

Romans

1

Around 58 A.D. the apostle Paul wrote a letter to Christians in Rome. He was in the Greek city of Corinth at the time. It is an amazing document. Someone has said, "Romans is the whole Bible in embryo." Warren Wiersbe writes, "The Protestant Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival were both the fruit of this wonderful letter."

Romans contains the Christian worldview and it was written by one of the sharpest intellects on the planet. Martin Luther was fulsome in his praise of this document. He wrote, "This epistle ... is the very purest gospel, well worth not only to be memorised word by word, but also to be used daily by every Christian as the daily bread of his soul."

The great theme of this book is "the righteousness of God." Romans 1:17 is the key: "The righteous shall live by faith." This book shows us how to be right with God, with ourselves and with others.

Paul calls himself 'a servant of Christ' (Romans 1:1). The Greek word used is 'doulos', meaning 'slave'. He's been bought by His master. Paul was 'called to be an apostle' (Romans 1:1). He's been given grace 'to call people from among all the Gentiles' (Romans 1:5). We often refer to him as the apostle to the Gentiles. He's writing to 'those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ' (Romans 1:6). He reminds them they 'are loved by God and called to be saints' (Romans 1:7).

Did you know, Christian, we are 'called to be saints'? We're not called to be awkward, or difficult or unpleasant. We're called to be saints.

The message Paul is authorised to proclaim is expressed thus in "The Living Bible" (Romans 1:2-4): "This Good News was promised long ago by God's prophets in the Old Testament. It is the Good News about his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who came as a human baby, was born into King David's royal family line and by being raised from the dead was proved to be the mighty Son of God with the holy nature of God himself."

Paul is grateful to God for the Christians in Rome. He's heard about their faith – everybody has – and he unceasingly mentions them in his prayers. He hopes it won't be long before he meets them in person, for he yearns to see them. He says: "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong." (Romans 1:11). He explains that he'd planned many times to come to them but had been prevented until now. His desire was "that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles." (Romans 1:13)

Paul wanted to know as many of the Lord's family personally as he possibly could. He wanted the church to be established with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Only a spiritual church is an established church.

Often life doesn't turn out the way we thought it would – and that's what Paul discovered. When he prayed that 'by God's will the way may be opened' for him to go to Rome, he little realised he'd be taken there as a prisoner to be a martyr. The dark shadow of persecution under the Emperor Nero was upon the church in Rome and he eventually joined the Christians there in their fiery trial.

Paul was such a determined man. He didn't capitulate in the face of the enemy. He saw the vast Imperial City as a great vineyard of souls and he purposed to gather fruit there for His Lord. He may have been prevented and hindered so far, but he was pressing on. Gospel preachers will always be resisted as long as the devil is out of the lake of fire.

In Romans 1:14 Paul states he has an obligation to get the message out. He's ready and eager. This good news is for Greeks, who reckoned themselves wise and who sought after wisdom. He felt duty bound to preach to them Christ, the Wisdom of God. Equally urgent was his desire to confront non-Greeks with the gospel and lighten their darkness.

Paul declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, (not even in the capital city of the Roman Empire) because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

He is gripped by a divine, dynamic message. The preacher traffics in immortal souls. He trades in the merchandise of eternity. His words are applicable to everyone. The gospel preacher has a commission from heaven and must speak:

"Oh that the world might taste and see
The wonders of His grace.
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace."

The biblical pattern is always "to the Jew first" for 'salvation is of the Jews.' When Samuel Chadwick went to any town or city for a mission he enquired where the Jews were and made it his first business to proclaim Christ to them. He was never deterred by those who argued, "They have their religion", because Judaism is not a saving religion. Here was an international message for everybody, everywhere, Jew or Gentile, religious or non-religious, wise or foolish.

Romans 1:17 is the key verse in this ancient letter. Let me read it to you: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'the righteous will live by faith'. Here's the good news. God doesn't ask us to behave, but to believe. It is faith in Christ that saves the sinner. God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel on the ground of faith. Believe and you receive. In the death of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by punishing sin; and in the resurrection of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by making salvation available to the believing sinner.

What does it mean to be righteous? When a person believes in Jesus, God the Father sees that person as if they had never sinned. Those who trust completely in God's son are reckoned as perfect by the Father.

Let me put it another way. The Father imputes to that person the righteousness of His Son, Jesus. The Father credits that person with the perfection of His son and God sees him now covered by Christ's righteousness. Righteousness is "the state of being 'in the right' in relation to God. This is exceptionally good news!

2

There's an old song entitled, "Love and Marriage". One verse says, "Try to separate them, it's an illusion; try, and you will only come to this conclusion. Love and marriage - they go together like a horse and carriage". The song ends "you can't have one without the other."

In Romans I there are two phrases that go together like two sides of the same coin and you can't have one without the other. The phrases are 'the righteousness of God' (Romans 1:17) and 'the wrath of God' (Romans 1:18).

'The wrath of God' implies the inevitable punishment of sin. This is built into the very structure of the universe. It's a spiritual law that consequences follow disobedience. 'The wrath of God' doesn't mean that God is easily upset or flies off in a tantrum, whenever the mood takes Him. Rather God is holy, a God of law and order and He cannot ignore sin. One expression of the wrath of God is His abandonment of the wicked to their sins.

In Romans 1:18-32 we have the divine explanation for the mess we're in. Paul spells out God's diagnosis of the very problem we face. It's the sin problem. Man's declaration of independence from God. Man's rejection of God and deliberate suppression of the truth.

Romans 1:18 reads, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men." Paul skilfully sets out to prove the utter ungodliness of the Gentile world. We are, as it were, led into God's courtroom. Paul argues that the Gentile world is guilty. Men are without excuse. Human history began with a man knowing God. If people are ignorant, it's because they choose to be ignorant. God has made Himself known from the beginning of creation in two ways. First, He has revealed Himself in nature. As Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands." Secondly, God has revealed Himself in our conscience. As John 1:9 shows God is 'the true light that gives light to every man.'

Romans 1:21 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." Here is a vital truth. The consequences of disobedience or rebellion are intellectual darkness. God is light and if a man rejects light, he is condemned to darkness by choice. Intellectual revolt against what a man knows to be right is always attended by the darkening of the whole understanding. If we suppress the truth, we end up believing a lie.

Man is incurably religious – he must have some kind of God. Fancy exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. But that's what happened. Man worshipped dumb idols that could never challenge his behaviour. Romans 1:25 puts it this way: "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised."

