 23 and following verses ‘This is the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.’ And yet it is so short that the statement seems scarcely to have begun when all is said, within so few lines are the most decisive thoughts concentrated. It is really as Vitrina has said, ‘the brief summary of Divine wisdom.’ “

## Established Beforehand

The word translated “set forth” has been viewed by expositors from various standpoints and has received different explanations. Scholars tell us that it may signify either of two meanings: (1) “*To exhibit*, present *publicly* (in view of oneself), or (2) *to set before oneself* in the innermost shrine of the spirit; to decide, to design *beforehand* within oneself.” It will be noted that the text of the *Authorized Version* adopts the first of these two meanings and that in the margin the alternative meaning of “foreordained” is given. Both meanings are in full accord with the teaching of St. Paul both elsewhere and in our Epistle. For the first meaning we may compare Galatians 3:1: “O, thoughtless Galatians! who fascinated you, before whose very eyes Jesus Christ was openly *set forth* as a crucified one?” [*Rotherham*]. The second sense is however the prevailing one in the New Testament; for

example Romans 1:13: "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I *purposed* to come unto you"; and Ephesians 1:9: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath *purposed* in him self." While the first meaning is not impossible, the context, in our opinion, speaks strongly in favor of the second meaning. "The fundamental idea of the passage is the contrast between the time of God's forbearance in regard to sin and the decisive moment when at once he carried out the universal expiation. It is natural in this order of ideas to emphasize the fact that God had foreseen this final moment and had provided himself beforehand with the victim by means of which the expiation was to be accomplished." If this be the true thought, then the translation, "Christ Jesus, whom God had foreordained [or whom God hath established beforehand]," would already give a hint of the contrast with the phrase "at the present time," which appears in verse 26. More over such an expression, placed as it is at the head of the whole passage, "brings out forcibly the incomparable grav-ity of the work about to be described."

### The At-one-ment

The Greek word translated "propitiation" is *hilasterion*. To explain it many commentators have had recourse to the technical meaning it has in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it denotes the *Mercy Seat*, the *Propitiatory* or *lid of the Ark of the Covenant*.

This meaning is urged in the *Emphatic Diaglott* in a footnote to this passage and is stressed by Brother Russell in *Scripture Studies*, Vol. V, page 442. Supporting this viewpoint is the fact that in the only other place in the New Testament where the word occurs, namely, Hebrews 9:5, it has this sense. There are other commentators, however, of equal scholarship and devotion, who prefer translating it in the passage before us as a *propitiatory sacrifice, or the means of propitiation*. Thus, one such, referring to the Mercy Seat, above which the Shekinah shone and on which the blood of atonement was sprinkled, writes: "Here is indeed a manifest and noble type of Christ. But on the other hand *the word "hilasterion" gets that meaning only indirectly. Its native meaning is rather 'a price of expiation.'*" And a somewhat sudden insertion here

of the imagery of the Mercy Seat seems unlikely, in the absence of all other allusion to the High Priestly function of our Lord.”

It has also been observed that if the matter in question were a well known definite object, the only one of its kind, such as the Mercy Seat, the word “the” could not be omitted, whereas it does not appear in the Greek text. It has been further observed that if the words “set forth” previously discussed be understood in the sense of “exhibiting publicly” there is a contradiction between this idea of publicity and the part assigned to the Mercy Seat in the typical Atonement Day arrangements: this object *remained concealed*, the High Priest alone could see it, and he only through a cloud of smoke. And if the verb be understood in the sense of “established beforehand,” it is still more difficult to apply the idea of an eternal purpose, either to a material object such as the Mercy Seat itself or to its typical connection with our Lord Jesus.

In regard to the *sense* of the passage, the difference is not at all material, nor does it so far as we can see in the slightest degree affect the Apostle’s reasoning. In either case there is reference to a significant type.

The proper idea of “propitiation” is to render propitious or to render favorable. Thus in Luke 18:13 the publican says to God, “Be merciful, *show thyself propitious* to me.” Whether we think of our Lord Jesus as the Mercy Seat (1; the Propitiatory) or as the propitiatory sacrifice (2; the *means of propitiation*), we should beware of entertaining the thought that he produced any change in Jehovah’s *character*; as if Jehovah required to be supplied with a *motive* to pity, an *inducement* to be merciful, a *price* for love and grace. “Far be such a thought from our minds! We ought to conceive of Jehovah as eternally, im-mutably, infinitely compassionate and merciful. That any transition is produced in His nature [disposition] by the mediation of Christ from previous vindictive cruelty to benevolence and compassion, . . . is a supposition full of blasphemous impiety. God has been from eternity and to eternity must continue the same; ‘without variableness or shadow of turning.’ Being absolutely perfect, he cannot change to the better; for perfection cannot be improved; the slightest alteration, therefore, of what he is would detract from that infinite excellence, without which he would not be



God. But while God is infinitely and immutably good, he is at the same time infinitely and immutably holy and just and true. Never ought we to speak of him as acting at one time according to mercy and at another according to justice; if by this mode of expression it be meant that the claims either of justice or of mercy are in any part of his procedure, in the smallest possible degree, suspended or left out of view. He never acts in opposition to the one or to the other, but always agreeably to both. The character of God is *perfect excellence*; infinite goodness:--not a hemisphere of separate stars, but one glorious sun of pure and 'holy light.' The attributes which constitute this character, though we may speak of them and reason about them, distinctly are completely inseparable in their exercise."

### Through Faith--In His Blood

Some, indeed most, commentators connect the phrase "in his blood" with the word "faith" thus: "through faith in his blood." While this may be grammatically possible, yet we believe those expositors correctly interpret the mind of the Apostle who separate these clauses and understand them as each qualifying the *hilasterion*, the Mercy Seat, or the means of propitiation. The *American Revised Version* seeks to indicate this sense by placing a comma after the word faith, while it is still more clearly indicated in the phraseology of the *Emphatic Diaglott*, which reads: "Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a Mercy Seat, by his own Blood, through the faith." The Apostle has told us that God established Jesus beforehand as the means of propitiation; he here explains *how that means operates*. Two conditions are required to make the means effective: one on the part of the Savior and one on the part of the sinner. Propitiation does not take place except *through faith* on the part of the saved and except *through the shedding of his blood* on the part of the Savior. Moreover these two conditions were not afterthoughts on the part of Jehovah but were decided on when he "set forth" or "established beforehand" Jesus as the means of propitiation or as the Mercy Seat. When in his eternal counsels he determined within himself that Jesus should be the means of propitiation, he also stipulated with himself that this should not be apart from these two conditions.

--P.L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

Nos. 32 & 33, THE HERALD, June & July 1958

*Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be propitiatory, through faith, in His blood, to show His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of His righteousness at this present season; that He might be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.*” -- Romans 3:25,26 [R.V. (margin)]

IN THIS half hour we continue our study of these two most instructive and devotion producing verses. In our last Meditation we noted that on the one condition of faith God’s free gift of righteousness, both imputed and imparted, was made possible by the atonement sacrifice of Christ. Here this at-one-ment sacrifice is shown to have both an *immediate* and an *ultimate* object.

## The Immediate Object of Christ’s Atonement Sacrifice

When God set forth or established beforehand Christ Jesus to be propitiatory by his blood through faith, his *immediate* object, the Apostle here informs us, we *to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime*. The meaning of this statement is obscured in the *Authorized Version* where it is rendered “for the *remission* of sins that are past.” Scholars tell us that the word is not *aphesis* (remission) but *paresis* (passing over or praetermission). As one of them remarks: “The sins of former times were neither forgiven nor punished; they were simply passed over; and for this reason there was need for a vindication of the righteousness of God. . . . This signal manifestation of God’s righteousness (in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood) was vouchsafed, not because the sins of the past were *forgiven*, but because they were only *overlooked for the time being without being forgiven*. . . . It was because the sins had been passed over and

had not been forgiven that the exhibition of God's righteousness . . . was necessary."

A somewhat related expression appears in Acts 14:16, where Paul speaks of the living God, "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways"; and again in Acts 17:30, where the Apostle tells us that "The times of ignorance God *winked at*" (*overlooked, R.V.*). In the words of another: "For four thousand years the spectacle presented by man king to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgments, Divine righteousness seemed to be asleep; one might even have asked if it existed. Men sinned here below and yet they lived. They sinned on and yet reached in safety a hoary old age! Where were the *wages of sin*? It was this relative impunity which rendered a solemn manifestation of righteousness necessary."

### To Declare His Righteousness

Obviously the word "righteousness" in this passage denotes not a gift from God to man but an attribute of God himself, an attribute which, long veiled, was put in the light of day by the death of Jesus. By God's righteousness we understand the Apostle to mean here God's retributive justice--that "mode of action whereby he maintains the *right* of every being, and consequently *order* throughout the whole universe, blessing him who has respect to this order, visiting with punishment him who violates it." Now "the attribute of *righteousness*, eternally latent in holiness, *passed into the active state* with the first appearance of the *free* creature. For in the fact of freedom there was included the *possibility* of disorder, and this possibility soon passed into reality. God's horror at evil (his holiness) thus displays itself in the form of righteousness preserving order and maintaining right. Now to maintain order without suppressing liberty there is but one means and that is punishment. Punishment is order in disorder. It is the revelation of disorder to the sinner's conscience by means of suffering. It is consequently, or at least may be, the point of departure for the re establishment of order, of the normal relation of free beings." Now in the passage under consideration the Apostle is explaining that "God judged it necessary, on account of the impunity so long enjoyed by those myriads of sinners

who succeeded one another on the earth, at length to manifest his righteousness by a striking act; and he did so by realizing in the death of Jesus the punishment which each of those sinners would have deserved to undergo.”

### **How Did the Sacrifice of Jesus Manifest God’s Righteousness?**

But it may be asked: In what sense can the death of Jesus be said to manifest or demonstrate the righteousness of God? Moreover they are not always railing infidels but frequently sincere Christians who are puzzled on this question. Surely, the latter reason, our sense of right and wrong (our conscience) is from God; how then, in all good conscience we ask are we to understand as righteous something which seems to offend our sense of right? How can the punishment of the innocent in the stead of the guilty be considered a righteous act, much less serve to vindicate God in his failure to adequately punish sins committed throughout the previous forty centuries? Do we not have here in a matter of tremendous importance an instance of that injustice (we speak as men) which in smaller matters would at once provoke our indignation?

It is not sufficient to reply to such honest inquirers with “Your doubts and questionings of this central theme of the Scriptures border on blasphemy!” Such puzzled ones may have as deep a reference for God and as great a longing after righteousness as those who hide their own lack of understanding by such unenlightening response. Their doubts and questionings are not against God’s righteousness, in which they have every confidence, but their conscience rebels at the false reasoning and philosophy which for centuries has permeated and falsified the true teaching concerning the ransom sacrifice of Christ. The idea of injustice has been introduced into the doctrine of the Atonement, and it is this that has occasioned their difficulty.

