

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS :

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

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

(Continued)

(d) *The Way of Holiness* (Ch. 6-8).

(i) Freedom from Sin (Ch. 6: 1-23).

“WELL, then”, I hear someone say, “if divine grace abounded more exceedingly where sin abounded, why not go on sinning, in order that divine grace may abound yet more?”

Perish the thought! We *died* as far as our relation to sin is concerned; how can we go on *living* in sin? Do you not know that when we were baptized into membership of Christ Jesus, we were baptized into participation in His death? That is why we were *buried* with Him through our baptism. The purpose of this participation in His death and burial was that we should for the future live a new life, just as Christ was raised from the dead by means of the Father’s glorious power. You see, it follows inevitably that if we were identified with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also be identified with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. Understand this: our old personality was crucified along with Him, so that the material which sin had to operate upon might be done away with. Consequently, we are no longer in bondage to sin: once a man has died, he is quit of the claims of sin upon him.

I repeat: if we shared the death of Christ, we believe that we shall also share His resurrection life. We know very well that Christ, now that He has been raised from the dead, can never die again: death can no longer claim any power over Him. As regards His death, He died once for all in relation to sin; as regards His life, He lives by the power of God. Similarly, you too must count yourselves dead in relation to sin, but alive in a new relationship with God by virtue of your incorporation in Christ Jesus. So do not allow sin to dominate your mortal bodies any more so that you are forced to obey its cravings, and do not go on presenting your bodily members as instruments which sin may use to do all sorts of wrong things. No: present yourselves to God as people who

have come back from death to live a new life; present your bodily members to God as instruments which He may use to do righteous deeds. Sin will have no further power over you, now that you are no longer living “under law” but under the grace of God.

But again I hear someone say: “Well, then, let us sin, since we are no longer living under law but under the grace of God”. And again I say, “Perish the thought!” Look at it this way. If you present yourselves to someone as slaves, to render him obedience, well, you are the slaves of that person to whom you render obedience. You may be slaves of sin, with death to look forward to; or you may be slaves rendering obedience to God, with righteousness as the outcome. And God be thanked that you, who once were slaves of sin, have now rendered heart-obedience to that pattern of teaching which was delivered to you. You have been emancipated from sin’s ownership; you have become “enslaved” to righteousness. I am using an analogy from human life because of your natural weakness.

Let me repeat: once you presented your bodily members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, adding to the sum of lawlessness; now, on the contrary, you must present them as slaves to righteousness, and the result will be holiness of life. When you were slaves of sin, you were “free” from the control of righteousness. But what did you get out of it? Things which now you are ashamed to think about, things which lead to death. But now you have been emancipated from the ownership of sin; you have become slaves of God. And now you have as the outcome of your service things which promote holiness, things which lead to eternal life. Sin pays its slaves the wages of death; God bestows eternal life as His free gift, which is ours by union with Christ Jesus our Lord.

(ii) Freedom from the Law (Ch. 7: 1-25a).

Now here, my brothers, is a further point to consider. You who know about law are familiar with the fact that a human being is under the law’s jurisdiction as long as he lives. A wife, for example, is bound by law to her husband while he is alive; if her husband dies, she is no longer liable to the law which bound her to him. That is why she is stamped as an adulteress if she becomes attached to another man in her husband’s lifetime; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law which formerly bound her, and if she is united to another man now she is no adulteress.

Now, my brothers, apply that analogy to yourselves. You died in relation to the law through the death inflicted upon the body of

Christ. In consequence, you have been united to another man, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order to produce fruit for God. When we were in our unregenerate state, our sinful passions worked their will in our bodily members, stimulated into activity by the law. But now we have been discharged from our liability to the law; we have died in relation to the power which formerly bound us, so that our present service—our “slavery” to God—is rendered in the new freedom of the Spirit and not in the old bondage to the letter of the law.

What are we to say about this? Is the law to be equated with sin? No indeed. But this is what I mean: I should never have become conscious of sin but for the law. For example, I should never have become aware of covetousness but for the law which says: “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20: 17; Deut. 5: 21). That commandment provided sin with a base from which to attack me, and as a result it produced all sorts of covetousness within me. Without a law to stir it into life, sin lay dormant. Once upon a time I was “alive”, when no law came to stimulate sin in this way. But as soon as I became aware of the commandment, sin sprang to life, and I “died”, so to speak; the very commandment which was given that men might live thereby resulted in death instead. Sin, you see, using the commandment to establish a base of operations against me, overcame me by subtlety and by means of the commandment it brought me into the state of death.

To summarize: the law is holy; the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Do I mean, then, that something which was good in itself proved death to me? No indeed; it was *sin* that brought about my death by means of something that was good, and this happened in order that sin might come to light, and that through the commandment it might be shown to be exceedingly sinful.