There are consequences to abandoning the truth. Man deceives himself into believing he is his own god. He becomes like a beast in his thinking and in his living. "The result of self-deification," says Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe "is self indulgence." God, in effect, says, "You've made your choice to ignore My voice" and He gives up. It's in Romans 1:24 "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity." Romans 1:26 says, "God gave them over to shameful lusts." Lesbianism and homosexuality were widely practised. In fact fourteen of the first fifteen Roman Emperors were homosexuals. Romans 1:28 says, "God gave them over to a depraved mind – (that's a mind that can't form right judgements) – to do what ought not to be done."

When the Bible says, "God gave them over", it means he allowed sin to run its course as an act of judgement. Reluctantly God does this, if man insists on his own way. To swap God for a fake god leads inevitably to a downward spiral.

The end of chapter 1 spells out most clearly how degenerate and depraved men can become when God, as it were, gives up seeking to woo them and impact their lives. Men's minds become so reprobate that they actually take pleasure in viewing perversion in others. Even their idea of entertainment is obscene. The Living Bible puts verse 30 as "They were back biters, haters of God, insolent, proud braggarts, always thinking of new ways of sinning and continually being disobedient to their parents."

Some commentators suggest that the decaying city of Rome itself has been perfectly described in Romans 1. The brutal city that persecuted Christians, killed slaves with impunity and threw out to die unwanted newborn babies.

Romans 1:18 had declared, "The wrath of God is being revealed". It is seen in man left to himself with no restraints and no inhibitions. Lost man living in hell on earth. Underneath human nature is all alike. The same heart is in the Gentile as is in the Jew.

In Romans 2 God's courtroom scene continues, but now it is the Jew who is in the dock and Paul will argue that the Jewish world is equally guilty. They had the advantage of possessing the Law of God, but they failed to practice it.

As it says in Romans 2:1 "You, therefore, have no excuse." You judge and condemn others for the very offences you yourself practise. Do you remember the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector in Luke 18 that was told by Jesus to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else?

Paul says this won't do. He outlines four principles of divine judgement.

Firstly "We know that God's judgement --- is based on truth" (Romans 2:2)

Secondly "God will give to each person according to what he has done." (Romans 2:6) This is the doctrine of recompense. What you sow, you reap.

Thirdly "God does not show favouritism (Romans 2:11). He is no respecter of persons. He is an impartial Judge.

Fourthly "God will judge men's secrets" (Romans 2:16).

If the Jews thought God was on their side and would let them off because of the special relationship He had with them, they had seriously misjudged their righteous and Holy Creator.

3

Romans 2 begins with man on trial – the Jew is in the dock. How man hates to be indicted. But God searches every heart and the secret places of the soul are naked before His all seeing eye. He always knows what's going on.

A truth we often overlook is that judgement is certain. There's no escape from God. Who has hardened himself against God and prospered? God's wrath is operative continually in history. It is also cumulative, increasing until it overflows on the Day of the Lord.

The Living Bible paraphrases Romans 2:3-4 as follows: - "Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing (these things) and overlook you when you do them, too? Don't you realize how patient He is being with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see that He has been waiting all the time without punishing you; to give you time to turn from your sin? His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance."

God's kindness has been interpreted as weakness. His tolerance and patience have been misread as God's unconcern for sin. The long-suffering and forbearance of God have been despised. Because God has not damned him instantly, sinful man wilfully misunderstands this to mean that God will not damn him at all. God is kind, but He's not soft.

Solomon saw this so clearly when he wrote (Ecclesiastes 8:11), "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong." But God's forbearance is an extension of mercy. It's not His will that any should perish. The self-restraint of God whereby He tolerates sinners and permits them to live is so they may repent and be saved.

Paul argues that through stubbornness and unrepentance "you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgement will be revealed." If a person refuses 'the riches of His kindness', all he is left with is 'the wrath of God.' There are only two ways and two destinies, which are made unmistakably clear. The Message paraphrase puts it bluntly. "Make no mistake: In the end you get what's coming to you. Real Life for those who work on God's side, but to those who insist on getting their own way and take the path of least resistance, Fire!"

It's crystal clear from the gospels the way to hell does not terminate in heaven. Those who are saved shall be eternally separated from those who are lost. (Sheep and goats; good fish and bad fish; wheat and chaff; good seed and tares; wise virgins and foolish virgins). As the Master said in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

I like the way "The Living Bible" summarises Romans 2:9-11: "There will be sorrow and suffering for Jews and Gentiles alike who keep on sinning, but there will be glory and honour and peace from God for all who obey Him, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. For God treats everyone the same."

Paul emphasises there is coming a judgement for all. Those without the revelation of the law (the moral law as summed up in the Ten Commandments) shall be judged according to the moral law as written in their hearts.

One commentator writes, "The Ten Commandments received from God's own hand by Moses are but the copy of a much older law, that law which the finger of the Maker wrote on Adam's heart and which, though sadly defaced by the fall, may still be traced on ours."

The Jews thought of themselves as invulnerable to the judgements of God. Were they not sons of Abraham? Disciples of Moses? The ex-Pharisee, now messianic Jew, Paul the apostle, delivers the killer blow. All the background of the Jew – his lineage and understanding of the Law – ought to have led him to God, but tragically he had wilfully, deliberately and consistently gone away from God.

If we saw in Romans 1 that the Gentile world was guilty, now we're discovering in Romans 2 that the Jewish world is guilty. The law they knew, but failed to do. Romans 2:13 says "It is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous."

There's something perverse in our human make-up that causes us to suspect that the Judge of all the earth may not do right. We want to know what will happen to the Amazonian Indian or the pygmies who have never heard the gospel. We look around and ask, "Lord, what shall this man do?" The very thought is indicative of our

perversity. We think we've caught God out. His response is, "What is that to you? You must follow Me."

The prophet Jeremiah expressed it so succinctly over 2,500 years ago.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (AV)

I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (NIV Jeremiah 17:9-10)

Throughout Romans 2:17-29, Paul doesn't pull his punches. Again it is the "Message" paraphrase that is easiest to understand. "If you're brought up Jewish, don't assume that you can lean back in the arms of your religion and take it easy, feeling smug because you're an insider to God's revelation ... "

The Jew stands proudly at the bar, confident in his own righteousness and indignant that any charge should dare to be levelled against him. "I'm all right, Jake!" But Paul wants to know, "Do you practice what you preach?" If not, whilst the Gentile has sinned against a little natural light, the Jew has sinned against the greatest spiritual light. They had 'in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth' (Romans 2:20).

"Yes, you teach others – then why don't you teach yourselves? You tell others not to steal – do you steal? You say it is wrong to commit adultery – do you do it?" (The Living Bible Romans 2:21-22).

These devastating questions are met with silence. The hypocrisy of the Jew is exposed. He taught others, but failed to heed his own instruction. This demeans God.

Moffat translates Romans 2:23-24 as: "You pride yourself on the Law; do you dishonour God by your breaches of the Law? Why, it is owing to you that the name of God is maligned among the Gentiles, as scripture says!"

