



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

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SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: 2 Samuel 19, Jeremiah 23, Romans 10, 11

The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to Paul

We are again reading Paul's letter to the Romans written at the end of his third missionary Journey, about AD 57. Though he knew many of the Christians at Rome he had never visited the infant church and was now planning to do so. He did visit, but not as he expected. The journey began with 2 years imprisonment in Israel, then a further two years in prison at Rome awaiting trial. In his letter he is introducing himself to the Roman church, and, most importantly for us, sharing his understanding of: *"the gospel concerning his Son... Jesus Christ our Lord"* (**Romans 1:3, 4** RSV). This is the longest of Paul's writings on the Cross, set out in the opening eight chapters of his letter; it has no equal in the New Testament. Perhaps not the easiest of expositions, for, as Peter said, Paul wrote: *"...some things... hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction"* (**2 Peter 3:16**). But many, including Luther and Charles Wesley, found Romans so moving, that they were converted. And today these chapters provide no better introduction to the bread and wine before us.

In the space that we have, this is no easy task. We shall concentrate on salient issues and highlight important words in Paul's vocabulary that convey the riches of our salvation through Jesus as we remember him in the bread and wine.

As in his first letter to the Galatians, about 10 years before, he starts with faith. He takes us to Habakkuk, a prophet who was having doubts in the way God was judging Judah; and we can have similar doubts when things go wrong. In Habakkuk God asks, 'don't you trust me, the first step is to believe in me'; *"He, who through faith is righteous, shall live"* (**Romans 1:17** see **Habakkuk 2:4**).

But this is just the beginning. Paul immediately destroys any thought that we can achieve the goodness God requires for: *"no human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law"*. (**Romans 3:20**). So what hope is there for us? In three short exhortations, (**Romans 3:21-26**; **5:1-11**; **7:21**; **8:1-27**), he tells us there is justice and a new life to be had.

The most powerful is the first exhortation in **Romans 3:20**. Here Paul lays the foundation of our change from a person haunted by guilt, to one at peace with ourselves. We find our conversion has to start with deep repentance; it was the message of both John the Baptist and Jesus at the beginning of their ministries, and it has to be at the forefront of our thoughts as we come to the bread and wine. But, as we stand at this point in the letter, we find ourselves asking who can save us, is there any hope?

Paul now takes us into a court room. God is the judge and we stand before him shaking in fear. In our hearts we know the judgment can only be death. But to our great surprise we hear the judge saying that the harsh judgement of law is not to be found in His court for His judgment is based on love and compassion. God knows our human weakness, therefore He says there is no charge to answer! The key words for all that follows are: *"But now the righteousness (it can be translated justice) of God has been manifested apart from law"* (**Romans 3:21, 22**). God has done what the law could not do. It is an aspect of God not fully seen in the past but now is achieved through Jesus. The remainder of this section (**Romans 3:24-26**) explains that we are justified by his grace as a gift. It cannot be earned. God has redeemed us from captivity to sin and guilt. **Romans 3:27** is a fitting ending to these opening verses: *"Then, what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded"*. We should be truly humbled, as was Paul after writing in a similar vein to the Ephesians: *"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father"* (**Ephesians 3:14**). This level of submission was rarely seen in Paul's day!

This personal depth of the gift of grace we have received in Jesus becomes more apparent in the next two exhortations, the first being in **Romans 5:1-11**. It starts: *“Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand”*. Paul is perhaps drawing on his own conversion. Before his conversion he was called Saul, and was possibly racked by guilt and mental torment when killing Christians. On the road to Damascus Jesus says to him: *“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (conscience).”* (**Acts 9:5 AV**). It was only when he no longer placed reliance on himself and found his strength in Jesus, his guilt was erased and he gained peace of mind in his relationship with God; no longer Saul a king but Paul, (meaning a little man), relying on God’s gift through Jesus to face the storms of this world. That this was a dominant theme in Paul’s life as a Christian can be seen in the greetings he uses in all his letters: *“grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*. Perhaps we should make it the seal of our correspondence as well as the seal of our lives.

To support the grounds of this new peace of mind he speaks of *“reconciliation”* (**Romans 5:10**). It is a word Paul uses more often than forgiveness. Why? Because you may forgive but perhaps never forget the hurt done to you. When you are reconciled, the relationship is restored as if the hurt had not occurred. Like a marriage marred by adultery where the offended party forgives and the relationship is fully restored as if the offence had not occurred, such should be our forgiveness of those who hurt us.

The final exhortation in **Romans 7:21 to 8:39** is again at a personal level where Paul shares with us his own experience of life. It was a principle also recognised by the Pharisees. They called it the two impulses, knowing what was right but not having the strength to resist the wrong, and for Paul it gives vent to one of the most heartfelt expression of guilt in the Bible: *“Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death”* (**Romans 7:24**), but Paul has the answer: *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”*. What becomes clear in this section is that God accepts we are still prone to sin, it is something that hasn’t been removed from our personalities. So God provides us with the blessing of forgiveness if we strive to do good and confess our sins.

Paul continues: *“I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh the law of sin... There is therefore now no condemnation”* (**Romans 7:25 to 8:1**). We still sin but if we seek forgiveness then there is no condemnation for those in Jesus. This is good news indeed.

The remainder of this final section in Romans goes on to speak of the spiritual relationship we have with God through baptism and that if we strive to develop spiritually rather than naturally then we will share in Jesus’ resurrection.

In this letter Paul has opened up his heart as never before and though we have only touched the surface, hopefully, by God’s grace, it has given us an appreciation of the extent of God’s love that He had for us in giving His only beloved Son.

As we break bread and drink wine let us then remember the one who freely gave himself for us so that we can have the opportunity of everlasting life.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Brother Ken Drage: Exeter UK 02.08.20