

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

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Tributes to Romans

It was Godet, the Swiss commentator, who said that the Reformation was certainly the work of the Epistle to the Romans (and that of Galatians also) and that it is probable that every great spiritual renovation in the church will always be linked both in cause and in effect to a deeper knowledge of this book. It was Martin Luther who wrote that the Epistle to the Romans is "the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men's souls. It can

never be too much or too well read or studied; and the more it is handled, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”

Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers, had the epistle read to him twice a week. And it was Coleridge who said that the Epistle to the Romans was the most profound writing that exists. Further, we find that one of the great scientists turned to this book, and he found that it gave a real faith. This man, Michael Faraday, was asked on his death bed by a reporter, “What are your speculations now?” Faraday said, “I have no speculations. My faith is firmly fixed in Christ my Saviour who died for me, and who has made a way for me to go to heaven.”

May I say to you, this is the epistle that transformed that Bedford tinker by the name of John Bunyan. A few years ago I walked through the cemetery where he is buried, and I thought of what that man had done and said he was a poet, but he wrote a book that has been exceeded in sales by only one other, the Bible. That book is Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It is a story of a sinner saved by grace, and that sinner was John Bunyan. And the record of history is that this man read and studied the Epistle to the Romans, and he told its profound story in his own life’s story, the story of Pilgrim—that he came to the cross, that the burden of sin rolled off, and that he began that journey to the Celestial City.

(material taken from *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee*)

In November 1515, Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and Professor of Sacred Theology in the University of Wittenberg, began to expound Paul’s Epistle to the Romans to his students and continued this course until the following September. As he personally prepared his lectures, he came more and more to appreciate the centrality of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. “I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,’ he wrote, ‘and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the righteousness of God”’ because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous...Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before “the righteousness of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This Passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.’ The consequences of this new insight which Martin Luther gained from the study of Romans are writ large in history.

(material taken from *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* by F.F. Bruce)

Main Teachings of Romans

1. *The doctrine of man*—In great measure this resolves itself into the doctrine of man as a sinner, as being guilty in face of an absolutely holy and absolutely imperative law, whether announced by abnormal revelation, as to the Jew, or through nature and conscience only, as to the Gentile...So is he bound by his own failure that he cannot restore himself; God alone, in sovereign mercy, provides for his pardon by the

propitiation of Christ, and for his restoration by union with Christ in the life given by the Holy Spirit.

2. The doctrine of God—All along the writer's intense purpose is to constrain the *actual believer* to see *the whole* causation of his salvation in the will and power of Him whose inmost character is revealed in the supreme fact that, "for us all," he spared not his Son."
3. The doctrine of the Son of God—The Epistle affords materials for a magnificently large Christology. The relation of the Son to creation is indeed not expounded in terms (as in Col.) but it is implied in the language of ch. 8, where the interrelation of our redemption and the transfiguration of Nature is dealt with. We have the Lord's manhood fully recognized, while His Godhead (as we read in 9:5) is stated in terms, and it is most certainly implied in the language and tone of e.g. the close of ch.9. Who but a bearer of Supreme Nature could satisfy the conception indicated in such words as those of 8:32-39, coming as they do from a Heb. Monotheist in intense convictions? Meantime this transcendent Person has so put Himself in relation with us, as the willing worker of the Father's purpose of love, that He is the sacrifice of peace for us (ch. 3), our "propitiatory" One, such that (whatever the mystery, which leaves the fact, no less certain) the man who believes on Him, i.e. (as ch. 4 fully demonstrates) relies on Him, gives himself over to His mercy, is not only forgiven but "justified," "justified by faith." And "justification" is more than forgiveness; it is not merely the remission of a penalty but, a welcome to the offender, pronounced to be lawfully at peace with the eternal holiness and love.

In closest connection with the message of justification is the teaching regarding union with the Christ who has procured the justification. This is rather assumed than expounded in Rom. (we have the exposition more explicitly in Eph., Col., and Gal.), but the assumption is present wherever the pregnant phrase "in Christ" is used. Union is, for St. Paul, the central doctrine of all, giving life and relation to the whole range.

4. The doctrine of the Spirit of God—No writing of the NT but St. John's Gospel is so full upon this great theme as Romans. Ch. 8 may be said to be the *locus classicus* in the Epistles for the work of the Holy Ghost in the believer. By implication it reveals personality as well as power (see esp. v. 26). Note particularly the place of this great passage, in which revelation and profoundest conditions run continually into each other. It follows ch. 7, in which the apostle depicts, in terms of his own profound and typical experience, the struggles of conscience and will over the awful problem of the "bondage" of indwelling sin. If we interpret the passage aright, the case supposed is that of a regenerate man, who, however, attempts the struggle against inward evil armed, as to consciousness, with his own faculties merely, and finds the struggle insupportable. Then comes in the Divine solution, the promised Spirit of life and liberty, welcomed and put into use by the man who has found his own resources vain. "In Christ Jesus," in union with Him, he "by the Spirit does to death the practices of the body" and rises through conscious liberty into an exulting hope of "the liberty of the glory of the sons of God"—not so, however, as to know nothing of "groaning within himself,"

while yet in the body; but it is a groan which leaves intact the sense of Sonship and Divine love, and the expectation of a final completeness of redemption.