The Jews had a religion of outward action, but God was looking for inward attitudes. The Jews, like the Gentiles, were 'without excuse.'

4

We know from the prophet Ezekiel how concerned God is for His holy name. (Ezekiel 36:20-23) His people are meant to be a good advert and live holy lives. At the close of Romans 2 Paul asks a leading question – Who is a real Jew?

He argues that it is not the cut of a knife that makes a Jew; not the surgical ritual of circumcision. The real Jew is one inwardly. It's the mark of God on your heart, by the Spirit, not a knife on your skin that makes a man a Jew.

Eugene Peterson puts it this way: "Better to keep God's law uncircumcised than break it circumcised." It's who you are that God recognises. A real Jew is anyone whose heart is right with God.

The Jew stands in the same need of salvation by grace through faith as the non-Jew. He's broken God's law and, in the words of John the Baptist, there's nothing to be gained by responding, "We have Abraham as our father." That's just a mantra and it doesn't fool God.

Romans 3:1 commences with the question, "Then, what's the value of being a Jew?" The first advantage Paul lists is that the Jews have been entrusted with the very words

of God. These words revealed promises of grace and warnings of judgement. The unbelief and unfaithfulness of the Jews could not undermine the faithfulness of God. Just because they broke their promises to God doesn't mean God will break His promises to those who love Him.

God is faithful to His promises and said He would punish Israel for her unbelief. As Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 2:13 "If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He can not disown Himself." God's righteous character never changes. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." (Romans 3:4). The faithfulness of God is never in question. God is absolutely dependable, but justice demands punishment. God's righteousness and holiness can only be vindicated by the punishment of sin.

You see, sin is essentially an attack on the holiness of God. God says, "Thou shalt not". Sin is the rebel saying, "Just try and stop me." If I haven't done a particular sin, it's not because "I'm not like that", but it's by the grace of God.

The real trouble with the Jew is that he had accepted the privilege implicit in being entrusted with the oracles of God, but had rejected the corresponding responsibility: consequently he had forfeited the privilege.

The two basic elements in real belief are trust in God's promise coupled with obedience to God's law. All sin is against God. As it says in Psalm 51:4 "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."

I like the way "The Living Bible" paraphrases Romans 3:5-8 as: "'But', some say, 'our breaking faith with God is good, our sins serve a good purpose, for people will notice how good God is when they see how bad we are. Is it fair, then, for Him to punish us when our sins are helping Him?' (That is the way some people talk.) God forbid! Then what kind of God would He be, to overlook sin? If you follow through with that idea you come to this; the worse we are, the better God likes it! Some claim that this is what I preach!"

Romans 3:9 is the momentous conclusion of this great lawsuit. All men are sinners. "We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." Sin is universal. The case is proved. Both Jew and Gentile are in the dock. Paul's arguments are irrefutable. The defendants' position has been totally shattered and their guilt has been demonstrated up to the hilt.

There follows a collection of Old Testament quotations that emphasise Paul's charge that both Jew and Gentile are under the power of sin. The judge sums up 'As it is written.' The Word of God is their ultimate judge.

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

The whole world is under the dominion and authority and reign and power of sin.

Romans 3:18 asserts: "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

The verdict is announced. The whole world is guilty. Everybody, everywhere. No exceptions. Jew and Gentile are both guilty under the law. All men are guilty before God.

Romans from 1:1 through to 3:20 has carefully spelt out man's ruin. He's a sinner who can do nothing to save himself. Romans 3:20 in "Good News for Modern Man" says

this:

"No man is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires; what the Law does is to make man know that he has sinned." That's the bad news.

From Romans 3:21 we start to hear the good news, the gospel. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (NIV Romans 3:21-22)

Paul explains how sinners can be saved. The theological term for this salvation is 'justification by faith'. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Listen! What the law imparts is a consciousness of sin. In the words of Galatians 3:24 "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." It highlights our helplessness because, try as we might, we keep breaking it. The situation is hopeless. Man has no way of getting right with God, unless God, completely, without assistance, puts him right. Here's the good news. God has provided a righteousness for mankind.

Perhaps you're saying, "I don't get it. Romans is really complicated and it's lost me now." Maybe "The Living Bible" paraphrase of Romans 3:21-22 will really help. "But now God has shown us a different way to heaven – not by 'being good enough' and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says he will accept and acquit us – declare us "not guilty" – if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins."

Here's the universal fact "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24)

5

Here's some wonderful news. It seems too good to be true. But it is true – honest to God. God will declare everyone who puts his trust in Jesus Christ "not guilty", but righteous. Having faith in Christ sets us in the clear. Why on earth does God justify i.e. put right with Himself, the ungodly? Answer – because there are no godly people for Him to justify. We're all at it – sinning. So God has put all our sins on Christ's account that He might put Christ's righteousness on our account. No wonder the hymn writer was ecstatic when he wrote

"Tis done, the great transaction's done,

I am my Lord's and He is mine

O happy day! When Jesus washed my sins away."

As it states in Romans 3:25: "God presented Him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood." The same truth is put forth in Ephesians 1:7: "In Him (Jesus) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

We've been redeemed: a ransom has been paid: paid in full and paid in blood. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. Philip Bliss wrote this stanza in one of his great hymns. "Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement, can it be? Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

One of the foundational truths of scripture is that there is no approach to God apart from the blood for "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22)

The Message Paraphrase Bible says this: "God sets things right. He also make it possible for us to live in His rightness ... God is the God of outsider non-Jews as well as insider Jews."

There's no room for boasting. Jesus did it all. We only have to believe and receive. Here's the bottom line: "A man is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands." This doesn't make the law redundant. As it says in The Living Bible in Romans 3:31: "Well then, if we are saved by faith, does this mean that we no longer need obey God's laws? Just the opposite! In fact only when we trust Jesus can we truly obey Him."

The law must be established because breaking it dishonours God. The law is holy but it is our Lord Jesus Christ who has fulfilled it. Did He not say in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." His fulfilment of the Law is mine and so the Law is established.

Never suppose that justification through faith is a new principle. It was introduced way back in the Garden of Eden. By faith Abel offered a sacrifice acceptable to God. This is an Old Testament doctrine. The Old Testament does not have one-way by which man is saved, and the New Testament another.

Now we're starting Romans 3 and "Good News for Modern Man" puts it this way: "What shall we say, then, of Abram, our racial ancestor? What was his experience? If he was put right with God by the things he did, he would have something to boast about. But he cannot boast before God. The scripture says, "Abram believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous."

This scripture is from Genesis 15:6. Abram was childless, 85, and expecting his servant Eliezer of Damascus would be his heir when he died. God said that would never happen. He took Abram outside his tent and said something that must have sounded unbelievable. "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if you can! So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5). And Abram believed God. That's all he did. He believed and God credited it to him as righteousness. Abram trusted God and God said, "That's it. You're righteous now."

