

## PROLOGUE TO PRISON

### Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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### Chapter 7 -

#### THE LIGHT OF THE LAW

Romans 3:9-20

Review is in order inasmuch *as we now reach the end of the first major division in Paul's letter to Rome.*

The first seventeen verses comprise the introduction with verses 16 and 17 stating the theme, "**I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also the Greek, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.**" Beginning at the eighteenth verse through 3:20, the Apostle Paul argues the necessity of the redemption that is in JESUS CHRIST by proving that the whole world, Jew and non-Jew, is in sin and guilty before Almighty GOD.

In the first chapter of the epistle beginning at verse 18, he demonstrates that the non-Jew stands convicted before GOD; then anticipating the Jewish reaction, he shows, beginning with chapter 2 through the 8th verse of chapter 3, that the Jew also as well as the Gentile stands condemned before GOD. In this present passage, 3:9-20, we have what might be called in the vernacular the "wrap up" of the argument. He begins with a question so ambiguous that no commentator is dogmatic as to its meaning.

The question is, "**What then, are we better than they?**" Who are "we" and who are "they"? Some say the "we" refers to the Jew. Paul has been discussing the Jew's advantage so the question naturally follows, "Are we Jews better than the non-Jew or the Gentile?"

There are others who believe that he is asking exactly the converse, "Are we Gentiles therefore better off than the Jews?" Because, you see, the Apostle Paul has now demonstrated that the Jew had advantages which increased his guilt inasmuch as he failed to live up to the responsibility inherent in them. The question makes sense either way, the point being, "Is there any defense left for Jew or Gentile?" The answer is an unqualified "no," after which the author states, "Have I not been showing you that all men are condemned?" His argument thus far concludes the sinfulness of all men, and now he is going to settle it with evidence from the Word of GOD. He is going to close this division of his letter by demonstrating unequivocally the universality of sin, the indiscriminate sinfulness of human nature.

That phrase "**under sin**" is an interesting word. It means to be under the authority of sin, under the reign of sin. The "reign of sin" will be discussed later at the end of the fifth chapter, The whole world is under the dominion of sin; the whole world is under the power of sin; the whole world is in sin's empire. This, incidentally, sheds some light on an apparent contradiction in the Word of GOD. John 3:16 declares, "**For God so loved the world . . .**" This same author admonishes in his first epistle, "**Love not the world.**"

Is this a contradiction? No, it is not, for in John 3:16 he is talking about a different world from the one in 1st John. In John 3:16 he is talking about the people that are in the world; GOD loved all the people in the world from Adam and Eve to the last person that will ever be born. GOD loves everybody. GOD is indiscriminate and impartial in His love for all men everywhere; He does not love one man more than another; He does not love the white man more than the black or vice versa; GOD is no respecter of persons. GOD loves the world in this sense; but the world order which has set itself against GOD and is operating contrary to His order, we are told not to love. We are told to reject it, not the people in it but the principles by which they operate contrary to GOD's law.

Finally, Paul comes to the proof, the ultimate proof of the universality of sin, and it is interesting to observe that he counts the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be this unanswerable proof. Here we have an insight into Paul's appreciation of the Old Testament Scriptures. So far as this brilliant Jew was concerned, this man who has influenced human history more than any other save JESUS CHRIST Himself, excepting Moses perhaps, the Old Testament was conclusive. Paul entertained no doubts whatsoever about its infallibility. Hence, when he marshals references, as he does in verses 10 to 18, the proof is final, the matter is closed, debate is silenced. Indeed he says just this, "**That every mouth may be stopped.**"

He uses here a typical rabbinic device in teaching and preaching, the stringing together of unrelated texts in defense of his argument. This was called "*charaz*" in the Hebrew, and it means literally the stringing of pearls. Observe these pearls of wisdom which the apostle strings together in this passage. Beginning at the tenth verse he says, "**As it is written, there is none righteous,**" None is righteous. And lest there be any doubt about his meaning, he adds, "**No not one.**" Then in verse 11, "**There is none that understandeth.**" In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote, "**the world by wisdom knew not GOD.**" No one understands.

You will recall in Chapter 1 a quotation from a London monitored broadcast originating in Moscow, in which, with all seriousness the Communists declared that JESUS CHRIST never existed, a fact which science has so proved! They really believed this; they apparently were sincere.

How can this be, this utterly irrational fact? The Bible says the whole human race is this way until it repents. Paul says, "**no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.**" The very fact that one recognizes JESUS CHRIST as Lord is evidence that he has been taught by GOD (John 6:45).

Recall Peter's remarkable testimony in Caesarea of Philippi, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" JESUS said, "**Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not**

**revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.**" This truth is not arrived at by the normal, rational processes; it is a gift of GOD.

**"There is none that seeketh after God."** One can almost hear people say, "Now wait a minute, is there any place on this earth where men do not seek after GOD? Look at the primitive animistic religions of Africa and Asia; what of the religion of Islam and Buddhism and Shintoism? How can the Bible declare that no one seeks after GOD? Sixty-five percent of the American people are church members; how can it be said, "No one seeks after GOD?" Why, we are a religious world! Indeed we are, and now let it be understood that this is precisely the point, man's religion is evidence of the fact that he is not seeking GOD!

