

STUDIES IN ROMANS

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III. THE UNIVERSAL NECESSITY OF SALVATION

(As Shown in the Case of the Gentiles)

Romans 1:18 to 2:16

Having considered in the preceding chapter the nature and meaning of salvation, we follow in the next two chapters the Apostle's argument in showing the universal necessity of salvation. The argument applies to the whole human race, to man as man. In this chapter we have the case of the Gentiles.

I. SIN IS UNIVERSAL

All men are guilty before GOD. They are all ungodly.

1. They are sinful in their nature -- They are unlike GOD and are therefore an offense to GOD in their nature.

Originally man was made in GOD's image and likeness: "**And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness**" (Genesis 1:26). This original state of man shows his likeness, his dominion and his commission. Men lost this image and likeness through sin; they are out of harmony with the CREATOR. They need salvation, or deliverance.

2. They are sinful in their deeds -- Their deeds are evil, proceeding from the evil nature within.

Their sin of deeds consists of both omission and commission. They have failed by way of omission to exercise their dominion and to execute their commission. Not only have they thus failed, they have actively done contrary to both. The wrath of GOD has been revealed from Heaven against their sin of nature and of deed. This wrath is the assessed penalty of violated law.

3. Sin is lawlessness -- What is law?

We can never understand sin until we comprehend law. We cannot show that sin is universal without developing an understanding of the law which sin violates. What then is law? In its last analysis law is the intent or purpose of the CREATOR in bringing a being into existence. GOD's intent in bringing man into existence is set forth in Genesis 1:26-31:

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

It is written indelibly in our nature. It inheres in the very constitution of our being. As a principle it antedates any particular formal statute. Law does not become law through enactment or legislation. Rather, law is expressed in enactments and statutes. Indeed, all statutes are but expressions of antecedent, inherent, constitutional law. The multitude of statutes are but expressions of the law principles in the constitution of nations and states.

Sin therefore is lawlessness, or any lack of conformity with law, whether in nature or in omission or commission of deed. An omission of duty and a commission of sin are but symptoms or expressions of a sinful nature. As our LORD said: **"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies"** (Matthew 15:18-19). As he again said: **"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit"** (Matthew 7:16-18). **"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit"** (Matthew 12:33). That preacher therefore had no adequate conception of sin who defined it as, "The wilful transgression of a known law." The greatest of all sin is a sin of nature. It is not dependent in obligation on our knowledge.

4. Law Binds in Spite of Ignorance.

Paul says, **"For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified."** Both natural and spiritual laws bind and have penalty notwithstanding our ignorance. The ignorance itself is sin, or may be a result of sin. And transgression is only one overt act of sin. It is equally sin to fall short of law or go beyond it, or to deflect from it. Righteousness is exact conformity with law. With this conception of law, and of sin, the Apostle speaks of its penalty, the wrath of GOD -- a wrath that is antecedent to its revelation. And yet this wrath is revealed.

II. GOD HAS GIVEN SUFFICIENT LIGHT

GOD did not leave men ignorant of sin and sin's penalty.

1. There are two books of this revelation: the book of nature in them, and the book of nature outside them.

(1) GOD has planted knowledge in them -- "**The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly**" (Proverbs 20:27). As the natural eye is the lamp of the body, so the spirit is JEHOVAH's lamp. "**If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!**" (Matthew 6:23). Man, therefore, by the very constitution of his being, has a knowledge of GOD, law, sin, and penalty.

(2) GOD has revealed law and penalty, outside of man, in nature -- But the Apostle argues a revelation of wrath outside of us and in the broad book of Nature. He says, "**For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse**" (1:20). His deity and His everlasting power are "**clearly seen**" in the universe which is the work of His hands.

Yea, not only Nature, but Providence in Nature, as was said to Noah: "**While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease**" (Genesis 8:22). And reaffirmed by this Apostle: "**Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness**" (Acts 14:17). Thus all nature in us or external to us, and GOD's marvelous providence, proclaim the knowledge of Him.