The Living Bible puts it this way, "Abram believed God and that is why God cancelled his sins and declared him not guilty." (Genesis 15:8)

Now follow me carefully. Abram was declared righteous when he was a Gentile, not a Jew. Fourteen years later he was circumcised and became a Jew. He was declared righteous because he believed God not because he kept the Law. The Law was given 430 years later! This righteousness from God is a sheer gift. What a gracious promise God made to Abram and Abram dared to believe it.

We read in Genesis 17:24: "Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised." So circumcision was a sign and a seal. As a sign it was the evidence that he belonged to God and believed His promise. As a seal it was a reminder that God had given the promise and would keep it.

So circumcision was the symbol and seal of the righteousness he already had as a gift from God. This was Abraham's great discovery – justification by faith alone. Abraham believed in the promise of the son God was going to give him, a type of God's own Son given for the world. That's why Jesus could announce to the Jews in

John 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, also understood righteousness through faith by grace. That's why he opens Psalm 32 with these words: "Fortunate those whose armies are carted off, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate. Fortunate the person against whom the Lord does not keep score."

Here's the problem. The Jews had used father Abraham as the great example of justification by works – because of what he did. But they'd missed the point. Paul corrects them by holding father Abraham up as a shining example of righteousness by faith.

The Living Bible expresses it well in Romans 4:11-12. "Abraham is the spiritual father of those who believe and are saved without obeying Jewish laws. We see, then, that those who do not keep these rules are justified by God through faith. And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those Jews who have been circumcised. They can see from his example that it is not this ceremony that saves them, for Abraham found favour with God by faith alone, before he was circumcised.

6

Martin Luther called the book of Romans, "The perfect Gospel". Coleridge said Romans was 'the most profound work in existence.' The Bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (Golden voiced) had Romans read to him once every week. John Calvin declared, "Romans opens the door to all the treasures in the scriptures."

The Book of Romans was the time bomb of the Reformation. What a liberating truth! "Justification by faith in Christ alone". No add ons, no small print, no provisos, 'sola fide'.

The Message puts it this way: "Out of sheer generosity God put us in right standing with Himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where He always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ."

Fact number 1 - you can't achieve your own righteousness. If your righteousness is the result of what you've been able to achieve, whatever else you say about it, it is self-righteousness. And it is the enemy of the righteousness of God.

Fact number 2 – The believing sinner is not merely acquitted but justified, given a standing as if he had never sinned.

Abram had a fistful of promises from God who cannot lie. They were given in Genesis 17:4-8 before he was circumcised: "You will be the father of many nations ... Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful ... I will establish ... an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants. The whole land of Canaan ... I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you.

Moffat's translation of Romans 4:13 is succinct. "The promise made to Abraham and his offspring that he should inherit the world, did not reach him through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith." Abraham is the spiritual father of us all.

Isn't it strange how easily we can miss the point? The Law was not given to save men, but to show men they need to be saved. Where there is no law, there's still sin, but it doesn't have the character of transgression because there is no clearly defined line that has been crossed. Because of our sinful nature, the only way we can avoid

breaking laws is not to have any to break. That's why God's blessings are given to us by faith, as a free gift, so it's not up to us; it's down to Him.

Abraham believed in a God who could raise the dead and create something out of nothing. Here's a precious truth. God must wait until the sinner is dead and unable to help himself, before He can release His saving power. Abraham hoped when it was hopeless. He chose to believe God instead of the circumstances. His complete confidence lay in God who had promised.

The Message Paraphrase from Romans 4:19 runs like this: "Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, 'It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child.' Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously sceptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what He had said. That's why it is said, 'Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right.'"

The same is true for us. As we put our trust in the God who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, we also are counted righteous. Jesus Christ was put to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.

One of the Puritans summarised salvation in this way:

"God the Father thought it, God the Son bought it, God the Spirit wrought it, the devil fought it, but, glory to God, I got it!"

Christianity is a resurrection faith. Every person of the Trinity claims responsibility for raising Jesus from the dead. "God the Father ... raised Him (Christ) from the dead." (Galatians 1:1) Speaking of His own resurrection, Jesus told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19) In Romans 8:11 we are told "the Spirit ... raised Jesus from the dead."

Romans is the most systematic of Paul's letters. It reads like an elaborate theological essay. One of the best commentaries I have read on Romans was written by Dr. Ian Paisley when he was imprisoned in the Crumlin Road jail in Belfast. Since Romans is a book of logic, it is a book of "therefores". When you see the word "therefore", it is logical to ask what it's there for. Paul has explained that God's way of salvation has always been 'by grace through faith'.

Romans 5:1 reads "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been put right with God through faith. Peace with God! Peace of mind! Eternal calm in the very depths of one's being. He that was a child of hell is now a child of heaven. A new relationship has been established. How wonderful! Once we stood in condemnation, now we stand in justification. Once we stood overshadowed by God's wrath, now we stand overwhelmed by God's love. Once we stood as rebels in God's sight, now we stand reconciled by God's Son.

By faith the soul cries out 'I will depend on no other'; 'I will cling to no other'. Faith, with eyes wide open, looks to Christ alone. Faith is lovesickness for the Saviour and its cry is, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Faith declares: "Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I find."

Paul writes (Romans 5:2) "Through Him (Christ) we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

What colossal benefits flow from being fully justified put right with God. We enjoy

'peace with God', our past has been taken care of and haunts us no more. We have access to God real time – now – today. The separating curtain between unapproachable holiness and sinful man has been ripped wide open from top to bottom. The dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been demolished and "through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit". (Ephesians 2:18) We have access. Christ is the entrance, 'the door', 'the way'. We stand 'in Christ'. He is the grace in which we now stand. We also have a glorious hope for the future.

The word 'rejoice' in Romans 5:2-3 can be translated "boast". Have we got something to boast about! We can boast about the 'glory of God.

7

We have, in our study, reached Romans 5:3 where Paul says we can boast about our sufferings because our character is being formed. As far as a Christian is concerned, trials work for him and not against him. Romans 5:3-5 in the NIV Bible read " ... we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."

The King James version famously states, "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience and experience, hope." The word 'tribulation' is interesting. It's from the Latin 'tribulum', which is a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it, used for threshing grain. The 'tribulum' is drawn over the grain and it separated the wheat from the chaff. As Warren Wiersbe says, "As we go through tribulations and depend on God's grace, the trials only purify us and help us to get rid of the chaff."

