

# THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2:19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,  
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in  
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

**From The Editor's Desk****2020**

This combination of two numbers denotes the year but it is also used to denote perfect physical vision when it is written 20/20.

But what about our spiritual vision, what do we see and discern when it comes to our life which from the beginning of the world has been in God, who created all things by Christ Jesus? Have we 20/20 vision for 2020 for the direction we need to go so as to end up being amongst the blessed who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb so that may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the heavenly city by the gates (paraphrased from Revelation 22:14)

Hezekiah said is it not good to have peace and truth in my day? 12 Kings 20:19. Our natural man would say, Yes, that's really good. But is it enough? Are we satisfied then as Hezekiah was that it is good if it lasts as long as I do? But we must have a vision that goes beyond that of Hezekiah's and we must have a vision for the church of tomorrow and what do we expect? Are we satisfied if I personally or my family or my church remains faithful now only or do we desire the same for the rising generation?

As we think of spiritual vision the perception that we have, there are two extremes, two directions that we might take. The one is that we might have a clear vision, we see what is happening today but fail to perceive tomorrow, on the other hand we may be so taken up and so zealous with tomorrow's problems or possibilities that we miss today's problems. We need to balance those things, we need to first take care of today. We need not only a vision to inspire us today but we must impart it to our children.

We must have a faith that knows that God understands us and knows us, that He has a will for our lives and we must trust in His power to work that out in us. In other words as we think of a vision of the Lord we must see Him as Lord of our life, as the King that is, we must have a vision of the works of God not just for today but for the future.

Each of us must take personal responsibility for safeguarding the next generation, tomorrow's church, we are personally responsible to walk in holiness, to courageously live scriptural truth, and shepherd our children to a life of victory and faithful Christian service. Victory in Christ is sure but whether we remain a part of that victory depends on us. *J.v.L*



*From the Pulpit*

The Greatest Letter Ever Written –  
Part 1 of 4 on the Book of Romans  
Linford Berry - 2014

We pray that your heart has been conditioned, that the ground is fertile and ready to receive what God wants to share with us through his Word today.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father we approach this study with fear and wonder for you are a great God and in the pages of this book, this letter to the Romans, we get a picture of ourselves and our sin and we get a picture of you and your Holiness and this causes us to tremble.

We also find that you are a gracious and a merciful God.

We ask that you would cause us to learn and grow in our understanding of who you are and who we are and what you have done on our behalf and then we ask that you would instruct us as to how we should respond to you and how we should live in light of your glory and of your grace.

Equip us and perfect us by your Word through your Gospel.

We ask for the illumination of the Holy Spirit and then the gift of repentance and faith so that we can rightly respond to your revelation.

May Christ be exalted and your glory be revealed in all of our hearts, Amen.

We are beginning a series of 4 sermons from the book of Romans and the 4 main sections in this book are chapters 1 through 4 which is basically an introduction to the book and the problem or the bad news.

Next we will look at chapters 5 through 8 which contain the solution to the problem with the good news followed by chapters 9 through 11 which deal with the theological implications of this good news and in the final message chapters 12 to 16 which deal with the practical implications of this good news.

Now why would we do Romans this way, why would we kind of flyover and only hit the peaks when there is so much deeper riches here?

It has been my experience especially in the Anabaptist world that we often misuse the book of Romans, there are certain sections and certain verses in Romans that we really like and we spend a lot of time preaching and teaching and referencing and then there are other parts of the book of Romans that we ignore, we pretend like they don't exist, and the parts that we do use we tend to usually either take them out of context or lift them from the context in isolation.

My attempt here in this first series of 4 sermons on the book of Romans is to help us keep the whole book connected and then to establish a foundation for a future study of the details later so that we don't end up with just lots of little bits and pieces but that we end up with a picture of the glorious whole.

This letter of Paul to the Romans is by many people considered to be the greatest letter ever written, it is the greatest letter ever written for a couple of reasons, but the main reason is because it contains the greatest message ever, ever written.

This letter is all about the good news of the Gospel from beginning to end but that good news is built upon some terribly bad news, in fact the bad news is worse than we think it is, but the good news is even more glorious even more beautiful than we could ever have imagined and so this is the greatest letter ever written.

I tremble with both excitement and with fear at the thought of even attempting to live and preach through this great letter.

Now before we get started in our study of Romans I have a few preliminary assumptions or considerations that I want us to keep in mind.

