

# Popular Commentary of the Bible

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Volume II

The Epistles of the Apostle Paul  
The Epistle to the Hebrews and the  
Catholic Epistles  
The Book of Revelation

*By*

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# THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE ROMANS.

## INTRODUCTION.

The author of the Epistle to the Romans, as he himself states in the introduction, was the Apostle Paul, chap. 1, 1. A large part of this great missionary's life is described in the Acts of the Apostles, and a short history of his youth and of his work as an apostle of Christ is given in articles appended to Acts 9 and 28 of this COMMENTARY. "It will be sufficient to state here that Saul (afterwards called Paul) was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, of Jewish parents, who possessed the right of Roman citizens; that, when young, he was sent to Jerusalem for the purpose of receiving a Jewish education; that he was there put under the tuition of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel, and was incorporated with the sect of the Pharisees, of whose system he imbibed all the pride, self-confidence, and intolerance, distinguishing himself as one of the most inveterate enemies of the Christian cause; but, being converted by a most singular interposition of Divine Providence and grace, he became one of the most zealous promoters and successful defenders of the cause which he had before so inveterately persecuted." 1) The letter throughout bears the characteristic impress of Paul, both in content and form. It is a part of the apostolic teaching, a part of Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, to make us wise unto salvation by faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The letter is addressed to the Romans, that is, "to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," chap. 1, 7. "From chaps. 1, 8 and 16, 19 it appears that the church at Rome had existed for some time when Paul wrote this epistle. How had it been founded? Evidently not through the services of St. Paul himself. When he wrote his letter, he had never been in Rome (chap. 1, 10, 13; 15, 23). The Roman Catholic Church of to-day claims that St. Peter was the founder of the church in Rome, and that he guided its destinies for twenty-five years as its first bishop. This claim has no foundation in the Bible. Indeed, it is contrary to all the evidence of the New Testament. Here is some of the evidence. 1. Up to the time of the apostolic council . . . St. Peter was still in Jerusalem (Acts 12, 4; 15, 7; Gal. 2, 1 ff.). Trustworthy tradition has it that he died in 67. From 51 to 67, however, is not twenty-five years. 2. St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans early in 58. But in this epistle he makes

no mention whatever of St. Peter, as he surely would have done if so prominent an apostle had founded the Roman church. 3. In his epistle (chap. 16, 3—16) St. Paul sends special greetings to a large number of Christians at Rome. But St. Peter's name is not mentioned in the long list of those whom St. Paul greets. What does that mean? It can only mean that St. Peter was not in Rome at the time. It is clear, then, that neither St. Peter nor St. Paul founded the church at Rome. Nor have we any evidence to the effect that any other apostle was the founder. The origin of this church must probably be accounted for in the following manner. Rome, the mistress and metropolis of the world, had a large number of Jewish inhabitants in those days. Some of them were present in Jerusalem on the great day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost was poured out on the disciples (Acts 2, 10). In all probability some of these 'sojourners from Rome' were among the 3,000 who were converted and baptized. When they returned to Rome, these converts carried the Gospel of Christ with them. That was the beginning of the church at Rome." 2)

The purpose of the epistle is stated by Paul himself (1, 11—15; 15, 22—32). Having long intended to visit the congregation at Rome, he here announced his probable coming in the near future. He wanted to prepare the church at Rome to become a suitable basis for carrying the Gospel farther westward. The instructions of Paul in this letter therefore assume the proportions of a full and exhaustive doctrinal treatise, the most systematic and complete of all the epistles of St. Paul: "a presentation of the divine counsel of grace and salvation in its universality, being intended and necessary for Jews and heathen alike." Then also, the congregation, composed of Jews and Greeks, with the Gentile Christians in the majority, had not yet formed a harmonious whole, the Jews believing that they were destined to enjoy special privileges in the kingdom of God, and the Gentiles exhibiting a tendency to look down upon the Jewish brethren. The exposition of Paul in this letter was intended to unify the two parties. On account of these two features the Epistle to the Romans is the most important

1) Clarke, *Commentary*, 6, 3.

Popular Commentary, New Test., II.

2) *Concordia Bible Class*, August, 1919, 131, 132.

writing of Paul, or, as Luther expresses it, "the chief book of the New Testament and the purest Gospel, which is well worthy that a Christian should not only know it by heart, word for word, but daily use it as the daily bread of the soul; for you can never read and study it too often and too well, and the more you use it, the more precious does it become, and the better does it taste." 3)

From Acts 20, 2. 3; Rom. 16, 1. 2. 23; 1 Cor. 1, 14 it appears that Paul wrote this epistle on his third missionary journey, in the winter of 58—59, just before leaving for Jerusalem. The conditions for sending the letter at this time were favorable, since Phoebe, a deaconess of Cenchrea, a port of Corinth, was on the point of traveling to Rome, and thus became the bearer of the precious message (chap. 16, 1. 2). The letter was dictated by Paul to Tertius, one of his companions and helpers, in the house of Gaius, at Corinth.

