

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 13 -

THE BANKRUPTCY OF MAN'S BEST

Romans 7:15-25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is wrong with such thinking? The same thing was wrong with Paul before he met CHRIST on the road to Damascus. It is self-deception. It reveals that one does not know the law nor understand it. I have never met a man yet who lives up to the Golden Rule, have you? He boasts of it as his religion in exactly the same way the Jew boasted in the law! They did not keep it, but that seemed to be unimportant; they had it! I have the Golden Rule, but do I live up to it? No man does! "The Sermon on the Mount is my religion." Have you ever really considered the Sermon on the Mount? Just take one verse out of it, **"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."** Purity within, not conduct, nor conversation, JESUS talked about an inward

condition. How many times have our hearts held desires that we would never dare to share with a most intimate friend? Anyone who embraces the Sermon on the Mount, who takes it seriously and tries to live up to it, will be led to despair.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"**Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.**"

There it is. This is the frustration of man, from the first generation to this, in spite of all of the devices, the schemes he invents by which to ignore this fact in his life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet he cannot stand the sense of failure so he escapes, maybe into more sin or liquor, or busyness working night and day, or he runs off to conventions and conferences or loads his life

with pleasure. He labors to stop the gnawing guilt. If he can afford it, he may consult a psychiatrist and may be told this guilt is artificial, false, adolescent.

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

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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