

studies in

ROMANS



book I

by Dr. Lehman Strauss

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PREPARATORY

About twenty-five years after the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, A.D. 56 or A.D. 57, the Holy Spirit directed the Apostle Paul to write a document which has proved to be the most profound and most powerful theological masterpiece ever penned. This supreme achievement is the divinely inspired *Epistle to the Romans*.

If there is any justification for thinking of one book in the Bible as being greater than another, I would cast my vote for Romans. Martin Luther said he considered the Epistle to the Romans as "rightly the chief part of the New Testament and the clearest gospel of all". Coleridge called this Epistle "the profoundest book in existence". Historians are in agreement that the Reformation was the product of the Epistle to the Romans, and that several spiritual awakenings which followed were likewise associated with concentrated preaching and teaching, and a deeper understanding of this book.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley attended a religious meeting in London. The message he heard was the introduction to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. It had a tremendous impact on Wesley. He wrote in his journal, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I trusted Christ alone for salvation. An assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, and saved me from the law of sin and death." There followed the well-known Wesleyan Revival that gave to England a spiritual transformation.

William Tyndale wrote in the 1534 edition of his English New Testament, "This Epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament . . . I think it meet that every Christian not only know it by rote and without the book but also exercise himself in it daily. No man can read it too often or study it too well."

It is this grand book in the New Testament we are about to survey. While Romans is not the earliest of Paul's writings, it stands at the very gateway to the New Testament Epistles. Paul wrote five books before he wrote Romans, but those first five are not placed chronologically in the Bible. I believe the Holy Spirit guided in arranging Romans to be first in order of the New Testament Epistles. The teachings in Romans are basic, foundational, fundamental, telling us

what Christianity and the Christian Gospel are all about. Every young pastor should give himself to a careful and prayerful study of Romans at the very beginning of his ministry, and then follow on to preach through the book expounding all 16 chapters, 433 verses, and 9,447 words in the King James Version.

It is interesting to observe how the human penmen of the Bible were guided by the Holy Spirit to write along different lines of truth. To one was given to record history, to another prophecy, and so on. The mighty subject entrusted to Paul was *The Gospel*. In Romans the word "gospel" appears not less than 13 times. The Book commences with the Gospel (1:1) and concludes with the Gospel (16:25). Here Paul is not preaching the Gospel to sinners, but rather teaching the Gospel to saints. God had committed to Paul "the mystery of the Gospel" (Ephesians 6:19).

The Christian who takes seriously the study of this key book in the Bible will be well informed in every major doctrine of our historic Christian Faith. No Christian will ever be led astray by false teachers or false teachings who secures a strategic grasp of Romans. One of the greatest spiritual experiences during my years as a Christian was received during the year I spent with Paul and his Epistle to the Romans. That experience strengthened me spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. It gave to me a new appreciation of God's plan of salvation, how a holy and righteous God can forgive and save sinners, and Himself remain righteous.

THE THEME OF ROMANS

In Romans 1:17 Paul announces his theme: "The Righteousness of God". The word "righteous" and its cognates occur not less than fifty-five times in Romans. The related terms having the same similar nature are as follows: right, righteous, righteousness, just, justify, justification. In Romans you will find the righteousness of God declared, defined and delineated more fully than in any other book in the Bible. It is the one theme Paul emphasizes, the very important word throughout his Epistle. There is a righteousness that satisfies God. Man does not possess it, and

without it he can never be admitted to heaven.

Is the righteousness of God available to us sinners? If it is, how can we receive it? Here is where the magnificence and magnitude of the Epistle to the Romans shine brightest. Paul shows exactly how God's righteousness comes to you and me. It is not by a complicated process, but through faith in Jesus Christ (3:22). And what are we to understand "faith" to mean? Faith includes three elements: (1) An *awareness* of certain facts. By this I mean an appeal to the intellect. (2) An *assent* to those facts. Now by assent I do not mean that we concur in the truth on a mere intellectual or academic level, but experientially. (3) An *action* on the sinner's part whereby he commits himself to the Revealer of the truth. In this instance the Giver of truth is Himself the Truth (John 14:6). God's righteousness comes to me through faith in Jesus Christ. This majestic theme Paul expounds with a fulness and finality you will find only in the Epistle to the Romans.