The Epistle to the Romans is plainly divisible into a doctrinal and a practical part. The first part, including chaps. 1—11, includes four subdivisions. After the introduction the topic of the letter is announced: justification by faith as revealed in the Gospel. The apostle shows that neither the Gentiles nor the Jews are righteous before God, but are by nature under the wrath of God. The righteousness of God, as earned by the vicarious merits of Christ, with all its blessings, is next pictured. A necessary fruit and consequence of imputed righteousness is sanctification, with its manifestation of good works. The universal grace of God is the basis

3) Luther, 14, 94.

of the election of grace, as Paul shows from the example of Israel and of the Gentile world. In the practical, hortatory section of his letter, the apostle then shows what Christian virtues flow from love toward Christ: humility, charity, obedience, a holy life in general. In the conclusion of the letter, Paul justifies his writing, expresses the hope of coming to Rome soon, commends Phoebe, sends his personal greetings, warns against false teachers, includes greetings of his companions, and concludes with a doxology.

The summary of the entire epistle cannot be given more beautifully than in the words of Luther: "Thus we find in this epistle in richest measure what a Christian should know, namely, what Law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, cross, is, and how we should comport ourselves against every one, whether he be pious or a sinner, strong or weak, friend or enemy, and against ourselves. And all this well established with Scriptures, proved with examples from his own experience and from the prophets, that there is nothing more to be desired here. Wherefore it seems that St. Paul in this epistle for once wanted to condense the entire Christian and Gospel doctrine in a brief summary, and prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For without doubt, he that has this epistle well in his heart has the light and power of the Old Testament in himself. Therefore let every Christian make it his common and steady occupation and exercise. Whereto God give His grace! Amen." 4)

4) Luther, 14, 109.

## CHAPTER 1.

**The Salutation of the Letter.** Rom. 1, 1—7.

V. 1. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, v. 2. (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,) v. 3. concerning His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; v. 4. and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; v. 5. by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name; v. 6. among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: v. 7. to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of using the usual, conventional form of brief address in this letter, Paul extends the customary salutation in a truly Christian and apostolic manner, in order to include in his opening greeting the wish for the highest spiritual well-being of the brethren in

Rome. A servant Paul calls himself. The word, if used alone, denotes the Christian, so far as he, in the discharge of his special Christian calling, surrenders himself completely to God's will, and excludes his own preference. But Paul modifies the word by calling himself a "servant of Jesus Christ," not a bondman or slave, as the literal meaning of the word in classical language would have it, since this term contains something of reproach, but a man who is under an obligation to Christ which he can never fully and adequately discharge. He had given, entrusted himself, his person, his life, his powers, to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; he was wholly devoted to Him in the spirit of sacrificial obedience, to the constant, complete, and energetic performance of the divine will. Whereas, however, he had this relation toward Christ in common with every true believer, there was one distinction which he enjoyed, very unusual and singular. He was called as an apostle by a special vocation from God, by an immediate call, Acts 9, 1 ff.; Gal. 1, 1. 12. The special prerogative of the apostolate

was his: he had seen the risen Lord, 1 Cor. 15, 8, he had received direct communications from Him, 1 Cor. 11, 23; 15, 3. As an apostle, Paul was separated, set apart from other men, given a special office, appointed unto the Gospel of God, for its special ministry. It is the Gospel of God, the glad tidings of which He is the Author, which His grace made possible. The message which Paul brought, by word of mouth and by letter, was not an indefinite philosophy, but the Word of God, as it is intended for the salvation of men.

This Gospel of God, these glorious, happy tidings, is not a new doctrine, but one which God had promised before through His prophets in the holy writings, or Scriptures, the ancient truth, proclaimed by the most credible witnesses, codified in guaranteed writings. Paul's words here are a testimony to the inspiration of the Scriptures as they were then known to the Jews. It was God that made the proclamation in olden times; they were His prophets that preached and wrote, not what suited their fancy, but what His Holy Spirit told them to put down for future generations; and therefore the writings that have come down through the ages are holy, as a product of the holy God and His Holy Spirit. The fact that the doctrine of Paul coincided fully with the testimony of the prophets is comforting also to us as an assurance that the Gospel, as preached in our midst, is the eternal truth.