2. By way of summary, we show how the revelation of law is made both in us and in nature outside of us --

- (a) In the very constitution of our being, "**The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.**"
- (b) In the operation of the conscience, either accusing or excusing.
- (c) In the order of the material universe which discloses the deity and power of the CREATOR.
- (d) In GOD's continual government of the universe by His providence evident in the recurring seasons.
- (e) In the appeal of all men to GOD's judgment for unrighted wrongs, and the invocation of His wrath upon the wrong-doer.
- (f) In the social order of men established everywhere, whatever the form of government, through which men define and punish wrong.
- (g) In the worship of all men everywhere in which by sacrifice in some form they seek to placate the offended Deity and appease His wrath.
- (h) In their very idolatries, by which they seek to lower the Deity to their own level and even beneath their level, and in their veiling their pollutions under the cover of worship, they yet bear testimony to His Deity and their amenability to His judgment.

3. This natural light is sufficient, but not efficient -- This internal light which GOD gives is not a faint spark, but a great light. With every man in the world there is an internal sense of right and wrong. Men may differ among themselves as to what particular thing is right or wrong, but all have the sense of right and wrong. They are keenly alive to their rights and keenly sensitive to their wrongs. But there can be no right and wrong without some law to prescribe the right and

prescribe the wrong. And there can be no law without a law-maker. And there can be no law without penal sanctions; otherwise, it would be no more than advice. And there can be no penalty without a judgment to declare it and a power to execute it. But every man knows that even an exact justice is not meted out in this world -- that many times the innocent suffer and the guilty triumph. Therefore, the conclusion comes like a conqueror, that there must be a judgment to come and a wrath to come.

It is this knowledge or consciousness of future judgment and wrath that makes death frightful to the evildoer. And it is this consciousness of amenability to GOD's future infallible judgment and inexorable wrath that restrains crime more than the dread of all human law and judgment. So it is demonstrated that there is in us a revelation of wrath against sin.

But men's lives showed that nature's light, whether external, internal or providential, has no power to regenerate or sanctify, and no power to propitiate or justify. It could warn, alarm and condemn, but it could not save. It was a sufficient, but it was not efficient.

4. Hence, a plan is needed which will have power unto salvation -- Here I want to show the contrast between the light of nature and the light of the Gospel. Both are brilliant, but one of them is sufficient and the other is efficient. In Psalm 19 we have this language:

**"The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
and night unto night sheweth knowledge."**

This is an abundance of light, and a sufficiency of light, but notice the contrast:

**"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."**
(Nature's light cannot help the fool).

Here it is the design of the Psalmist to put in contrast the light of nature and the light of GOD's Word. In one of them the knowledge is sufficient; in the other the light is both sufficient and efficient.

The last verse of chapter one affirms that there was sufficient knowledge so that GOD's ordinance made such deeds as were enumerated worthy of death, and yet it declares that they themselves willfully disobeyed and consented to disobedience in others. I ask the reader to note particularly that it is very far from the Apostle's thought to belittle the light of nature. He boldly avows its sufficiency, but in that it lacks efficiency there is necessity for another light which is **"the power of God unto salvation."**

This revelation was sufficient to leave them without excuse because when they thus knew Him as GOD they were guilty of these sins:

- (a) They glorified Him not as GOD.
- (b) Neither were thankful.

- (c) Became vain in their reasonings (imagination).
- (d) Darkened their senseless (foolish) hearts.
- (e) Professing to be wise, they became fools.
- (f) Became idolators, changing the glory of the uncorruptible GOD into an image made like corruptible man, birds, beasts, and creeping things.

III. MEN ARE "INEXCUSABLE"

Paul's discussion continues the argument as to the universality of sin, and the necessity for the new and efficient revelation of Gospel light as follows: Having this sufficient natural light, sinners are "inexcusable" because they, as individuals and as society, pass judgment on others, not excusing them, and therein condemning themselves in all wrong-doing.

