

THE PENTECOST

ISSUE #76 SEPTEMBER 2013



THE PENTECOST



The New Testament Letter of Paul to the Romans is like a “flagship” epistle among his other New Testament writings.¹ In this September, 2013 issue, I am excited to begin a series of commentary on the Book of Romans. Jake Balzer has submitted an article on resolving personal failures and we will also discuss gambling. God bless you!

Shawn Stevens

You may not think you have time for Bible study but in this issue, and the rest of the issues of this year, the Book of Romans has been researched for you. So pull up a chair, grab your Bible and let's look at it together, along with a couple of other interesting issues.

Ramona Stevens

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INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

I think that most people studying the Book of Romans would admit that they didn't get far into this epistle without becoming awestruck at the grandeur of this work. That is because it is the Apostle Paul's masterpiece epistle. It explains the doctrine of salvation, perhaps in a fuller way than do any of his other works.

An early Bible translator, William Tyndale, had this to say about the Book of Romans:

For as much as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure evangelion, that is to say, glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also a light and a way unto the whole scripture; I think it meet that every christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.¹

Tyndale said that it was “a light and a way unto the whole scripture.” That is because it explains the greatest theme of the Scriptures, the redemption of man and personal salvation by faith. It cannot be read too often or studied too much, Tyndale tells us, and the deeper it is searched the more of its treasures will be discovered. In this series of studies, we hope to uncover some of these treasures.

However, these studies can be compared to a diver who dives to the bottom of the sea and finds an incredible coral reef. He brings up a few pieces of what he can carry to the surface to show them to others. However, those specimens of coral and sea-life are only a small fraction of the whole. It is my hope, that after these short studies, you will be inspired to “go diving” down to the “coral reef of Romans” and explore, study, absorb and live out its truths.

The Book of Romans speaks to modern man just as powerfully and with just as much relevance as it did to its first-century readers. It speaks out against adultery, homosexuality, hatred, deceit, civil disobedience and other moral vices. It speaks about the shortcomings of empty intellectualism and gives light on social issues by showing us how to relate to each other. It also gives us God's view on human government. It tells us what to expect in the future as well as showing us how to live today. Most importantly, Romans opens up the Bible's teaching on redemption and salvation by faith.

Romans has a message of hope, taught here more frequently than in any other New Testament book. We read; “For in hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?” (Romans 8.24). We also read:

26 And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;

27 and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what

is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren:

30 and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?

33 Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth;

34 who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than

conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8.26-39

These hope-filled words assure the Christian that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose, that he will be conformed to the image of Jesus, that God is for him, that Jesus is praying for him and that nothing can separate us from God's love. God is the God of hope. We read; "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15.13).

The Apostle Paul introduces himself as the author of the epistle to the Romans. He wrote the letter from Corinth, most likely on his third missionary journey, sometime around AD 56. The Church at Rome, the receiver of this epistle, has a somewhat mysterious history. Unlike the other Churches that Paul writes to and that we have epistles for, Paul did not found the Church of Rome. Where did it come from? We have very little direct evidence to answer this question. The Roman Catholic Church says that Peter had a twenty-five year episcopacy over the Roman Church. However, this is difficult to support. There is some evidence that Peter came to Rome to do some ministry

and we know that he was executed there. However, there is very scant evidence to establish any long-term ministry for him in Rome. In fact, Paul does not even mention Peter in his epistle to Rome, which would seem strange if Peter was there during this time.

If the Roman Church was not started by Paul, and Peter had little involvement with it, how did this Church come about? Most likely, it was first a grouping of Romans who were among the converts which came to the Lord on the Day of Pentecost. In fact, in Acts 2.10, Roman visitors are mentioned as part of the crowd there witnessing the Pentecostal event. It is conceivable that these Roman converts went back to Rome and started a Church there. Whatever the case, the glory for this Church-planting does not go to man. We will have to give it to the Lord Himself.

The Book of Romans remains the flagship epistle, heralding hope and salvation to all who will receive its message. Let us open our hearts to its precious truths.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTE:

1. Editors Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, et al. NKJV Study Bible. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 2007), 1763.

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NKJV Study Bible. Editors Radmacher, Earl D., Ronald B. Allen, et al. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
Scripture taken from the American Standard Version.