The origin of the Gospel is divine; its agreement with the testimony of the prophets cannot be questioned; its content is Jesus. It treats of His, God's, Son, God Himself, in the Gospel, testifies of His Son. The Son of God, whose eternity and divinity is emphasized by the name, Ps. 2, 7, was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. The only-begotten Son of the Father, John 1, 14; Col. 1, 15, assumed human nature as a descendant of David, His mother Mary being of the house and lineage of David. Of the seed of David He was born, according to the flesh, Luke 3, 23 ff.; His was a true human nature, flesh and blood like that of all men, all human beings. He was made in the likeness of men, Phil. 2, 7, though not after the usual conception and birth; He was made like unto us, His brethren, in every respect, subject to the same weaknesses and ills which flesh is heir to, but without sin, Heb. 2, 17.

This same Jesus, however, that is a true human being is at the same time declared, ordained, appointed, constituted, the Son of God in power, the almighty Son of God. He was always the Son of God, but in the state of His humiliation He had hidden His divine majesty under the form of a servant. But now He was manifested, established, as the Son of God with the full possession of the divine glory and majesty. The Son of David, the weak and despised Jesus of Nazareth, according to His human nature, exercises unlimited authority, absolute sovereignty. And all this was brought

about according to the spirit of holiness, according to His higher, heavenly, divine nature, 2 Cor. 3, 17. This unique nature is called a spirit of holiness, because it belongs to the superhuman, supermundane world, because it is found only in Him that is above all, at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, Eph. 1, 20—23. "The whole Gospel of Paul is comprehended in this historical Jesus, who has appeared in the flesh, but who, on the ground of the spirit of holiness, which constitutes His essence, has been exalted as Christ and Lord." It is the eternal Godhead that now, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God, appears in Christ and determines His entire manner of being. His divine nature has permeated, charged, His human essence with its glory and power. And all this is true in consequence of, by, the resurrection of the dead. By His death, Christ laid aside all human weakness forever. Then He arose from the dead. It was a true resurrection or returning to life; He entered into a new life and being; He assumed the unlimited exercise of the divine attributes which had been transmitted to His human nature. For that reason also, in and with the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the believers unto eternal life is guaranteed, 1 Cor. 15, 12 ff. All these wonderful things are stated of Jesus Christ, the God-man, anointed by God to be the Savior of the world, and therefore our Lord, the Master and King of all believers. All the works of His office He performed, and still performs, in order that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

This same Lord Jesus Christ who has been revealed in such a wonderful way is also the One through whom Paul received grace and apostolate. By the activity of the exalted Christ, Paul was converted, He was made partaker of the grace of God in the Redeemer, of full and complete forgiveness of sins. And then, as a special distinction, he received from Jesus, the Lord of the Church, the office of apostle, Gal. 1, 1. He belonged to the special class of teachers whom the Lord gave to the Church in the early days for the establishment of His kingdom in the hearts of men. It was the purpose and object of his labors in his office to establish the obedience of faith among all nations, in the midst of all Gentile peoples. The purpose of Paul's preaching was to work faith, to create in the hearts of men obedience to the norm and rule of the Gospel; for Christian faith is essentially such willing obedience, Rom. 10, 16; 1 Pet. 2, 8; 4, 17. The preaching of the Gospel, which was the essential work of the apostolate among the Gentiles, has in itself the power to work assent and faith. And therefore the faith of the Christians, by which they accept Jesus as their Savior, serves for the glorification of the name of Jesus, that Christ's name may be above every name. In the Gospel

Jesus is preached, in it He is revealed to men, and their acceptance of His salvation redounds to His glory.

Having thus explained the content and glory of the Gospel and of his office in the proclaiming of the wonderful message, Paul turns directly to the members of the congregation at Rome, telling them that they, the great majority of them, belonged by birth to the Gentile peoples, but were nevertheless the called of Jesus Christ. The call of Jesus Christ through the Gospel has been effective in their case; by virtue of His call they belong to Him as His own, they have been regenerated or converted, they have become subjects of Christ. But not only to these Christians from the Gentiles, to all, rather, that are beloved by God in the city of Rome, belong to God as His beloved children, to all that are called saints, that have become saints by the call of God, that have been separated from the world and been consecrated to God, Paul addresses himself. They were not called by God because they were holy, but their holiness is the result of His call, issued to them out of His great love, an expression of His sincere love for them. Note that Paul addresses all the members of the congregation at Rome with these honoring titles. To him they all are beloved of God and called saints, just as we to-day consider all the members of a true Christian congregation as dear children of God, even though hypocrites may be found in their midst.

