

God Gave Them Up

"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 divinity, so that they are without excuse"—Rom. 1:20.

ROMANS CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

PAUL'S letter to the brethren and sisters at Rome is very deeply doctrinal, but it is also very personal. He mentions nearly 40 specific individuals in ch. 16, beside several references to households.

We must always remember that the Truth is a *personal* thing—a matter of personal relationships to others—not a mathematical or technical or coldly individual thing. Paul says in ch. 1 that without ceasing he made mention of them always in his prayers. This is not exaggeration: this was Paul's whole heart and life.

First and above all, the whole meaning and power of the Truth is an intense personal relationship to God and Christ—

"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17).

Not just to know *of* them. Not even just to know *about* them: to know the truth concerning them (though that is truly vital in itself). But to *know them personally* as close and intimate companions: far more intimate and closer to us than anyone else can possibly be.

It is quite possible—and if we observe ourselves we shall often catch ourselves falling into it—it is quite possible to work diligently all day long on the work of God, and not once think of Him as a personal, living Reality, as a Friend, as a Companion, in terms of closeness, and affection, and communion. Yet this is the very essence of the Truth. This is the central, heart-purpose for which all else is designed. We may feel we are "always abounding in the work of the Lord," but it is meaningless if it is not built upon this.

There is no point, no value, no life, in doing God's work if there is not an ever-conscious personal relationship at the heart of it. It is this personal, affectionate relationship to God and Christ that draws us from evil, and strengthens us in good. Nothing else can.

In our poor, so-brief little life-span, the basic purpose of *all* that we do must be the schooling and purifying and developing and transforming of our own character. Knowledge is good. Knowledge is essential. But knowledge is just a means to an end—not an end in itself. *Character* is the vital thing that knowledge must be creating—spirituality, holiness, integrity, purity, beauty. We are being put through exercises and experiences to create holiness. Even Jesus himself "learned obedience by the things that he suffered" and was "made perfect through suffering."

God does not actually *need* us to do anything for Him. All that we do for Him is training for ourselves. Now this needs qualifying to avoid misunderstanding. God does not need any particular one of us, but in His wise divine purpose there is work to be done by man, and the work itself is important. In the plan God has devised faithful servants are an essential part. It has pleased Him to condescend to make His beloved children co-workers with Himself.

And we must always be mindful that *all* we ever do of any good is God's working in us, and not of ourselves (Phil. 2:13)—

"It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Our part is to yield, to submit, to conform, to put away other things that waste our time (*God's* time, for all belongs to Him) and distract our interest, to maintain our attention in the right direction, to discern and co-operate with the shaping and molding hand.

And further, character is not a self-centered operation. It is the very opposite. We cannot be holy in a selfish vacuum. We cannot turn inward and just work out our own salvation as if others did not exist, though that may be tempting to the flesh. It is so selfishly pleasant to get off into our own little corner of isolation.

Character is essentially a self-forgetting, outgoing relationship, primarily to God and Christ, but also to all members of the Body of Christ, and in a more general sense to the whole suffering world. Paul is our example, as Christ was his. He wrote similarly to other ecclesias as he does here to the believers in Rome—

1:9—"Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

His concern was for every member (2 Cor. 11:29)—

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"

Paul's whole life was the love and fellowship and welfare of his brethren: intense empathy with and sympathy for them. About three years after writing this letter, as he approached Rome as a prisoner, this same group of brethren came out 35 miles to meet him—

"Whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage" (Rom. 28:15).

But, just about another 5 years later, in his final tribulation—on trial for his life, about to be offered—in this same city of Rome, he had to sadly say, like his Master before him (2 Tim. 4:16)—

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me."

And he gave thanks to God for one lone, faithful brother in the whole city who diligently sought him out in his cell, and found him, and refreshed him, and "was not ashamed of his chain." In the conditions then prevailing, doubtless this loyal Onesiphorus risked his own life to succor Paul.