Tribulation here is pressure and affliction. It comes because of a righteous walk and must be endured. This is not the affliction resulting from our sin. This is the affliction that results from our not sinning, e.g. Abram's anxiety for the backslider, Lot, and the battle he fought to save him or the heart cry of Abram for Sodom and Gomorrah. How true the words of Acts 14:22 (AV): "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." It is through faith and patience that we receive the promises, and Abram is a great role model for 'stick ability', enduring to the end.

One reason why a Christian can rejoice in suffering is because he knows it is not meaningless. Part of God's purposes is to produce character in His children. The man of quality is the tested man.

Romans 5:6-8 in NIV read, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Amazing! God's love is lavished on us in spite of our undesirable character. We were neither righteous nor good. Christ died for us sinners who had no use for Him. What amazing love!

The Message Paraphrase arranges Romans 5:9 this way "Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of His Son, now that we're at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of His resurrection life!"

How marvellous are the words "But God" in Romans 5:8. "But God – when we were helpless, hopeless, clueless – demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

When we deserved nothing but wrath, God bestowed on us nothing but grace. If you're a Christian, why not just lift up your heart in thanksgiving to God right now. Let it dawn on you what's happened to you. You've been 'justified by His blood,' you've been made guiltless and Christ's perfect righteousness has been added to your account. Through Jesus Christ you have now received reconciliation and been put on friendly terms with God. Isn't that something worth rejoicing about? When the Father looks at a justified person, He sees that person clothed in the perfection of the Son of God.

In Romans 5:12 Paul makes a transition from discussing 'sins' to discussing 'sin' – from the fruit to the root. He is talking about something endemic in the nature of man, not his misdeeds. Men since Adam are born as sinners. Sin has infected humanity and man could not stop the spread of it. It has infected the whole human race. Luther declared, "There are but two men, Adam and Christ, and all other men hang at their girdles."

1Corinthians 15:45-49 expresses the truth this way: "The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam, a life giving spirit. ---- The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

What does this mean? We are Adam's offspring, fashioned of his clay, partakers of his flesh and blood. Adam, the first man, is the representative man of the old creation: he is our federal head as sinners.

Christ, the second man, is the representative man of the new creation. He is our federal head as saints.

Adam not only sinned himself, but sinned on behalf of all his posterity. We were in his loins when he fell, and we fell in him.

The law had been disgraced by disobedience; Jesus came to grace it with complete and thorough obedience. Jesus fulfilled the law for us: we were in His loins when He accomplished its every jot and tittle.

By a series of contrasts, Paul demonstrates the quality, strength, adequacy of grace in Christ. God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing.

Let's keep it simple.

There are only two men - the first Adam, the last Adam

There are only two acts – disobedience and obedience

There only two results - sin and death transmitted to, God's grace transmitted to the whole human race - all who will receive the free gift.

There are only two races - the old man, the new man.

There are further contrasts. Adam was placed in a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, but chose to disobey.

Christ entered an imperfect world, surrounded by hatred and ugliness, but He chose to obey. "I am come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). By His obedience Christ

fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the Law.

The two races are eternal races. We choose the race to which we will belong. There is a gift of justifying righteousness that is freely given to any sinner who puts their faith in Christ Jesus. It's great how the Message paraphrases Romans 5:18: "Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life!"

§

A best selling Christian author wrote a book entitled, "What's So Amazing About Grace?" The answer is in the latter part of Romans 5. Sin ruled and reigned over us. Sin abounded. Eternal death would be our everlasting destiny. But Jesus came and identified us with Himself. He offered grace to cover all our sin. Now believers can 'reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.' Where sin abounded, grace superabounded.

Grace challenged sin for our dominion and grace won the battle. Sin is dethroned: its reign, its tyranny is past. Grace has triumphed. By free, unmerited, undeserved favour we are what we are. We are eternally exalted through righteousness, by grace.

Here's a vital truth. One is constituted a sinner through Adam, not because of one's personal sins; and one is constituted righteous through Christ, not because of one's personal acts of righteousness, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:6)

Moffat translates Romans 5:17 onwards as: "Well then, as one man's trespass issued in doom for all, so one man's act of redress issued in acquittal and life for all. Just as one man's disobedience made all the rest sinners, so one man's obedience will make all the rest righteous. Law slipped in to aggravate the trespass; sin increased, but grace surpassed it far, so that, while sin had reigned the reign of death, grace might also reign with a righteousness that ends in life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now we begin Romans 6 which Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones called "the most misinterpreted chapter in the New Testament". Some objected to Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone because they thought it would lead to moral irresponsibility. It can appear to encourage lawlessness. Romans 6:1 "Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?" Paul's response is "Of course not." We died to sin. Through faith we're united to Christ now, just as through our natural birth we were united to Adam. We're in Christ now. As a Christian, we are dead to sin. We don't feel dead: that's why Paul must inform us. We have been grafted into the body of Christ when we were born again and therefore have died and been raised again with Christ - which baptism symbolises. In Christ you have died to the reign and rule of sin.

Note that Paul does not teach that immersion in water at baptism puts people "into Jesus Christ", for that was accomplished by the Spirit when they believed. Their water baptism was a picture of what had already happened: the Holy Spirit identified them with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Jesus referred to His death, burial and resurrection in Luke 12:50 as a baptism. "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed." God has put us into Christ, members of His body, identified with Him. He is everything to us. As it says in 1Corinthians 1:30: "... our righteousness, holiness and redemption."

Grace is more than pardon from sin; it is power over sin. When a believer is grafted into the body of Christ at conversion, the very life of Christ, the righteousness of Christ is literally in him. We are united to Him. We're not meant to keep going under our

own steam – but we do. So often 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 Christians.

Romans 6:6 is an amazing revelation truth. It says, “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

The old man has been crucified; the man I used to be in Adam, the old ego, self; the hold of the old nature has been forever broken, snapped, severed. We were crucified with Christ and therefore have died to the reign and rule of sin. We are out of sin’s territory altogether. In Jesus Christ we have died to sin so that we no longer want to ‘continue in sin’.

Galatians 2:20 is the summing up of Paul’s argument on justification. It declares, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” We would not know we were in Adam if God had not told us in His Word. We would not know we had been baptised into Christ if God had not told us in His Word. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ whereupon we died to sin because God told us that’s what happened in His Word. Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ. The Message puts it this way: “When Jesus died, He took sin down with Him, but alive He brings God down to us. From now on, think of it this way: sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you ... You are dead to sin and alive to God.” Sin and death have no dominion over Christ. We are “in Christ”, therefore, sin and death have no dominion over us. We mustn’t let it. We’ve a part to play.

In a nutshell it is this: Know, Reckon and Yield.

Romans 6:6 “We know that our old self was crucified with Christ.” We must reckon this fact to be true in our own life. But it doesn’t square with my experience. Nevertheless Romans 6:11 says, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Count on this; reckon this to be factually true, because God says it is.