Instead of the short formula which custom demanded in formal letters, Paul's love causes him to expand the word into a greeting showing the full measure of his regard. He wishes them all grace, the full mercy of God, the free forgiveness of their sins, the basis and source of every good gift that comes down from above. He wishes them peace, as the happy result of the possession of grace and mercy. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. His redemption has removed the cause of strife, the Father is reconciled to us. This happy state of the assurance of God's grace, of the certainty of His reconciled heart, should continue and their faith in these gifts of God be strengthened. God the Father should grant these blessings, but they should, at the same time, proceed also from Christ Himself, in whom we have the right to call God our Father and expect the fulness of spiritual blessings at His hands. God the Father and Jesus Christ are thus in the same measure and with equal force the Source of our salvation. Such comfort there is in faith in Jesus the Savior.

#### The Introduction to the Letter.

Rom. 1, 8—15.

Paul's longing to see the Christians of Rome: V. 8. **First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.** V. 9. **For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that with-**

**out ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, v. 10. making request if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.** V. 11. **For I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; v. 12. that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.** In this introduction Paul pursues the course usually adopted by him in his epistles, namely, of first placing himself in relation with his readers; and his first point of contact with them is gratitude for their participation in Christianity. "First," above all things, before everything else. Very emphatically Paul brings out this thought of his sincere gratitude, which must always stand first in the Christian's life and precede all prayers and wishes. Note that the apostle refers to "my God." That is the essence of true faith, that the believer puts his personal trust in God and uses the language of personal application with a full understanding of personal obligation. It is the God whose he is and whom he serves, Acts 27, 23. Through Jesus Christ, Paul thanks God; for without the salvation gained by our great Substitute man could not enter into the proper relation with God, nor could any work of man, even prayer and thanksgiving, be pleasing to God. The precious name of Jesus Christ, which has been named three times in the salutation, appears also in the introduction proper, at the head of the letter. His thanks to God concern them all, for they are actuated by the fact that their faith, visible to all men by its fruits and manifestations, by their Christian life, was spoken of in the whole world. Since Rome was the capital of the world, anything unusual happening there was sure to be transmitted and to spread into all parts of the world with great rapidity. It was a fine testimony to the soundness of their faith that the Roman Christians had such an enviable reputation wherever the Christian religion was professed.

The thanksgiving of Paul was naturally a matter between him and God; it was hidden from the observation of men. He therefore appeals to God, who hears his ceaseless prayers for the Roman Christians, as a witness of the truth of his statement, of the sincerity of the love which he bears them, although he had not till now stood in personal relation with them. It was this God to whom Paul here appealed in solemn affirmation, whom he served in his spirit in the Gospel of His Son. His spirit, his regenerated heart, enables him to perform his work in prayerful communion with God. He serves God in the Gospel of His Son, in the preaching of the redemption earned through the blood of the Son of God. This ministry is a sacrificial service, a true act of worship, a fine external manifestation of the internal relation with God. A true minister of the Word does

not only serve God in the Gospel when he proclaims the Word publicly and privately, but also when he deals with God alone, in the communion of prayer for himself and all those entrusted to his spiritual care.

To his thanksgiving in behalf of the Roman Christians, Paul added a constant reminder about them, pleading with the Lord whether, in accordance with his prayers, he would ever be so fortunate as to come to them by the will of God. That was one of the most eager wishes of the apostle, to see the brethren in Rome face to face, to be sped on his way to them, to have the good fortune that would enable him to make the journey to see them. But he places the matter into the hands of God. The Lord of the universe and the Church, whose almighty hand shapes circumstances and destinies, could and would surely at His appointed time arrange matters so that Paul would see Rome, Jas. 4, 15.

The reason for his earnest petition and pleading Paul states to be his sincere longing to see the Christians in Rome, to become personally acquainted with them, with the purpose of transmitting to them some spiritual gift, in order to confirm, to establish them. Whatever of gracious gift Paul might be able to communicate to them in the form of teaching, admonition, consolation, he did not ascribe to his own personality and gifts, but to the mercy of God, of which they became partakers through the Spirit of God. For it is the Holy Ghost alone that works spiritual benefits in the heart of men through the preaching of the Word. But while the brethren at Rome will thus be confirmed and strengthened in their faith and in their Christian life, Paul himself will not remain without benefit. He himself will find comfort, consolation, Christian encouragement among them when they are strengthened. Both parties will thus gain an advantage through faith in one another, by their mutual faith, whose oneness is here emphasized. As Paul gives evidence of his faith by instructing the Roman Christians, by testifying of his faith, so they give evidence of their faith by accepting the Word of God with gladness. Thus both would receive comfort and cheer in their faith. He that teaches and confirms others, himself has benefit therefrom and is edified, since he sees that the Word is received by the hearers with all indications of the gracious power of God.