1:11—"I long to see you."

He had never visited the ecclesia at Rome, though from ch. 16 it is clear he knew many of the members. He longed to see them that he might impart to them some spiritual benefit, and—

1:12—"That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

This is, and *must* be, the reason for our visiting and associating with one another, and this aspect must be constantly borne in mind. Any time of our association not spent for this purpose is time wasted, unfaithful stewardship, lost opportunity.

There are, of course, many different ways, direct and indirect, by which this purpose may be furthered, and therefore we must be slow and careful in judging others' activities, because we do not know their motives. But let us be sure that we ourselves bear this ever in mind, and that this is always *our* motive. Our constant goal must be to do *everything* we do to the glory of God and to spiritual upbuilding of both ourselves and others. All else is empty, animal folly, leading only to rejection and death.

1:13—"I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, but was hindered hitherto."

This is interesting. Paul had many times planned to visit Rome, but so far had not been able to do so. At the time he was writing, it had been about 7 years since he had first gotten as far as Corinth—the closest he had been to Rome. It was his practice, as is clear from the history in Acts and from what he says to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:13-16) to gradually work toward Rome, establishing ecclesias and fields of activity on the way.

We know too, of course, that he was guided by the Spirit, both directly and indirectly, as to where to carry the Gospel. He had recently spent 3 years in Ephesus, as headquarters for evangelizing Asia Minor—first detained there by the tremendous opportunities and also by the opposition the Truth was receiving; and then he was suddenly driven away from Ephesus by the great uproar and agitation created under the leadership of Demetrius the silversmith.

So we see how Paul's life was guided and laid out for him by the Spirit, often with great danger and violence and abruptness, and often in ways we would think strange, such as long periods in prison when he just ached and agonized to be out preaching the Gospel. But the enforced confinement, though a physical hardship, would be an opportunity for study and meditation, and for writing many needed letters of comfort and instruction that a busy outside active life would have prevented.

Certainly Paul never wasted his time, whether in prison or not, nor did he use his hardships and confinement as an excuse to neglect the service of his Lord, for he writes from prison (Phil. 1:12-14)—

"The things which happened unto me have fallen out unto the furtherance of the Gospel, so that *my bonds for Christ are manifest in all Caesar's court and in all other places,*

"And many of the brethren of the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear."

Such was the power of a fearless and faithful example.

1:16—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

First of all, this is an important verse as to the vital necessity for salvation of believing the One True Gospel of the Kingdom. But why does Paul say, writing to *brethren*, that he was not *ashamed* of it? Why should there be any thought that he might be?

The Gospel is a simple, "unlearned," unworldly thing. It requires simple, unworldly people to believe it and value it. The Gospel, in its simple beauty was providentially unearthed for our benefit in these last days by the labors of brethren Thomas and Roberts.

There were those in Paul's day, and have been ever since, who—enamored of worldly learning—were not satisfied with the simple teaching of the Gospel. They were, in effect, ashamed of it. It did not appeal to the worldly wise, or the speculative-minded. They desired greater scope for worldly learning and philosophy and theory.

Why is the Gospel the "power of God unto salvation?—

1:17—"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

To Paul, this is a key Old Testament passage: "*The just shall live by faith.*" In these early chapters of Romans, Paul is establishing the truth of salvation *by faith*, as against salvation *by works*. He is contrasting a gracious *gift* of eternal life with legally *earned* life.

But he is certainly not contrasting faith with righteousness or with obedience or with holiness. Rather he is establishing faith as the only gateway to, and power of, righteousness—

"Therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed from faith to faith."
Instead of—

"The Just (or righteous) shall live by faith."
—the Diaglott and some other versions have it more clearly—

"The righteous by faith, shall live."
That is to say—
"He who becomes righteous through faith, shall live."