Your feelings tell you differently, but God says you’re Satan’s slave no longer, you’re now a child of God. The devil always tries to make us doubt the divine facts.

As Watchman Nee taught, “Knowing ourselves to be dead, we must reckon it so. Our reckoning must be based on knowledge – knowledge of a divinely revealed fact.”

Then we must yield our bodies to the Lord to be used for His glory. We are to offer the parts of our body, all our faculties, to God for His service.

Do remember the devil is not extinct, nor is he annihilated. But he was dethroned at the cross. Our old man was put to death. Now, if we sin, we sin by choice. Before we couldn’t help it. We were in the realm of sin and death. But now because He lives, we also live.

Sin will keep asserting itself, but know this; God did not send the old man to hospital to be cured, but to Calvary to be crucified. There’s a new man living in this mortal body now. When the enemy whispers, “Nothing’s changed. You’re just the same.” I can echo Peter’s words, “I don’t know the man you’re talking about.”

9

Have you ever said as a Christian, “The old man is dead, but he won’t stay dead. He keeps coming back to life.” That’s not strictly true. Your old man is dead – crucified with Christ at Golgotha. You’re now “in Christ”, a new creation, a new man. What

keeps asserting itself is your sinful nature, the old habits, the old patterns of behaviour.

Galatians 5:17 reads "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

Put another way, we've been delivered from Egypt – we're never going back. We've been through the Red Sea of the blood of Jesus Christ – but we must drive out enemies from the Promised Land. "Our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin, i.e. our old nature, might be done away with or rendered powerless that we should no longer be slaves to sin". The old man's gone. God has put me into Christ – but the sinful nature remains in our mortal bodies. God's divine purpose is spelt out in Ephesians 1:4 - "... that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

Notice that the believer is not told to "let go and let God" but to co-operate with God in this whole act of freedom. If a Christian is to become in experience what he already is in position i.e. dead to sin and alive to God, he can't just sit back and do nothing. Romans 6:12 says: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." In other words, resist the devil, put up a fight, exercise your will. Romans 6:13 says, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God ... and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness."

Here's the glorious truth. When God justified us, He also sanctified us. We are holy and set apart for Him because we are "in Christ". The whole work was finished at the cross. We realise it progressively, but it is true now.

Christ by His death and resurrection is our sanctification. The sanctification accomplished for us must be accomplished through us. We must work out what He has worked in. Sanctification is righteousness reigning in life today.

Romans 6:14 declares, "Sin shall not be your master." Sin is personified and is seen by Paul as a power that enslaves. A believer is 'not under law'. That doesn't mean one can do anything. It means one is under obedience unto righteousness, but 'under grace', wonderful enabling grace. A willing servant to righteousness.

Romans 6:17 "You used to be slaves to sin" – slaves were beaten and we were slaves in the slave market of sin. And Jesus paid our ransom; we're the purchase of God. Now, we're God's slaves, His bondservants.

We have exchanged masters. Now we present ourselves to God for His exclusive use. We're enslaved to righteousness. To be righteous in the New Testament sense means you live to the glory of God and live to please Him. As Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "The man no longer under the law is now under law to Christ. He is not free from righteousness, but free to righteousness. He is set free for the practice of righteousness. He is now a slave to love, under the 'tyranny of love.'"

Note that Romans 6:19 is an exhortation. It is a command. It is not done for us. "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."

As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "You gave yourself to that, now give yourself to this. Every Christian, by definition, has already been set free from sin. Sin in the Christian is no longer our master; it is just a nuisance, an annoyance. A Christian is "enslaved to God." We have no right to sin. For a Christian to sin is like a man in an army

fraternising with the enemy. When we sin, as a Christian, we sin because we choose to sin." Derek Prince, the renowned Bible teacher, put it this way, "It is impossible to live in sin and be in the grace of God. God has only one remedy for the old man and that is execution. Mercifully it took place 2,000 years ago. Like Barrabas, I realise I am the rebel who goes free, because Christ died in my place. Now there is a double yielding for the Christian. Yield your will to God and then yield your members to God as weapons of righteousness."

At the end of Romans 6 we see the contrasting results of two different life styles. Give yourself to sin and you remain free from the control of righteousness, and your shameful life style ends in death. Become God's love slave and you reap all the benefits of holiness and eternal life. But there's no escaping the fact that something is going to control you – either sin or righteousness. It's not a case of choosing whether you will serve, because serve you will, but rather whom you will serve – Satan or Jesus.

Romans 6:23 is the gospel in a nutshell: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "The wages of sin" or 'the rations of sin' is death – even the second death – a final and irreversible separation from God and from 'the face of God', from the life of God. It means to be eternally outside God's life, with all the consequent misery and suffering. God's free gift of eternal life is inestimably better. There's really no contest.

I like the way Matthew Henry concludes his commentary on Romans 6. He writes, "Sinners merit hell, but saints do not merit heaven. We must thank God and not ourselves, if ever we get to heaven. And this gift is through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is Christ that purchased it, prepares us for it, preserves us to it."

10

In Romans 7 Paul is writing to Christians who know the Mosaic Law. Twenty three times in the chapter the word law is used. Paul points out that our first husband was the law. It made demands on us. But when we died in Christ, we died to the law through the body of Christ, and death changes everything. By death, we're free from the law. We now have a new husband – the Risen Christ. Since your 'old man' is dead, you are no longer married to the law.

There is nothing wrong with the law. It is the revelation of the will of God. It is not human, but divine. As it says in Romans 7:12 - "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good." Romans 7:14 declares: "the law is spiritual." The beautiful passage in Psalm 19:7-11 honours the law.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.
By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

As the way to life, the road of justification, the law is fundamentally flawed, not of itself – "the law of the Lord is perfect" – but because of our inability to live up to it. The law cannot impart life. However, it is brilliant at showing us where we fall short and why we need help. Only if there were no laws to break would there be no sinning.

Paul indicates that the more the law thundered loudly in his ears – "Do not covet" – the more he felt the power of sin chaining his life. It was as if "sin revived", it sprang to

life and he was devastated.

Here was an inward attitude, not an outward action, that had mastered him. The Message paraphrases Romans 7:7-8 "The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behaviour would be mostly guesswork. Apart from the succinct, surgical command, "You shall not covet," I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it."

There is something about human nature which, when you tell it it can't immediately wants to. This is the Adamic nature. Paul's discovered that the power of sin within him keeps sabotaging his best intentions.

The law exposes sin. It is like a great x-ray revealing sin working death in me. The demands of the law are righteous, but the person upon whom the demands are made is unrighteous. Immediately there is a confrontation between my flesh and my spirit. The old and new natures in the believer clash.

We can all readily identify with John Donne who wrote:

"Canst Thou forgive that sin whereby I won others to sin and made my sin their door?