There is a story told that when Edward VI was a young prince and deserved for his misdeeds to be punished another boy was taken and whipped in his stead. He was guilty of idleness; another was required to suffer the consequences. He neglected his tasks; another was chastised. He played the truant; another was required to smart for it. Christian teachers have

taken this monstrously unjust transaction as an illustration of the Atonement; it is truly an illustration of the Atonement as they mis-conceived it. But the misconception is gratuitous; there is no real resemblance in the case presented. The case is most decidedly **not** in point. Since the story has been told so often, it might be well to make it in point and consider whether it presents itself in any aspect so monstrous and absurd. To make it in point, the parts played in the story by the young prince and the other boy must first be reversed. The young prince suffers for his humbler truant companions, not one of them for him. He does it of his own free will, not of constraint or compulsion. Only such an act as this would overcome their perversity, their wrong mindedness and conduct. Moreover he offers himself to this chastisement knowing that nothing else would overcome it and knowing, blessed be God, *that this would be effectual to do so*. What is represented to us in the New Testament is not that Jesus Christ, an innocent person, was punished without reference to his own will by a God who thus showed himself indifferent as to whom he punished so long as some one suffered. But Jesus, being one in purpose and spirit with the Father, being indeed the worthy Son of such a Father and in harmony with the Father's heart of love, *of his own will* became man and suffered what the sin of the world laid upon him to lift the world out of sin.

### **The Principle of Vicarious Sacrifice Not Unjust**

“Vicarious suffering: It is strange to hear the mighty uproar made about it when indeed in lower forms--not low in themselves though low as compared with the highest--it is everywhere, where love is at all. For indeed is not this-- one freely taking on himself the consequences of others' faults and thus averting from those at least in part the penalties of the same, building what others have thrown down, gathering what others have scattered, bearing the burdens which others have wrapped together, healing the wounds which others have inflicted, paying for things which he never took, smarting for sins which he never committed-- is not this, I say, the law and condition of all highest nobleness in the world? Is it not that which God is continually demanding of his elect. They approving themselves his elect as they do not shrink from this demand, as they freely own them selves

debtors of love to the last penny of the requirements which it makes? And if these things are so, shall we question the right of God himself to display this nobleness which he demands of his creatures? Shall we wish to rob him of the opportunity or think to honor him who is highest love by denying him the right to display it?"

### **Which Do You Seek: Righteousness or Exemption from Punishment?**

"To a Jew, and to almost all races when St. Paul wrote, the idea of an expiatory sacrifice for sin seemed natural and obvious. But for the special Christian doctrine of expiation the basis is to be found in the memorable chapter 53 of Isaiah. That great Prophet of the captivity is assuring Israel of their restoration to their own land. This restoration is to follow on the due punishment of her sins: 'She hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' And the restored people is to be, before all else, a righteous people--'all righteous'--a people of God's favor because they are living according to God. But there is so much sin still remaining in them as to make it necessary that *the new life of the recovered people should be based on a great act of propitiation*. The Righteous Servant. . . offers his life a willing sacrifice for their sins. The chastisement of their iniquities falls on him; he accepts the burden and is obedient unto death. Dying he makes his soul a guilt offering; living through death exalted and powerful, he becomes an intercessor accepted with God, the head of a new seed whom he 'justifies' before God by the intimate knowledge of God's mind and character which in his voluntary humiliation he has won. This wonderful prophetic picture represents a vast advance in moral teaching on what had gone before. It is not only that the self sacrifice of a perfect human will is substituted for the animal victims, to which the enlightened conscience of God's people already refused to allow any real efficacy, but also that the idea of propitiation is put in a context where it is made plain that it can be only *the prelude to a state of actual righteousness* in those who are to be justified by it. It occurs as part of the answer to the question. Not How is Israel to escape punishment? but How is Israel to become the really righteous nation, living in the likeness of God? . . ."

All conceptions of propitiation may be distinguished into true or false according as righteousness or exemption from punishment is the end which is specially in view.

### The Immoral Notion of Caiaphas

“Thus when we pass on into the New Testament we find in Caiaphas’ saying, ‘It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not,’ the typical expression of the quite immoral notion\* of the forcible sacrifice of an innocent person in order to exempt a guilty race from punishment. In our Lord’s teaching, on the other hand, we find the doctrine of atonement raised to its highest moral power. As the Forerunner had revived the teaching of Isaiah by pointing to him as the ‘Lamb of God who taketh away’ (i.e. taketh up and expiatheth) the sin of the world, so Christ himself spoke of the covenant which he came to inaugurate, as to be based upon the sacrificial offering of his body and the outpouring of his blood; spoke also of the ‘remission of sins’ as the benefit to be expected from his expiation.” The ransom sacrifice of Christ, his “sacrifice of propitiation to which we contribute nothing, and in which we do not share, remains a necessary prelude to the establishment of the new life. *It is in virtue of this that we are justified and accepted and allowed to start afresh.*” “But no teacher in the world ever made it so plain that God can be satisfied with nothing that any other can do for us--with nothing but actual likeness to him in ourselves. No teacher ever made it so plain that what we are to desire is not to be let off punishment but to be actually freed from sin. He left no room for doubting that only by following his steps, even to the cross, and surrender of our lives can we share his fellowship.”

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\*None the less immoral as Caiaphas intended it, because, as St. John perceives, a Divine truth uttered itself through his lips (John 11:51).

We are now prepared to answer the question “In what sense can the death of Christ be said to demonstrate the righteousness of God?” We reply: In two ways so closely connected that either of them separated from the other would lose its value. First in the very fact of his death, and second in the mental attitude which Christ maintained throughout this ordeal.

In the death of Christ, the Just for the unjust, God is revealed as One against whom no creature can revolt without meriting death. This demonstration however, striking though it was, would have been incomplete without the moral manifestation which accompanied it--the mental attitude maintained throughout by our Lord. Instead of realizing in the death of Jesus the punishment deserved by us, God might have permitted us to endure our own punishment. But had he done so, how many of us would have undergone it as Jesus did, *accepting it as deserved*. This is what he alone could do by virtue of his holiness. ("O, *righteous* Father, the world hath not known Thee" (John 17:25).

### **It Satisfies Our Longings As Nothing Else Can Do**

If the doctrine of atonement has involved intellectual difficulty because of the false views with which its clear light has been obscured, "on the other hand it has proved itself, as the popular Christian literature of all ages sufficiently shows, widely and deeply welcome to the human heart. This wide welcome which it has received shows that it contains a deep truth. And from this point of view, *from the point of view of our practical spiritual needs*, we do well to meditate much and deeply upon this doctrine. We can depend upon it. If we are to go on patiently doing good in a world like this (so full of disappointment and anxieties and moral failures and torturing scruples), we must have peace in our heart. And this is what the really evangelical doctrine is capable of giving us. It bids us continually look out of ourselves up to God and assures us that his love, manifested in the sacrifice of his Son, is there continually, unchangeably. It is there, waiting till first we turn to him, to give us the assurance of entire absolution and admission into the divine fellowship, wholly irrespective of what we have been or done; and it is there continually, however often we fall, with the same large and liberal hand to pour out continual forgiveness. [His love] never wearies of restoring us again and again to the solid foundation of the peace and grace which are by Jesus Christ. We are not meant to be miserably anxious or morbidly introspective. We must confess our sins, and that with exactness, without self sparing, without self excusing, in utter humility and truth: 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' "



To quote from our late Pastor: “If we lose sight of the fact that God regards us from the standpoint of the will, if we get to thinking of ourselves and God’s estimate of us according to the flesh, we are sure to get proportionately into darkness and confusion and discouragement. But let us not forget, on the other hand, that the spirit or will is counted alive because of its righteousness, because it is in harmony with God. Let us, therefore, never be slack in respect to the will, or intention governing the conduct of our lives, but remember that any laxity will mean the proportionate loss of spiritual life. To will right is always possible to us, and nothing less than an absolutely loyal will could be acceptable to God in Christ.” --*Manna*, May 4

### **Behold the Lamb of God**

And if perchance this page should meet the eye of one who has not yet learned to look by faith on him, the “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world,” let it here be said that you may find your peace, nay, you *will* find it, when you turn to him. “You will carry, it may be, the scars of those wounds which you have inflicted upon yourself to your grave; but the wounds themselves he can heal, and heal them altogether. He can give you back the years the cankerworm has eaten, the peace your sin had chased away, as it seemed to you, for ever. He can do so and will. ‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow’--this will be then your prayer, and this your prayer shall be fulfilled. The blood of sprinkling will purge, and you will feel yourself clean. Your sin will no longer be yourself; you will be able to look upon it as separated from you, as laid upon another, upon One so strong that he did but for a moment stagger under the weight of a world’s sin, and then so bore, that bearing he has borne it away forever.” -- *P.L. Read*.

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 34

*Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. -- Jeremiah 9:24*

IN OUR last Meditation we saw that in the Apostle's view the *immediate* object of Christ's atoning sacrifice was to clear away all misunderstandings as to the righteousness of God--misunderstandings which may have arisen on account of his long tolerance of sinners prior to Calvary. God had gone on "passing over" sin all over the world in loving forbearance, bearing with men's sinfulness that they might thoroughly learn the lesson of their own need of him and their inability to save themselves. But this very forbearance rendered God's character liable to complete misunderstanding. He might have been supposed to be kind indeed, but indifferent to sin. ("These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" Psa. 50: 21.) Thus seen, the *immediate* object of Christ's death was to rescue God's righteousness from all misunderstanding--to show his righteousness "because in his Divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom. 3:25 R.S.V.).

## The Ultimate Object of Christ's Atonement Sacrifice

But in addition to this *immediate* object, God had in view an ultimate purpose which appears in the words we next consider: "And for an exhibition of his righteousness at the *present time*, in order that he may be righteous while justifying him who is of the faith in Jesus" (Ver. 26, Diaglott). The careful student will note that the ultimate purpose of God expressed in these words --the *supreme end* and aim of the propitiatory sacrifice of our Lord--is here shown to be twofold: (1) a demonstration of the righteous character of God ("that he might be just") and (2) a complete

provision for man's righteousness ("while justifying him who is of the faith of Jesus").

Thus Christ's atonement meets every need and satisfies every claim. In relation to God it vindicates his character, whether in failing to punish (in "passing over") sins done aforesaid under former dispensations or in forgiving sins done under the present dispensation; while in relation to man it provides nothing less than righteousness for him--righteousness instantaneously imputed to him on his exercise of faith and gradually imparted to him as he continues in the way of faith and obedience. "Herein lies the deep and precious meaning of the two statements of St. John: 'God is light,' and 'God is love.' If God were light alone, in the modern sense, there would be a danger of forgetting his righteousness. But in the Cross he is revealed as both Light and Love. All his attributes are blended, united, and correlated. 'Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other' (Psa. 85:10)."