THE TEXT IN ROMANS

The Epistle has a text. As one might expect, the text is taken from Scripture. The only Scriptures extant in Paul's day were the Old Testament. So he reached back to a neglected portion, to the Minor Prophet Habakkuk, and selected a text. It was actually not Paul's selection, for he was being directed by the Holy Spirit, so we may be certain that the text meets perfectly the need. It is a short text. Dr. McClain points out that it has only six words in the English; six in the Greek; three in the Hebrew. But the text is freighted with meaning, the entire book of Romans being based on it. "As it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17 cf. Habakkuk 2:4).

The text from Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). When this text of six words is divided into three equal parts, those parts fit perfectly the three New Testament passages:

"The just" (Romans 1:17)

"shall live" (Galatians 3:11)

"by faith" (Hebrews 10:38)

"*The just*" are the justified ones, those who have been declared righteous by God. *Justification* is that sovereign act of God whereby He *declares* righteous all persons who come to Him through faith in the sacrificial, substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a legal, or judicial term, meaning that the Divine Judge, who is God, officially declares and treats as righteous the believing sinner. Justification is no small thing in the Christian life. It is the major blessing which carries with it every other blessing with which God has blessed His children (see Ephesians 1:3). This is what Romans is about. This the student will see when we reach Romans, chapter five. There Paul says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have . . ." And then he goes on to list the blessings that accompany salvation. "... *shall live* . . ." Having been declared righteous by God, we shall live. Righteousness and life are linked together just as unrighteousness and death are inseparable. An unrighteous man does not have eternal life because he is dead spiritually, "being alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 2:1; 4:18). Our Lord said concerning His own sheep, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish . . ." (John 10:28). He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Righteousness and life are inseparably linked together. Paul testified to this in Galatians when he wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"... *by faith* . . ." Faith means belief, trust, total acceptance. It means a strong, unshakable conviction that something is true. It is this idea of *faith* that is emphasized in the Epistle to the Hebrews. After Habakkuk's text is quoted in Hebrews 10:38, there follows immediately the mighty section on faith (chapter 11). In my judgment, the break between chapters ten and eleven is not good. This is a poor chapter division, faith being the main theme carried into chapter eleven from 10:38. But the whole point in the Hebrews passage is that faith is the principle upon which the

righteous are to live. It is the principle which controls the whole life. Where the real root of faith is present, there the real fruit of faith will be found. However severe the trials, like those discussed in Hebrews chapter eleven, faith will carry the believer through. For the child of God, faith is a way of life.

Now keep in your mind that the word *just* means *righteous*. This will aid you to see how the text fits perfectly the theme in Romans. Man's big problem is unrighteousness, therefore the quest of his heart is, "How should man be just with God?" (Job 9:2). The answer is supplied in Romans. God had a plan whereby He would provide righteousness for unrighteous people. That plan is fully developed and discussed in this one Epistle. Paul calls it "the gospel of Christ . . . for therein (in the gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed" (1:16, 17). God has only one standard of righteousness for all mankind; it is God's own righteousness, and He has provided a means whereby guilty sinners who are unrighteous may be declared righteous.

You are invited to join with me for an excursion through this magnificent Cathedral of Christian Truth. Here you will see gems of God's making, riches from His great storehouse of truth. This Epistle will show you how to be sure of entrance into heaven and how to live enroute.

