

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS: AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

II. THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. Ch. 1: 16-11: 36

(Continued)

(c) *The Way of Righteousness : The Universal Need Met.*

Ch. 3: 21-4: 25

(i) God's Provision. Ch. 3: 21-31

BUT now a way to get right with God apart from the principle of legal righteousness has been revealed. This way, which is attested by the law and the prophets, is provided by God, through faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe in Him. As we have seen, there is no difference: Jew and Gentile alike have all sinned, and all fall short of God's glorious standard—but Jew and Gentile alike can be brought into a right relationship with God and secure His pardon. This pardon they receive freely, by His pure grace, and they receive it because of the redemptive work accomplished by Christ Jesus. For He has been set before us by God as the One whose sacrificial death has made propitiation for our guilt, and what He has thus procured for us becomes effectively ours through faith. God's righteousness has thus been demonstrated. This explains why God in His patience could pass over sins committed before the coming of Christ, instead of exacting their proper penalty; it was in prospect of the demonstration of His righteousness at this present time. By this demonstration we see how God, while remaining perfectly righteous Himself, can pardon those who believe in Jesus and bring them into a right relation with Himself.

If this is so, where is there room for any of us to boast of his personal righteousness? There is none, of course. It is not the law of works that deprives us of all ground for such boasting, but the principle of faith. For the conclusion of our argument is that a man is set right in God's sight by faith, quite apart from the works prescribed by the law. Is God the God of Jews alone? (For that would be implied by the view that only by keeping the Jewish law can a man find acceptance with Him.) Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Of course He is their God too—the God of Jews and Gentiles alike, for it is one and the same God who will accept Jews by virtue of their faith and Gentiles on the same

ground. Do we then by this principle of faith make the law null and void? Far from it! On the contrary, we confirm the law and give effect to it.

(ii) An Old Testament Precedent. Ch. 4: 1-25

Take, for example, Abraham, our forefather so far as natural descent goes. What shall we say that he has obtained? Certainly if Abraham was accepted on the ground of works, he has some reason for boasting. But that is not the ground on which he stood before God. For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15: 6). Now, to a man who works his reward is not reckoned as a matter of grace but as something which is his due. But to one who does not work, but believes on Him who gives a free pardon to the sinner, his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

Look at David, too, for a moment. He describes the blessedness of the man whom God reckons as righteous on a basis other than that of works when he says:

Blessed are they whose transgressions have been forgiven, whose sins have been covered ;

Blessed is the man to whose account the Lord reckons no sin (Psalm 32: 1 f.).

Now, does this blessedness belong to circumcised or to uncircumcised persons? For it is the same blessedness that is implied when it is said that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. Well, then, what was Abraham's condition when his faith was thus reckoned to him? Was he circumcised or uncircumcised? He was uncircumcised ; circumcision was a subsequent seal of the righteous status which he received before God while he was as yet uncircumcised. Thus he became the spiritual father of all those who exercise faith while they are uncircumcised, so that righteousness might similarly be reckoned to their account, and the spiritual father of circumcised persons as well—not simply on the ground of their circumcision but rather because they follow in the footsteps of that faith which our father Abraham exercised when he was not yet circumcised.

It was not through the law that Abraham received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness which he obtained by faith. For if those who are under the law are the heirs, then Abraham's faith has been rendered void and

the promise has been nullified. It is wrath, not blessedness, that the law produces. But where there is no law, there can be no transgression.

No ; it was on the ground of faith, and the reason for that was that it might be by God's grace, so that the promise made to Abraham might be confirmed to all his descendants—not to those who lived under the law but to those who lived by Abraham's faith. Thus Abraham is the spiritual father of us all ; that is what God meant when He said to him, "I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17: 5). For Abraham believed God—God who brings the dead to life and calls the things that are not as if they actually were (and gives them a real existence by doing so). Beyond all hope Abraham believed in hope, so that he became "a father of many nations" in accordance with God's word: "So numerous will your descendants be" (Gen. 15: 5). He did not weaken in faith as he considered his own body now as good as dead, when he was about a hundred years old, nor yet as he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb ; far from doubting the promise of God in unbelief, he became strong in faith, giving glory to God and being fully assured that God was able to perform what He had promised. Therefore "it was reckoned to him for righteousness".

Now this statement, that "it was reckoned to him for righteousness", was not recorded for Abraham's sake alone ; it was recorded for our sakes as well, for it will be reckoned to us too for righteousness if we believe on Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord—Jesus, who was delivered up for our sins but raised up that we might receive deliverance and pardon.

(iii) The Blessings which follow. Ch. 5: 1-11

So then, having entered into a right relationship with God on the ground of faith, we enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, too, we have received the right of access into this state of grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in the hope of attaining the glory of God. Not only so, but we even rejoice in our afflictions, for we know that affliction produces patience, and patience produces a tested character, and a tested character produces hope—the hope which does not let us down, because God's love is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Look at it this way: when we were still weak Christ, in the hour of our need, suffered death

for sinners. You will scarcely find anyone willing to die for a *righteous* man; there may, however, be someone who would perhaps venture to die for a good man—but God confirms *His* love to us by the fact that Christ dies for us when we were still *sinners*. If He did that for us, much more shall we be delivered from wrath through Him now that we have entered into a right relationship with God through His sacrificial death. I repeat: if we were reconciled to God through His Son's death when we were still hostile to Him, much more shall we experience salvation through His life now that we have been reconciled. And more than all that: we rejoice in God Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ—the One through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

(iv) The Old and the New Solidarity. Ch. 5: 12-21

Now mark the comparison and contrast. It was by one man that sin came into the world, and death entered by means of sin; death accordingly has been transmitted to all mankind, on the ground that all have sinned. Long before the giving of the law sin was in the world, although sin is not reckoned as positive transgression in the absence of a positive law. Yet death exercised dominion from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those whose sin did not take the form that Adam's did, for his sin was a positive transgression. Now the first man is a "type" of the Man who is to come, but his "typical" character is limited, for God's gift of grace is not on all fours with the original fall. Through the one man's fall the many died, but the grace of God and the free gift which comes through the grace of the one man Jesus Christ have been bestowed in much greater abundance upon the many. The free gift is not on the scale of the effect of one man's sin. As a result of one sin the judgment came, and led to condemnation; but the free gift is bestowed after many "falls", with a view to justification. If, by reason of one man's fall, death exercised dominion through that one man's agency, much more will those who receive the abundance of God's grace and His free gift of righteousness reign triumphantly in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

To sum it up: it was through one man's fall that all men found themselves involved in condemnation; and similarly it is through one man's righteousness that all men are blessed with a justification which brings life in its train. For just as the many received the status of sinners through the one man's disobedience, so the many will receive the status of righteous persons through the one man's

obedience. It was to make the trespass abound the more that law came in—by a side road, so to speak—but where sin abounded, divine grace abounded more exceedingly. God's purpose in this was that, as sin had ruled, with death as its inevitable sequel, so grace should rule on a righteous basis, with eternal life as its goal, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(To be continued)