First of all we must consider that this is the Word of God and as such we must take it seriously and must take it as authoritative. It has been given to us as the inspired word of God breathed out by God and as 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16 tells us all Scripture breathed out by God is useful and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that men and women of God may be competent, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So may God use our study of this book to make us into more competent Christians who are better equipped to serve God and others.

Secondly another consideration we must bring to this letter to the Romans is that it does not in any way contradict the rest of the Bible. God is one, when He reveals himself He reveals himself as One and therefore He cannot contradict himself.

Now there are many charges against the book of Romans that it does indeed contradict other parts of the Bible, I say this cannot be because on the positive side this book of Romans is full of references to the Old Testament, over 57 of them, the Apostle Paul appeals to the authority of Scripture which was then the Old Testament.

This book is consistent with the Old Testament but also it is consistent with the Gospels and the rest of the Epistles, the message of the book of Romans is a more thorough treatment of Christian doctrine or the Gospel than any single book but it is the same Gospel, not a different Gospel, but the same Gospel that we find in every other page of Scripture, Old and New Testament.

In fact as many serious students of the Scripture have discovered and as I have discovered personally in my own study a good understanding of the book of Romans turns the lights on for understanding everything else in the Bible.

So don't be looking for or assuming contradictions but look for congruence (similarity), be expecting consistency not inconsistency.

Thirdly this letter this greatest the letter ever written, it is weighty, it is rich, it does have complexity to it, and some people accuse it of being hard to understand.

Now I would say to us that in reality it isn't so hard to understand as long as we are willing at the outset to let it say what it says, just let it say what it says.

You see the problem with this book is not that it is hard to understand the problem with this book is that it is offensive to the natural man, it is offensive because the Gospel is offensive, it is not so hard to understand but hard to believe and so it is our inclination to read it and to say, especially at certain places, surely it doesn't mean that? And so we figure out elaborate ways to make it say something else.

And this is the source of most of the confusion surrounding this book.

It is kind of like Mark Twain's declaration that it isn't the stuff in the Bible that he doesn't understand that bothers him it is the stuff in the Bible that he does understand that bothers him.

If we approach this study, if we approach this book, or any of the rest of the Scripture for that matter, if we approach it honestly and openly as it is written and as God intends it than the result should be one of surrender, surrender to the authority of it whereby we say, Yes Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. But if you are not willing to approach this text or any other text of Scripture in this way then you will not understand and it will not have the desired effect.

Fourthly this book is a well-reasoned argument, it is some of the best logic to be found in the pages of Scripture, this book is a well-reasoned argument but it is not argumentative, there is a big difference, you see some people read this book like bitter medicine when in reality it is the most beautiful the most glorious explanation of the Gospel that we can find in any one place anywhere.

Many people use the text of Romans, or pieces of it at least, as a sledgehammer to kind of win an argument or a debate and I would say if we take it apart and use it in an argumentative way then we do a disservice to the text and we do a disservice to ourselves.

If the only tool you have to deal with the book of Romans is a sledgehammer then every problem is going to look like a nail, that's just the way it's going to be.

So instead be looking for the beauty and glory of God, be looking for the love of God along with the terrible wrath and judgement of God, it all comes together in this glorious letter and if you do find a sledgehammer please, please use it on yourself first before you pick it up to use it on others.

Fifthly this letter is for us today, it isn't just some text written to some first century Christians that does not apply to us today. In the words of John MacArthur in his introduction to his commentary on Romans he says this: "The Epistle to the Romans speaks to us today just as powerfully as it spoke to men in the first century.

It speaks morally about adultery, fornication, homosexuality, hating, murder, lying and civil disobedience.

It speaks intellectually telling us that the natural man is confused because he has a reprobate mind.

It speaks socially telling us how we are to relate to one another.

It speaks psychologically telling us from where true freedom comes to deliver man from the burden of guilt.

It speaks nationally telling us our responsibility to human government.

It speaks internationally telling us the ultimate destiny of the earth and especially the future of Israel.

It speaks spiritually answering man's despair by offering hope for the future.

It speaks theologically teaching us the relationship, between law and grace, between works and faith.

But most of all it profoundly brings God himself to us."

This is for us today, here.

I wonder how many of us have sat down and read the whole book of Romans at one sitting, if you haven't done that I would urge you to do so and more than once.

