

PROLOGUE TO PRISON
Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS
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Chapter Two -
The Power of GOD

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16, 17)

Two clear, strong verses in the introduction to his Epistle to the Romans, by which the apostle Paul declares his theme. The Gospel of CHRIST is "**the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,**" in it "**the righteousness of God (is) revealed**" . . . "**the just shall live by faith.**" *Romans is the whole Bible in embryo.* Romans is, as it were, the Bible abridged. Implicit in these two verses in the message of the letter. The Gospel means good news. The reason is found in these two verses.

The passage under consideration divides nicely into five parts:

One, "**I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.**"

Two, "**It is the power of God unto salvation.**"

Three, "**To every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**"

Four, "**Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.**"

Five, "**As it is written, The just shall live by faith.**"

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Why should it have been necessary for the apostle to say this? Is it conceivable that one should be ashamed of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST? Indeed it is. *The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST has been an embarrassment to many, so embarrassing to some that they will not preach it; so embarrassing that some will not speak of it. There are pulpits where the Gospel is unacceptable.* Here is a church advertisement in a daily paper announcing a new religious broadcast. And what is its appeal? It is directed to the intellectual, to the one who desires a "respectable faith" without a naive Gospel! The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST is not popular; hence the apostle Paul significantly emphasizes deep personal pride in the Gospel by his negative declaration.

Why are men ashamed of the Gospel? Paul says to the Jew the Gospel is a "**stumbling block**"; to the Greek it is "**foolishness.**" A stumbling block to the Jew because he requires a sign. What sign does he require? The Jew thought of his MESSIAH in terms of an earthly kingdom, the restoration of the Throne of David, giving the Jew a place of preeminence among the nations. They did not see their MESSIAH as "**despised and rejected of men,**" as a suffering servant. They did not see their MESSIAH hanging on a Cross, His body broken, bleeding, a crown of thorns on His head. This could not be their MESSIAH. But it was; and as we traverse Paul's

letter to the Romans, we shall discover that the Old Testament taught that the MESSIAH was to be this.

The Gospel is foolishness to the Greek, and one enamored of intellect. The Gospel is an offense to pride of intellect, and Paul is writing to Rome, the mistress of the world. What is his message? ***He proclaims a despised and rejected Nazarene, crucified on a Cross as a common criminal. Is this message supposed to have appeal for the proud Roman? Paul is not ashamed of it! Paul is proud to declare it; but how many, for no other reason than ego, deprive themselves of this glorious message?***

You will remember the interesting story of Naaman (II Kings 5), the captain of the king's host of Syria. Naaman was a great man, possessing all that any man could want, enjoying status and position; but says the Scripture with penetrating realism, "**he was a leper,**" a type of sin in the Bible. He would have paid any price to be rid of his leprosy. Now it happened that in one of the wars between Syria and Israel, a little Jewish girl was captured in Samaria and taken to the house of Naaman. When she learned of his desire to be cured of leprosy, she said, "Oh if he only knew of the man of GOD in Samaria!"

The king of Syria, hearing this, order Naaman to go to the King of Israel, and in the course of events Naaman was brought to Elisha, the man of GOD. Elisha sent a servant who said, "**Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean**" (II Kings 5:10).

Naaman responded in proud wrath saying, "**Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage**" (II Kings 5:12).

But with irresistible logic the servant said, "**My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?**" Yielding to such clear logic the wise captain turned and washed in the water seven times and came up clean.

There are men and women who for no other reason than sheer unmitigated pride are depriving themselves of the cleansing, forgiving, regenerating power of GOD in the Gospel. Offer them profound thoughts, some thing intellectual which appeals to their pride of understanding, this they will take seriously. Give them some difficult thing to do that they may boast in accomplishment, it is acceptable; but to simply trust what JESUS CHRIST did on the Cross of Calvary, how many turn their backs on that incredible offer?

Thank GOD that the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest intellects who ever lived, could say, "**I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.**" Why - "**For it is the power of God unto salvation**" The power of GOD. One historian, looking back upon the millenniums of human frailty, upon the perennial failure of humanity, generation by generation, century by century, declared, "nothing that is possible can save us." With what wisdom he spoke. The possible cannot save us - it requires the impossible. That is the reason why Paul was proud of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST because it is the power of GOD unto salvation. This is not man's doing, not human effort, not human achievement, individually or collectively. It is not ethics, not morality, not charity, not a sociological reform movement; it is the power of GOD. That is the Gospel, and nothing less

works.

Bruce Catton, editor of *American Heritage* and a leading authority on the Civil War, speaking on the theme "What 1861 Has to Say to 1961," gave three-quarters of his remarks to a contrast of the weaponry and the science of war between 1861 and 1961. The last quarter of his talk was addressed to what he declared to be history's greatest problem; namely, human nature, the most explosive fact in history. He closed by pointing out that the problem of 1961 is identical to that of 1861, human nature. The problem in 1961 A.D. is identical to that of 1961 B.C.; it is man himself.