Faith is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a power to accomplish an end: "*Faith without works is dead.*" Faith, if it does not lead to works, produce works, is dead. Faith is never a substitute for holiness. To the Hebrews, in very direct and decisive exhortation, Paul says plainly (12:14)—

"WITHOUT HOLINESS SHALL NO MAN SEE GOD."

And the context clearly shows that he is not giving a soothing assurance of something that will flutter down from heaven upon us at the last day. Rather he is solemnly warning us of something that must be accomplished by the mighty power of faith and love *right now*. If we hope for salvation, we had better give far more attention to this matter of holiness, and what it involves of transformation of our lives, that most—in or out of the Truth—appear willing to give. Surely this is very clear from the next vs. in Romans—

1:18—"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

We should note the "all," for it is essential to Paul's line of reasoning. In reading the stomach-turning description of natural human corruption that follows, we are apt to be put off the track by its very vileness. Paul gives as examples some of the worst forms of unrighteousness, but he is speaking of all unrighteousness, large and small. Often the only difference between big sins and little ones is that the little ones take less courage, and are more cowardly and despicable. This is not to belittle serious sins, but to illustrate the deadly seriousness of what we may consider "minor" sins. It is fatal to belittle any sin, however "small." If we can deliberately choose to sin—deliberately, knowingly choose to do anything displeasing to God and contrary to His law of holiness, then it does not matter how small or big it is, as it is always deadly, because the heart is wrong. Any heart that can choose to displease God in order to please the flesh is still dead in sin: it has not been reborn and transformed to the way of life and love—

"Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin* . . . he CANNOT SIN, because he is born of God"

(1 John 3:9).

Such may repeatedly stumble and fail, but they will be quick to cleanse themselves with repentance and tears, and renewed efforts to overcome.

Why is the wrath of God against all unrighteousness? Vs. 19-20 are very significant. They state very decisively God's view on a very important issue, especially important today, in the light of man's current learned foolishness—

1:19-20—"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. 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 (divinity), so that they are WITHOUT EXCUSE."

God considers that in His works of creation He has given unmistakable and overwhelming evidence of His power and His divinity: that is, His supreme nature and position. Observing the works of creation, both within himself and around him, man has absolutely no excuse for not clearly recognizing the existence and the hand of God, and seeking knowledge of God, and submitting to God.

There is absolutely no excuse for the new, modern, man-centered superstition of "Evolution." It does not rate a moment's consideration, any more than the absurdities of "learned" Platonic mythology. It is a tissue of impossibilities woven to obscure the reality and authority of the holy, sin-hating God Who is everywhere obvious in His mighty works, staring man in the face. That is God's view, and it is conclusive, and we must thankfully recognize its truth and justice. On the strength of God's testimony here, we can be absolutely sure that anyone who is so abysmally blind as not to be able to see God in Creation has nothing of value to tell us about that Creation.

Daily, almost hourly, in this marvelous modern age of investigation, we are ever anew struck by the fantastic wonders of the infinite intricacies of created things. The deeper man probes into the construction of living things, the more wonderful are the things he finds in evidence of wisdom and power and design, and the more utterly impossible the superstition of evolution is shown to be.

1:20-22—"... so that they are without excuse 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. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

What a perfect description of modern, "learned" man! If this was true of the pagan Roman world, with their very limited knowledge of the details of the construction of all living things, what must be the stupidity and guilt of man today? No wonder Christ is to be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who refuse to face the reality and authority of God!

1:24-26—"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than [better, margin: rather than, instead of] the Creator. . . For this cause God gave them up to vile affections."

And verse 28—

"God gave them over to a reprobate mind [margin: mind void of judgment] to do those things which are not convenient."

Again, a perfect description of modern, "evolutionary" man. What time has ever been like today in this respect of moral uncleanness and "vile affections"? Not that these abominations are new. From the days of Sodom—and doubtless from before the Flood—this has been the nature and bent of the common, groveling, unclean human animal. Ancient Greece, the philosophical brains of the ancient world, with the marvelous, timeless beauty and splendor of its art and literature and architecture, is proverbial for vile abominations and immorality.