5. *The doctrine of duty*—While the Epistle is eminently a message of salvation, it is also, in vital connection with this, a treasury of principle and precept for the life of duty. It does indeed lay down the sovereign freedom of our acceptance for Christ's sake *alone*, and so absolutely that the writer anticipates the inference (by foes, or by mistaken friends), "Let us continue in sin." But the answer comes instantly and mainly through the doctrine of union. Our pardon is not an isolated fact. Secured only by Christ's sacrifice, received only by the faith which receives Him as our all, it is *ipso facto* never received alone but with all His other gifts, for it becomes ours as we receive, not merely one truth about Him, but Him. Therefore, we receive His Life as our true life; and it is morally unthinkable that we can receive this and express it in sin. This assumed, the Epistle (ch. 12 and onwards) lays down with much detail and in admirable application large ranges of the law of duty, civil, social, personal, embracing duties to the state, loyalty to its laws, payment of its taxes, recognition of the sacredness of political order, even ministered by pagans; and also duties to society and the church, including a large and loving tolerance even in religious matters and a response to every call of the law of unselfish love. However we can or cannot adjust mentally the two sides, that if a supremely free salvation and that of an inexorable responsibility, there the two sides are, in the Pauline message. And reason and faith combine to assure us that both sides are eternally true, "antinomies" whose harmony will be explained hereafter in a higher life, but which are to be lived out here concurrently by the true disciple, assured of their oneness of source in the eternal love.
6. *The doctrine of Israel*—Very briefly we touch on this department of the message of Romans, mainly to point out that the problem of Israel's unbelief nowhere else in St. Paul appears as so heavy a load on his heart, and that on the other hand we nowhere else have anything like the light he claims to throw (ch. 11) on Israel's future. Here, if anywhere, he appears as the predicative prophet, charged with the statement of a "mystery", and with the announcement of its issues. The promises to Israel have never failed, nor are they cancelled. At the worst, they have always been inherited by a chosen remnant, Israel within Israel. And a time is coming when, in a profound connection with Messianic blessing on the Gentiles, "all Israel shall be saved," with a salvation which shall in turn be new life to the world outside Israel. Throughout the passage St. Paul speaks, not as one who "will not give up a hope," but as having had revealed to him a vast and definite prospect, in the Divine purpose.
(material taken from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing)

Terminology

- a. **Flesh**—Flesh and spirit wage incessant warfare the one against the other within the citadel of Mansoul. This warfare, as described in Paul's writings, is not the warfare between matter and mind, between the physical and rational elements in man...'flesh' is the basic material of human (and animal) life...Man, in fact, is animated flesh; 'all flesh' (e.g. Gen. 6:12; Is. 11:5; Joel 2:28) means 'all mankind'...'Flesh' may denote

human nature in its weakness and mortality: 'he remembered that they were but flesh' (Ps. 78:39).

- 'Flesh' is used in the ordinary sense of bodily flesh
- 'Flesh' is used of natural human descent or relationship
- 'Flesh' is used in the sense of mankind
- 'Flesh' is used variously in the sense of human nature, as follows
 - i. Weak human nature
 - ii. The human nature of Christ
 - iii. The 'old nature' in the believer
 - iv. Unregenerate human nature
- Since, then, believers are no longer 'in the flesh', but 'in the Spirit'
- The flesh is subject to the principle of 'sin and death' (Rom. 7:23; 8:2)

- b) **Spirit**—Similarly in the Pauline writings 'flesh' and 'spirit' are opposed terms. Believers in Christ are no longer 'in the flesh' but 'in the Spirit' (Rom. 8:9); they 'walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Rom. 8:4); they do not produce 'the works of the flesh' but the fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:19, 22).

We can distinguish the following principal usages of 'spirit' in Paul:

- The 'spiritual' part of man's constitution
- The Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit
 - The Spirit imparts life
 - The Spirit bestows freedom
 - The Spirit supplies directive power in the lives of the 'sons of God'
 - The Spirit intercedes for the people of God
 - The Spirit is the sanctifying agency in the lives of believers
 - The Spirit is the pledge of the future

Not only does the Spirit enable believers here and now to realize their prerogative as 'the Lord's free-born children in the way of holiness'; this too is an advance instalment of that 'liberty of the glory of the children of God' (RV) which, according to Romans 8:21, is eagerly awaited not only by themselves but by all creation. The deliverance from bondage which they have already begun to enjoy in the Spirit will be consummated then...

(material taken from *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* by F.F. Bruce)