Canst thou forgive that sin which I did shun a year or two, but wallowed in a score?

When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done, for I have more."

The problem is expressed also in Galatians 5:17 "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

By the law, our inability to live right is made evident. Let the believer realize God is the Lawgiver on the Throne and He is also the Lawkeeper in my heart.

There is a purple passage in Romans 7:14-20. It's a brilliant exposé of the civil war that rages in the human heart. Sin, as a principle, is working within me, spoiling my best efforts to live for God. Listen to the passage: -

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

A Christian is someone who doesn't understand himself at all. He really wants to do what is right, but can't. He apparently lacks the wherewithal.

The 'wretched man' of Romans 7 tried to meet the claims of God's law himself. Note how many times "I" is repeated. He thought God was asking him to keep the law. But the key in the Christian life is not effort; it is union. The Christian life is "no longer I, but Christ."

There's a contradictory streak in a man which makes him do what he abhors. I have a will, but it is so overpowered by the lusts of sin that I am helpless. My passion is stronger than my reason.

The end of the chapter, in The Message Bible, says:

"It happens so regularly that it's predictable ... I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."

How Christ is the answer, we shall learn next time!

11

In Paul's day the punishment for a murderer was gruesome in the extreme. The dead body was fastened to the body of the sentenced prisoner. It was strapped on forehead-to-forehead, nose to nose etc. The living man became a human cross on which the corpse hung. The power of death slowly overcame life and soon there were two corpses instead of one.

When Paul cries out in Romans 7:24: "What a wretched man I am!" the Greek word for 'wretched' indicates a person who is exhausted after a battle. He's desperate. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" i.e. the old nature.

He's tried everything until he's sick of trying. Have you despaired of yourself or do you suppose if you read more, pray more, fast more, you'll be a better Christian?

Paul isn't the only born again believer to discover what a problem he is to himself. He realises that of himself, he could not obey God's law. He hadn't got it in him. "Someone, help me " is his plea. The answer is in Christ alone.

The first words of the delivered man in Romans 7:25 are very precious: "Thanks be to God" – not "thanks be to Paul" – It was God who did it "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

If Romans 6 was all about "How to stop doing bad things", Romans 7 has been about "How can I ever do anything good?" The big issue is to avoid legalism at all costs. The legalist suggests you can become holy and please God by obeying laws. You measure your spirituality by conforming to a list of do's and don'ts. That is arrant nonsense. As Warren Wiersbe points out, "You were not justified by keeping the law and you can not be sanctified by keeping the law." The weakness of legalism is that it sees sins (plural), but not sin, which is the root of the trouble.

The bottom line is "Who's in charge of your life?" The old nature (the flesh) or the new nature (the spirit)? It's as if a tug-o-war is going on inside every believer just as the twins were struggling inside the womb of Rebekkah. There was Esau – born first, a type of the carnal nature, with no interest in spiritual things. He sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. And Jacob, a spiritual man, often crafty and up to no good, but eager to advance spiritually. He even wrestled with the angel until he was blessed. Are you limping after God because He's broken you or is your natural strength still surrendered to His Lordship?

Romans 8 begins with a great victory cry. It's a declaration of freedom. "Therefore" – in view of all the arguments that have been so carefully laid out like a forensic scientist presenting incontrovertible evidence – "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life

set me free from the law of sin and death.”

The person “in Christ” is free forever from the threat of condemnation. In Christ Jesus I stand justified. It depends not on what I am or do, but entirely upon what Christ is and has done. The law – good though it is – was powerless to do anything to put me right with God.

As Paul said in Romans 3:20 “No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law.” We’re just not good enough. God has provided a righteousness that is not a goal to be achieved, but a gift to be received. And it’s got nothing to do with keeping laws.

Romans 8 has been called the chapter of the Spirit. The book of Romans contains 25 references to the Spirit, 19 of which occur in Romans 8.

There are two laws. “The law of sin and death” which, like gravity, holds us to the ground, spiritually. As long as we’re ‘in Adam’, that law reigns.

Then there’s the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus – the reign of grace through righteousness unto eternal life. This law triumphs over the law of sin and death. This is a superior law.

You can’t break the law of gravity, but you can introduce another law – the law of aerodynamics – and begin to fly. Let me put it another way. “The law of sin and death” is there all the time, but God has put another law into operation. It’s like switching on the light. It doesn’t come on automatically. It is a stronger law, but you have to turn it on.

Paul had groaned at the end of the last chapter to be rescued from himself. He loved God’s law in his mind, but kept transgressing it in his body. Now, in Romans 8:2, he declares the answer: “Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”

The walk of the Spirit is the King’s highway, the way of holiness. God has done what the law could not do. It’s God’s business to make Christians, only He can do it. No one can make himself a Christian. The very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death (Romans 7:10). I couldn’t live up to it. However, Jesus found the law no obstacle; He fulfilled it and He’s become the door to the King’s highway of holiness for His people.

The Living Bible tells us plainly in Romans 8:3 what God has done, “He sent His own Son in a human body like ours – except that ours are sinful – and destroyed sin’s control over us by giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins.”

The natural man is unregenerate. He lives according to his sinful nature, his mind is hostile to God and he cannot please God. Flesh gives birth to flesh. It will always be flesh. The carnal mind is the mind of the old nature. It does not submit to God. To live according to the flesh means to live a worldly life, to live in my own strength, under my own direction.

Nothing happens to the flesh by regeneration. I am no less subject to temptation today than before I was saved. My flesh is the same, but the person occupying the body has changed. The same sinful desires await their opportunity to spring into action, but now with the mind I serve the law of God. I have a new loyalty: I desire to live for God.

Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace. If the Spirit of God controls you,

you are a Christian and if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. How is it with you, my friend? Are you saved or not yet saved?

12

We're now reached Romans 8:11 which brings glorious news: "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you." One day God will raise our mortal bodies from the dead. I believe in the redemption of the body. One day the graves of Christians will be opened. Our brand new bodies will rise. The self-same Spirit who has quickened our own souls and who dwells within us, shall also in glorious resurrection, clothe these bodies in the robes of immortality and incorruptibility. He, who first breathed life into Adam's clay, shall impart immortal life to our resurrected clay. What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Moffatt's translation puts Romans 8:12-13 like this: "Well then, my brothers, we owe a duty – but it is not to the flesh! It is not to live by the flesh! If you live by the flesh, you are on the road to death; but if by the Spirit you put the actions of the body to death, you will live."

Here's the marvellous truth: the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. The believers have received the Spirit of sonship or adoption which causes us to cry out, "Abba, Father." We're God's children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

James Moffatt continues in Romans 8:18-19: "Present suffering, I hold, is a mere nothing compared to the glory that we are to have revealed. Even the creation waits with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed."