OUTLINE OF ROMANS

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION (1:1-17)

- I. Paul and His Status (1:1)
 - A. Paul the Servant
 - B. Paul the Sent One
 - C. Paul the Specialist
- II. Paul and The Saviour (1:2-6)
 - A. Christ the Historical One (1:2)
 - B. Christ the Human One (1:3)
 - C. Christ the Holy One (1:4-6)

- III. Paul and The Saints (1:7-13)
 - A. His Description of Them (1:7)
 - B. His Delight in Them (1:8)
 - C. His Devotion Toward Them (1:9, 10)
 - D. His Desire for Them (1:11-13)
- IV. Paul and His Subject (1:14-16)
 - A. A Supernatural Revelation
 - B. A Solemn Responsibility (1:4)
 - C. A Swift Readiness (1:15)
 - D. A Saving Remedy (1:16, 17)

PART TWO

CONDEMNATION (1:18-3:20)

- I. The Heathen are Condemned (1:18-32)
 - A. The Provision for the Heathen (1:19, 20)
 - 1. The Legacy of Comprehension
 - 2. The Light of Conscience
 - 3. The Light of Creation
 - B. The Pronouncement Against the Heathen (1:18, 19, 20, 25, 28)
 - 1. They Suppressed the Truth (1:18)
 - 2. They Subverted the Truth (1:25)
 - 3. They Spurned the Truth (1:28)
 - C. The Perverseness of the Heathen (1:21, 23, 25)
 - 1. The Sin of Ingratitude (1:21)
 - 2. The Sin of Idolatry (1:23)
 - 3. The Sin of Infidelity (1:25)
 - D. The Punishment of the Heathen (1:24, 26, 28, 32)
 - 1. God's Prerogative to Punish (1:18)
 - 2. God's Procedure in Punishing (1:24, 26, 28)
- II. The Hypocrite is Condemned (2:1-16)
 - A. There is No Excuse (2:1, 2)
 - B. There is No Escape (2:3-5)
 - C. There is No Exception (2:6-11)
 - D. There is No Exoneration (2:12-16)
- III. The Hebrew is Condemned (2:17-3:8)
 - A. His Privileges (2:17-20)
 - B. His Profession (2:21-24)

- C. His Pretense (2:25-29)
- D. His Prerogative (3:1-8)

- IV. The Human Race is Condemned (3:9-20)
 - A. The Condition is Pronounced (3:9)
 - B. The Condition is Proved (3:10-18)
 - C. The Conclusion is Positive (3:19, 20)

PART THREE

JUSTIFICATION (3:21-5:21)

- I. The Introduction to Justification (3:21-31)
 - A. Righteousness Announced (3:21)
 - B. Righteousness Attested (3:21)
 - C. Righteousness Appropriated (3:22, 23)
 - D. Righteousness Attributed (3:24-26)
 - E. Righteousness Approved (3:27-31)
 - 1. Boasting is Excluded (3:27)
 - 2. Faith is Exemplified (3:28)
 - 3. Law is Established (3:29-31)
- II. The Illustration of Justification (4:1-8)
 - A. The Case of Abraham (4:1-5)
 - B. The Case of David (4:6-8)
- III. The Independence of Justification (4:9-25)
 - A. Justification is Independent of Ordinances (4:9-12)
 - B. Justification is Independent of Obedience (4:13-18)
 - C. Justification is Independent of Obstacles (4:19-25)
- IV. The Inclusiveness of Justification (5:1-11)
 - A. Justification Affects my Past Life (5:1)
 - B. Justification Affects my Present Life (5:2)
 - C. Justification Affects my Prospective Life (5:2)
 - D. Justification Affects my Purpose in Life (5:3-5)
 - E. Justification Affects my Progress in Life (5:4, 5)
 - F. Justification Affects my Perspective of Life (5:6-8)
 - G. Justification Affects the Preservation of Life (5:10, 11)

- V. The Interlude (5:12-21)
 - A. The Commencement of Sin (5:12)
 - B. The Curse of Sin (5:12)
 - C. The Consequence of Sin (5:12-14)
 - D. The Contrast Between Adam and Christ (5:12-21)

PART FOUR

SANCTIFICATION (6:1-8:15)