1. He starts out with the declaration in chapter 2:1 that whenever the individual man passes judgment on a fellow man for alleged wrong-doing, and whenever organized society passes judgment on a member of society, that proves that they are inexcusable if they do wrong, since by their judgment they have established the principle of judgment. And in verse 2 he advances to a new thought: **"But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things."** What is that judgment of GOD that we know so confidently? How do we know it? What is the knowledge? The knowledge there is the knowledge that comes from nature. His argument demands that from the light of nature in us and outside of us we know that GOD's judgment on such things as are enumerated in the first chapter is according to truth -- that the things there enumerated are wrong, and that when GOD punishes them the punishment is just.

2. In verse 3 he asks this question: **"And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"** On what kind of reasoning shall a man who lives entirely apart from the Bible, and yet does claim light enough to pass judgment on the wrong-doer, escape the judgment of GOD? If the wrong is done to him by organized society, whether tribe or clan or nation or republic or a limited monarchy, no matter what the government is, that government holds some things to be wrong and assesses punishment worthy of death. "Now," he says, "do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of GOD? You certainly cannot." We have no hope from such light as is in nature, because in nature every violation of law receives a just recompense of reward -- every one, whether we know the law of nature or not. If a man puts his hand into the fire, it will burn him. If he takes poison, it will kill him. Confining our judgment to the law of nature, any hope that we may indulge and with which we may solace ourselves, is foolish, since we cannot escape the judgment of GOD.

3. He advances in the argument: **"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"** The thought here is that GOD doesn't punish every week -- that in the moral government of the world a long time sometimes elapses between the commission of a crime and its exposure, and in multitudes of cases exact justice is never rendered in this world. Paul asks that question because of GOD's method of delay in His final punishment. What is the reason of the delay? He says that it is from **"the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering."** GOD is good; GOD is patient; GOD bears a long time before He strikes. "Now

are you going to despise that?" As the Apostle says "**Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.**"

There you get at the real reason of GOD's delay in punishing in his moral government. There was no delay in the case of Adam. When he sinned, GOD made the inquisition. He called him to His bar at once. Since that time why does He not do that? Because that very day grace intervened, and man was put upon a grace probation, and the Gospel was preached that day in that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. And the throne of grace was set up that day. On the east side of the Garden dwelt GOD with the cherubim to keep open the way to the tree of life. This delay comes from His goodness, His forbearance, and His longsuffering and the reason for that goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering was to give man, though guilty and worthy of instant death, the opportunity to repent, not through anything in him, but through grace.

IV. GOD IN MERCY DELAYS PUNISHMENT

The original penalty due to Adam's sin was suspended by the intervention of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST under a probation of grace. From that day all men, whether Jews or Gentiles, have been freed from the immediate execution of that divine wrath. There have been earthly judgments on wicked men, and chastisements on Christian men, but the full penalty of the wrath of GOD has never yet been visited upon man. When a wicked man dies, he goes at once to hell, but if that were counted full execution of the divine penalty, that man would not have to leave hell to come and stand before the judgment of GOD. And if a Christian when he dies goes immediately to Heaven, that is not to be considered the full salvation of that man. The reason is that the body is not involved either in the case of the good man or the wicked man. When this final wrath of GOD is visited upon man, it is visited upon both soul and body.

1. The first reason for the suspension of the penalty under a covenant of grace, is that this gives space for repentance -- Peter and Paul both discuss that proposition. Paul discusses it here in the chapter where he says, "**Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.**" Peter discusses it in his second letter where he says that we must construe the longsuffering of GOD toward sinners to mean salvation.

2. The second reason is that neither a good man nor a bad man can thoroughly understand until the Judgment Day the reasonableness of GOD's government and be constrained, whether condemned or saved, to admit the righteousness of the sentence pronounced -- no man will realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the exceeding richness of GOD's forbearance, nor the fulness of GOD's grace in fixing the final decision until that day.