A further reason for Paul's desire to come: V. 13. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. V. 14. I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. V. 15. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also. To the reason given above, that he wanted to impart to the brethren at Rome some spiritual gift and be strengthened

with them, Paul here adds an explanation from the standpoint of his office as apostle to the Gentiles. He does not want them to be ignorant of the fact that he had often had the earnest intention to come to them, Acts 19, 21. Up to the present time he had been prevented from carrying out his purpose, chap. 15, 20—22. It had not been lack of interest in them, indifference to the work carried on in their midst, which had kept him away, for he was fully aware of his position as the apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. He was anxious to have some fruit among the Romans also, to see some people added to the congregation as a result of his evangelical labors, just as he had seen such results among other Gentile nations; he wanted to gather fruit unto eternal life, John 4, 36. The souls which a preacher of the Gospel gains by his testimony are looked upon by the Lord as fruit, as sheaves of the harvest, and for that reason Paul desired to labor in the midst of the world's capital, to win more souls for the great spiritual harvest.

All this anxiety and desire, therefore, Paul bases upon the obligation which he feels resting upon him, so far as the preaching of the Gospel is concerned. To the Greeks, those that were familiar with the Greek language and the highest culture of the Romans, as well as to the barbarians, the people not conversant with these advantages; to the wise according to the standard of this world as well as to the unlearned and ignorant, he was debtor, he considered himself indebted. He felt that he owed them the Gospel of Jesus Christ; he could not rest content until he had discharged this debt. For that reason his willingness was directed toward the accomplishing of this end: he, on his part, was altogether prepared and ready, his readiness was a fact, he wanted to preach the Gospel in Rome also. This assurance, so fully substantiated, was undoubtedly sufficient to take away any scruples or doubts which the brethren at Rome might have entertained as to the great apostle's personal feeling toward them. Note: The Gospel of Christ is intended for the uncivilized nations as well as for the civilized; barbarism is as little a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel as worldly culture and learning is an aid to its propagation. Mark also: Christians should at all times feel the obligation to preach the Gospel resting upon them; so long as there is even one individual in the world in whose case no effort has been made to make him acquainted with the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, so long there is a debt scored against the Christians; it is time that we hurry with the discharge of this indebtedness.

The Theme of the Letter. Rom. 1, 16. 17.

V. 16. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. V. 17. For therein is the righteousness of God re-

vealed from faith to faith; as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.** Paul had declared his readiness to preach the Gospel at Rome, the capital of the world. And all the wisdom and pride of the haughty metropolis would not deter him from it. "Anywhere, no doubt, one might have misgivings about identifying himself with a message which had for its subject a person who had been put to death as a criminal; anywhere the Cross was to Jews a stumbling-block and to Greeks foolishness. But at Rome, of all places, where the whole effective force of humanity seemed to be gathered up, one might be ashamed to stand forth as the representative of an apparently impotent and ineffective thing. But this the Gospel is not; it is the very reverse of this, and therefore the apostle is proud to identify himself with it." 5) In no way is Paul ashamed of the Gospel, the glorious message of salvation. For he knows and confesses that a power of God it is unto salvation. What no human doctrine, no worldly philosophy is able to accomplish, the simple message of Jesus Christ brings about. It is not merely accompanied by the power of God under certain circumstances, but it is in itself, at all times, a power of God. Herein it serves the highest, the most wonderful purpose: it brings salvation to every one that believes. In delivering sinners from sin, death, and damnation, it brings and transmits to them life and salvation. The power is there always, whether the Gospel-truth is accepted or not; "but a man can experience and enjoy this power only when he accepts it by faith." 1 Cor. 15, 1 ff.; Jas. 1, 21. And this power and glory of the Gospel is intended for every one, for the Jew first, but for the Greek as well. To the Jewish people God had revealed Himself first, in their midst the Savior had lived, a continual living manifestation of the Gospel, a revelation of the merciful power of God. But the glad tidings were not confined to the Jews: Jews and Greeks were alike in need of the message of salvation. For neither Law and the works of the Law, on the one hand, nor wisdom and culture, on the other, can deliver mankind from the misery of sin and its consequences. Salvation is possible only through the power of the Gospel.