"Glorious paradox! 'Just in punishing,' and 'merciful in pardoning' men can understand; but 'just in justifying' the guilty startles them. But the propitiation through faith in Christ's blood resolves the paradox and harmonizes the seemingly discordant elements. For in that 'God hath made him [who knew no sin] to be sin for us' *justice* has full satisfaction; and in that 'we are made the righteousness of God in him,' *mercy* has all her desire."

### **To Whom Was Christ's Atonement Sacrifice Offered?**

It is worthy of notice, ere we leave this memorable passage, that the metaphors of "ransom" and "propitiation" are each complementary of the other and each serves to check the other's misuse. The thought contained in the word "ransom" is that of a price paid by Christ in order that we might be set free. He gave his life a *ransom* for many--he, the Lord that *bought* us (Mark 10:45; 2 Peter 2:1). Again, the word propitiation suggests that the offering of Christ's life in sacrifice was the means to win for us forgiveness from God. Thus far both these metaphorical words have their clear, harmonious and usual meaning. But some, not recognizing the limitations which each word imposes on the other, have worked these metaphors out far beyond the thought of the Apostle.

Ransoms, they argue, are paid to those who have previously held the prisoners captive; consequently, it is maintained, the price must have been paid to the enemy who held us captive; that is to say, Christ's life was offered as a price to the Devil in order that *his* claim might be satisfied and we might be justly set free. Such an idea was advanced as far back as the time of Origen, and others since his time have sponsored it. But this extension of the scope of the metaphor of the ransom is wholly alien to the Scriptures.

Again, the word "propitiation" has suggested from time to time the blasphemous notion that the Son wrung from the angry Father the pardon which he was unwilling to give. Such an idea is wholly alien to the Scriptures. But in fact the two metaphors are mutually corrective and each tends to exclude the misuse of the other. The idea that Christ offered any thing to the Devil is corrected by the notion inherent in the word "propitiation," for it is propitiation (not of the Devil but) of the *Father*. What the Son offered was a sacrifice directed to the Father only. "Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered him self without spot *to God*" (Heb. 9:14). On the other hand, the idea that the Father's mind needed to be changed towards us is corrected by the suggestion inherent in the other metaphor--ransom; for it is the Father himself who, because he loved us, gave his own Son to buy us out of the slavery of sin. He it was who "found" the ransom. (See Job 33:24.) It was the Father who *sent* the Son. (See John 3:16.) In the words of another: "Each metaphor suggests a single idea--each complementary of the other, and cor-rective of its misuse--and both combine to tell us of the one inseparable love of the Father and the Son, uniting in a sacrificial act which is ascribed to both, to redeem us from the tyranny of sin and to set the pardoning love free to work upon us, without obscur-ing the true hatefulness of sin or the true character of God." \*

With verse 26 of chapter 3 the Apostle brings to a close his development of the great fact of history by which justification (or righteousness) by faith is made available for mankind, namely the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. What a wealth of utterance has we seen contained in these six short verses (21-26). Ere we pass on to the next passage let us reverently pause and with the spirit of prayer and devotion in our hearts take a last, loving, lingering, glance together at the

dear, sweet, life giving, life sustaining words, calling to mind as we do so the lessons we have associated with them in the last seven “Half hours”; and as we listen again to their glad yet solemn music may they touch responsive chords in our hearts, the melody of which shall appear in lives manifestly controlled by him who bought us with his own precious blood. Listen:

*But now, apart from Law, a righteousness from God stands displayed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being declared righteous, freely, by his grace, through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be propitiatory, by his blood, through faith, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; and for an exhibition of his righteousness at the present time, in order that he may be righteous while justifying him who believeth in Jesus.*

--Romans 3:21-26, Free Translation

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\*For an exhaustive discussion of this phase of the subject of atonement we refer all to the masterly work of Charles T. Russell--"The Atonement between God and Man," page 447 and following pages.

### **Where, Then, Is the Glorifying?**

The words we next consider give evidence of the intensity of interest with which, under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle had finished dictating the foregoing passage. *Where, then, is the glorifying? Shut out. By what kind of law? Of the works? Nay, but through the law of faith. Verses 27-31*

There can be no doubt but that the boasting which the Apostle here says is shut out is that of the Jews. Indeed some translators give “Where, then, is *thy* boasting?” as though a Rabbinit were actually in discussion with him. But it is of the mass of his unbelieving countrymen collectively, rather than to one of them representatively, that he is speaking. And what a psychological scene it is which is presented pictorially here before our mind’s eye! In the words of another: “We see the Apostle standing, as it were, on some elevated platform, and looking round and round inquisitively. He seems to be in quest of some object with which he has been familiar, indeed too familiar. But he cannot see it in all that plane of things that is around him. He exclaims--not in a disappointed but in a glad and jubilant tone--*Where, then, is the*

*glorying?*--that glorying which is always so obtrusive of itself--that glorying which is scarcely ever absent when a Jew is present--Where, I say, is this glorying?"

He does not, of course, mean that the Jews had ceased to glory; it is not the *fact* of their glorying but their right to do so which he is discussing. Men may in fact glory when they have no right to do so. The Jews thus gloried. But it is the right which the Apostle disputes, and disputing, denies.

Others, however, besides the Jews have been and are guilty of improper glorying. We need not suppose that in asking "Where, then, is the glorying?" the Apostle allowed his mind to be utterly oblivious of corresponding tendencies in others. In the words of the writer last quoted: "We may reasonably suppose, on the contrary, that he gives expression to his thoughts and feelings regarding the glorying of the Jews, because he realized that this element of the spirit of Judaism was too apt to be imported into Gentilism, *and would be in danger of infecting and infesting the Christian Church as a whole.* Men everywhere are too prone to haughtiness and self glorying. . . . Pride is one of the disfigurements of humanity in general. *And even from behind a profession of faith in Christ, and of justification by faith alone, and of the abnegation of glorying in the matter of justification, the forbidding lineaments of a supercilious spirit may lower forth.* Paul knew this; and hence we doubt not he had an aim that went far beyond the Jews when he asked, *Where, then, is the glorying?*"

We cannot agree with those commentators who think the Apostle is speaking "after a kind of *insulting* manner." The associations of the word *insulting* lie on the line of malignity. And we are certain that no true follower of Christ, speaking under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit, would malign any one. For the same reason we would not say, with some others, that he is speaking *derisively*, but we do not deny that, as one writer puts it: "there is a *jubilant* tone of logical, theological and ethical triumph" in his question, *Where, . . . is the glorying?*

## It Is Shut Out

“It is,” says the Apostle, “shut out.” Moreover it is not shut out by brute force but by a law--not that of works but of faith. The fact that the glorying is said to be “shut out” implies that it had tried to intrude. It had, as it were, struggled hard to get a footing. But it was unsuccessful. It was thrust out; and shut out. An interdict was laid upon it. It was put under a ban.

“And who can analyze or describe the joy and rest of the soul from which at last is ‘shut out’ the foul inflation of a religious boast? We have praised our selves, we have valued ourselves on one thing or another supposed to make us worthy of the Eternal. We may perhaps have had some specious pretexts for doing so; or we may have ‘boasted’ (such boastings are not unknown) of nothing better than being a little less ungodly, or a little more manly, than some one else. But this is over now for ever, in principle; and we lay its practice under our Redeemer’s feet to be destroyed. And great is the rest and gladness of sitting down at his feet, while the door is shut and the key is turned upon our self applause. There is no holiness without that ‘exclusion’; and there is no happiness where holiness is not.”

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 35, THE HERALD, October 1958

*I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of thine only  
(Psa. 7:16).*

*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 (Phil. 3:9).*

In this “half hour” consideration of the last five verses of chapter three continues, studying them especially in relation to their context.

*Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. For we reckon that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also; if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through the faith. Do we then make law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish law.*

--Romans 3:27-31 [Amer. R.V., Margin]

How are these verses to be understood? Some devout scholars, understanding the Apostle to have ended his argument with verse 26, prefer to regard these five verses “as a cluster of distinct and abrupt utterances, with which the preceding argument--so triumphantly wrought out--is jubilantly, as well as logically, crowned.” Such a viewpoint is certainly worthy of thoughtful consideration; for there is no thing fanciful about it--it agrees with the facts, and it does no violence to the inspired language. But while admitting this, we yet confess that the view which most strongly appeals to us as being the correct one is that these verses, while to some extent partaking of the nature of “conclusions drawn,” *are yet to be understood as links in a chain of argument not yet complete.* Let us briefly review the trend of the argument.

## Review

It will be recalled that in the first section of our Epistle (1:18 to 3:20), the Apostle conclusively



showed that the great need of the world, both of Jew and of Gentile, is righteousness, and that so far from their attaining righteousness by keeping the requirements of law, the moral law possessed by Gentiles only reveals their sinfulness; while that same moral law, as expressed in the written law given to Israel, similarly condemns the Jew--for by law (moral law, not ceremonial law) is knowledge of sin (3:20).

In the second section, which extends from 3:21 to 5:11, man's extremity is shown to be God's opportunity. The age old question: "How can man be just [righteous] with God?" (Job. 9:2; Amer. R.V.) is answered. God himself has revealed the way (the only way) in which this can be. It is a way of faith--a righteousness (or justification) by faith.

### **Faith Righteousness Attested By "The Law and the Prophets"**

This new way of righteousness is grounded on a great historical fact (the central fact of history); namely, the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. Such, we have seen, was the burden of the Apostle's message in the first six verses of this section (3:21-26). The principal idea next developed is that this new way of righteousness (justification by faith) is not out of harmony with the Law. It is in agreement with and is attested by the Law. This idea, it seems to us, forms the subject matter of the passage 3:27 to 4:25. That this would be his line of argument the Apostle had already given a hint in 3:21 with the words, "Now, apart from law, a righteousness from God stands displayed." He had accompanied this announcement by the assertion that such righteousness was "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." This assertion he now proceeds to demonstrate, first in a general way by reference to the general tenor and spirit of the Old Testament (3:27-31); and then in a special way by reference to the example of Abraham (4:1-25).

### **General Spirit of Old Testament Harmonizes with "The Law of Faith"**

In chapter 3, verses 9-20, we saw (Meditations No. 26) that the conclusion to which the Apostle had been led by the searching study of the law (of works) was that it was intended to shut the mouths of all men, and of the Jews in particular, before God by giving them

the knowledge of sin. But the stopping of mouths, the bringing of all boasting to silence, is precisely that which is here shown to result from the Gospel, the “law of faith.” Therefore the “law of faith” far from being out of harmony with the “law of works” is attested by it. Such would appear to be the gist of the Apostle’s argument in verses 27 and 28.