Let us consider the situation. We know that the law is spiritual. But I am carnal; I am sold into the power of sin. I do not recognize what I am about; I do the thing I hate, not the thing I wish to do. Now, if I do something that I do not wish to do, I assent to the law; I confess that it is good. But as things are it is no longer I who do what I hate; it is indwelling sin that does it. I know that nothing good dwells within me—that is, in my fallen nature. The *desire* to do good is present with me, but not the *power* to do good. I do not perform the good that I wish to do; I practise the evil which I have no wish to do. But if I do what I have no wish to do, it is no longer I who do it; it is the indwell-

ing power of sin. I find, then, this law in operation, that when I desire to do what is good, evil lies ready to my hand. My inward being agrees with God’s law and delights in it, but I see in my bodily members another law in operation, waging war against the law which my mind approves and taking me prisoner in order that I may serve the law of sin which operates in these bodily members of mine. Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me (I cry) from this body which drags me down to death? Thanks be to God for the deliverance which is mine through Jesus Christ our Lord!

(iii) Freedom from Death (Ch. 7: 25b-8: 39).

So then, so far as I personally am concerned, with my mind I serve the law of God; it is with my lower nature that service is rendered to the law of sin. This being so, there is no reason why those who are members of Christ Jesus should go on in a state of “penal servitude”, for the Spirit’s law—the law of that life which is ours in Christ Jesus—has set you free from bondage to the law of sin and death. What the law could never accomplish, because it was hampered by the defects of the unregenerate human nature which it had to work with, God has accomplished. When He sent His own Son in the likeness of the very flesh which sin uses as its instrument, He sent Him as a sin-offering, and thus passed the death-sentence on sin in that domain of human flesh. Thus He achieved His purpose that what the law ordains should be fulfilled in us as we live under the power of the Spirit instead of (as formerly) after the promptings of the old nature.

Those who follow the promptings of that old lower nature think the thoughts which come naturally to it, and those who follow the promptings of the Spirit think the Spirit’s thoughts. To have a mind in tune with the old nature means death; to have a mind in tune with the Spirit means life and peace. You see, the mind which is in tune with the old nature is a mind hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law; in fact, it *cannot* submit to it. Those who follow the promptings of the old nature are unable to please God.

But you, my friends, do not follow the promptings of the old nature; you live in the sphere of the Spirit, if indeed God’s Spirit dwells within you. Of course, if anyone does not have Christ’s Spirit, he does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, then the body may still be subject to death because of sin, but the spirit is filled with life because of righteousness—that righteousness with which God has invested you. But if the Spirit that dwells within

you is the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, then He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will impart life even to your mortal bodies through the Spirit that dwells within you.

So then, my brothers, we are men under an obligation—not to the old nature, so that we should live in conformity with its desires, but to the Spirit of God. If you live in conformity with the desires of the old nature, you are bound to die. But if by the Spirit you treat the body's former activities as dead, you will live. The sons of God are those who are led by God's Spirit. It is no spirit of slavery that you have received, to bring you back into a state of cringing fear. No! it is the Spirit that makes you sons, enabling us to address God as "Abba"—that is, "Father". God's Spirit Himself bears consentient witness with our human spirit that we are God's children. And if we are His children, then we are His heirs—heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share His suffering, so that we may also share His glory.

The sufferings which we have to endure in this critical time are, in my judgment, not to be compared for a moment with the glory which is going to be revealed to us. All creation, with earnest longing, is waiting for the revelation of the sons of God. The creation, you see, was subjected to frustration—not of its own accord, but by the will of Him who so subjected it—but this is only a temporary condition, alleviated by the hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to corruption and enter into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know full well that the whole creation up to the present time has been groaning and enduring birth-pangs, and we ourselves too, who have the indwelling Spirit as the first-fruits of this coming glory, groan inwardly as we wait for our investiture as sons of God, on the day when we receive the redemption of the body as well as of the soul. It was in this hope that we received our salvation. But hope which sees its realization is not hope; why should a man hope for something which he already sees before his eyes? But if we hope for something which we do not see as yet, we wait for it in patience.

So also the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in words. And He who searches our hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, for it is in accordance with God's will that the Spirit intercedes for the people of God. We know, too, that God causes everything to co-operate for good to those who love Him, to those whom He has called in accordance with His eternal purpose. For He fore-

ordained those of whom He had already taken knowledge, to be sharers of the image of His Son, in order that the Son might be first-born among many brothers. Then, He called those whom He had foreordained; He justified those whom He had called; He glorified those whom He had justified.

In view of all this, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who can be against us? Why, He did not withhold His own Son, but delivered Him up to death on behalf of us all; how then can He fail to bestow all things freely on us along with Him who is His supreme gift? Who can bring any charge against God's chosen people? It is God who justifies us; who will condemn us? Christ Jesus who died, or rather who has been raised from the dead, is the one who is at God's right hand making intercession for us as our Advocate. Who will separate us from His love? Can affliction do it? Can distress? Persecution? Hunger? Nakedness? Danger? The sword? These things are real enough, as the scripture says:

For Thy sake we are being killed all day long;

We are counted as so many sheep to be slaughtered (Ps. 44: 22). But amid all these things we conquer—we more than conquer—through Him who has loved us so. I am utterly assured that nothing—neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor powers, neither present things nor things to come, neither height nor depth nor any other created thing—can ever separate us from God's love which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(To be continued)