Just how the Gospel is a divine saving power Paul now explains, namely, since the righteousness of God is revealed in it. Righteousness, the state of being righteous, which is a condition of salvation, is lacking in every member of the human family since the Fall. But now righteousness, the state or condition in which a person is acceptable before God, has God on his side, is revealed, is made known in the Gospel. It is the righteousness of God, not merely a righteousness which has its source in God and comes from God, but a righteousness valid before God, one which finds full recognition in His sight, 2 Cor. 5, 21. It is not a

righteousness which has its seat in man, the result of man's own efforts, but a righteousness which is imputed to man by God, and therefore has full standing in His sight. This righteousness is revealed, uncovered. It is present, has been present from eternity, in Jesus Christ, whose vicarious, active obedience has brought about a merciful judgment of God. But this fact would remain unknown to man without the revelation of the Gospel, and therefore the righteousness which was gained through the merits of Christ is revealed and offered to all men in the Gospel. It is being revealed out of faith into faith: it is a righteousness out of faith, it becomes our full possession as a consequence of faith; and it is a righteousness into faith, it is expressly intended for faith, it can be obtained only by faith. As soon as a person accepts the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he becomes a partaker of the righteousness which is ready for him in the Gospel; a person must simply take what God gives him, and he has the possession and enjoyment of the great blessing upon which life and salvation depend. And in order to show that the doctrine which he here teaches is in full accordance with the writings of the Old Covenant, St. Paul quotes the word of a prophet, Hab. 2, 4: **The just will live by faith, in consequence of, through faith; he will never see destruction, but will be in full enjoyment of the highest form of life, in and with God, forever.** And so Paul has given a summary of his Gospel; he has stated, in these two sentences, the theme or thesis of his letter to the Romans.

#### The Moral Decay of the Gentile World.

Rom. 1, 18—32.

The refusal to heed the natural revelation of God: V. 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness, v. 19. because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. V. 20. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse; v. 21. because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Paul had pictured the revelation of the righteousness of God in the Gospel. And this revelation was sorely needed in view of another revelation of God, namely, that of His wrath, which is being uncovered and made known as a reaction of His holiness and righteousness against every transgression of His will. Down upon, against every ungodliness and unrighteousness of men this wrath is made plain and exerts its power. Whether a person is neutral and irreligious, or whether he openly denies and violates the divine Law: in either

5) *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2, 589.

case God, from the throne of His majesty and power, will reveal, and now reveals, His wrath in the last judgment. The punishment which is being meted out to the wilfully unrighteous blasphemers is a part of the final judgment upon them. Its coming is inevitable, because these irreligious and immoral people are characterized by the fact that they held back, checked, repressed, hindered, the truth in unrighteousness. Men have the truth, the revelation of God in nature. And this truth is intended to have a moral effect, to keep men in check, to guide them in the way of civic righteousness. But they hold back the truth, they resist its influence, they close their eyes to its promptings; and all this in unrighteousness. Men willingly serve unrighteousness in preference to the truth; they reject the truth and accept the unrighteousness and godlessness, and thus their guilt is brought out all the more strongly.

The meaning of the truth which Paul has in mind he brings out in the next sentence. What may be known of God is evident to them, for God has given them evidence to that effect. What is knowable of God, what men can conceive of with regard to His essence by means of their senses, that is plain to the hearts of men: He has given them this knowledge, He has made it plain to them. It is a knowledge which is transmitted to men through the works of creation. For the invisible attributes of God, some phases of His divine essence, are plainly seen since the creation of the world, are brought to the knowledge of men by means of the things that are made, through the creatures themselves. Human reason, when rightly used, cannot help but perceive the divine qualities as manifested in the work of creation and providence. It is clear to human intelligence that there must be an eternal power that governs the universe, and that this Godhead has also other attributes, such as wisdom, goodness. The completed creation preaches these qualities of its Master; it praises the incomparable greatness and glory of God.<sup>6</sup> So clear and unmistakable are these evidences of the existence of God, of the creation and preservation of the universe by His almighty power, wisdom, and goodness, that men are without excuse and defense. The impulse given by God that all men should recognize His majesty and prepare their hearts in a corresponding manner is so great that every evasion of their plain duty leaves them with a bad conscience. They will not be able to advance a single reason for the purpose of mitigating their offense. It cannot be the fault of God and His creation if man does not properly recognize and serve Him; on the Day of Judgment no man will be able to allege the innocence of ignorance. Note: The apostle does not represent the natural knowledge of God as a sort of means

of grace, by which men might attain to the saving knowledge of God. It is only when a person has been converted to God through the Gospel that he makes the proper use of the natural revelation of God. But the natural knowledge of God is to serve as an incentive to stimulate earnest and untiring search for the true God, Acts 17, 27.