We know now only in part, but then we shall know as we are known. The wicked, as quick as a flash of lightning, will see the exceeding sinfulness of all their past sins. In the case of every man before his conversion he realizes that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? "I, the Lord." He is the only one. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man, when he looks at his good qualities, to take a telescope and look through the little end of it and see them more in number and larger in bulk than they really are. But he reverses that telescope to look at his faults, and sees them infinitesimally few and small, and by the same strange power by which he sees double in the first group, he sees his faults blend and become

fewer in number. He sees one star with the naked eye where there are two, and just a splash in the milky way where there are ten thousand distinct worlds. By a kind of "hocus pocus" he takes up his little handful of evil deeds and begins to apologize for them, and finally stands off and says, with complacency, "Now, LORD, see my record. You can see how my good preponderates over the evil." Right at that time comes the flashing of the supernal light of infinite holiness upon the scales and presto! What a change! These good deeds that look so mountainous and multitudinous begin to diminish in size and number and shrink and pulverize until they become like fine dust. One breath of wrath blows them away like powder. On the other side, that little infinitesimal group of evil begins to multiply and magnify and swell and tower and blacken until it is a great mountain range, peak after peak, oozing with the putrid poison of that abominable thing which GOD hates -- SIN.

So in a sense never before, all will then admit that by the deeds of the law no man can be justified.

3. I want to add a third reason -- No man is competent to take account of the evil of his deeds or the good of his deeds until he sees the end of their influence. It is impossible for a man to do anything that terminates in himself, but it will surely touch everybody connected with him -- Father, mother, brother, sister, friend. Not only so, but after it has cast its gloom over all the circle of those that are nearest to him, by ties of blood, there is that awful power of action and reaction that carries it on till the judgment day.

If we drop a little pebble into a placid lake -- a stone no larger than the end of the finger -- by the power of action and reaction the tiny ripples begin to radiate until they strike the utmost shores of that lake. So time is the ocean into which our deeds are dropped, and the influence of our deeds in their radiating wavelets in every direction never stops until it strikes the shores of eternity. How then can any judgment inflicted now make that man see? Those that are in hell today do not see it. Those in Heaven today do not see it.

It will take the light of the Judgment Day to bring out the full realization, and when that time comes there will be one instantaneous and universal dropping upon the knees. Every knee shall bow, all together -- all the lost in hell and all the saved in Heaven, and every tongue shall confess.

When a man is just about to turn around under the "depart" of GOD's final condemnation of soul and body and go into hell forever, before he goes he will say, "LORD GOD, in my condemnation thou art just."

Judgment of man here upon this earth is based upon uncertain proof. How many times the most notorious criminal is acquitted simply from the lack of legal evidence! There is moral conviction in the minds of the judge and the jury that he is guilty, but the proof does not show it in a legal way. In that day all evidence will be in hand, and the law construed and vindicated with even and exact justice. There can be no suborning of testimony, no blindfolding the eyes of the judge with a bribe, no reticence on the part of witnesses as to what they saw or heard. The evidence will be complete, not only to GOD, but, as I have said, to man. If ever any Christian allows himself to indulge in feelings of pride and thinks that in the partnership between him and GOD his "I" is a capital letter and GOD is spelled with a small "g," it will not be that way up there.

He will know that his salvation is not of works, but from its incipiency in GOD's election to its consummation in the glorification of his body, that athwart the whole long-extended golden chain of salvation shall be written in the ineffaceable letters of eternal fire, "SALVATION IS OF GRACE," and across the whole dark descending stairway to eternal hell, over every step of it, in letters of fire, "MAN'S DAMNATION IS OF HIMSELF!"

V. "ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL"

Now comes another strange thought -- that judgment in the last day will be, says Paul, "**according to my Gospel.**" The judgment of the heathen will be according to this gospel, and it will be well for him, even if a lost soul, that he be judged according to this Gospel. There cannot be a case of a lost man in which it should be better for him to be judged by somebody else than JESUS. Here is a little baby that has never personally committed any sin. It dies one hour from its birth without ever lispng its mother's name. It has inherited sinfulness of nature. It died, in the sense of condemnation, when Adam sinned. To put it as an extreme case, let us call it a heathen baby. Suppose he was not judged by the gospel. He would be forever lost. But the Gospel points to another HEAD, JESUS CHRIST the Second ADAM. The death of JESUS CHRIST avails for the salvation of that one whose condemnation is only on account of Adam's sin and only on account of inherited depravity. If it were not for the Gospel, that child would perish throughout eternity, because the law could not save him.

