

"The Gospel of God "

Romans 1: 1 to 5: 2.

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The Roman epistle is the epistle for the teaching of the gospel. It is the gospel of God. How wonderful it is that God has been pleased to speak to man in the way of glad tidings, for that is what gospel means. These glad tidings have a focal point. Coming as they do from the heart of God they focus our attention upon a real living Person. This immediately distinguishes the gospel from everything which makes a bid for the ears of men. It is "concerning His Son." The Son is quickly identified for us, being "Jesus Christ." As the Son of God is the theme of the gospel we may expect some unfolding of the love of God, and we later read that "God commendeth His love towards us." Who more able to make known the heart of God than the Son who has ever subsisted in the sweetness and love of eternal relationship?

"Jesus" is His personal name. Given to Him in His incarnation, bringing before us thoughts of His lowliness and humility; at the same time bespeaking His glory and grace, for JESUS means Jehovah the Saviour.

"Christ" is an official title. He is God's anointed Man. As such He shall give effect to the will of God by so establishing His righteousness that blessing might freely flow to those who deserve only eternal judgment. The gospel then concerns "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

I wonder if we are all united in owning His as "our Lord"? Is He your Lord? Is He my Lord? Thank God, through grace I do truly say He is my Lord. Later in the epistle (Romans 10: 9) a well known verse — would to God its truth and power were as familiar as the words — "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Yes, saved, by the grace of God! The Saviour in His incarnation came of David's royal line. This made Him available to all that are of Israel, thus the note is sounded forth — "to the Jew first."

Then the declaration has been made that He is Son of God. We are not all of Israel but we are all, because of sin, under the power of death, hence the Son of God is available for all, and the declaration is to the effect that He is — "Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from (of) the dead."

How unlike the first man! Christ's life and ways were all marked by holiness as the first man had been marked by sin. Death is the king of terrors and defeats us all. The Son of God has again and again demonstrated His death-conquering power. For instance at the tomb of Lazarus — "Come forth, and he that was dead came forth."

We learn in Romans that death came in by sin, and we are now introduced to Him who is able to deliver from death because He has dealt with the sin question.

The gospel then concerns this One who has made known the love of God and has brought life in where death had reigned.

The gospel which thus presents Him brings before us the fact that man has been on trial for long centuries and has been proved guilty, helpless, hopeless, sinful wreck, absolutely incapable of extricating himself from the position in which sin had enslaved him, incapable too, of expiating his

guilt. The law has come in and can only accuse and condemn, and no flesh is justified by the deeds of the law. This is the crowning conclusion of Romans 1 and 2 with the first half of Romans 3. Man is indicted before God, and the whole world is brought in guilty! Well, if we cannot deal with our guilt what is to be done? We can do nothing! The sooner we accept this the better for us. If anything needs to be done the only One who can do it is the One against whom we have sinned.

Thank God, there is in the gospel the revelation of righteousness of God. He has established His right to bless and justify those who, by sinning, had established their right to be forever damned. And He has done it on a righteous basis, and *that* the finished work of Christ on the cross. God has manifested His righteousness apart from the law and it is not by works but "by the faith of Jesus Christ," and it is "*unto* all" — this is the scope of the gospel. All have a common need for "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Truly "There is no difference." All are guilty before God. How large-hearted He is, His righteousness is "*unto* all." To the Jew who thought he was religiously near, and to the Gentile who was "afar off," whether he knew it or cared about it or not. But His righteousness is only "*upon* all them that believe."

This is the application of it. Only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are in the benefit of the gospel. How blessed then is the fact that God has revealed His righteousness in the gospel. He has a right to judge us; what we have done by sinning against Him affords Him the right to *banish* us for ever. But wonder of wonders, He has established His right to *bless* us by what Christ has done. What we never could have done for ourselves in an eternity of endeavour God has done for us through that one act of sacrifice at the cross. The application of this through the gospel is to "him which believeth in Jesus." If then we have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour we stand before God in righteousness; we are justified and have been cleared from every charge of sinning that could be levelled against us — indeed God Himself could not charge us for He has cleared us! In Romans 3 we learn on what ground God has done this. Let it be emphasised that we have not merited it, for "all have sinned."