Why did the Pharisees crucify JESUS CHRIST? Because of their religion! Why did the very man who authored this letter, Saul of Tarsus, persecute the Christian Church and do everything he could to exterminate it? Because of his religion. In history the supreme expression of man's rebellion against GOD is religion, whether it is Christian religion or any other. One reason the Christian nations, so-called, are impotent in world affairs today is that they have made of Christianity a religion.

In Africa today you might hear a Moslem evangelist saying to the Nationals, "Who is causing all the trouble in the world today? Who started the First World War? - the Second World War? Who has the H-bomb? Who possesses the threat of thermonuclear war? Do the Moslem nations? They do not. They are peace-loving. It is the Christian nations that are the great disturbers of the peace in our modern world." Would you have any defense?

Dr. Reginald Thomas, on a Sunday morning Bible Hour over NBC was pointing out that faith which is authentic must be organized, a fact which he demonstrated from the New Testament. But said he, "***We are in great danger in our modern world of organizing JESUS CHRIST out of His Church!***"

This happens; that is the reason why I cannot get excited about Church union; it is possible to organize JESUS CHRIST right out of His Church. When we have diluted and emasculated faith in JESUS CHRIST and made of it a religion, it is as powerless as any other. Religion cannot save; only JESUS CHRIST can save! History clearly shows that men are ingenious in their effort to avoid GOD, to avoid JESUS CHRIST, and about this we shall speak more.

**"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable"** is the record. Literally this means they have "*turned sour*"; what a description of human nature without CHRIST, "they have turned sour." When you read, "**They are all gone out of the way,**" you are reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "**All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way.**" This is sin in its root sense, in its essence - man going his own way. "I want my own way!" That is the root sin. You cannot tolerate this as a father. My seventeen-year-old son says, "I will have my own way!" He will discover that this is an intolerable situation in the home, and it is intolerable in GOD's universe, man insisting on his own way and inventing religions to uphold his anarchy.

**"There is none that doeth good, no, not one."** Here he speaks of the inwardness of man as it is expressed through his lips. "**Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,**" declares

the New Testament. "**Their throat is an open sepulchre.**" You can almost smell the stench which rises from the open grave with its putrefaction. "**With their tongues they have used deceit.**" Polite society refers to it as little white lies. "**The poison of asps is under their lips.**" How easily one can poison a person with his lips! Probably there is no more effective way to destroy man than with speech. Some are masters at this kind of destruction. "**Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.**"

It is difficult to go anywhere in our modern society today in the normal course of events without exposure to smut and profanity. Go to an average service club where the respectable leaders of the community sit together for lunch weekly and listen to the profanity, the jokes and stories at each table and then to the anecdotes which the speaker so often feels are required to establish rapport with his audience. One's soul writhes within at the sordid conversation of men.

"**Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known.**" Interesting that this should have been written. For two thousand years man had been unable to find the way of peace; and today, nineteen centuries subsequent to this writing, peace seems more elusive than ever before. How can we expect peace with Russia when we cannot even have peace on our city streets in traffic; when we cannot have peace across the backyard fence or between a white man and a dark man, between management and labor, between husbands and wives? What right do we have to expect world peace? "**The way of peace have they not known.**"

But you say, "This is rather rough on human nature, and I am not willing to accept it."

Well, you need not; it is your prerogative to hold to an optimistic illusion about mankind if you wish. Bear in mind, however, that this is the Divine estimate as GOD sees into the heart of man, not his outward appearance. "**The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.**"

The October 28th, 1962 issue of Saturday Review contained a startling editorial by the editor, Norman Cousins, which gives a glimpse of human nature beneath the veneer of civilization and culture:

*"In Las Vegas the head of the local Civil Defense Agency recently called for a militia of five thousand men to protect residents in the event of thermonuclear war. The men would be trained to crush an expected invasion, not from foreign shores but from Southern California. (He is not being facetious.) It is believed that Los Angeles as a major city would be under direct attack. 'Survivors,' warned J. Carlton Adair, the Las Vegas Civilian Defense official, 'would come into Nevada like a swarm of locusts; obviously they would have to be repulsed.'"* So the Civil Defense leader in Las Vegas is asking for a militia trained to kill Southern Californians trying to escape the horrors of thermonuclear war.

In a less organized way other Americans are now preparing to kill Americans. A Chicago suburbanite, according to Time Magazine, intends to mount a machine gun at the entrance to his fall-out shelter and blast away at shelterless neighbors who might try to get in out of the radioactivity. Countless other Americans may be making no open declaration about their intentions, but they are calmly going about the business of equipping their shelters with guns or

tear gas devices, just in case desperate neighbors might want to poach on their preserves during or after an attack. Some are now preparing their children psychologically to accept the murder of their playmates; all this goes under the heading of Civil Defense.