Perhaps I should just read the whole book of Romans this morning but my fear was that I might lose some of you along the way so in the reading of the first 4 chapters I want you to pay attention, however that works for you, for some of you that means following along in the copies of your Scripture for others that means just sitting there and listening, whatever it is that helps you not to be distracted I want you to hear the first 4 chapters of this greatest letter ever written. (Read Chapters 1 through 4 of Romans)

First of all the author, Paul, a slave of Christ, and apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles he calls himself many times and that brings us to who he is writing to, the church in Rome, those who are the saints, those who are loved by God and called to be saints, he writes to them grace to you he says and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now who were these saints in Rome? Well evidently no apostle had been there yet, Paul had not made any missionary journeys to Rome yet although he indicates in this passage that he wants to come to them, it seems

the saints in Rome had become saints as the message of the Gospel was brought to them by the followers of Jesus who had migrated to Rome over the years but the church in Rome had not had the privilege or the advantage of apostolic teaching.

The church in Rome was made up of some Jews and probably more Gentiles as he references a couple of times in the text.

The main purpose of the apostle Paul in writing to the Romans is outlined for us here in the first few verses, Apostle Paul a slave of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God. And then he gives us very simply in a couple of verses a summary of the Gospel of God right off the bat.

So this purpose for writing this book is to explain the Gospel of God and that's what he does from the first verse to the last, the Gospel, the good news, the good news which also includes some very bad news which makes the good news "gooder" better, and then why this does matter, why does this matter to Jews, why does it matter to the Gentiles, how should Jews and Gentiles relate to each other in light of this good news?

And how it should be lived as saints in the world with each other and with the world in which we live?

It is all part of the Gospel the good news of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul gives some other reasons for writing this book as well, some we find in chapter 1 others we don't find until chapter 15 but first of all he says I want to come and see you folks, I want to encourage you and I want you to encourage me, and he is writing this letter by way of introducing himself to the saints in Rome kind of gives them some preliminary kind of introduction.

Paul asks for prayers from them, this is found in chapter 15, he asks for prayers as he journeys to Jerusalem where he knows he may face imprisonment, he hopes that the offering that he has collected in Corinth, where he probably was when he wrote this letter, he hopes that this offering will be accepted there by the Jews from the Gentiles, he asks the Roman church to pray for him, he is hoping that the Roman church will support him because he intends to go to Rome and then on to Spain for missionary service there it seems he is asking the church in Rome to support him in that endeavour.

The apostle Paul seems to be aware that there might be some conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome and so we have a chapter and a half, 13 and 14, the deal with some of this conflict, for the most part the book of Romans is not like many of the other Epistles which are written as a corrective, the book of Romans is written basically as an explanation of the Gospel.

The Gospel is the message as I said of this book from beginning to end and in chapter 1 verses 16 through 17 we find the apostle Paul's thesis statement right here, some of the most potent words you will find in the text of Scripture, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

And the rest of the book of Romans is all about that, it is all about explaining, demonstrating, defending that.

Now our usual inclination may be to think that once we have heard and responded to the gospel in conversion then we could move on to other more important things.

That idea is foreign to the apostle Paul and it ought to be foreign to us. Instead of moving on to other things the apostle Paul goes deeper into the Gospel he says I am eager to preach the Gospel to you, the saints, called by God in Rome.

This is the most important thing he could do.

And since we ourselves need to understand more and more the scope and magnitude of God's mercy and grace, no matter how long we have been believers, then we should meditate on and study this gospel and seek to live out of its power, out of its grace.

This Gospel is for all of us.

Another difficulty that we have is that in looking for application to our lives would look often only the stuff that we can do, just tell me what to do people say, but in Romans, and indeed in the rest of Scripture, much of the application involves a change in our thinking and we should not underestimate such a change for if we think differently about God and about our-

selves and if we think differently about God's purpose then our whole lives will be influenced as a result.

The purpose of the Gospel is not just to cause us to do something but to cause us to be somebody, to be children of God, to be fashioned after the likeness of Christ.

This is about being, this is about being transformed, this is about being sanctified and saved.

Now the apostle Paul does give us some things to be doing but they are usually towards the end of his Epistles and after we have been taught about being, that has to come first.

One of the main themes of this book and the entire Bible is that merely doing will never suffice.

The issue is that we must trust God exclusively for our being.