This same agreement of the general tenor and spirit of “the law” with “his” gospel of faith righteousness, St. Paul next develops from another point of view--that of Monotheism, a doctrine dear to the Jew and in which the latter gloried. If instead of the one true God mankind had to do with several gods or with even two, there might be some question as to the truth of St. Paul’s message. In that case there might be as many different methods of salvation as there were gods, one for the Jews, another for the Gentiles, etc. But since there is only one God, while he might deal temporarily and for special reasons of his own with only one nation, all such distinction must disappear as soon as the question of final salvation arises. “Monotheism has as its natural corollary the expectation of one only means of justification for the whole human race.”

Now the principle of Monotheism forms the basis of “the Law and the Prophets.” “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). When, there fore, the Apostle asks: “Is God the God of Jews only? is he not the God of Gentiles also?” he could reply with assurance: “Yea, of Gentiles also,” for the entire Old Testament had already drawn from Mono theism this glorious inference. Throughout the Old Testament, Jehovah is celebrated as the God not of the Jews only but of all the earth. “Say among the nations: ‘The Lord reigneth, . . .’ he will judge the peoples [not the Jews only] with equity” (Psa. 96:10). “Who would not fear thee, O King [not of the Jews only but] of the nations” (Jer. 10:7).

### **The Essence of the Apostle’s Teaching**

“For we reckon that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.” In verse 28 we have the essence of the Apostle’s doctrine. However, as it is obviously a condensed summary of the whole preceding discussion, we need not elaborately expound it here. Each feature it contains has already been considered in our previous studies. The word “justified” as we noted in Meditations No. 17 is a judicial or forensic

word; that is to say, it is a word derived from processes of law. When a court condemns a man on trial the court does not *make* him guilty. The prisoner might as a matter of fact be innocent. What the court does is to *declare* him guilty. Conversely if a court *justifies* a man under trial, the court does not thereby *make* him innocent. The man as a matter of fact may be guilty. What the court does is to *declare* him innocent. This judicial or forensic import of the words *to justify* (*dikaioo*) is its uniform significance throughout the New Testament, whether it be associated with faith (Rom. 5:1), grace (Rom. 3:24), blood (Rom. 5:9), works (James 2:24) or words (Matt. 12:37). Most Protestant commentators admit this, although Roman Catholic expositors in general have maintained that the word is not used forensically but psychologically or ethically as meaning to make inherently righteous.

Two illustrations will suffice here to show the New Testament usage. In Luke 10:29 we read of one who “willing to *justify* himself said unto Jesus: And who is my neighbor?” The expression, evidently, does not mean that the lawyer desired to be made inherently righteous. It means that he desired to make himself out to be righteous; to be so considered by Jesus; to be reckoned or declared righteous without regard to his actual state. Again in Luke 7:29 we read: “And all the people that heard him [Jesus], and the publicans, *justified* God, being baptized with the baptism of John.” The word here cannot mean that the people in general and the publicans in particular produced inherent righteousness in God. “Obviously it is a term of judgment: they *judged* that God had acted right in the mission of John, and they *declared* their judgment. . . . It would be absurd as well as blasphemous to speak of making God inherently righteous.”

The other prominent word in this verse, “faith,” was discussed in Meditations Nos. 15 and 16. There we sought to show what faith is and how it may be obtained. The question as to whether or not it is the gift of God, and if so in what sense, is there discussed. Belief of the heart as distinguished from mere intellectual acquiescence is also considered in those two “half hours” and scriptural proofs produced to show that the only faith which St. Paul honors by that name, the only faith which in his opinion will justify, is that which worketh by love.

## Does the Gospel Abolish Moral Law?

In verse 31 the Apostle touches on a subject that will be more fully elaborated by him later. “Do we then abolish law through faith? Far be it. On the contrary we establish law.”

“The force of the Apostle’s query is this: ‘Do we, preachers of the Gospel, introduce a doctrine which involves a species of moral lawlessness? -- Do we take off the reins of moral restraint?-- Do we para-lyze the moral power of Divine law?-- Is it a legitimate inference from our doctrine, . . . that licentious ness may be indulged with impunity?’ Such ideas were supposed by some to be inseparable from the doctrine of justification by faith without works of law. Hence the Apostle’s subsequent query: ‘Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound’ (Rom. 6:1)?”

This idea he once repels with intensity of dislike: “God forbid [or That be far from us].” “He, as it were, intimates that he could never be a party to the promulgation of any such doctrine. He could not for a moment engage in preaching and promoting any doctrine that had bound up in it as a legitimate involution the subversion of moral law.”

*“We cancel Law, then, by this faith of ours? We open the door, then, to moral license? We abolish code and precept, then, when we ask not for conduct but for faith? Away with the thought; nay, we establish Law; we go the very way to give a new sacred ness to its every command and to disclose a new power for the fulfillment of them all. But how this is and is to be, the later argument is to show.”*

*-- P. L. Read*

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 36, THE HERALD, November 1958

*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand unto Abraham (Gal. 3:8; Am. R. V.).*

THE Apostle has demonstrated that the general tenor and spirit of the Old Testament harmonizes with his Gospel of faith righteousness (3:27-31). One thing more remains for him to do in this connection--he will call on "the Law and the Prophets" to complete their witness (v.21) by furnishing an instance in which justification is shown in the Old Testament, no less than in his Gospel, to be "by faith apart from works of law" (3:28). And that the testimony may be conclusive, he passes by numerous less prominent heroes of faith (Heb. 11) and appeals at once to the case of Abraham, the illustrious "father" of the Jewish nation. If it can be shown that Abraham was justified by faith and by faith alone, "his" Gospel is established. On the other hand if it should appear that Abraham was justified by some works of his own or even by a combination of faith and works of law, that would demonstrate the fallacy of the Apostle's doctrine.

## Abraham -- the Friend of God

As we enter upon the study of Chapter 4, it is not difficult to realize that "the Jewish disputant is present still to the Apostle's thought. It could not be otherwise in this argument. No question was more pressing than that of acceptance with God. And St. Paul had not only in his Christian Apostleship debated that problem countless times with rabbinic combatants, he had himself been a rabbi and knew by experience alike the misgivings of the rabbinist's conscience and the subterfuges of his reasoning.

"So now there arises before him the great name of Abraham as a familiar watchword of the controversy of acceptance. He has been contending for an absolutely inclusive verdict of 'guilty' against man,

against every man. He has been with all his might shutting the doors of thought against human 'boasting,' against the least claim of man to have merited his acceptance. Can he carry this principle into quite impartial issues? Can he, a Jew in presence of Jews, apply it without apology, without reserve, to Abraham--'the Friend of God' himself? What will he say to that majestic example of man? His name itself sounds like a claim to almost worship. As he moves across the scene of Genesis, we (even we Gentiles) rise up as it were in reverent homage, honoring this figure at once so real and so near to the ideal: walking with God himself in a personal intercourse so habitual, so tranquil, so congenial. Is this a name to becloud with the assertion that here, as everywhere, acceptance was hopeless but for the clemency of God, '*gift wise, without deeds of law*'? Was not at least Abraham accepted because he was morally worthy of acceptance? And if Abraham then surely, in abstract possibility, others also. There must be a group of men, small or large, or at least one man who can 'boast' of his peace with God.

"On the other hand if with Abraham it was not thus then the inference is easy to all other men. Who but he is called the 'Friend' (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8)? Moses himself, the almost deified Lawgiver, is but 'the servant': trusted, intimate, honored in a sublime degree by his eternal Master. But he is never called 'the Friend.' That peculiar title seems to preclude altogether the question of legal acceptance. Who thinks of his friend as one whose relation to him needs to be good in law at all? The friend stands as it were behind law or above it in respect of his fellow. He holds a relation implying personal sympathies, identity of interests, contact of thought and will, not an anxious previous settlement of claims and remission of liabilities. If then the Friend of the Eternal Judge proves, nevertheless, to have needed justification and to have received it by the channel not of his personal worth but of the grace of God, there will be little hesitation about other men's need, and the way by which alone other men shall find it met."

## Abraham Justified by Faith Alone

In the first eight verses of the chapter the Apostle proves that Abraham was justified by faith and in verses 9 to 12 that he was justified by faith alone. These twelve verses form the first part of the chapter.

“In the second, verses 13 to 16, he supports his argument by the fact that the inheritance of the world, promised to the patriarch and his posterity, was conferred on him independent of his observance of the law. The third part, verses 17 22, proves that that very posterity to whom this heritage was to belong was a fruit of faith. In the fourth and last part, verses 23 25, this case is applied to believers of the present. Thus *righteousness, inheritance, posterity*, every thing, Abraham received by faith; and it will be even so with us if we believe like him.”

The chapter begins with the question:

*What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? -- Verse 1*

Some difference exists in the text of the various manuscripts with regard to the Greek word translated “hath found.” Some place it at the end, as in the Authorized Version quoted above; some place it after the word “father,” as in the American Revised Version which reads: “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, hath found according to the flesh?” Some omit it entirely, as in the Diaglott translation: “What, then, shall we say of Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?”

Notwithstanding this slight obscurity in the text, the main thought of the question is clear. It is not a question as to *what* Abraham had found. There was no doubt in the mind of the Apostle or his readers as to that. Abraham, they were assured, had found righteousness or justification. The sole question was *how* had he found it. Had he found it on the grounds of faith alone or in some other way?

## Had Abraham Grounds to Glory Before God?

The Apostle continues:

*For if Abraham were justified by words, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed\* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. -- Verses 2,3*

How shall we understand the words “but not before God”? Some have supposed that the meaning of the Apostle is that even though justified by words, Abraham would still not have had grounds for exulting before God. Of course in an important sense this is true, for there are no moral creatures anywhere who could attain to any moral excellence apart from the grace of the Almighty God. Even his angels in heaven who have never fallen, he charges with folly (*frailty*: liability to error [Samuel Cox] Job 4:18).

But the glorying of which the Apostle is speaking, the glory which his Jewish opponents would understand him to mean, is that which would have been legitimate in the case of Adam had he not sinned and in the case of the angels who have never sinned. Would not Abraham in fact have grounds for *such* exultation even in the presence of God himself if he had earned his justification: if he had been justified by works, if he had rendered perfect obedience to law’s every requirement? Whether or not he would have indulged in the act of glorying is beside the question. He most assuredly would have had grounds for so doing had he been justified by works. We must therefore look in another direction for an understanding of the Apostle’s words “but not before God.”

This phrase is what is termed an “elliptical expression.” We believe it can be understood best by supplying the ellipsis [or missing words] in the following manner: “*But [Abraham has] not [whereof to glory] before God.*” With these missing words supplied, the context might be paraphrased thus: If Abraham were justified by works he had whereof to glory. But the truth is that Abraham hath not where of to glory before God, however much he might have to glory before men. In that well known passage of scripture, Genesis 15:6, which speaks of the way in which Abraham was justified, we find nothing what ever about works but faith alone is mentioned: “Abraham *believed* God,” that is to say relied on



God's faithfulness. This, his faith, the simply taking God at his word, was placed to Abraham's credit for righteousness.

