

The Roman Road

This title is designed to focus attention on the subjects of man's sin, sin's penalty, God's provision, and man's justification as dealt with in the Book of Romans.

The word most frequently used in the New Testament, and translated "sin," was already in use at the time it was brought over into the New Testament. Secular documents, contemporary with Bible times, found and translated, show that this word was used in a sentence where a warrior hurled his spear and failed to strike his foe. Thus, the word literally means "to miss the mark." In secular documents the word applied to failure in any field of endeavor, whereas in the Book of Romans it is used of missing the divinely appointed standard, that goal conformable to and fixed by God Himself. Romans 3:23 thus reads:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Sin is "to miss the mark," or "to come short." Sin is universal among men, "for all have sinned." And, the divinely appointed standard is "the glory of God," an expression that speaks of the perfections of God's character. Those perfections were visibly seen in the sinless life of Jesus. The God of John 1:1-3 "was made flesh, and dwelt among" men for some 33 years. Eyewitnesses, with careful and deliberate scrutiny, saw the attributes of Deity shining through the veil of human flesh.

They "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (1:14). He is the revealer of God (Matthew 11:27), and those who saw Him saw God (John 14:9; 20:28,29). No human being has ever met, or measured up to the standard of holiness and perfection made manifest in the life of Jesus. "All have...come short of the glory of God." The following is God's description of "both Jews and Gentiles" alike:

"There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:9-12).

In Romans 5:12-21 we find a discussion of Adam and Jesus Christ, Adam being termed "the figure of him that is to come" (5:14). The word "figure" means a type. Therefore, there is some point of similarity between Adam and Jesus Christ, namely that both preeminently influenced the human race. Adam's influence was destructive, bringing in sin and death (5:12), whereas Jesus Christ's influence was saving, bringing in righteousness and life (5:17,19); and the effects of their influence stand upon all who are under their respective headships.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (5:12). Sin comes from a sin nature inherited from Adam (Genesis 5:3, Job 14:1,4; Psalm 51:5; 58:3), and acts of sin stem from that nature (Matthew 15:18,19; Mark 7:20-23). Adam's sin is referred to as "Adam's transgression" (Romans 5:14). Transgression is a "stepping over," and always implies a breach of the law. Since Adam's sin was "transgression," and "where no law is, there is no transgression" (4:15), then we know that Adam's sin was the breach of a revealed commandment of God. That was not the case with those who lived in between Adam and Moses, or the giving of the law at Sinai by the hand of Moses. "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (5:14). Death in their case was the result of Adam's sin.

In between Adam and Christ two things "entered into the world." One, "sin...and death by sin" (5:12). And two, "the law" (5:20). The period between Adam and Moses is called "until the law" (5:13). Thus, the law in view here is specifically the law given at Sinai by the hand of Moses, as in Nehemiah 9:13, 14. Knowing that man, as a result of his own free will, would sin, God purposed that in time "the law" would also enter specifically "that the offence might abound" (5:20). The law did not make men sinners, for "until the law sin was in the world...(and)...death reigned from Adam to Moses" (5:13,14). The law, however, would make men transgressors. Therefore, it caused sin to be revealed in a form in which it could not be mistaken.

The law, contrary to the religious tenet of many, never was a saving instrument. The law reveals the righteous character of the Lawgiver. It is somewhat like a mirror. It does reveal your condition, but it cannot do anything about it. There was nothing wrong with the law. It was "holy, and just, and good" (7:12). But, there was something "the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh" (8:3). It could not bring man, born with an inclination and bias toward evil, into a state of "no condemnation" before a holy God. God alone was able to do that through His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour (John 3:17, 18, 36; 5:24; Romans 8:3).

If righteousness is imputed on the basis of obedience to the law, "then Christ is dead in vain," or literally "without a cause" (Galatians 2:21). Thus, "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" (3:11). Human

judges, under the law, were obligated to “justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deuteronomy 25:1). But God, in His saving plan, does what the law could never do, namely justify “the ungodly” on a principle “reckoned of grace,” without “works,” solely as a result of believing (Romans 4:5).

“The law was added” (Galatians 3:19), or “entered” (Romans 5:20), for a specified purpose, and a specified period. The covenant of promise, by which God saves sinners, existed before “the law was added,” and continued after the law served its purpose. Thus, men, as in the case of Abraham, were saved hundreds of years before “the law entered” (Galatians 3:17,18). The principle of law is diametrically opposed to grace. Thus, the law was not added to grace as a means of saving the sinner. It “entered” to show sinners the real nature of their sin, and to point them, through the repeated sacrifices of the innocent in the place of the guilty, to a spotless Saviour who, in His death and infinite grace, offers a salvation free in answer to faith. Thus, a man like David, who lived during the zenith of the law, nonetheless “describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works” (Romans 4:6).

Sin is “to miss the mark,” and sin is universal (Romans 3:23). But, what is the penal consequence of sin? Romans 6:23 states that “the wages of sin is death.” This “death” is contrasted to “eternal life.” It is spiritual death as described in the words “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). It describes all unbelievers (John 6:53; Ephesians 4:18). It is remedial in this life, that is, during “the hour” that “now is” (John 5:25) solely as a result of believing on Jesus Christ (5:24). But if one dies physically in such a condition, then he will experience “the second death” of Revelation 20:14,15 in the life hereafter, which is irremedial (Matthew 7:23; John 8:21,24; II Thessalonians 1:8).