This then is said of those who have believed the gospel, "Being justified *freely*" nothing to pay. Had we been asked to pay we should have been lost for ever. We read in the parable of the two debtors in Luke 7, "and when they had *nothing* to pay, He frankly forgave them both." It is all the free-giving of God — "by His grace."

But there was a price to be paid, however much beyond men. Jesus has paid it all — yes, "all to Him I owe." The matter of our guilt has been thoroughly dealt with, God has not closed His eyes to it, His grace which reaches out to justify the guilty does so on a stable, incontrovertible foundation, the righteous basis of Christ's finished work. So it is "through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus: whom God has set forth to be a propitiation (or, a Mercy Seat) through faith in His blood."

In the tabernacle in the wilderness the Mercy Seat was the throne of God. *There* His claims were met by the blood of sacrifice which was sprinkled upon and before the Mercy Seat. *There* was the righteous meeting place between God and the mediator of the Old Covenant, Moses. Christ, the Mercy Seat, is the meeting place now for God and the sinner. God has set Him forth in this way, "through faith in His blood."

His life has been given in sacrifice that the claims of God may be fully met and that men might be enabled to meet Him in righteousness. On this ground is God's righteousness in forgiving guilty sinners declared. "To declare His righteousness: for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

This teaches that every sin forgiven in Old Testament times was so, prospectively, in anticipation of the finished work of Christ; and "at this time" refers to this present time since Christ was crucified. Those who now trust the Saviour are justified — made right with and by God who is righteous — right in everything He does. Christ's precious blood has opened a righteous way back to God for guilty sinners. Let us thank God for such amazing grace to the guilty and take our place with all who believe the gospel of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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As we travel through this wonderful epistle we learn from Romans 4 that two examples are adduced by the Spirit of God to demonstrate the truth of justification by faith. Abraham, the father of all who believe, came to God in faith, and "his faith was counted for righteousness."

As to David, the second example, he was the fountain head of the kingdom; as Abraham was the fountain head of promise. David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works. This, of course, is the great theme of this chapter — being made righteous before God without works, on the principle of faith alone. David said, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Abraham illustrates the blessing of "him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly."

He and David, both pillars in the history of God's earthly people, emphasise the blessedness of those who come to God pleading no merit of their own. We conclude then that a man is justified by faith without works at all, without law works or any other works. This is a divinely formed conclusion, taught in the Word of God, and exemplified by none less than these two figureheads in God's ways with Israel. God who puts righteousness to the account of the believer in Jesus will never put sin to his account. Again let it be most strenuously affirmed that man can of himself do nothing towards this blessing, all is of the sovereign mercy of God. Again in Romans 4, when Abraham had realised his incapability of implementing the promise of God he found strength in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Abraham accepted that when he could do nothing God would do everything, and that is just what he proved. Notice, *God is able*. We are utterly unable — God is completely able. This is where faith rests. There is this difference between Abraham and ourselves — he believed what God would do; we believe what God *has* done, for "we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

In the death of Jesus our sins have all been dealt with. He has borne them sacrificially, even as the apostle Peter elsewhere says, "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2: 24).

Let us then thank God, as we take account of our Lord Jesus Christ who went in death on our behalf at Calvary and is now out of death in resurrection, and gladly acknowledge that as Christ is absolutely clear from everything with which He had charged Himself in dying, so all who believe the gospel are as clear from every charge of guilt as He is, now risen from among the dead.

The blessed result of His death, the conclusion of the matter, for faith, is detailed in Romans 5.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We may now look back over our guilty *past* and say, "we have peace with God." As to *present* standing we say, by Him, "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." As to the *future*, "we rejoice

in hope of the glory of God."

How blessed is the confidence that we shall eventually be at home where all is suitable to the God who will bring us there. How marvellously He has wrought that we should delight to be there, and that He should delight to have us there. Thus as to the *past* — peace with God; as to the *present* — we stand in grace; as to the *future* — we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Praise be to God for having so acted towards us in gospel blessing. He has done so righteously, He has acted in perfect consistency with all that He is, for — "The work that Thine own Son has wrought, has brought us back in peace and free."