*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. -- Verses 4,5*

Here the Apostle draws an illustration from the domain of common life. To the hired workman who has performed his task his pay is not a matter of generosity on the part of his employer but a matter of justice. His employer is under obligation to pay him the stipulated wages as a *debt*. But according to the Genesis account, Abraham was not treated on this footing; he is therefore not one who has fulfilled his task. The same result is possible from the parallel and opposite standpoint: *to him that worketh not*, whatever is reckoned must be reckoned of grace, not of debt. This is precisely the manner, according to Moses, in which righteousness was reckoned to Abraham: out of God's sheer generosity, because he chose to regard Abraham's faith. Therefore, it is seen again that Abraham is not one who fulfilled his task; he is not declared righteous on that account.

### **Him that Justifieth the Ungodly**

There would be nothing remarkable if the Scriptures had stated that God would declare the righteous righteous; indeed we would have had difficulty in understanding how he could consistently do anything else. But the miracle of grace lies in his having found a way to declare the ungodly righteous.

But the word "ungodly" is a word "intense and dark; it means not the sinner only but the open, defiant sinner." Is it to be understood here as having special reference to Abraham? We scarcely think so. Of course, it would be true even of Abraham potentially, for the heart is deceitful above all things. But it is the class to which Abraham and all who are justified by faith belong, rather than Abraham particularly, that the Apostle has in mind in introducing this word into the discussion. The strong word "ungodly" has more than likely been suggested to his mind by the quotation which he is about to make from Psalm 32:1. "St. Paul is ready now with a conspicuous example of the justification of one who was truly at one miserable period, by his own fault, 'an ungodly one.'

## The Covering of David's Sins

“ ‘Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme’ (2 Sam. 12:14). He had done so indeed. The faithful photography of the Scriptures shows us David, the chosen, the faithful, the man of spiritual experiences acting out his lustful look in adultery. He half covered his adultery with the most base of constructive murders and then, for long months, refused to repent. Yet was David justified: ‘I have sinned against the Lord’; ‘The Lord also hath put away thy sin.’ He turned from his awfully ruined self to God, and *at once* he received remission. Then and to the last he was chastised. But he was then and there unreservedly justified with a justification which made him sing a loud beatitude.”

“Just as David too speaks his felicitation of the man (and it was himself) to whom God reckons righteousness irrespective of works: ‘Happy they whose iniquities have been remitted, and whose sins have been covered; . . . Happy the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin’ (Psa. 32:1,2).” -- Ver. 6 8 (???)

“Wonderful words in the context of the experience out of which they spring! A human soul which has greatly transgressed, knows it well, and knows too that to the end it will suffer a sore discipline because of it, for example and humiliation. Nevertheless it knows its pardon and knows it as a happiness indescribable. The iniquity has been ‘lifted’; the sin has been ‘covered,’ has been struck out of the book of ‘reckoning’ written by the Judge. The penitent will never forgive himself; in this very psalm he tears from his sin all the covering woven by his own heart. But his God has given him remission, has reckoned him as one who has not sinned, so far as access to him and peace with him are in question. And so his song of shame and penitence begins with a beatitude and ends with a cry of joy.”

We need not suppose that David here “plays the part of a *second* example side by side with Abraham. The position of Abraham is unique, and Paul will return to it after this short interruption. He merely adduces a saying of David, the inspired singer, which seems to him to complete the testimony of Moses about Abraham.”

## Imputed Righteousness

We pause here to notice the word “counted.” It is a translation of the Greek word *logizomai*, which occurs eleven times in this chapter. (Ver. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, and 24.) In the *American Revised Version* this Greek word is uniformly rendered in this chapter “reckoned,” but the *Authorized Version* employs three different words, **count**, **reckon**, and **impute** to render the same Greek word and thus tends to obscure the clearness and force of the argument. What is the meaning of this word and of the corresponding Hebrew word from which the term “imputed righteousness” is derived? Scholars tell us that while the primitive meaning is to reckon, whether the estimate be true or false, the secondary and usual sense is to reckon to a person what is not strictly his. Thus Eli reckoned Hannah to be drunken from the motion of her lips in prayer when she was really sober (1 Sam. 1:13).  
--P.L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 37, THE HERALD, December 1958

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision  
avails anything, but faith operating in us by love.*

-- Galatians 5:6, *Diaglott*

IN 3:21 we saw the Apostle asserting that “his” Gospel of faith righteousness was “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” In the last five verses of chapter 3, we saw him demonstrating this assertion to be true by reference to the general tenor and spirit of the Old Testament. Not content with so general a proof, he proceeded to cite a particular instance, and in order that the argument might be decisive he appealed at once to the case of Abraham himself. In the first eight verses of chapter 4, we saw him demonstrating that Abraham was justified (declared righteous), not on account of works of law he performed but solely on account of the fact that God, out of his sheer benevolence, had reckoned his faith to him for righteousness. In the verses we now consider (4:9-12),

the Apostle proceeds to show that Abraham was justified not only by faith but by faith alone.

### **Abraham Justified by Faith Alone**

*Cometh this blessedness* [this imputation of righteousness without works (v.6); this forgiveness of iniquities, this covering of sins (v.7); this non imputation of sin (v.8)] *upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. -- Verse 9, Authorized and Am. R.V.*

In light of Genesis 15:6 (so forcefully presented by the Apostle in the preceding passage) a Jewish opponent could not dispute the fact that Abraham was justified by faith. But he would advance the argument that Abraham's case was not in point so far as Gentiles were concerned. It merely illustrated the way the Jews (the circumcision) were to secure justification. Such an objection (doubtless urged many times by opponents of St. Paul's Gospel) has been well expressed by another: You speak of the justifications of David and Abraham. "But David was a child of the covenant of circumcision and Abraham was the father of that covenant. Do not their justifications speak only to those who stand with them in side that charmed circle? Was not Abraham justified by faith *plus* circumcision? Did not the faith act only because he was already one of the privileged?"

If this contention were true, then those who remained uncircumcised would remain ineligible for faith justification and consequently ineligible for the salvation unto which the "righteousness of [or from] God" was designed to lead (1:16). But the Apostle has said (3:22) that "his" Gospel is "unto all" men and "upon all" believers, irrespective of any other distinction whatsoever. In the matter of justification by faith there is "no difference" between the circumcised and the uncircumcised; and before he has finished he will have not only asserted this to be the case but will have demonstrated it beyond all question.

### **Abraham Reckoned Righteous Before Circumcision Was Instituted**

The point of the Apostle's question here is unmistakable: "Abraham, it is true, was circumcised; but at what time?-- before his justification or after? Not before but long after. Abraham had 'faith counted to him for righteousness' fourteen years (at least)

before he was circumcised, even reckoning from the time to which the passage quoted in verse 3 refers. He was a believer some considerable time before that period. The Apostle mentions as the effect and evidence of his faith his leaving his native land and going out, on the footing of the Divine promise, 'into the place which he should afterward receive for an inheritance, not knowing whither he went' (Heb. 11:6). But even the time referred to in the third verse was fourteen years previous to his circumcision. The Apostle seems to have selected Genesis 15:6 because then the first express declaration of Abraham's faith being imputed to him for righteousness was made. It preceded Sarah's giving him Hagar and could not, therefore, be much less than a year before the birth of Ishmael; for aught that appears to the contrary, it might be much more (Gen. 16:3). And we know that Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time circumcision was instituted and first practiced (Gen. 17:25).

"Circumcision, therefore, seeing it took place so long after his justification could have nothing to do with the ground of it, since a cause cannot follow its effect. From Abraham's being justified when 'in uncircumcision' it is obvious *first* that as circumcision was not (in whole or in part) the ground of *his* acceptance with God, it cannot be a solid foundation of hope to *others*. Dependence upon it, in this view, must be vain, springing from ignorance and misconception. *Secondly*, it is obvious that uncircumcision is no *hindrance* to the justification of *any*. As Abraham was justified when 'in uncircumcision' an uncircumcised Gentile may now be justified in the same way with Abraham. His justification being the pattern of the way in which God 'justifies the ungodly' in every age. 'They who are of faith,' whether Jews or Gentiles, 'are blessed with believing Abraham' (Gal. 3:9; *Weymouth*).

### **Circumcision Is a Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant**

"What, then, it may be asked did Abraham derive from circumcision? What was the meaning and the sign of the rite? This inquiry the Apostle answers in verses eleven and twelve."

*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had yet being uncircumcised:*

*that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.*

In instituting circumcision God said to Abraham, “It shall be a *token* of the covenant betwixt me and you” (Gen. 17:11). In the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word “token” is the same as is here in Romans 4:11 translated “sign.” Other covenants had been ratified by signs. For example, God set the rainbow in the sky as a *sign* or *token* of his covenant that the waters should not again become a flood so as to destroy all flesh (Gen. 9:6-17). In every case the matter of importance of course is the covenant itself, not its sign or token. Rainbows in themselves are powerless to prevent destructive floods. Their usefulness consists in reminding us of the covenant of our powerful and faithful God.

So with circumcision; it was not the reality but a sign or token of the reality. And what was the reality of which circumcision was the sign? We answer, in the language of the scripture just quoted: “The covenant betwixt me and you,” that is to say the covenant between God and Abraham (usually referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant, into which we shall shortly have occasion to inquire more particularly) we may here state is briefly summarized in the statement that in Abraham and in his Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17, 18; 26:4).

### **Circumcision Is Also a Seal of the Righteousness of Faith**

Circumcision, then, was intended as a sign or token of the Abrahamic Covenant. But the Apostle speaks of it additionally as a “seal”: “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he [Abraham] had while he was in uncircumcision.” Circumcision, then, did not *confer* this blessing; what it did was to *confirm* it. It did not *convey* a standing of righteousness before God but *bore witness* to the righteousness already reckoned. Quoting from an able writer: “In no dispensation do rites bestow anything; they are the shadow, not the substance; they are a seal. But the seal is worthless apart from the matter or from the document that it attests. The Jew had torn off the seal from the

covenant and then vainly boasted of this meaningless imprint.”

A seal of the righteousness reckoned to him on account of his faith! What can this righteousness mean but that circumcision of heart enjoined on Israel again and again in the Old Testament: circumcision which the martyr Stephen testified they were (as a nation) yet without. “And Jehovah thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut. 30:6). “O stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always fight against the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, you also do” (Acts 7:51). [See also Deut. 10:12 16; Jer. 4:4.] To this heart circumcision St. Paul has already referred (2:25 29), considered in Meditations No. 23. There he shows that the mark in the flesh is merely intended as the seal of a proper heart condition. “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who 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.”