But with the rise of Christianity—even a corrupted Christianity—these vile things were relegated to darkness, and a veneer of respectability and religion was carefully laid over the "Christian" world. Men at least had a "form of godliness." Officially, these vile things of the flesh were condemned and proscribed. Laws were passed against them, as far as any public activity was concerned. And those laws have remained, and been enforced, up until very recently, well within memory.

But today, within the past 20 years or so, the holy laws of God against these abominations—long recognized and outwardly accepted, if not actually obeyed—have been cast aside. And foremost in the new Canaanitish trend are those so-called "Christian" religious bodies who claim the duty and privilege of teaching and upholding the pure and holy Word of God.

Fornication, divorce and homosexuality—the very abominations specified as against which God's wrath is revealed from heaven—are now openly embraced and condoned and defended, yea, glorified, by the large and once-respectable religious denominations.

Surely this is both a wonderful sign of the time of the end—"as it was in the days of Lot"—and a wonderful testimony to the timelessness of the pure and holy Word of Him Who changeth not!

But there is a great and sobering lesson for us in these things, as we see the great churches of the world oozing and dripping with the leprosy of Canaanite immorality. There is a deep underlying principle that explains this phenomenon, and that comes much closer home. It is in that 3-fold knell of hopeless doom of verses 24, 26 and 28: "God gave them up." Terrible words!—

"God gave them up to uncleanness . . .

"God gave them up to vile affections . . .

"God gave them up to a mind void of judgment."

Let us ponder those words, and tremble. Where much is given, much is required, and we have been given very, very much of the goodness and revelation and condescension of God in these last days. Because they chose the *first steps* in a certain path, God gave them up to go all the way—to uncleanness, to vile affection, and finally, to a mind void of judgment: hopeless of return. And these vile things are now lapping at the doors of the ecclesias. It seems clear that many who bear the name Christadelphian are very shallowly rooted. Their thinking (or rather, feeling) flows with the vicissitudes of the world: they sway with the world's fashions, they sway with the world's morals. Things unknown and abhorred among us a generation ago now press at the doors, simply because the world's morals and manner have changed.

There is no safety except in complete, wholehearted dedication and allegiance and service to God. Come ye out from among them and be ye separate, *separate*, SEPARATE! What does it mean? Does it mean anything to us? Do we *tremble* at the Word? Has it all become so commonplace and thoughtless?

God *may* give us till tomorrow to repent, to put away the thick clogging clay of worldly interests and lusts and pleasures and pursuits. He *may* give us till tomorrow to decide to give all our heart and soul and mind and spirit to Him. He may, and we fervently hope and pray that He will: *but we have no assurance that He will*. We dare not presume on it. He may "give us UP." He is infinitely longsuffering when His wisdom so dictates, and He sees reason so to be; but He will not be mocked, and He is also a consuming fire.

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CHAPTER 1 was about the Gentile. Ch. 2 is directed toward the Jew. The message is different, but the underlying principle is the same. The Jew—and rightly so—condemned the vile abominations and superstitions of the learned and "modern" Gentile: the so-capable Roman, the scientific and philosophic Greek. But the Jew did not see the true picture. It is easy to see the faults of others. They (v.17) rested in the Law of Moses, and made their boast of God.

Naturally speaking, the Jew had reason to boast. They had a holy, just and good national law, direct from the hand of God, that is still today—3500 years after it was given—not only unsurpassed but *completely unapproached* by any of man's tinkering, ever-changing, jigsaw of special interest legislation. Israel was given a pure and beautiful religion and national form of joyful, ennobling worship; a rigid code of cleanliness and morality, wisely and necessarily enforced with the death penalty to prevent festering corruption; no permanent ownership of the land; no interest charges (the root of all social injustice and oppression); no jails (tax-supported crime factories); debts worked out by honest labor with a 6-year limit and a guaranteed generously-underwritten new start; one year in every 7 a complete rest and rejoicing in worship of God; every 50 years an entire new national beginning for everyone on a fair and equal basis, wiping the whole slate of accumulated inequality.