Is it possible that there are still those who believe human nature is capable of changing itself? Have we learned nothing from a Mussolini or a Hitler or a Stalin or a Khrushchev or a Mao Tse Tung? Not that we would make scapegoats of these men, but in them we see the evil of human nature in the ultimate. In them we see the logical and inevitable product of failure to take GOD seriously. It is only because of our pride that we will not admit the bankruptcy of humanity.

"We have harnessed the atom," declared General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, "but we will never make war obsolete until we find a force to bridle the passions of men." Where is there a force to bridle the passions of men? Paul's answer is the Gospel, for it is the power of GOD unto salvation. "Military alliances, balances of power, League of Nations, all in turn have failed," declared General of the Army, the late Douglas MacArthur, at the Japanese surrender ceremony, "leaving the only pathway to be by way of the crucible of war." Now the utter destructiveness of war blots out this alternative. We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door.

The problem is basically theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence, an improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science and literature and art and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh. Two thousand years ago JESUS said, It is "**Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man**" (Matthew 15:11). Everything that is wrong with history springs from the heart of man. It is the touch of human nature that makes the atom a threat. There is nothing wrong with nuclear fission apart from the way man uses it. The touch of man upon history infects history.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" - for whom? EVERYONE! Jew or Greek. To the apostle that meant everybody, Jew and non-Jew. The apostle Paul, an "**Hebrew of the Hebrews**" who took his religion more seriously than any of his contemporaries, states emphatically that the Gospel is salvation for the Jew. There are places in our American society today where such a remark will be received as religious intolerance. If this be so, JESUS, a Jew, was intolerant as was Paul, a Jew, one of the proudest Jews who ever lived. Men say, "Well, they have their religion." ***To be sure they do, but it is not a saving religion.*** There is only one way a Jew can be saved, and that is by the Gospel; and as a matter of fact, we shall see subsequently in our study that the first Hebrew, the progenitor of Israel, is the supreme example of the salvation by faith, the crowning argument for the efficacy of the Gospel.

"It is the power of GOD unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also

to the Greek"; it is universal truth; it is for everybody. This is the justification for foreign missions, JESUS said "Go," and the Christian Church is not at liberty to do less. The Church that is not going to the whole world with the Gospel is failing, in disobeying her LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. The Christian who is indifferent to missions is some thing less than Christian for JESUS CHRIST said **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15).

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The Gospel works for the one who believes it. Belief is not a matter of the intellect; it is a matter of the will. It is said that the encyclopedias published in Russia today teach the JESUS CHRIST never existed. What is more irrational? The Encyclopedia Britannica gives twenty thousand words to the life of JESUS, but the Russian encyclopedias teach that JESUS was nonexistent! Stated in Association Press release datelined London: "Russians say Christmas is a capitalistic plot. Radio Moscow declared today that JESUS CHRIST never existed, that Christmas is a capitalistic plot to keep the working people in chains. The image of the supposed founder of Christianity is purely legendary and mythical. Science long ago established that JESUS CHRIST never existed."

There you see unbelief. It is not a question of the intellect at all; there is nothing intellectual about this. This is sheer stupidity. No, really it is not stupidity; it is diabolical; it is from the pit of hell. Making the truth a lie, that is unbelief. There is not a man anywhere at any time in history who honestly challenged JESUS intellectually who did not receive reasonable satisfaction from Him. No fact of history is more intellectually satisfying than He who is Truth Incarnate. It is not that men cannot believe; it is that they will not. They simply reject the evidence which is overwhelmingly for JESUS CHRIST.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Why is it the power of GOD unto salvation? **"For therein (in the Gospel) is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."** The Gospel exposes the righteousness of GOD. The Gospel unveils the righteousness of GOD. The Gospel releases the righteousness of GOD. Later in the Epistle we shall discover the dominant, inflexible line Paul draws between the righteousness of GOD and the righteousness of man. No one is more qualified to draw this basic distinction than he, for no one had succeeded so well in human righteousness.

Recall his testimony in Philippians 3. He dared to say, **"If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more."** But Paul discovered that it was his religious zeal, his very drive for human righteousness that made him so hostile to CHRIST, that made him the number one enemy of the Church, that made him oppose GOD. And Paul will remind Israel that it is their attempt to achieve their own righteousness which prevents them from coming to CHRIST and receiving the righteousness of GOD which is by faith.

Someone has said that the devil's best argument against the Gospel is a good man. There are citizens in American cities who never darken the door of a church; and if you ask them why, they will say, "I am as good as anybody who goes to church," and as a matter of fact outwardly they are. It is their goodness which keeps them from JESUS CHRIST and the Gospel.

It is not the men on skid-row, or on all of the skid-rows in America combined; it is not those in the second precinct in Washington, D.C., or of all of the substandard precincts of our cities; it is not the men in the prisons of our country who will finally be responsible for the demise of our civilization. If our nation dies, it will be due to the respectable people in our country who on the basis of their self-righteousness will not come to JESUS CHRIST and be saved. ***The attitude is the real enemy of the Gospel, not skid-rows and prisons and tenements but good people who refuse CHRIST.*** It was they who put Him on the Cross 1900 years ago, and they have been crucifying Him ever since.