### **Of Whom Is Abraham “Father”? And Who Are They Who Are Rightly Called His “Sons”?**

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Apostle also draws our attention in these verses to the wisdom displayed by God in arranging the institution of circumcision so that it should occur several years subsequent to the counting of Abraham’s faith to him for righteousness. This was by no means accidental but a part of a deep design. It was to the end “in order that” Abraham might be “the father of all them that believe” whether Jews or Gentiles. The sign of circumcision given to him as a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision made him eminently fitted to be a “father” to the uncircumcised believer; while possessing the sign of circumcision made it possible for him to be also the “father” of Jewish believers. The word here translated “father” designates an exemplar, a representative, a pattern, a leading and eminent example others may copy. Thus we read of Jabal as being the “father” of such as dwell in tents and have cattle (Gen. 4:20), and in the next verse his brother

Jubal is mentioned as the “father” of such as handle the harp and pipe. Satan is spoken of by Jesus as the “father” of wicked Jews (John 8:38). Conversely we see that it is not sufficient to be born in the physical line of descent from Abraham to be considered a “child” or “son” of Abraham. Only “Israelites indeed” are considered worthy of the title of a “son” of Abraham (John 1:47). Thus our Lord denied this title to Jews who had proved themselves unworthy of it. Their circumcision meant nothing to him in the absence of the real circumcision of heart which should have characterized them. “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). Note also the sublime remark of our Lord on witness in the faith of Zacchaeus, as evidenced by his works: “Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold. Jesus said unto him: To day is salvation come to this house, *forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*” That is to say, forasmuch as he is not only of the circumcision but is treading in the track of the faith of Abraham and is therefore worthy to be called one of his sons (Luke 19:8,9). In full harmony with this expression of our Lord, the Apostle reasons: “Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham” (Gal.3:7 [*Am. R. V. J.*]).

### **Faith Without Works Is Dead**

It is worthy of notice that the Apostle does not say that Abraham is the “father” of those who merely acquiesce in the doctrinal viewpoint he held. Faith in St. Paul’s life and teaching is much more than a mere mental agreement as to the philosophy concerning God, his attributes, plans, and purposes. The Apostle is speaking of those who “walk” in the steps of Abraham’s faith (4:12). Scholars tell us that the word here translated “walk” is a military term, meaning to “march in file.” The picture before the Apostle’s mind seems to be that of an army whose weapons are not carnal marching in file. First there comes before his mind the noble *career* of Abraham. In its general course and in its crises his career gave ample evidence of the faith in God within Abraham’s heart, which *actuated* that career. Next he envisions a host of others with similar careers; not similar in details (for in detail they differ widely) but similar in the respect that they result from the same motive. They are



animated by the same mainspring; they give evidence that faith in God has been that which has directed their course. Marching in file in the track of that faith which Abraham had before he was circumcised; this is their characteristic. And of such the Apostle writes: Abraham is their “father”; to them as to him righteousness shall also be reckoned.

Mere profession of faith unaccompanied by “works of faith” is worthless (as stressed in James 2:20). A man *believes* a thing when he *acts* as if it were true. If he fails to so act, instead of producing the evidence that his faith is real he manifests on the contrary that his faith is dead, no matter what his professions may be. Because Abraham’s faith was evidenced by his conduct “therefore” it was reckoned unto him for righteousness (Rom. 4:22). How eloquently Zachaeus’ course in life attested his faith! Half of his goods to the poor! Reparation of wrong to the extent of fourfold! Small wonder that our Lord recognized him as a “son of Abraham,” as one who was marching in file in the track of that faith which Abraham had while as yet uncircumcised.

--P. L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 38, THE HERALD, January 1959

*And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. --Galatians 3:17, 18*

ONCE again our attention is directed to Abraham, the friend of God, “father,” exemplar or pattern of all believers, whether Gentiles or Jews. In our last two Half Hours we have seen the Apostle conclusively demonstrating the fact that Abraham was reckoned righteous by God, not because he was in fact righteous, having kept law’s every requirement, but because it pleased God to regard Abraham’s faith. Moreover the Apostle was at pains to show that this standing in God’s sight was enjoyed by Abraham

several years before circumcision was instituted, thus making it apparent that Abraham was justified (declared righteous) not only by faith but by faith alone.

But a further question would be advanced by the Jewish disputant. After being thus blessed with this standing before God, Abraham had received a magnificent promise. He and his seed were to receive a rich inheritance; they were to be heirs of nothing less than the “world”! Now surely, the opponent would argue, the seed to which this inheritance related could be none other than the nation of Israel: Abraham’s issue through Isaac. And if this be granted, the Apostle must then concede that after all even though *justification* was by faith and by faith alone *inheritance* was not. *Inheritance*, the Apostle must admit, was by another means: that relationship to Abraham which was possessed by those who were his physical descendants and were under the Law Covenant mediated by Moses. St. Paul knew that this thought lay deep in the heart of every Jewish opponent. There fore in the four verses we now consider (4:13 16) “he attacks it unsparingly, demonstrating the very opposite is the truth; for the Law, far from procuring the promised inheritance for the Jews, would infallibly deprive them of it.”

*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*

Three things claim our attention here: (1) the promise; (2) the seed to whom the promise was made; and (3) the grounds or means whereby the fulfillment of the promise is made certain.

## The Promise

When we turn to the Genesis account, we do not find any of God’s promises to Abraham containing the precise words “heir of the world.” But it is easy to see that this must be their outcome, and the Apostle in this comprehensive expression gives us the substance of them all. Thus we read: “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2,3). Again we read, “In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall

all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:17,18).

Inheritance of the world would necessarily include, of course, the inheritance of the land of Canaan, and indeed this feature is specifically mentioned. “I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the *land of Canaan*, for an everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8; see also 12:7; 13:15; 15:18). Reference to this portion of the promise is also made in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into *a place which he should after receive for an inheritance*, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in *the land of promise*, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, *the heirs with him of the same promise*” (11:8,9).

### The Seed

But the promise was not limited to Canaan. The fact that the substance of these glorious promises to Abraham meant nothing less than the inheritance of the “world” would not be disputed by the Jewish opponent. Indeed he himself would have been only too ready to have multiplied scripture quotations in support of this teaching, perhaps recalling the promise through David to the Messianic Seed of Abraham: “I have given thee *the uttermost parts of the earth* for an inheritance” (Psa. 2:8). But the Apostle is about to show, to the great discomfiture of those who “rested in the law” and to the great encouragement of those whose rest is in God, that the seed which is to inherit the promise is not Israel after the flesh but Israel after the spirit. Not the nation which can claim *physical descent* from Abraham but the nation, composed of both Gentiles and Jews, who can claim Abraham as their “father” on higher grounds: because of a kinship of faith, because of the possession of a like confidence in God to that which Abraham manifested to such high degree.

Some years before this the Baptist had uttered the warning: “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” (Matt. 3:9). In harmony with these words of our Lord’s forerunner, the Apostle is now to point out (what he will later in chapter 9 more fully

elaborate) that the physical descendants of Abraham are not the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). From God’s stand point “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel; neither, because they are the [natural] seed of Abraham, are they all children” in God’s sight. On the contrary, in God’s estimation the “children of the promise [they which are of faith--Gal. 3:7] *are counted for the seed*” (Rom. 9:6 8).

### **A Heavenly and An Earthly Seed**

For the purpose of his present discussion the Apostle does not enter on the question as to *how* the promise is to be fulfilled. He is concerned here only with the condition, the grounds, the means whereby it is to be fulfilled. Elsewhere the scriptures distinguish between a heavenly and an earthly seed and show how the blessing will proceed from one to another of various groups within those two main divisions. First our attention is drawn to the fact that *all* the promises of God, and therefore this Abrahamic promise, are yea and amen in one particular Seed. God hath appointed the Anointed Jesus heir; not of the world only but of “all things.” Thus indicating that the promised blessing of all the families of the earth must come to them through him (Matt. 1:1,2; 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 1:2). In another illuminating passage the Apostle shows that in the Father’s plan Jesus is not to be alone in this glorious work. He is to have a company of anointed ones closely associated with him: as closely associated and united as the members of a body are to each other and to their head. His words are, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). Comparing scripture still further with scripture, we are confirmed in the above understanding. In a powerful passage we are expressly informed that the Seed to whom the promise was made is Christ; if we be Christ’s, then we are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to that promise: joint heirs with Christ if so be that we suffer with him. (See Gal. 3:16,29; Rom. 8:17.)

But while this “choice” seed (the Anointed Jesus and his anointed Church with whose calling, character qualifications and development the New Testament is chiefly concerned) is to be highly exalted (from human to spirit conditions, even to the Divine nature itself) this class will not constitute the whole of Abraham’s

seed. There are others who will be raised to spirit conditions, though not to Divine nature, and the willing cooperation of these will also be enlisted. According to our understanding of the Scriptures, the Church, which is his Body (Eph. 1:23), will be assisted in the work of blessing and restoring all nations by the rest of the Church of the Firstborns (Heb. 12:23): “the virgins her companions that follow her. . . “ (Psa. 45:14).

Others again will be raised to human conditions, indeed the greater number of Abraham’s seed, and will enjoy an earthly paradise. Of these Abraham and others of the faithful ones of a prior age will have exalted stations: they will be princes in all the earth (Psa. 45:16). These one time “fathers” will have become the “children” of Christ Jesus, their everlasting Father, by his Bride, the Lamb’s wife (Isa. 9:6; Rev. 21:9). In full harmony with those on the spirit plane and in co-operation with them these perfected men will be occupied in turning many to righteousness throughout the Millennial Age. As a result they will shine amongst their fellow men as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:3).

### **Does Israel After the Flesh Constitute the Earthly Seed of Abraham?**

We thus see that five groups or divisions may be distinguished amongst the posterity of Abraham-- amongst the true God recognized faith seed of Abraham. First, our Lord Jesus himself, the Seed most excellent: the Messianic Seed. Second, the Church which is his Body. Third, the rest of the Church of the Firstborns, sometimes referred to as the Great Multitude or Great Company (Rev. 7:9). Fourth, the Ancient Worthies, and fifth, the Restitution Class composed of the remainder of the world of mankind who *embrace the faith of Abraham, who walk in the steps of his faith.*

The Apostle, however, in the passage in Romans we are considering, does not distinguish these groups or divisions. He does not even distinguish between the Gospel Age Church and the Restitution Class of the Millennial Age. For the purpose of his present discussion he is content to regard them as together, forming one large group: the seed of Abraham. He is concerned with emphasizing the one distinguishing characteristic common to them all. Together they

constitute the household of *faith*, and that is the point of emphasis.

But some one may be inclined to ask, Are not Israel after the flesh part of the seed of Abraham? To this we would make answer: Not according to our understanding of the scriptures. But, it may be insisted, Do they not constitute the *earthly* seed? We answer No. Many Gentiles will be found amongst his earthly seed. If Israel after the flesh share the faith of Abraham they may together with Gentile believers constitute his earthly seed; if they share his faith, they may be found even amongst his heavenly seed. Indeed, we know as a matter of fact that some (for example, the Apostles) will be found amongst Abraham's spiritual, heavenly seed. But in whatever group individual members of Israel after the flesh may be found, it will not be because of their flesh relationship. It will be because of their faith relationship to Abraham. And they will not be counted for the seed in any sense of the word if they are found destitute of the faith which characterized him.