Death is the penal consequence of sin. This is God’s decree (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12; 6:23). All men are sinners. Therefore, all men are under the sentence of death, and headed for judgement. Sin separates. Sin pays in death. One “dead in trespasses and sins” is said to be “without God” (Ephesians 2:12).

The question is, “What is God’s provision?” What has He done in meeting the need of the sinner? The answer is: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God is not only holy, just, and faithful, that is, true to His character and His word, but He is also an infinite God of love, mercy, and grace. He has decreed that death—separation from God—be paid as the penalty of sin. How could God be faithful and true to Himself, and His word, and execute a just judgement upon sin, and at the same time justify, or declare righteous those who are sinners? God cannot forgive sinners on any grounds, or simply because He is indifferent. Justice must be satisfied. And, thank God it has been. The punishment on the sinner took place in the Person of a Substitute, so that God’s judgement was meted out upon the One who took our place.

Christ’s death was “for us,” namely “for our sins.” (Romans 5:8; I Corinthians 15:3). God’s provision and human failure are linked together. The “us” for whom Christ died are described as “without strength...the ungodly...sinners...enemies” (Romans 5:6,8,10). The words “sinners...(and)...ungodly” show that man does not conform to God’s standard. “Enemies” indicates that the sin nature was not placid or passive, but was expressed in overt acts of rebellion against God. And, “without strength” confirms that man is powerless for good, incapable of saving himself by human merit or good works. The fact that “Christ died for” such a category of men serves to bring out the character of God’s love. Christ’s death completely satisfied what God demanded as payment for sin, and on the basis of justice satisfied He saves all who accept the payment made. Therefore, God is both “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (3:26).

Justification has a legal, or judicial tone. God, the inflexible standard of holiness, is “the Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25). Man, the sinner before God, is the defendant. “It is God that justifieth,” not man (Romans 8:33). To justify is to declare righteous, to acquit, to free from guilt or blame. The words just, justify, justification, right, righteous, righteousness, and meet are all translations of the same Greek root.

In justification God’s part involves “grace” (Romans 3:24) and the shed “blood” of Jesus Christ (5:9). “Grace” is contrasted to “works” in Romans 4:4 and 11:6. The shed “blood” of Jesus Christ is that “one act of righteousness” referred to in Romans 5:18 (*American Standard Version*). Men are not justified by acts of righteousness during the life of Jesus before the cross. They are declared righteous on the basis of the “one act of righteousness,” namely Christ’s death on the cross (5:6-10, Hebrews 10:14). Man’s part is to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31). Such belief is apart from works (Romans 4:5). It is the committal of one’s eternal destiny to Christ (II Timothy 1:12). And, it is a definite turning—an act of the will—to God from every other confidence (I Thessalonians 1:9).

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

“Debt” is that which is legally due an employee for work done. “Reward” is the compensation for that work. But, such a principle is “not reckoned of grace.” Yet, it is written, “For by grace are ye saved through faith...Not of works...” (Ephesians 2:8,9). If the sinner earned salvation by good works, God would be under legal obligation to reward him with it, and the entire matter would have nothing to do with the grace of God. Grace is God doing for fallen man what he is powerless to do for himself. It is the spontaneous act of God, in harmony with Himself, in which He stepped down from His judgement throne to take upon Himself the penalty and guilt of human sin, thus satisfying His own justice, maintaining His integrity, and making it possible to declare righteous the sinner who receives it by faith in Jesus Christ, his Substitute.

The Innocent was crucified that the guilty might go out free. Your guilt is established by God’s Word. It is now a matter of whether you will accept God’s Provision as your Substitute. The work “is finished” (John 19:30), in view of which “the righteousness of God is unto all” in its offer, but it is only “upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:22). Unequivocally, “the righteousness of God” is “revealed” in “the gospel of Christ” (1:16,17), which is “how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:3,4). That message, of a Specific One and what He did on behalf of sinners, “is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Romans 1:16). To this one requirement no other human obligation may be added without perverting the lucid and simple message that salvation is solely the grace of God.

Jesus Christ, “whose Son is he?” (Matthew 22:42). All who seek the answer must turn from the wisdom of men. Since “no man knoweth the Son, but the Father” (11:27), then the answer can only be found in “the record that God gave of his Son” (I John 5:10). In that record, the Son is supreme. He is the Creator of “all things” (John 1:3), “the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16,17), “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42), yea, the spotless “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (1:29). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Trust Him alone.

You do not have to implore, or beg God to save you. You do not have to reform your life, or walk the aisle of a church. You do not have to audibly pray some model prayer conjured up by man. One asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer is without ambiguity: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30,31).

Many spend more time worrying about the future than preparing for it. Do not presume on the future and let this day of salvation pass. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2). “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” All who do are declared righteous, justified, not condemned, and shall never come into condemnation (Romans 4:5; 5:1; John 3:18; 5:24). For them the future is bright and glorious. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” and come go with us on the path that leads to glory. (Colossians 3:4; Titus 2:13,14).

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