But we can do in our own strength many things so that is what we tend to gravitate toward and therein lies the problem as expressed here in Romans chapter 1 and following.

One of our biggest issues is that we put ourselves at the centre of everything, including the Gospel, notice that is not what the apostle Paul does he calls this the Gospel of God, this is all about the Son of God through whom we have received grace for the sake of His name.

In verse 16 this is the power of God it is to display the righteousness of God.

And we put ourselves at the centre.

This is the picture we get in verses 18 through 32, this is the bad news, that we have put ourselves at the centre, we have put ourselves in the place of God, and so the wrath of God has been revealed, has been made manifest, has come upon us and we suffer the inevitable results.

It should be no surprise to us that we see here in verse 24 that this depravity, this unrighteousness starts in the heart, therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts, that's what they wanted, He let them do it. And furthermore this corruption enters the mind, verse 28, they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

This selfishness starts in the heart, it is developed in the mind and it finally fleshes itself out in horrible behaviour, we see this in the last couple of verses of chapter 1.

It should be no surprise to us then if that's how the flesh works that the Gospel happens first by a change of heart and then, accomplished by Christ, a development of the mind as we change our thinking and that is followed by a resulting change in behaviour.

But too often we go at this backwards we attempt to change the behaviour first and then the mind and finally the heart and all that does is reveal to us that we are still at the centre of our gospel. We don't really see God at the centre of the gospel we see ourselves.

And lest we misunderstand the apostle Paul then goes on in chapter 2 to point out where we go wrong. We look at other people and we say, ha, those are bad ones and look at me I'm so much better!

No you are not, no you are not, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, there is no one who meets God's standard of perfect righteousness.

You might say I'm better than that person over there and God says; Who cares you are still not as good as me. Not even for the Jews, the Jews who had special access to the things of God, He says you keep the law and you are circumcised, great, but if you are uncircumcised and keep the law you too are a child of God, if you don't keep the law it doesn't matter who you are descended from, it doesn't matter who you are related to you are subject to the wrath of God.

And so you say then okay I get it, I get it, I'll keep the law.

Not so fast. Chapter 3 tells us that even the Jews, the ones who were entrusted with the oracles of God, the law of God, they were not able to keep the law, what makes you think you're going to keep the law?

The news is worse than we thought, you see the law is a cruel taskmaster not only does it give us an impossibly difficult standard to meet and then it tells us, oh by the way you can't do it.

And so in chapter 3 verses 19 through 20 he says every mouth will be stopped, everybody is going to have to shut up because God has the last word and God will hold every man accountable according to his standard. And he says by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's

sight, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew, doesn't matter if you're a Gentile, doesn't matter if you're a pagan, doesn't matter if you're a Mennonite, Catholic, Presbyterian or whatever, no human being will be justified by the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

That is what the law is for, the law shows us up, the law shows us how bad we really are but then comes the good news.

It's a pretty bleak picture isn't it, an impossibility, yes impossible to please God, impossible to be righteous according to the law and then comes verse 21 chapter 3 some of the sweetest words in the Bible begin with the conjunction "but" but now, something's happened, Christ has come, Christ has come and He reveals and makes manifest and displays the righteousness of God.

Now notice the law and the prophets did point to him, they did say He was coming, it isn't anything new, it isn't anything that is foreign to the Old Testament, the apostle Paul has been using the Old Testament all along and he continues to but now Christ has come, the righteousness of God, the righteousness that we need that we must possess if we are going to experience the glory, the honour, the peace of God that we read about in verse 10.

This righteousness of God is available but it is only through faith in Jesus Christ, we must believe, we must trust, we must acknowledge and admit that we are sinful at our core, that we are unrighteous, that we have rebelled against God, we must trust that the work of Christ for our redemption in propitiating or perverting the wrath of God is enough that it will save us.

And all of this requires that we accept this as a gift.

Do you know how hard it is to receive a gift? For some of you it is harder than others right, somebody wants to give you something and you are just dead set on not letting them give it to you. Why, why is it so hard for us?

Because we want to do it for ourselves! That's our problem!

That's our problem all along its been the problem from Romans 1 all the way through Romans 3 we want to do it for ourselves and God says, no go, you can't do it for yourself.

The gospel tells us we are wrong, we are very wrong, we are not right, we are fatally wrong, the only hope we have is the gift but that gift requires

that we give up on ourselves, that we give up on our desires, on our ability to be right and we trust only in Christ.