### **Believing Israelites to Form Nucleus of Abraham's Earthly Seed**

In a later chapter in this Epistle (ch. 11), the Apostle will tell us of his hopes, nay of his firm conviction that the great majority of Israel after the flesh will come to embrace Abraham's faith and share his inheritance. When the Gospel Age has ended, "after those [Gospel Age] days" (Jer. 31:33), God will make a New Law Covenant with Israel. Like, yet oh so different from, their Old Law Covenant. It is the Apostle's confident expectation that *then* they will be found with God's law written on their hearts instead of on tables of stone. Instead of the great mass of his countrymen being blinded as at present and only the few showing faith, conditions will be so changed that the great majority will believe and turn to the Lord and only the few will reject him. Indeed it is his happy belief, inspired by scriptures we cannot now take time or space to discuss, that his brethren according to the flesh will form the nucleus of the Restitution Class, the earthly Seed of Abraham. To this nucleus and largely as a result of their missionary efforts all nations shall be drawn, to them all nations shall be joined, in them all nations shall merge.

## Faith Not Law the Ground of the Promise

But these thoughts are not uppermost in the Apostle's mind now. Here (4:13-16) he is occupied--intensely occupied--with the fact that the present condition of his countrymen is that of blindness. Ignoring the faith which was the sole instrument in Abraham's case, both for justification and inheritance, they "rest in the law" and think the promise will be secured to them on that account. This cannot be, he insists, "for, if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect (v. 14)."

--P. L. Read

# Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 39, THE HERALD, February 1959

*And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.--Galatians 3:17,18*

IN our last Meditation we noted that Abraham's earthly seed are distinguished in a number of scriptures, but such distinction is not made in the verses now under review (4:13-16). Here the Apostle is occupied with the fact that the condition of his country men at the time he wrote was that of blindness. They rested in the law and thought the promise would be secured to them on that account, ignoring the faith which was the sole instrument in Abraham's case both for justification and inheritance. This cannot be: "for if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect (v.14).

In the Galatian letter St. Paul presents the *historical* proof that the keeping of the Law could not secure the fulfillment of the promise (3:17,18). He there shows that the Law Covenant was not given until four hundred and thirty years after the Abrahamic

Covenant. It therefore could make no difference to or make no change so as to annul or abrogate that older covenant which rested on God's promise and man's reliance on God's faithful performance of that promise. In the passage before us he reaches the same result from another standpoint. His reasoning is that if an inheritance is promised on the one condition of faith and then it develops that in order to come into possession of the promised inheritance it becomes necessary to first render obedience to certain other conditions not previously stipulated, it becomes apparent at once that the promise was not serious. It could not have been made in good faith and any reliance thereon would be misplaced. This would be still more apparent if the conditions imposed were impossible to execute. In that case the one exercising faith in the promise would find his faith made *void*, *emptied* (the word is the same as that in Phil. 2:7 where the Apostle speaks of our Lord as *emptying* himself). His faith would be deprived of its object, drained of its contents, and thus made useless. Not only so, but the promise itself, having an impossible condition attached to it, would be paralyzed in its effects.

But the promise, as a matter of fact, was made by Almighty God himself. It must therefore have been made in good faith. To suppose otherwise would be to doubt the veracity of God. Such a conclusion can not for a moment be entertained (3:3,4). Therefore no such impossible condition as obedience to the requirements of the Law Covenant could have been attached so as to interfere with the fulfillment of the promise. Or to use the words of the Apostle: "Therefore it [the promise and its fulfillment] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed" (v.16).

### **Where Law Is Not There Is No Transgression**

Moreover the opposition of the Law and the Promise both in their operation and in their effects is still further manifest in verse 15: "Besides, the Law works out wrath; but where law is not, there is no transgression" (*Diaglott*).

The Apostle must not be understood here as affirming that prior to the giving of the Law there was no sin, for as a matter of fact we know to the contrary.



He himself informs us in the next chapter (v.13) that “until the law,” that is to say from Adam “until the law sin *was* in the world.” What we understand him to be teaching us here is (1) that where there is no law sin, in the form of transgression of law, cannot exist; (2) that no sooner is a law given to fallen man than he is bound to transgress it because his imper-fect state is such as to render him powerless to do otherwise, and (3) the transgression of law brings in its wake the condemnation and punishment of God. This idea of Law’s operation and effects is worked out in remarkable detail and to our great edification in chapter 7, as we shall see. At present it must suffice us to note Law’s incompatibility with Promise and to rejoice in the knowledge that “*therefore* it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is father of us all.”

### **The Seed Is Composed of Jewish and Gentile Believers**

Some have supposed that the Apostle does in these words distinguish between heavenly and earthly seed. Those who adopt this view understand the seed “which is of the Law” to refer to the earthly seed and the seed “which is of the faith of Abraham” to have reference to the heavenly. We have already indicated our belief that the scriptures elsewhere do indeed make this distinction, but we are unable to see that this distinction is made here. To our understanding the Apostle does but differentiate here between believers of Jewish and Gentile origin without any indication of whether they will be found amongst the heavenly or the earthly seed.

Instead of the promise being made of none effect as it would have been had it depended for its fulfillment on obedience to the requirements of the Law Covenant, it was made sure by depending on faith only. And to whom was it made sure? We answer: To all the seed in the true and full sense of that word as we have endeavored to point out that sense in the preceding paragraphs. After what has gone before we can not doubt but that the expression “all the seed” refers to all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. The seed “which is of the Law” would thus refer (not to fleshly Israelites without faith nor yet to those Jewish

believers only who were destined to become a part of Abraham's earthly seed, but) to all Jewish believers, with out regard to whether they would be found amongst the heavenly or the earthly seed. If this thought be correct, then the corresponding phrase the seed "which is of the faith of Abraham" would refer to Gentile believers, some of whom might be of the earthly and some of the heavenly seed of Abraham.

It may be objected that in referring to the seed "which is of the Law" St. Paul does not mention the qualification of faith and therefore he is speaking of Israel after the flesh, without regard to whether they are believers or not. But neither the immediate context nor the general tenor of scripture will support this objection. In light of the foregoing context we have considered, we cannot but understand that the presence of *faith* is implied in "all the seed" to whom the promise is made sure and that the expression "which is of the Law" refers not to Jews as such but to the Jewish believers only. In the case of the Gentiles, that seed "which is of the faith of Abraham," the attribute of faith is expressly mentioned because it appears in them without any question of it being supplemented by abortive attempts at obedience to the requirements of Law.

### Father of Us All

The last words of verse 16 "sum up all that has been developed in the previous context. Believing Jews and Gentiles, we all participate by faith not only in justification" but also in the inheritance; for the true seed to whom this promise was made was that of faith, not according to the Law. Abraham is therefore the sole stem from which proceed those two branches which form in him one and the same household of faith.

When then shall we say (we Israelites) that Abraham our forefather has found *according to the flesh*? Not righteousness, certainly, for *that* he found by faith. Nor was his the faith of a circumcised man, for it was several years previous to his circumcision that his faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. Moreover it is not "according to the flesh" that he was made heir of the world. The inheritance of the world is not his as the reward of merit (because of his having performed every requirement of God's righteous law), for this he did not do. It is his because he rested in the promise,

because he relied on, trusted in the unfailing word of God.

Such, as we have seen, has been the substance of the Apostle's argument in the first sixteen verses of chapter four of our Epistle. But unbelief in mind and heart is difficult to conquer; prejudice is not easily disarmed and routed. And notwithstanding the Apostle's cogent reasoning, a Jewish opponent would yet be apt to debate the matter further. Such an one might insist: "What you say, Paul, is undoubtedly true *so far as it goes*. But the inheritance, as you have shown and as I am glad to concede, is really not so much centered in Abraham himself (illustrious father of our nation though he be) but in his seed, especially in his Messianic Seed. That great One for whom our nation yet waits with longing expectation. This Messianic Seed was certainly promised to be a son of David *according to the flesh*. It is written: 'Jehovah hath sworn unto David in truth; he will not turn from it; *Of the fruit of thy body* will I set upon thy throne.' And David, in his turn, was a descendant of Abraham *according to the flesh*. Now there could have been no David and consequently there could be no Messianic Seed unless there had first been an Isaac. And Isaac was born to Abraham in the way of natural, physical generation. Is it not apparent therefore that instead of finding nothing according to the flesh, as you would have us believe, Abraham really found a very great deal? For he found Isaac thus; and without Isaac it is clear that the whole plan and purpose of God would have been frustrated." If possessed of a sufficiency of this world's polish and refinement such an opponent might hesitate to utter the rest of his thoughts, but if not he would add: "And we Jews are the descendants of Isaac--God's chosen people. Surely there must be something wrong with your gospel, Paul, reducing us as it does to the level of Gentile dogs in the sight of God." A mind as familiar as was St. Paul's with the secret thoughts of the Israelitish heart could not, as an able writer has observed, "neglect this important side of the question." On the contrary, in the verses we now consider (4:17-22), he enters into this new subject as boldly as into the two preceding. Sapping the last root of Jewish prejudice by scripture, he demonstrates that the birth of Isaac, no less than the grace of justification and the promise of the inheritance, was the effect of faith.

## **The Birth of Isaac Was “A Birth from the Dead”**

Let us follow the Apostle as he traces in the Old Testament narrative the evidence that Isaac's birth, natural though it was, was yet a miracle vouchsafed to living faith--that it might well be described as a “birth from the dead.” First he will appeal to scripture to support his previous assertion that Abraham is the “father,” not of believing Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. And will the scriptures support his argument? Will the law again be found to “witness” to his message? It is even so. The Gospel preached beforehand to Abraham: “In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8) lies hidden in the very name of the Patriarch. For the name “Abraham” means “Father of a great multitude.” How, then, had he come to receive this name? Was it always his? No, indeed! It was given him in connection with the confirmation of God's promise: “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham, *for a father of many nations have I made thee*” (Gen. 17:5).

There is in this promise, though, an expression that seems to be belied by the facts of the case. How could God say, “*I have made thee a father of many nations,*” when as a matter of fact Abraham was still childless? Is there not some error in the translation here? Should not the record read: “*I will make thee a father of many nations*”?

Such a conclusion indeed would necessarily be our had the promise proceeded from the mouth of any other than the great Jehovah. But the form this language takes only reveals his grandeur, for, as the Apostle goes on to say, he is that God “Who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Ver. 17). In his sight a thousand years are but as a day and a day as a thousand years. In his sight, therefore, all generations are included in one view--the dead as though they still lived; the unborn as though they already existed.