ROMANS CHAPTER 1

OUTLINE:

I Paul's Introduction 1.1-7

II Paul's Desire To Serve The Roman Church 1.8-16

III Judgment On The Pagan World 1.17-32

I Paul's introduction

The Book of Romans opens with Paul's introduction. We read; "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," (vs 1). Paul introduces himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. The word "servant," "doulos" in the Greek, means slave; "deo" means "bind" and, so, bondservant. It is a Greek term commonly used for unwilling permanent slaves. Though one's own will is free, he has chosen to bind himself to God. The term indicates subservience and subjection. The term indicates devotedness.¹ Paul is more than just a bondservant. He is a love-slave of Jesus Christ. We read of love-slaves in the Old Testament. We read:

12 And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:

14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.

15 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.

16 And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee;

17 Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise.

Deuteronomy 15.12-17 (KJV)

The word “ebed” in Hebrew means a love-slave.² In Old Testament times, if a servant wanted to remain a servant to his master he could do so and this was called being a love-slave.

As well as being a love-slave of Jesus Christ, Paul was called to be an apostle. Paul is divinely called; “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel:” (Acts 9.15). Also:

16 But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee;

*17 delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee,
18 to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto*

God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me.

Acts 26.16-18

This is Paul's commissioning. He is called to be a minister (see Acts 26.16) and an apostle (see Romans 1.1). The word “apostle,” “apostolos” in the Greek, refers to a person who is sent and it appears seventy-nine times in the New Testament.³ Paul is separated (see Romans 1.1) to the gospel of God. The word “separated” is “aphorizo,” in the Greek, meaning to “mark off by boundaries.”⁴ To be separated is to be devoted to a special purpose, and to be separated from worldly pursuits. Being set apart was a recurring theme in the Old Testament. One could be set apart to holiness (see Leviticus 20.26). Paul is set apart for the gospel. The word “gospel” means “glad tidings.”⁵

Paul's gospel is the gospel of God “which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures,” (Romans 1.2). This is a reference to Old Testament authority. Paul's message did not originate with Paul. Remember that Paul had been accused of preaching against Moses (see Acts 21.20). Paul's gospel was grounded in the Word (see Romans 1.2).

Paul boldly declares that Jesus is the Son of God. We read; “who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord,” (vs 4). Jesus is more than a good teacher or prophet. He is the Son of God. Some might ask, “How

do we know that Jesus is the Son of God?” We are told that the resurrection of Jesus declares Him to be the Son of God (vs 4). It affirms His claims to Sonship. The word “declared” is “horisthentos” in the Greek and this means “boundary,” “marked off by boundaries” or “designated.”⁶

The Romans epistle was written “To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: ... ” (1.7). Saints are not simply ones canonized by the Church. Instead, the word “saints” in Greek is “hagioi” and means “holy ones.”⁷ A saint is a Christian. The saints are beloved of God. Don't miss that; it is early in this epistle. This is something that we are told in the first chapter of the book. God is a loving God. (See Psalm 25.6, Ephesians 2.4-5, Psalm 36.7, Isaiah 63.7, 1 John 3.1).

II Paul's Desire To Serve The Roman Church

Paul blesses the Roman Church, saying; “ ... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1.7). Grace is God showing favour and pardon upon those who do not deserve it.⁸

Paul observes and commends the Roman Church; “ ... your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.” (vs 8). The Roman Christians of this time were not known for awesome cathedrals but, rather, known for their faith. Faith is the initial trust which initiates salvation and it is the abiding trust which brings growth. Paul prayed for the Roman Church. We read; “...

unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers” (vs 9). The Roman Church was on Paul's prayer list and he prayed for them unceasingly. This shows Paul's faithfulness to his Churches. In his prayers, he asks that God would grant that he could come to them (see vs. 10). We also read; “For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;” (vs. 11). Here, Paul's heart is to come, to give, to establish, and to encourage. Paul says that he wants to see them strong.

Further, Paul says that “I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” (vs. 14). A debtor, here, is a reference to fulfilling his commission. Paul's heart is to reach out to all. These words, “Greeks” and “Barbarians,” carry with them connotations. Greeks were thought of as wise, educated, philosophical and cultured. Barbarians is a reference to those not Hellenized, who were thought of as cavemen and brutes. Paul feels he is called to a well-rounded ministry that reaches out to a broad cross-section of very different people. You might be a youth pastor, focusing on youth ministry, and saying, “I am not reaching out to a broad group but, instead, to youth only.” However, in your youth group there are “Barbarians” and “Greeks” there too and you need to be well-rounded and diverse in your ministry to them. Not all of them are the same; there is a diversity within your particular outreach group.