Man has never dreamed of anything like this, and he could not make it work if he did. But this glorious national law was underwritten by God Himself, and *guaranteed* to work: no disease, no poverty, no fear or insecurity—IF they would do their part.

And the Jew had a wonderful 2000 year history of the Almighty God of heaven manifesting Himself to and working with their ancestors as His special people above all others on earth.

No wonder the Jew despised the Gentile, with their hodge-podge legislation all in favor of the powerful, just like today; and their hobgoblin pagan Platonic superstition, just like today.

But the Jew forgot that where much is given, much is required, and as Paul reminded them in v. 11 —

“There is no respect of persons with God.”

And the Jews never realized that their wonderful, God-given Law was not to glorify them but to humble and condemn them so that they would look tremblingly to the mercy of God; not to give them pride but humility; not to make them confident of their righteousness, but to make them keenly conscious of the hopelessness of their weakness and sinfulness, apart from the love of God.

What Paul is leading up to, and what comes out more clearly in ch. 3, is that all mankind—Gentile and Jew—are sinners without exception, and have no hope of escape from death except in Christ.

Truly there are different degrees of sinfulness. Open rebellion is a far different thing from helpless human failure and weakness, sincerely striven against and repented of. But both are sin, and both are fatal, apart from the way of redemption in Christ. This the Jew could not see, and cannot see today. As Paul says in 3:19 —

"Now we know that what things so ever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and *all the world may become guilty before God.*"

Similarly in 5:20—

"The Law entered *that the offence might abound.*"

Sin is a disease. We have, as Paul says in 7:23—

"The law of sin in our members, warring against the law of our mind."

Offences, transgressions, are the symptoms of that disease. The Law of Moses was given so that the symptoms would become obvious and identifiable, so that man may recognize his diseased condition, and seek unto the Great Physician.

We are not under the Law of Moses, but still it serves the same purpose for us as for them. We know we could not perfectly keep that holy Law any more than they could. There were many great and godly men of the Jewish race, but none of them—except Jesus himself—could obey that Law of God to perfection. This is the message of Paul to the Jews in ch. 2—

2:1—"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."

Here is where we are all in danger. It is so easy for us to say, and even more easy to think complacently within ourselves—

"*WE* are the chosen people of God: all the outside world are sinners."

We know the latter part is true, and hopefully the former part is true, but the attitude is wrong: it is the old Jewish blindness. We are *all* sinners, and we shall *perish as sinners* if we judge others rather than ourselves.

There are certain rigid divine laws of separation from the world and from error. There are certain rigid laws of fellowship. In faithfulness they must be obeyed. They are God's laws. We did not make them; we are under them. And in obeying these fellowship laws, there must be a discerning of facts, as to who has the Gospel of Truth, and who are faithful to it.

But it is especially important at such times to make sure that our attitude is in harmony with Paul's warning here; and that we are always vividly conscious that at our very best and even when we are trying our hardest, we still have that ever-present law of sin in our members, and never fully do what we should, and are always ourselves in need of the mercy of God. It is when we are judging others that we must most carefully and searchingly judge ourselves—as to our attitude, our motive, our spirit, our consistency, and our constant remembrance of our own inherent sinfulness and need for mercy.

And it is at this solemn time especially, as we partake of these memorials of the body and blood of him who lovingly gave his life on our account, that we must examine *ourselves*—

"*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat...*"

The flesh is evil; the heart is deceitful. But the love of God is infinitely stronger than either, and it CAN purify and transform us in holiness by the Word. In the end, a vast, glorious, rejoicing

multitude will have overcome the flesh. Every one of us can be among them—but only if we resolutely cast aside everything in our lives that does not contribute to this one purpose—

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside EVERY WEIGHT, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

—G.V.G.