And so the apostle Paul asks in verse 27 what becomes of our boasting then?

Kind of puts it in its place doesn't it, you think you're special, think again, you think you have it altogether think again. There is no favouritism with God, there is no other way to be made right with God then to come to him in faith and trust and be justified by his free gift of grace.

And then in chapter 4 we hear the Jews chiming in, yes but what about Abraham, didn't he count for anything?

Yes, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. So if you too believe and trust God and not yourself then you are a child of Abraham.

Then in the end of chapter 4 we have this definition of faith the kind of faith we are talking about here it says; Abraham hoped against hope because he heard the word of God and he believed, God said it and he knew it was going to be true, it didn't stop him from believing when he considered his own limitations he was as good as dead, he was 100 years old how was he going to have a child and Sarah she was 90 something and barren, Abraham believed God. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised.

And in verse 22 it says that is why his faith was counted as righteousness.

And then the sweet conclusion here at the end of chapter 4, this is not just for Abraham, this is for us if we believe, if we trust like Abraham did, if we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead the one who was delivered up and died for our trespasses and raised for our justification, if we believe Him, if we trust Him, then we will be counted as righteous before God.

This righteousness will be nothing that we can boast about because it is not ours to start with, it has been given us to us as a free gift by the grace of God, him that glories, him that boasts let him boast in the Lord.

This is not about you it is about Him.

Now what are you going to do about this?

Faced with all the evidence that the apostle Paul brings to us here in these chapters what will be your response?

Over and over again in in this great letter the apostle Paul writes about the obedience of faith, the reality of this Gospel, the reality that we are selfish rebels, that God is a righteous judge, and then the reality that this righteous judge has come has made a way at very great cost to himself, through no goodness of our own, He has made a way to be brought into right relationship with him, this good news demands a response.

There are only two possible responses: Yes Lord or No.

The only 2 possible responses are a further rejection of the truth of who God is, a further pursuit of selfishness or the other when in obedience to faith whereby we say, yes Lord, yes Master, I surrender myself, I surrender my selfish desires, I trust you completely.

If you say I'm going to wait, not yet! You are in fact rejecting God and you are subject to his wrath both in this life and in the judgement and judgement is coming.

But if you say yes Lord, even if you don't fully understand, you can still pray as the father who had a child who was healed by Jesus says, I believe, help me in my unbelief.

Then you will have demonstrated the obedience of faith and then you too can be a child of God, a child of Abraham and be justified in the sight of God.

So which will it be this morning right here, right now?

Go back and scan chapter 1 verses 28 to 32 see if you see yourself there anywhere, anywhere at all, if you can't find yourself there look at chapters 2 and 3, I assure you are there.

What are you going to do?

Way down in the deep dark recesses of your heart you have to admit that even if you are better than most of your friends you still don't measure up to God's standard and that my friend is the standard that matters.

You, all of us must we need to be saved from the righteous wrath and judgement of God.

God will judge, that is a certainty, the question is are you going to presume on his kindness and his forbearance and his patience as he says in chapter 3, don't you know that these things are God's means to bring you to repentance, don't presume on that, if you do it says you will be storing up in yourself the wrath of God.

Will you repent, will you agree with God about your status before him, will you agree with God and will you trust God or are you going to harden your heart and store up the wrath of God which will be poured out you.

The choice is yours, the time for decision is now, what will it be?



## THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

“Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill” *Isaiah 5:1-7*.

In Hebrews 11, we read of the champions of faith, and we would hope that there were many more who were not mentioned. We also read of many who were not faithful. These were the choice vine mentioned in Isaiah which had failed to produce the fruit desired of the Lord.

Throughout all of time, there were those who were God conscious and had a wholesome fear of God. This was true of Abraham, and a covenant was made with him to rise up a people for God's name. This was completed in the children of Jacob, who was later renamed Israel. These people had a special place in God's heart, and special care was given to them. These were the choice vine spoken of in Isaiah 5. God wrought many miracles in His special care for them, but again, many things happened that were displeasing to God.

Finally, God sent His Son, Jesus, to show man what was desired by God. He also made it possible to put His own Spirit within the heart of man to

prove good and evil and to give man the ability to live in obedience to Him. Finally, the Lord came to His vineyard to establish a better plan for man. He rebuked the leaders of that time because of the disrespect and lack of production. When Jesus thought of all of the effort put into His vineyard and of all of the loss, He wept over it and pronounced a judgment to come.