- I. Our Standing in Christ (6:1-7:6)
 - A. The Fact for Information (6:1, 2)
 - B. The Figure for Illustration (6:3-5)
 - C. The Formula for Application (6:6-13)
 - D. The Function of Sanctification (6:14-23)
 - 1. The Sovereign-Subject Relationship (6:14,15)
 - 2. The Master-Slave Relationship (6:16-23)
 - 3. The Husband-Wife Relationship (7:1-6)
- II. Our State in the Flesh (7:7-25)
 - A. The Heinous Sin in the Natural Man (7:7-13)
 - 1. Paul's Defense of the Law (7:7, 12)
 - 2. Paul's Description of Sin (7:8, 11)
 - B. The Horrible Self in the Carnal Man (7:14-25)
 - 1. The Condition Within (7:14, 18)
 - 2. The Conflict Within (7:15-20)
 - 3. The Conclusion (7:21-24)
 - 4. The Conquest (7:25)
- III. Our Strength in the Spirit (8:1-15)
 - A. The Holy Spirit in the Spiritual Man (8:1-15)
 - 1. God's Provision for the Christian (8:1-4)
 - 2. God's Pleasure in the Christian (8:5-8)
 - 3. God's Presence in the Christian (8:9-11)
 - 4. God's Program for the Christian (8:12-15)

PART FIVE

GLORIFICATION (8:16-39)

- I. The Glorified Christian (8:16-18)

- A. The Witness of the Spirit (8:16)
 - B. The Wealth of the Sons (8:17)
 - C. The Waiting of the Sufferer (8:18)
- II. The Groaning Condition (8:19-27)
 - A. The Groaning Creation (8:19-22)
 - B. The Groaning Christian (8:23-25)
 - C. The Groaning Comforter (8:26, 27)
- III. The Golden Chain (8:28-30)
 - A. Foreknown
 - B. Predestinated
 - C. Called
 - D. Justified
 - E. Glorified
- IV. The Grand Consummation (8:31-39)
 - A. Protected Against Opposition (8:31, 32)
 - B. Perfected Against Accusation (8:33)
 - C. Pre-empted Against Condemnation (8:34)
 - D. Preserved Against Separation (8:35-39)

PART SIX

DISPENSATIONAL (9-11)

- I. God's Past Selection of Israel (Chapter 9)
 - A. The Passion of Paul (9:1-3)
 - B. The Privileges of Israel (9:4, 5)
 - C. The Promise of God (9:6-13)
 - D. The Purpose of God (9:14-24)
 - E. The Place of the Gentiles (9:25-33)
- II. God's Present Suspension of Israel (Chapter 10)
 - A. The Present State of Israel (10:1-4)
 - B. The Present Standing of Israel (10:5-12)
 - C. The Present Salvation for All (10:13-21)
- III. God's Prospective Salvation of Israel (Chapter 11)
 - A. The Remnant is Blessed (11:1-6)
 - B. The Remainder is Blinded (11:7-12)
 - C. The Reason for the Break (11:13-24)

- D. The Restoration to Blessing (11:25-32)
- E. The Riches of God's Wisdom (11:33-36)

PART SEVEN

DEPARTMENT (12-16)

- I. Relationships of the Believer (Chapter 12)
 - A. Consecration to God is Encouraged (12:1)
 - B. Conformity to the World is Expelled (12:2)
 - C. Consideration of Believers Expected (12:3-16)
 - D. Charity to All is Entreated (12:17-21)
- II. Responsibilities of the Believer (Chapter 13-15:13)
 - A. To the Powers Over Him (13:1-7)
 - B. To the Persons Around Him (13:8-13)
 - C. To the People Like Him (14:1-15:13)
- III. References to the Believers (Chapter 15:14-16:27)
 - A. Paul's Comments About Himself (15:14-33)
 - B. Paul's Commendation of Others (16:1-23)
 - C. Paul's Conclusion (16:24-27)

To be continued