Having stated wherein the truth consists which men so consistently hinder and reject, Paul now shows in what way men oppose the truth and nullify its influence. Though men had come to know God by means of the natural knowledge, though this knowledge is before their eyes always, though the idea of monotheism is ever found in the midst of polytheism, yet men would not praise and thank the true God as God. They refuse to have their knowledge influence their actions, their mode of living. They will not permit their passive knowledge to become an active worship. Instead, they fell to reasonings upon the essence and cult of God, and in their perverse, self-willed reasonings and speculations they were made vain; their instinctive perception of God became confused and uncertain; their unintelligent, foolish heart became darkened. Their thoughts were directed toward vain, foolish, evanescent things; they refused to accept instruction for their own benefit. This is the condition of all men by nature. The book of the works of God in creation is before their eyes, and they cannot but acknowledge the existence of God and the presence of certain divine manifestations, but they refuse to have this knowledge influence their thoughts and will; they deliberately hinder all good effects of the instinctive knowledge. And what they reason and speculate themselves, all their conclusions and judgments, is altogether wrong and perverted, just as they have not the slightest desire and intention to manifest any gratitude for the blessings received from the providence of God.

The result of deliberate folly: V. 22. **Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, v. 23. and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. V. 24. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; v. 25. who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.** Here the result of ignoring God and of deliberately setting aside the guidance of the natural knowledge of God is shown. When men claimed, asserted, boasted their own wisdom, 1 Cor. 1, 22, they became fools, they were stultified in intellect. The true wisdom, which comes down from above, is ever humble, but where the divine truth is missing, human philosophy with its boastful attitude makes its appearance. And so the final re-

6) Cp. *Theol. Quart.*, 10, 9 ff.

sult of the vanity of their mind, of the darkness and foolishness of their intellect, was that men have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the semblance of the picture of mortal man. The semblance which was chosen in the place of God was the picture of some man or of some animals, either birds or four-footed beasts or reptiles. Such an idol was to be a representation of the Godhead, Is. 44, 12—19; Ps. 115, 4—8; 135, 15—18. History gives many examples; for the idols of the Greeks and Romans, also of the ancient Germans were statues in the form of men; the eagle of Jupiter and the ibis and hawk of the Egyptians were sacred birds; the white ox of the Egyptians, the golden calf of the Israelites, goats and monkeys in other nations, were four-footed idols; and among the reptiles were the crocodile and various serpents, all of which were given divine honor. Such were and are the manifestations of the false religions of men when they turn from the true God. In the foolishness of their unnatural idolatry they pervert the original order of God. "Man, made in the image of God, now makes God in his own image; and the master of the animal kingdom has so far forgotten his dignity as to worship the pictures of animals which should be subject to him."

The result of this idolatry is a loss of all true morality as well, a fact which God permitted as a well-deserved punishment. Therefore, because of their godlessness and idolatry, God has delivered the idolaters into uncleanness. It is a divine punishment and destiny; God punishes sin with sin. In the lusts of their hearts, in the condition in which they were in consequence of their godless, irreligious conduct, which they delighted in, God has given them over to uncleanness. The sinful lusts and desires of the heart were the people's own doing, and the dishonoring practises which followed were God's punishment. When a person refuses to heed the warnings of God in nature and conscience, then these warnings are finally withdrawn, the unrighteous person is abandoned to the gratification of his desires and lusts, to every form of uncleanness and immorality, just as a physician may finally leave an untractable patient to his own devices. And so the uncleanness of the idolaters results in gross transgressions of the Sixth Commandment, that their bodies are dishonored in themselves. Through all immoral vices the bodies of men are shamefully treated; uncleanness takes away all the honor which the body of man possesses as a creature of God, 1 Cor. 6, 18.

The apostle now emphasizes once more that the motive which prompted God to this punishment lay in the transgressors themselves. It is carried out in the case of all those that changed the truth of God, the true worship of God, the true God Himself, into a lie, into idolatry and idolatrous practises. Men have exchanged the true living God for idols, to whom they falsely attach the name gods. And the creature they

have thus honored and served in place of the Creator, in preference to the true God, to whom alone all blessing and honor is due, as Paul emphasizes by the conclusion with the Hebrew Amen. This same emphatic belief and confession must live in the Christians of all times: there is only one true God, He who has revealed Himself in His Word for the salvation of mankind.