During His ministry, Jesus pointed out many areas of lack in their lives. The people trusted that being the children of Abraham would stand them in good stead with God, but it was pointed out to them that they did not have the nature and virtue of Abraham. God would have been pleased if they would have followed through and embraced the faith of their father, Abraham, but they had lost the essence of it.

Now God has established a new vineyard with Jesus being the choice vine. Now the branches shall be attached to the vine and have the life of the vine. They bear the fruit of the Spirit of the Lord. He has said that a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it is in the vine. The concern of the present time is: are we truly alive in Jesus, or are we claiming life by being the posterity of men of faith? We need to beware lest we deviate as Israel did. It was said that with many of them, God was not well pleased. First Corinthians 10 speaks of how they lusted after evil things. They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. They murmured and complained. Idol worship included much immorality. They took heathen wives. Gold and silver and Babylonish garments were a temptation to them. If God was displeased with such doings in that day, would He not be even more displeased when the enlightened people of our day do similar things? So now, neither being the creation of God nor the children of Abraham is enough.

To please God and to be His child, one must possess the Spirit of God and bear fruit accordingly. It is not in man to direct his steps, but rather he needs to be led of God in all of his endeavors. Jesus is the true vine that God has placed in a new vineyard which He has hedged about. It receives His special attention and care. His followers are as branches grafted in that bear the nature and virtue of the basic vine, which is the Lord, the Son of God. In Israel's time, care was taken with the vineyard to prune and purge that which was undesirable to God. To remove that which was not produc-

tive was often disappointing and sorrowful for man, but it was a work that preserved God's purpose. This purging was often carried out through the ungodly nations of the earth whom God used for His purpose. Even as God sent prophets who had insight into the will of God, He will send messengers now to reveal His will for His people. The basic nature of man is the same now as it was then. It was said that they were a hard-hearted, stiff-necked, and stubborn people. We have the same tendencies. We are different only when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and let Him rule in our lives.

Throughout history, man has been inclined to pride and vanity. Are we separated from that now in our Christian experience, or is it still an inclination in our lives? God is the gardener, and He is interested in purging the dead wood from His vineyard. That which does not bear fruit, He will remove, and that which does bear fruit, He will purge so that more fruit will appear. The opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount describe attitudes that are pleasing to God, Matthew 5:3-11.

Keeping the Law is not sufficient for salvation in the present dispensation. Jesus introduced a new and better way to live a life pleasing to God. He taught by word and example, and beyond that, He empowered man by the gift of the Holy Spirit with the ability to perform the will of God. Without the indwelling Spirit, it is impossible to please God. And yet we are in the flesh and subject to temptation. We need to be purged by repentance from the evil pattern of our lives. It is often a daily event to place judgment on our deeds and attitudes. The Word and Holy Spirit, with the help of our brethren, are of great benefit in determining what is well pleasing to God. He is in error who would say that God does not care how he dresses or how he entertains himself. The vanities of the ungodly are not becoming to the people of God. The wearing of jewels and gold and silver and costly array is displeasing to God (1 Tim. 2:9). He sees it as an evidence of pride. The prophet even spoke of those who walk with mincing steps, Isaiah 3:16-17. Do tight clothes of today result in mincing steps? The way they dressed their hair is mentioned. Often the deportment of mankind tells something of their self-esteem and is an expression of pride.

Some of the works of the flesh are recorded in Galatians 5:19-21: "Now

the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelling, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” We could also include lying, railing, and blasphemy, or disregard for the triune God and His wishes.

Paul speaks of evils that are too terrible to mention. Those who live in these sins are on the outside of the vineyard of the Lord. Galatians 5:22-26 teaches of the fruit of the Spirit. Most of these embody our relationships with our fellowman. Jesus taught that His followers should have love for each other. The demonstration of this love goes much beyond tolerance for each other. First Corinthians 13 expands on the workings of love. Compassion and empathy toward our fellowman bring about the fruit desired of the Lord. The word teaches that wickedness will increase and the righteous will be few. Mankind is defying the deity of God and questioning His very being. His commands are trodden underfoot, but let us not be misled.

The Word teaches that God will not always strive with man but will bring the world into judgment. Then the vineyard of the Lord will be taken from this world to the Heavenly realm, and those who remain will be forever separated from God in eternal destruction. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” Hebrews 4:1.