All the heathen children who die before they reach the years of personal accountability are saved. Take the adult heathen. Even if he be lost, it is better for him that he be judged according to the Gospel than merely according to the law of nature. There is never any mercy in the law of nature. In the light of grace Paul, speaking of the heathen, says: "**And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.**" In CHRIST He bears with the sins of the heathen in a way that the law could not bear. Let a baby and a man stick their hands into the fire. The fire burns the baby who is ignorant the worst because it is most tender.

But when JESUS judges the heathen, He judges them more kindly, because they lacked knowledge, and though the man be lost forever, there are degrees in hell. Not all men who go to hell will have the same extent to suffering. It is not like running all the sentences into one mold so that they will all come out alike, as candles, in length and thickness; but according to light and opportunity JESUS will judge. The servant that knows not his master's will and does it not, shall be punished with few stripes. If there is one principle of the final judgment of JESUS CHRIST that is transcendently above any other principle, it is this principle: that the judgment will be rendered according to the light, the privilege, the opportunity.

Here the words of JESUS, "**It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.**" Why? Because these had great light; those little light. That is why it is a benefit to a lost man to be judged by JESUS CHRIST. That is one of the sweetest thoughts that ever creeps into my mind -- that JESUS shall be my judge. No wonder David, when GOD put the alternative before him, "Would you rather fall into the hands of your enemies or into the hands of the living GOD," said, "LORD GOD, let me fall into thy hands. Do not leave my chastisement to be assessed by men." I never think of GOD's judgment except with satisfaction. Even when I am thinking about things I have done that are wrong, I am glad that

GOD is to be the JUDGE.

QUESTIONS FOR STIMULATION AND REVIEW

1. How does the argument for the universal necessity of salvation apply to the whole human race?
2. What are the four arguments applied to the Gentiles?
3. What is ungodliness?
4. What is unrighteousness?
5. What is the consequent wrath of GOD?
6. What is law?
7. What other use of the term "law" in this letter?
8. What then is sin?
9. What is penalty?
10. How is the wrath of GOD revealed?
11. What must follow the fact of right and wrong?
12. When and why a judgment of wrath?
13. Why were the Gentiles left without excuse, and of what sins were they guilty?
14. What the consequences?
15. By way of review what have we found: (1) As to the theme of this letter? (2) As to the ground of salvation? (3) As to the necessity for this salvation? (4) As to how this revelation of wrath is made in us and out of us?
16. Having this light, why are sinners inexcusable? Explain, "But we are sure," and so forth, verse 2.
17. What is GOD's method of punishment, verse 4?
18. What is the reason for the delay?
19. According to what?
20. What is each case?
21. What the extent of punishment?
22. What part does the light a man has play?
23. Why a judgment at the end of the world?
24. How is judgment to be by the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST? Illustrate.
25. What the transcendent principle of the judgment?

LET US RETHINK THE CHAPTER

I. SIN IS UNIVERSAL

1. All are sinful in nature
2. All are sinful in deeds.
3. Sin is lawlessness
4. Law binds in spite of ignorance

II. GOD HAS GIVEN SUFFICIENT LIGHT

1. Two books of revelation
(1) Within us

- (2) Without us
2. How this revelation is made
3. This natural light is sufficient, but not efficient
4. Hence a plan with power is needed

III. MEN ARE "INEXCUSABLE"

1. By judging, men have established a principle of judgment
2. Cannot escape judgment of men, much less of GOD
3. Or, despisest thou GOD's goodness

IV. GOD IN MERCY DELAYS PUNISHMENT

1. Gives space for repentance
2. Man cannot understand until the Judgment Day
3. Must see the end of our deeds

V. "ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL."

~ end of chapter 3 ~