The glory to be revealed in us is the glory of likeness to Christ. "We are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord' (2 Corinthians 3:18). "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

There's a lot of groaning going on in this fallen world. Romans 8:22 says, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." One day the whole of creation will be emancipated and will share in our glory. The entire created universe is suffering because of man's first disobedience. The groans of the universe will cease and the glory of the new heaven and new earth will burst forth in all the splendour of the divine handiwork. Corruption and decay, futility and frustration will be forever banished. Paradise lost will be paradise regained. One day creation itself will be delivered from suffering, pain and bondage.

Creation is personified as a woman in labour waiting for the birth of her child. Eugene Peterson in the Message Bible paraphrases this section of Romans 8 wonderfully. He writes, "All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy."

We, believers, have been groaning. We have the first fruits of the Spirit (a foretaste of the glory to come) but we want so much more!" "We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23). We long to have immortal bodies. We don't desire to be ghosts or angels. Our desire is to have bodies that will perfectly serve the goals of our minds and hearts. We have our new spirit. Now we want our new body! The full manifestation of what it means to be

a son of God will not come until the end of the age.

In Christ, for the redeemed man, the sovereignty that Adam lost is fully restored to the children of God. All the rights and privileges of sonship are at our disposal by His grace. One day, Christian, you shall be raised a spiritual body like Christ's resurrection body – raised imperishable, raised in glory and raised in power.

Paul writes of the same truth in 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling". He goes on in verse 4 "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

Man's perennial helplessness to achieve the kind of world he dreams about is a continual frustration. The human race longs to be delivered. We long to be liberated from bondage to decay and corruption. The whole universe languishes, painfully waiting for the day when the sons of God shall be revealed. The whole creation is waiting for the removal of the curse. For the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. "In keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). We ourselves long to be 'across the bridge ---- in that land where we'll never grow old.' One day the Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

In Romans 8:26 the Spirit groans. We don't know what we ought to pray for so often, but the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. There were times when Jesus, during His life on earth, offered up prayers with loud cries. When He healed the deaf and mute man in Mark 7 we read, "He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to Him, "Ephphatha"" ("Be opened"). In John 11:33 when He saw people weeping outside Lazarus's tomb, the word says 'He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.'

The whole of creation has been groaning to be set free, believers have been groaning for our bodies to be redeemed, the Spirit has been groaning. One day hope will become reality and groans will change to shouts of praise.

There is built in to the very cosmos a frustration in which the whole created universe joins, including the children of God. It will be resolved at Christ's return when the sons of God are revealed to the world.

13

Romans 8:28 is much quoted. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Notice it does not say "we understand." Part of being human is that we are bewildered by events that occur and puzzled beyond measure. But faith's bottom line is that God is a good God and that is something we know.

Romans 8:29-30 contain great eternal truths. We were foreknown by God and predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. God appointed our destiny beforehand and decreed that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers. And we, the born-again, should be just like Him. Christ is the first-born of the virgin (Luke 2:7), the first born among many brothers (Romans 8:29), the first born from among the dead (Colossians 1:18) and "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation" (Colossians 1:15).

As Warren Wiersbe points out, "God predetermined that one day we would be like His

Son. Predestination applies only to saved people. Nowhere are we taught that God predestines people to be eternally condemned. If they are condemned, it is because of their refusal to trust Christ (John 3:18-19). "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Predestination has been defined as the action of God in foreordaining from eternity whatever comes to pass. Calvin did not invent this word, nor the doctrine which it describes: He discovered it in the scriptures. We are touching on majestic themes: the sovereignty of God, His providence in the affairs of men, His care of mankind. The Word of God teaches that God is sovereign and man is free at one and the same time.

Romans 8:30 declares, "And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified."

Peter in his first letter, in writing to Christians, addressed them as "God's elect ---- who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Those He foreknew, He predestined to be like Jesus --- "Those He predestined, He also called" -- the special calling of grace. Do you remember when He called you by name? The hymn writer put it this way: "He drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice Divine."

Long before your mum and dad wondered, "Will it be a boy or a girl? What shall we call the child?" He called you. "Those He called, He also justified" -- God put you right with Himself. You didn't do it. He made you a Christian. You're His workmanship.

Justification leads to glory. God's purpose in creation and in redemption is glory. To make His Christ the firstborn son among many glorified sons. "Those He justified, He also glorified".

Romans 8:31 is a startling, unanswerable question. "What, then, shall we say in response to this?" that is, in response to these great eternal truths. If Divinity is for us, shall we fear humanity? If Heaven is for us, shall we fear hell? How do we know God is for us? Because of Calvary.

The Bible tells us that God 'spared not' the old world but poured His wrath out upon the universe at the time of flood. He 'spared not' the angels who sinned but cast out one third of the celestial race. He 'spared not' unbelieving Israel but judged even the chosen race for their awful sin of rejecting His Son, their own Messiah. "God did not spare the natural branches" (Romans 11:21). Such is His justice.

But, wonder of wonders, such is His grace -- "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." Such amazing grace is inexhaustible.

To give His son for angels we might understand, but to give Him for me -- that's grace. With His Son, God 'freely gives us all things.'

Romans 8:33 asks, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" The infinite and eternal One has justified them forever. Christ Jesus died and rose for them and is now at the right hand of God interceding for them. Imagine that -- the One who will judge men on that day, according to Paul's gospel (Romans 2:16) actually pleads our cause. The Holy Spirit also makes intercession for the saints (Romans 8:27) in accordance with God's will.

I like the way "The Message Bible" sums up these clinching arguments. "So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending His own Son, is there anything else He wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us – who was raised to life to us! – is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us.

Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing ----None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us."

There can be no victory where there is no battle. Through Christ, overwhelming victory is ours.

The chapter ends with the great apostle declaring he is convinced that nothing will be able to separate us from Christ's love. "Neither death" – with all its terrors: "nor life, neither angels nor demons" – no satanic force at all. "Neither the present nor the future, nor any powers." "Neither height nor depth" – these are astrological terms. The stars can't hurt you – "nor anything else in all creation" – thinkable or unthinkable – nothing in outer space "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So we've reached the end of Romans 8. We're half way through this incredible document. Luther's friend, Melancthon, copied this letter out twice. A French scholar called it, "The cathedral of the Christian faith" and Martin Luther himself declared, "This epistle ---- is the very purest gospel."

We've dealt with some classic themes: - the wrath of God: the universal guilt: who is a real Jew? : the test case of Abraham: the only way to be right with God: in Adam or in Christ: the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

We've rejoiced in this great salvation: - justifying righteousness, liberty from sin through Christ, the indwelling Spirit, electing love, coming and certain glory. No wonder Coleridge called Romans, "The most profound work in existence."