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### **DESERT PLACES** – *Contributed by a Brother in Christ.*

This has been an inspiration with me for a while. The Lord keeps nudging me; so in weakness and prayer, I will endeavor to share what the Lord has given. How are you finding Christian life? Do you get weary with the day-to-day living? One might begin to wonder, is there more that God would have for me? What is it that seems to be missing? Here are some meditations.

Let us take a look at our Shepherd's life and example. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" Matthew 11: 28-29. The first happening in Jesus' life after His baptism is found in Matthew 4:1-2: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a hungry." Next came the temptations. Then the angels came and ministered unto Him.

Later, in Matthew 14, there is the account of the beheading of John, verse 13 has often been a mystery to me: When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart." Of all places to take His disciples to go and rest, why do you suppose Jesus chose the desert? Perhaps there was something in His experience in the wilderness that our Saviour had learned and desired to teach His disciples. "Though he were a Son, yet taught he obedience by the things which he suffered" Hebrews 5:8. There seems to be a connection in the two preceding accounts.

Why do we find ourselves in desert places at times, sort of dry and with little inspiration? Christian life is supposed to be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Could it be that Jesus has led me to this dry and thirsty place? If our dear Shepherd went to the desert while on earth, then would He not, at times, lead His sheep there today? Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Many people followed Jesus into the desert and were soon hungry. Maybe we feel like we need to get out of here. Jesus said, "They need not depart" Matthew 14:16. Could it be that right in the middle of this desert place, Jesus has a work for you? The desert is a place where we have no resources. Here we find ourselves looking down and being disgruntled with the circumstances in life. Jesus says, "Look up, my child! Do not begin to say within yourself that you need four months to get inspired." Jesus' command is, "Give ye them to eat." He is still commanding the multitudes to "sit down" today. Then He wants to give us a portion of the loaves and fishes.

He wants me as His disciple to go and give that tired mother some bread and fish. She has had a long and tiresome day tending to her little ones. She

has become weary in her day in the desert. Tears well up in her eyes as she sees you going out of your way to give her some food. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” Amos 8:11.

Am I convinced that there is a famine in the land today? The multitudes are starving. If I am not seeing it, I need to pray for the Lord of the harvest to open my eyes and give me the compassion Jesus had when He beheld the multitude. As the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, so will He lead His disciples to that crying soul. It can be testified that when the Spirit is doing this work in a believer, the desert truly becomes a place where wells of water are springing up with joy. Is it difficult to believe that this was the testimony of the disciples as they gathered up the fragments? “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” Psalm 126:6. Am I willing to go weeping and mourning into the desert to experience a place of rejoicing and a place where the angels come and minister? “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” Matthew 5:4. Or do I want the good, easy life that will leave a soul parched and dry and continuously reaching for something of the world that will never satisfy. “Woe unto you that are full! For ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” Luke 6:25.

We see the multitudes today, and many appear to be having a good time. But there is a hidden cry in their souls. We must believe that. We need a living faith that will motivate. It is my faith that God is calling the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof. Satan is desperately working to water this truth down. Our enemy wants to blind us to the need and to the mighty working of God to save souls. We walk by faith and not by sight. The Spirit is able to reveal the hidden cry of a soul to His children. When the Spirit moves us to respond to the cry of that soul, we must not confer with flesh and blood which will deceive. We may feel like the impression He gives is too small to offer. Does it take something more than the little boy’s lunch? Jesus said, “Give you.” It may be sharing an inspiration from my devotions that morning with someone in town. The Lord only knows how far that seed will go. He said that it will not return to Him void.

Let us not be stingy with the Word of God. Satan wants us to put that precious seed in a napkin and hide it in the earth, where the Lord says it will be taken away and given unto another, and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, Matthew 25:30. Let us be up and doing while it is yet day, because the night cometh when no man can work. “Let us pray for each other, not faint by the way, in this sad world of sorrow and care. “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” Philippians 2:15-17.



## RECOGNISING SIN

*For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.  
Psalm 51:3*

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;<sup>6</sup> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:1-6 <sup>(ESV)</sup>

It is taken for granted that the sins of the unconverted world and the vices of society are not to be named among us. But the so-called grey areas and the seemingly innocent things sometimes tempt us to take liberties, and these present the greater risk of defilement. The psalmist asks, “Who can understand his errors?” and then cries out, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults” Psalm 19:12. As he considered his secret, unrecognized faults, it

appears he felt the same uncertainty we sometimes feel about the way we live. It is not God's will that we should be in doubt about our standing with Him. May Scripture guide us so that we can build on a sure foundation.