Such is the majesty of our God, and it is always appropriate for us to pause in humble adoration when we contemplate it. But the point with which the Apostle is chiefly concerned here is to show that the faith of Abraham corresponded to that majesty. And what an insight his analysis gives us into the essence and quality of Abraham's faith. It was undoubtedly

the two attributes of God the Apostle here mentions: his power to *quicken* (“God who quickeneth the dead”) and his power to *create* (“God who calleth those things which be not as though they were”). On these Abraham’s faith fastened in this moment of decision. Quickening power there must be if from his body, now “as good as dead,” and in Sarah’s old age there should come a son through whom the promise might be fulfilled. “Quickening power there will be,” reasons Abraham, “for God’s purpose knows no hindrance. Dead though I and my wife may be as regards our generative faculties, God is he that giveth life to the dead. And though I see them not, it is as much in his power to summon them to appear as it is in mine to summon my servants; he has announced his purpose so to do, so my faith takes hold on his promise and already I rejoice in prospect of my own future life and in the seed which for multitude he has likened to the starry heavens above my head, and which in his sight are no less real.” --P.L. Read

## Half Hour Meditations on Romans

No. 40, April 1959, Page 55

*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?--Acts 26:8*

HAVING discussed the narrative in Genesis concerning Abraham’s justification, a narrative that was doubtless present to the mind of all his readers, the Apostle concluded his review with the words: “And therefore it [Abraham’s faith] was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:22). In the words which follow he “extracts the permanent principle contained in Abraham’s case to apply it to us” (Godet).

*Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. --Verses 23,24*

## Abraham's Justification Is an Example and Pattern for the Church

Earlier (Meditations No. 14) our attention was drawn to the fact that the “faith of the Christian is the faith of Abraham.” Here the Apostle makes this very clear. While it is true, of course, that the object of Abraham’s faith was different in form from that of the Christian, yet in substance it was the same. *In each case the object of faith is God himself.* In Abraham’s case faith rested in God’s promise; our faith rests in an accomplished fact. Abraham looked *for ward* to the birth of Isaac [which we noted in Meditation No. 39 was a birth from the dead] and looked *forward* also to that greater Seed who should come through Isaac. We look *back* to the resurrection of Christ. Both in his case and in ours faith and the disposition of mind and heart is the same: a firm reliance on *God*. Moreover the Apostle is not content to compare the faith of Abraham with that of the Christian in a general way. He traces the parallel much closer by showing that in Abraham’s case and in ours this reliance on God *has particular reference to his quickening power.* Neither the birth of Isaac, to which Abraham looked forward, nor the resurrection of Christ, to which we look back, being possible without the exercise of this power of God.

The Apostle, however, is concerned not only with comparing Abraham’s **faith** with ours. The point of chief emphasis is that to us as to Abraham **God will reckon faith for righteousness.** Not only is the Christian’s faith identical with that of Abraham but it **will receive similar recognition and approval by God.** The record in Genesis of God counting the faith of Abraham to him for righteousness was not written for Abraham’s sake alone but for us also. As a matter of fact, it was not written for Abraham’s sake at all in the sense of being written for his assistance or encouragement, for it was not written until some 400 years after the events recorded. The meaning here would seem to be that the account of Abraham’s justification was not written merely to relate a fact belong to **Abraham’s** history but was written for our encouragement. So that we who share Abraham’s faith may have the assurance that righteousness will in like manner be reckoned to us. Scholars tell us that in the Greek this point is brought out much more forcibly than in our English translation. The Apostle does not,

it seems, use the mild expression that faith “shall be” imputed to us for righteousness. What he really says is that it **is sure to be** imputed to us. One writer commenting on this passage expounds it thus: “Every time this condition [faith] shall be fulfilled, the same imputation *will certainly take place*; such is the meaning of the word [translated *shall be*]” (Godet).

### A Seeming Difficulty

It would not seem possible for the Apostle to have drawn more closely the parallel between Abraham’s justification and that of the church, both in regard to the faith exercised and to the righteousness imputed, yet the fact that Abraham lived prior to the time when the great sacrifice for sins had been made by our dear Redeemer has been urged as presenting a difficulty in the way of accepting without some qualification the Apostle’s teaching. In this connection it has been intimated to us more than once that a discussion of the subject in this series of “Meditations” would be appreciated by many.

Thus far we have hesitated to act on this suggestion, but since this would appear to be the proper place in the series for the subject to be discussed if it is to be discussed by us at all, we are venturing to do so now. In giving this question brief consideration here, we desire to state first that our aim is practical rather than doctrinal. We find in ourselves and in others a natural disposition to give attention to doctrine rather than to walk, whereas what attention we give to doctrine should ever be with a view to a closer walk with our Lord.

As an able writer has observed: “There is in this a great and imminent danger. One may hold the most accurate views regarding the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, may be able to state them in the most precise formulas, may be thoroughly instructed in dispensational and prophetic truth, and may know familiarly the teaching embodied in the types and ordinances and yet be barren of fruit. There is grave danger lest that which was Philadelphian become Laodicean in character: rich, increased with the best doctrinal goods (handed down from fathers with whom they were living, life controlling truths) and conscious of no need, but lukewarm. There may be little life where there is much light” (Mauro).

## “Now I Know In Part”

Again, in expressing our views on this as on all other questions of interest to our readers, we would not be unmindful of the Apostle’s words that now “we know in part”; nor would we forget that in an other place he cautions us: “If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 13:9; 8:2). Moreover we remember that while never contradictory truth is many sided, and perhaps no truth more so than that of justification. Our answer, then, to any question propounded on this subject must necessarily depend upon the point of view of the questioner: upon the meaning which, at the time of his question, he associates in his mind with the word “justification.” Some for example use the word “justification” as including not only the **instantaneous imputation of righteousness** which God makes to a man on his exercise of faith but also the **gradual impartation of righteousness** which after takes place in the believer’s experience. Others limit the use of the word “justification” to the first of these two experiences, employing the word “sanctification” to describe the second. While, as we have suggested previously (Meditations No. 17), we believe that it conduces to clearness of thought to thus distinguish justification by faith from sanctification, yet it is no part of our present purpose to insist on this distinction. The point we do desire to make is that unless a uniform use of the word “justification” be adopted it will invariably be necessary to inquire as to the meaning understood before an answer to any given question can be attempted.

## Faith Justification Distinguished from Eternal Life

From one of Charles Russell’s numerous expositions we quote the following statement: “While the Ancient Worthies could come into harmony with God through faith in the operation of a plan not fully revealed to them and not even begun, it would appear that it would be impossible for divine justice to go further than this with any, until the atonement for sin had been actually effected by the sacrifice of Christ.”

(*Scripture Studies*, Vol. VI, pages 111, 112.)



With the line of thought here suggested we are in very good accord, and while we would not wish to speak either too positively as to what is or is not possible with our great God who “callesh those things which be not as though they were.” And who said to Abraham not “I will make” but “I have made” thee a father of many nation. Yet we confess that to us also “it would appear” to be impossible for divine justice to have done more for the Ancient Worthies than offer them a *robe* to wear: a precious robe, ‘tis true; a robe of righteousness that covered their imperfections from his sight, enabling them to live at peace with him and to enjoy his fellowship. But he could not release them from the death penalty until later.

But while it is true that not until Jesus had offered himself in sacrifice was **death** abolished and **life** (yes and even immortality for some) thus brought to light, it does not follow that we who now eagerly embrace this additional privilege of passing from death unto life wear any different *robe*. While none can enter upon this new and living way Jesus dedicated for us unless they wear the robe of righteousness, it is not another or a different robe from that worn by the “faith” class of every age.

### **“Apart from Shedding of Blood There Is No Remission”**

In full agreement with the foregoing, we find the writer to the Hebrews assuring us in connection with his discussion of the typical arrangements that “apart from shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22; *ARV*). According to this scripture, since the blood of efficacy (that of Jesus) had not yet been shed in Abraham’s day, there could have been no remission for him. But it has been pointed out in connection with Psalm 32 (quoted in this chapter), “we are to distinguish sharply between forgiveness of sins and remission of penalties” (Russell, *Reprints*, p. 3260). And as another able writer has observed, the Greek word translated in our Bibles as “remission” (Heb. 9:22) is not to be understood “in the sense merely of forgiveness. In keeping with the thought of the whole passage, the word is used in the wide sense of ‘release’ rather than of ‘cleansing’” (George Milligan). Abraham’s sins were forgiven or passed over but he was not released from the death penalty. (See discussion on Rom. 3:25 in Meditations No. 32.)

Again, in enlarging upon David's case Russell goes on to state that while his sins were forgiven "yet the punishment which the Prophet had foretold came upon him in due time. Thus we see that forgiveness of sins here stands not for judicial forgiveness, which would have exonerated the forgiven one from all punishment, but it stands merely for the removal of divine disfavor, which had come upon the king as one of the results of his transgression."

In this connection it may also be observed that the ransom sacrifice of Christ was still only in prospect: at least far from a complete transaction while our Lord Jesus was yet in the flesh. Yet prior to his death he was able to *forgive* men but not to release them from the penalty of their sins. "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). But it should be carefully noted that this was not said to every one, only to those possessed of genuine faith. Again, it was before he could release her from the penalty of death that he said to the woman whose tears of repentance wrought from living faith washed his feet: "Thy sins are forgiven." [Note: *are* for given, not *will* be.] "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:47-50). [Not in the hope of finding peace after I have been crucified but go in present possession of it.]

*He turned with 'Daughter, be of good comfort,*

*Thy faith hath made thee whole,'*

*And peace, that passeth all understanding,*

*Then **straightway** filled her soul.*

Justification by faith, then, in our view of the matter, would appear to be scripturally defined as a robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10) and is scripturally explained to mean forgiveness of sins (Rom. 4:7) but does not include release from the death penalty imposed on Adam and his race. This could be accomplished only by the payment of the ransom price to God. Furthermore it would seem that this precious robe of righteousness has been offered to all the "faith" class from the earliest times even unto now. The wearing of it brought them all, Ancient Worthies and Gospel age Church members alike, peace with God and fellowship with him as they have realized that their sins were covered from his sight.

In addition to the wearing of this robe, believers since the death of Jesus have been permitted (still only

by faith) to pass from Adamic death unto eternal life. The Apostle has yet to unfold how this passing from death to life is accomplished by the believer's union with the resurrection life of Jesus: the glorious "overcoming" which the supply of his spirit of life makes possible to such even now in this present life; the final victory which awaits those who "abide" in him, holding fast their confidence to the end; the whole process of sanctification. We are assured that in later chapters he will do so, plainly and adequately. But since the *first* requirement of all who would enter upon that narrow pathway *is to be properly dressed for the journey*, the Apostle has thus far confined his teaching to the elucidation of the only way whereby a sufficient robe for such a journey may be secured. It is a robe of righteousness granted not as a reward of it but as an unearned gift from the God of all grace on the exercise of faith in him as exemplified in the case of Abraham. --P. L. Read