The depths of immorality and godlessness: V. 26. For this cause God gave them up into vile affections; for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature; v. 27. and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another: men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. V. 28. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient; v. 29. being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, v. 30. backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, v. 31. without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; v. 32. who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. Here is a striking and terrible arraignment and characterization of the Gentile world in the time of Paul and of the unbelieving world of all times. It was because the Gentiles persisted in their idolatrous practises and refused to give heed to the knowledge which was before their eyes, which was actually bombarding their intelligence on every hand, that God gave them over, abandoned them: they fell to the very lowest depths which bestial passions may reach, into lusts and desires of dishonor and shame. The heinousness of their transgression is marked by the words referring to the sex of the transgressors, for they became guilty of the most unnatural and revolting filthiness, since the persons of the female sex among them (they can no longer be designated as women) changed the natural use according to God's divine institution into one altogether at variance with nature, women practising unchastity with women. And in the same way the persons of the male sex abandoned, gave up, the natural use of the opposite sex within the bonds of holy matrimony, and burned in their venereal lust and desire toward one another, males perpetrating shameless acts with males, and receiving the reward, the punishment for their error, for their wilful, grievous departure from the order of God. It was necessary that they be punished

in themselves, in their own bodies; it was demanded by the holiness and righteousness of God. The punishment for the sins of unchastity here referred to is in proportion to their unnaturalness and to the extent of the sinners' departure from the service of the true God to all manner of base idolatry.

The apostle now adds another factor in the guilt of the idolaters. Just as they did not consider God worthy of being kept and regarded in their knowledge, God has also abandoned them to their reprobate mind. Their conduct and the consequences of their action are again placed in relation to each other. God had given them the opportunity to know Him, the book of nature was open before their eyes, and they could and did read the revelation offered there. But they refused to accept the finding of their own intelligence; they did not consider it worth while to seek the true God; they did not want to retain the true knowledge of God. A reprobate mind they showed, and to this mind they were condemned. They have lost all moral discrimination, and therefore they are abandoned to their nefarious acts, to do those things which are not proper. The apostle gives a long catalog of their sins in which they find their delight. Cp. 2 Cor. 12, 20; Gal. 5, 19 ff.; 1 Tim. 1, 9 ff.; 2 Tim. 3, 2 ff. They are filled with, their hearts and minds know nothing but, unrighteousness, they delight in violating not only all divine, but also all human laws, especially such as pertain to the welfare of their neighbor. They are filled with wickedness, with the delight in doing evil, with badness or depravity, with covetousness that seeks only its own advantage. They are full of various vices: envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity. The envious person begrudges his neighbor every advantage, and often reaches the point in which he plans and puts into execution his removal. And if it does not come to that point, there will be quarrels, maligning and calumniating talk. Body and life, money and goods, honor and good name, are attacked by people that have abandoned God and, in turn, have been abandoned by Him. The third group includes, in general, such people as have lost all sense of morality and decency: slanderous whisperers, that welcome every opportunity to harm the reputation of their neighbor; insolent persons hated by God, people that make it a practise to treat their neighbors with abject vileness; overbearing boasters, that put themselves forward at the expense of others, that boast and brag about

their real and imaginary advantages and virtues; inventors of all evil and malice which wickedness can devise to harm their neighbor; disobedient to parents, denying even natural affection; without understanding, refusing to accept advice from any one else; without all natural affection of love; without mercy, absolutely callous toward the needs and distress of others; in short, they have denied all human feeling and sympathy, they have become unnatural monsters. And all this because they would not accept God as their God. The depth of their profligacy is finally indicated by a summarizing sentence: Being such people, so constituted, that they knew the righteous judgment of God, fully conceding to Him the right to determine the relation of human beings toward one another, and fully aware also of the fact that all those that commit the sins mentioned by the apostle are guilty of death, yet they not only persist in doing them, but they also encourage obstinate malefactors in their persistent depravity.

This description of the godless world is strikingly correct at all times even in the midst of the highest intellectual enlightenment. If people deliberately take God's honor away from Him and transfer it to creatures, the result will be that God will abandon them to the most terrible vices, uncleanness, unchastity, lack of charity and compassion, and every form of unrighteousness. Such conditions are not a mark of barbarism, but they are found in the very capitals of culture and learning in our days. The words of the apostle exactly characterize the situation in the world at the present time. Worship of heroes and mental giants has taken the place of true service of the revealed God. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, lasciviousness, unmentionable sins, are prevalent. Corruption, insatiable greed and covetousness, have taken the place of real humanity and altruism, and all efforts at reform, especially by means of legal enactment, are vain. The world is rapidly drifting toward the brink of an abyss and will shortly find to its horror that the Day of Judgment has dawned.

**Summary.** *The apostle salutes the Christians at Rome, tells of his longing to see them and of the duty he owes them in the Gospel-message, states the theme of his letter, and pictures the deep depravity of the Gentiles that refuse to heed the admonition of the natural knowledge of God.*

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Guilt of the Jews. Rom. 2, 1—10.

Correct knowledge and judgment alone avails nothing: V. 1. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that

judgest doest the same things. V. 2. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. V. 3. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that