Obviously, if your righteousness is the result of what you have been able to achieve; whatever else you say about it, it is self-righteousness. And it is the enemy of the righteousness of GOD. ***The righteousness of God is as far removed from human righteousness as Heaven is from hell. The difference is measured by infinity, and it is presumption consummate for any man to assume that he can stand before Almighty GOD on the day of judgment and expect his human goodness to qualify him for eternity. GOD will say, "Why did you reject my Son? Why did you not believe the Gospel which I provided for your eternal salvation?"***

No man is good enough; and we shall hear Paul insisting in no uncertain terms, "**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God... There is none righteous, no, not one.**" Of course this is not a popular message, but it is the truth of GOD, and a man rejects it to his eternal peril.

Paul testifies in Philippians 3:9, 10 "**Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss (He refers to the total of all his religious achievements) for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.**" This is a remarkable thing. You can have this righteousness in a moment; you can have it forever by believing in JESUS CHRIST, consenting to CHRIST, acquiescing to CHRIST, trusting CHRIST, and what He did for you on the Cross of Calvary.

How beautifully He put it in the Beatitudes, "**Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**" (Matthew 5:6). It is as if JESUS said all you need do is desire, you shall have. Indeed, we shall see in Romans 2 that this is precisely the prerequisite - the man who desires eternal life will have it. Want it, and you may have it. Have it forever! That is the glory of the Gospel.

Finally, the apostle Paul quotes from the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:4), "**As it is written the just shall live by faith.**" The Gospel was not Paul's innovation. The Gospel was not invented by the apostles. The Gospel of JESUS CHRIST was not introduced by the New Testament. Paul opened his Epistle by declaring, I am "**separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.**" Moses preached the Gospel. Abraham who lived before Moses is Paul's strongest evidence for his message. The Psalmist wrote about the man whose sin in not imputed to him, a fact which Paul argues in Romans 4.

The Gospel was the theme of the Old Testament; in fact, it is found, in type, away back in the

Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had covered their shame with fig leaves, which did not satisfy; they ran and hid from GOD. The record declares that GOD covered them with coats of skin - blood sacrifice. Nothing but the shedding of blood has ever been satisfactory to cover sin. Writes the author of Hebrews, "without shedding of blood is no remission." The covering of our first parents with coats of skin was prophetic of the sacrifice of the Son of GOD upon the Cross of Calvary; and when one accepts JESUS CHRIST as his SAVIOUR and LORD, he is clothed in the garment of His righteousness, robed in His perfection. That is the profound efficacy of the Gospel.

Quoting from the Old Testament Paul writes, "**The just shall live by faith.**" Who are the just? They are those who, having trusted in the Son, are reckoned as perfect by the FATHER. This theme will be covered much more adequately in Romans chapter 5; but suffice to say here, *when a man believes in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, GOD the FATHER sees him as if he had never sinned. He has been totally absolved, hence justified. The FATHER imputes to that man the righteousness of the Son. The FATHER credits that one with the perfection of His Son and GOD sees him now covered by CHRIST's righteousness. There is no longer fear of judgment, no longer any uncertainty as to one's eternal welfare, for it is not the questionable validity of his own merit upon which he depends but upon the worthiness of CHRIST's Person and His Work.*

"**The just shall live by faith.**" "Live by faith." "Live." It requires great patience to wait for Romans 6, 7 and 8, where Paul discusses the sheer workableness of the Gospel - how to live daily, hourly, moment-by-moment by faith. Most Christians fail not because they do not try. *Indeed, effort may be the cause of failure* as with Paul, as with Israel, (Romans 10:1-4) but because they do not appropriate the resources given in the Gospel for daily, hourly, moment-by-moment use.

Southern California papers carried the story during the last war of a certain man from the southern mountains who migrated out to the West Coast and secured employment with an aircraft industry. He wanted to do his part for the war effort; and having a large family, he did not qualify for the military. A number of weeks went by, during which his paycheck failed to show up in the office as being cancelled, and subsequent investigation revealed that he had all of his paychecks neatly filed away. Having never seen a check before in his life and being unfamiliar with its use, he assumed that these papers were an expression of appreciation for his part in the war effort; meaning he was working at another job to support his family.

Humorous to be sure, yet tragic when you realize it is not unlike many Christians. GOD has given a blank check, so to speak, signed in the blood of JESUS CHRIST, His Son, payable to whomsoever will, whenever he needs it, in whatever amount is needed. Unfamiliar with these inexhaustible resources GOD had made available or indifferent because of pride, we deprive ourselves of precious benefits, meanwhile working overtime in a futile effort to become what only the Gospel can make us by faith alone. "The just shall live by faith." Is it any wonder Paul was proud of this message?

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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