Romans chapter 7 is a good explanation of what sin is and how it can so easily take over our life and so separate us from Christ. Adhering to the law or rules or regulations will not save us, chapter 7 brings out the struggle we face when it comes to keeping the law thinking it will save us when all it really does is to show us our sinful nature but rather as we see in verses 22 to 25 there is a far better way to take that will bring deliverance: Romans 7:22-25 <sup>22 (ESV)</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” Romans 8:7. When the sinful passions in our bodies (the carnal mind) are confronted by the law of God, they are provoked into rebellion. It wasn't until we began to know God's law that the true colours of the sin nature within us were exposed. Before this exposure, our awareness of sin within us was muted. But after the exceeding sinfulness of sin was revealed to us by the law, it became the means of God calling us. Then we, with Isaiah, cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone” Isaiah 6:5. Like the publican who went to the temple to pray, we called upon God and pled for mercy because of our sins.

But now we find, even after having experienced the new birth, that we must still reckon with the sin nature within. But it is different now because we are grieved by the sins that still tend to show themselves in our lives. Just as Peter was grieved when he denied his Lord, so we lament when we find that we have been overtaken. In our hearts we hunger and thirst for righteousness and our delight is in the law of the Lord, for we really do want to serve Him. We understand what the apostle felt when he cried out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Romans 7:24. Yet he found comfort in the fact that his failings

were not the fruit of an impure heart; rather, the weakness of the flesh caused him to come short of the perfection he desired.

Originally, the letter to the Romans was not divided into chapters as it is now. Actually, chapter 8 is a continuation of chapter 7 and explains its principle more fully. Those whose hearts are fully turned toward God are not under condemnation. But as they learn to walk by the Spirit, they receive the power to live a holy life that is more vibrant than the life afforded by the law.

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:20. This statement of Jesus must have shocked some of those listening. How could anyone be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees? They went to great lengths to emphasize the strictness of the Law, in some matters requiring an observance that distorted the original meaning of the commandment. They liked to display their piety, intending to leave the impression that they were indeed a holy people.

Paul also testified that as a Pharisee he lived blamelessly according to the Law as understood by the Pharisees. If the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is not sufficient, where is our hope? And how can we attain holiness? The fundamental weakness of the law was that, though it spelled out the requirements of righteousness, it failed to provide the power to attain it. The hope of God’s people in Old Testament times rested in the observance of the ceremonial law. Though the true meaning of its types and shadows was largely hidden from them, yet the keeping of the Law was accounted to them for righteousness when it was done in faith. It was this faith factor that proved to be their greatest challenge, and for lack of it many of them fell by the way, Hebrews 3:17-19. There is no other means of accessing the Father than by faith.

All understanding, all revelation, all divine truth, comes only by this avenue. In the absence of faith, men turn to some human device to quiet the inner cry of the soul. When this does not really satisfy, they often resort to increasingly drastic measures. Thus it was that the scribes and Pharisees emphasized excessive strictness in their teaching of the law. They prided

themselves in their accomplished righteousness. Our challenge today is very similar to that of former times. Our justification is by faith, Romans 5:1. Our righteousness is of God by faith, Philippians 3:9. It is an imparted righteousness, not a righteousness that we have accomplished by managing to keep ourselves from the sins of the world.

When faith is alive and vibrant, our God is very real to us, and we love Him with all our heart. Because we love Him we sincerely want to please Him in every way. It is then that iniquity is not imputed to us (Ps. 32:2). When faith begins to wane, we see a loss of this holy desire, self-denial becomes weak, and we do only the minimum of that which pertains to the faith—and sometimes hardly that. We look around to see what others are permitting and as long as we are not worse than others we feel that we are alright.

Let us fear lest our righteousness should not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. May we appreciate more fully the wonder of the righteousness that is imputed to us as we believe in the atonement made for mankind.

Let us endeavour to earnestly and truthfully see our hearts as God sees them.



How can we do it? How can we stay pure? How can we stay holy?

Well I think one of the keys is the Word of God, I think we need to keep coming back to this book (the Bible) because as someone has said this book will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from this book. That's the way it works.



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