

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 12

THE FREE GIFT OF GOD

Romans 6:1-14

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

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

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

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

In the same sense, for example, it is possible for us to know the symptoms of the disease, without knowing what the disease is. We may have nausea or a fever or pain in various parts of our body

and yet not have any idea as to the cause. We see war, racial problems, management and labor disputes, homes and marriages rent by divorce, juvenile delinquency and crime, drug addiction and alcoholism; these are the symptoms, but we need something that will reveal to us their cause. What is the proof of these problems? We need, as it were, an x-ray which will reveal the source of the trouble in order that we may deal with it.

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

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

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

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

There are three problems Paul faces:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is basic to our Christian experience that we realize we were baptized into CHRIST's death, and raised to walk in the newness of life. John the Baptist spoke concerning JESUS, "**I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire**" (Matthew 3:11). Paul is not talking about a rite or a sacrament here; he is talking about the

dynamic act of GOD when the HOLY SPIRIT baptizes or grafts a believer into the body of JESUS CHRIST, so that the life of CHRIST, the righteousness of CHRIST, is literally in him; he has been infused with CHRIST's life. We are united with Him in His death, and we are united with Him in His resurrection; the old self has been crucified, that is, the sinful body has been destroyed. We are no longer enslaved by sin! Or to put it another way, the Adam nature, the hold of the old nature, has been broken; it has been snapped, severed; therefore, live now in the new life that CHRIST has provided.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or to look at it another way, before justification I was "dead" to the availability of GOD's power in grace, and therefore limited in my resistance to sin, to my self, my own strength, my own ability. Whenever I was tempted, I had to fight it alone, and most of the time I was whipped by it; but now, having been justified, I have been quickened to a new life; I have been made aware of a new resource in JESUS CHRIST. Having been made aware of this new resource, I am free at any given moment of any hour of any day to reckon on the new resource, to appropriate it.

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

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

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

Walk by faith in what GOD says to be true, however much your experience contradicts it. You will find out it is true. You will find out it works. The power is there, and it is available if you will take it. Actually, this is the way of Christian action. You may think of Christian action in

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

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

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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