In Hartford, Connecticut, at a private meeting of local residents who had come together to consider Civil Defense problems, one citizen advised his neighbors that firearms were standard equipment for shelters along with stocks of food and medicines. "People who are wounded or suffering from radiation will run around like mad men trying to find shelter," he warned, "and since there will only be so much water and food for one's own family, the intruders will have to be turned back, even if it means shooting them." A woman who lived next door to the citizen who had just given this advice, asked a question. "John," she said, "you and your family have been our closest friends for ten years. Do you mean to say that if this city is bombed, and my baby and I were caught in the open, and we were hurt and came to your shelter, you would turn us away?" John said, "You build a shelter of your own. I've got to look out for my own family." "But suppose we had built a shelter of our own, yet were caught by surprise, being out in the open at the time of an attack, and we discovered that the entrance to our shelter was covered with rubble, and we had no place to turn excepting you, would you still turn us back?" The answer was still yes. "But suppose I wouldn't go away, and kept trying to get in, would you shoot me?" John said that if the only way he could keep his friend out would be shooting her and her baby, he would do it.

This is our modern world; **"the way of peace have they not known!"**

In Romans 3:10-18, the apostle reverses the sequence which he used in the first chapter. There he began, **"when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. . ."** Refusal to worship GOD resulted in the reprobate conditions which followed. In other words in chapter 1 he states the causes first, then the consequences followed by the cause, verse 18, **"There is no fear of GOD before their eyes."** Man individually or collectively, when he does not reverence GOD, degenerates; this is inevitable, and this degenerative process is at work in history, has been working from the Garden of Eden when our first parents disobeyed GOD. Whether we like it or not, we are living in an eschatological period in history; more than any former generation we are experiencing the cumulative result of this degenerative process in human nature.

Some years ago it was my privilege to hear a psychiatrist lecture in Berkeley, California. On the blackboard he had drawn islands on the upper left-hand corner and in the lower right-hand corner. The psychiatrist began by saying, *"Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to talk about sin. I realize it is unconventional for a psychiatrist to talk about sin; nevertheless, I am going to do so."* In the upper left island he wrote "GOD" and down on the lower right island he wrote "man," then explained this separation of GOD and man as sin. GOD is on an island, and man is on an island, and between GOD and man there is an impassable gulf; but he continued, *"The point of sin is this, GOD didn't put man on the island; man put GOD on the island. This is sin, man banishing GOD from his life. Man alienating himself from GOD."* This is original sin, and everything that plagues history comes as a result of this banishment.

What is the conclusion of the matter? We have already intimated, Paul declares, ***"The Jews have no defense since I have demonstrated from their Scriptures that they are under sin. The Gentiles certainly have no defense for I have shown that they have the law written in their***

*hearts. Thus the mouths of all men have been stopped. Man no longer has any recourse; all men are guilty before GOD."*

Then is stated one of the most basic facts about the law to be found in Romans. **"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** *By keeping the law no one can be justified, the reason being that the law was meant to reveal to man his sin, that he might turn to GOD in faith for salvation.* In Galatians Paul says, **"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ"** (3:24). The law cannot redeem us from sin; the law only reveals the fact of sin, the remedy for which is JESUS CHRIST. Now Paul begins with verse 21, the redemption, apart from the law, in JESUS CHRIST, by virtue of His cross and resurrection. Having painted the pessimistic picture of the human dilemma, Paul now moves into the glorious optimism of the Divine solution, the grace of GOD through JESUS CHRIST.

In the 12th verse, the Apostle Paul says, **"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable."** That is to say, they have been rendered useless. This is how sin works in a man's life; it renders him useless. He may be busy, even productive, but he will not be all he was created to be. He will not be the man GOD intended. Unredeemed man is ultimately useless because he was made to glorify GOD and enjoy Him forever.

One vivid picture of this is the story of the master violinist who, falling on evil days, brought his instrument to the pawn shop for a loan. The pawnbroker took the precious instrument and laid it on the shelf. Two things are true of that instrument while it is on the shelf: it is in the possession of one who is not its rightful owner, and it is not being used for its created purpose; it is just gathering dust. To be without JESUS CHRIST, unredeemed by His self-sacrifice; to be without His management in one's life, regardless of how busy one may be, is to be possessed by someone other than the rightful owner; to be used for some purpose less than the one intended. **It is to be a man on the shelf!**

Finally, the violinist is able to redeem his violin; rushing into the pawnshop, he lays down the ticket and the money with interest, receives his instrument and hurries home. Breathlessly he enters his studio, opens the case, takes out the violin, dusts it off, tightens the bow, tunes the strings and puts it to his chin. Once more the instrument is in the possession of its owner and it begins to make the beautiful music for which it was created. That is redemption and that is what JESUS CHRIST does for man.

There is another way of looking at this. The word "glory" means literally to fulfill one's purpose. The glory of the flower is fragrance and beauty. The glory of the sun is to light and warm the earth. The glory of the rain is to wet the ground that it may bring forth fruit. The glory of man is to glorify GOD. This is the explanation for the purposelessness, the directionlessness, the meaninglessness of life. Today persons of all ages in all parts of the world are saying, where do I find meaning for life? The answer is, only in JESUS CHRIST is there meaning.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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