From this point in Romans 5, we progress in the knowledge of Himself. Verses 3 to 5 give us, in a sense, experience in circumstances of trial and contrariety — in other words, wilderness experience. What marks a wilderness is barrenness, no sustenance. In the spiritual counterpart of this the believer learns that there is no support for him in the world through which he passes. Yet, in the good of verses 1 and 2, he says, "and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also."

This obviously cuts across the natural course of things — "glory in tribulations"? Yes, because we know that tribulation is used to form us as we go through it in communion with God. The moral quality of "patience" (endurance) is acquired in the face of trial. We are morally strengthened to stand against the storm just as the tree bending to the wind strikes its roots deeper. This endurance works experience, for we are brought to the conscious knowledge of the faithfulness and support of God. We learn to distrust ourselves, for we are just as incapable of *sustaining* ourselves in the path of faith as we were of justifying ourselves. So we learn God when things are seemingly against us. Blessed experience that gives us to trust Him unreservedly!

And experience works Hope. This makes the light of the coming glory shine more brightly before us, cheering us on our heavenly way, detaching us more distinctly from the world and conforming us more to God's world. While being helped through the circumstances of this godless world we keep the goal in view, looking forward to those circumstances of glory which shall be ours with our blessed Lord where He is. Praise God, there is an end to the tribulation and the testing, but may we learn the lessons that God would teach us in it. There certainly is spiritual and moral gain for us now, for as we read later in the epistle, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

"And hope maketh not ashamed" — it is certain of realisation. While we hope, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." While hope looks to the future we now have that which is a pledge of all that God has given and promised. The Spirit, by His poser, gives us the consciousness of the love of God. We are enabled *now* to know and enjoy that which shall be our eternal portion. This is language applicable to all who form the Christian company — "the Holy Ghost which is given to us."

May we then go in for the knowledge of God, the enjoyment of the love of God as expressed in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." The cross is the lesson book of the love of God! Verses 7 and 8 definitely contrast the love of God with the love of man to man, "but God commendeth His love toward us."

For sinners — the unworthy, the undeserving — indeed those deserving only of eternal wrath, for such Christ died! Let us ever remember that the full expression of the love of God was in Christ's death. Blessed as our enjoyment of God's love is, our enjoyment, ebbing and flowing as it is, is not the measure of the love of God. The Scripture ever directs us to look out from ourselves to that which perfectly displayed the love of God — the death of Christ.

So while we were neither righteous nor good, while we were yet sinners, God gave Christ to die for us and we can now most surely say, "much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." He gave his life for those who by sin had forfeited their right to live and this being so judgment will never touch those who believe. Then, too, "if, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by (in the power of) His life." That is to say, present, day to day, practical salvation through every pressure and trial of the way, is assured to us because Christ lives in the power of an endless life at the right hand of God. He administers to us all that we need to lead us triumphantly through this life of responsibility and experience. We shall be saved, all the way by Him. This is a touch on the priestly service of our Lord Jesus Christ in His ministry of succour, sympathy, and salvation toward His own until they join Him where there is no care nor testing.

We come now to the last verse of this first section of the Epistle to the Romans — "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (the reconciliation)." As reconciled to God all distance is gone, no hatred remaining, all enmity has been slain in the cross of Christ, we are brought near to God:

"So near, so very near to God,
We could not nearer be;
For in the Person of the Son,
We are as near as He."

How wonderful these results of the gracious operation of God! We find our joy in God — the God against whom we had sinned, whose judgment we had justly incurred, the God who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, the God who has blessed us for ever, the God who will surely set us in glory with Christ, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — we joy in Him. Our hearts rise to Him giving Him His worthy praise. We worship Him in the power of the Spirit of God whom He has given to us. This is the peak of the epistle, for God has blessed men who once were at a distance from Him and they, now brought near, praise, worship and adore!

Let us praise Him again and again for His grace in which He has abounded toward us in "the gospel of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our *Lord*."