Paul boldly announces; “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.” (vs. 16 KJV). This is one of the most marvellous verses in Scripture. Paul is not reluctant to preach. Romans were always boasting of power. However, Paul was speaking of a different kind of power, the power of God.

Just as a soldier fights on different terrain, Paul was eager to preach in the capital of the empire and beyond. He was not disheartened by criticism. Nor was he intimidated by persecution. The word “power,” here, is “dunamis” in the Greek.⁹ We get the word “dynamite” from this. Some try to mix the gospel with other religions. However, this does not work. If you add dynamite to a campfire you will find that they don't mix. Paul knew that Christianity doesn't mix with other religions, with dead religions. Imagine a fire built of dead wood and men adding more dead wood to the fire. Then imagine someone trying to add “dunamis” (dynamite) to the fire. It would blow everything up. The gospel of power that Paul preached is like that.

Is salvation for a select few who were chosen for it and not for most who hear the message of it? Paul says that salvation is for “... every one that believeth; ...” (vs 16).

III Judgment On The Pagan World

In verse 18, we read of the wrath of God. We are told; “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against

all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hinder the truth in unrighteousness;” If ever there was a subject that people want to avoid, it is that of the wrath of God. However, God's wrath is spoken of throughout the Bible. Those who are not ashamed of the gospel will tell of it. God's wrath is a righteous wrath (see Psalm 2.5, 12).

Those who experience God's wrath do so deservedly:

because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them.

For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse:

Romans 1.19-20

These ones are without excuse. The phrase “without excuse” is “anapologetous,” meaning “defenceless.”¹⁰ The man who is living wickedly does not find Scripture saying to him, “You poor, unenlightened soul who doesn't know better.” Instead, Scripture says that they are without excuse.

Homosexual sin is mentioned in this chapter. Of the wicked, Paul says:

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Romans 1.24-27 (NASB)

The Bible does not regard homosexual lifestyles to be an alternative way of sexual expression. It calls this sin and condemns these lifestyles as “indecent acts” and deserving of “penalty.”

Looking at the life of Paul, we see what it is to be a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Paul is a love-slave of Jesus and he is called as a minister and apostle. He is set apart to the gospel, or glad tidings, of hope. His message did not originate with him, but with God, and was grounded in the Old Testament. He had a message for the saints, or “holy ones,” at Rome and saints from every age have benefitted from this epistle. Paul had a heart to see the Church established. He was not ashamed of the gospel and he warned people of God's wrath.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES :

1. Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament. Vol 3. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 11.
2. John MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : Romans 1-8 (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1991), 4, and Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament. Vol 3. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 12.

3. John MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : Romans 1-8. (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1991), 21.
4. Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament. Vol 3. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 14.
5. William Tyndale, quoted in John MacArthur, Jr., The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : Romans 1-8. (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1991), 9.
6. Ibid., 15-16.
7. Ibid., 18.
8. William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary by William Hendriksen. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 48.
9. Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament. Vol 3. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 28-29.
10. Ibid., 35.

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- Scripture taken from the American Standard Version and the King James Bible.

Resolving Personal Failures

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my

infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

An engineer had a very responsible position. He was involved with space-connected industries. However, one day he made some serious blunders in his calculations concerning the launching of one of the large rockets. One mistake led to another and soon there was a reaction against his work in the whole department. He was fired from his job because of his mistake in calculation. He went home that evening, a broken man. Everything he had ever dreamed of had been taken away from him. And all because he had made a mistake. If only they would have given him another chance. But that was now too late. Early the next morning the telephone rang. It was the manager of a large corporation that had been in competition with his former company. The caller got right to the point, "I understand that you were fired yesterday. Why?" The engineer tried to be truthful about it and explained that he had made some serious blunder in his calculations and judgment and that the company had lost hundreds of man-hours and thousands of dollars. "Good," the man replied. "I want you to come to work for us tomorrow morning." But the engineer objected, "I just told you I made a horrible mess out of my last job." "I know that," the manager replied, "that's the reason I

want you. I don't want to fool around with someone who hasn't had a chance to benefit from his previous mistakes."

Making mistakes is a vital part of life. This is especially true in Church work where almost all the work is with people. The manager of a large industrial corporation has said that ninety-five percent of the mistakes that are made are made in, and with, personnel. To master the art of working with people takes time and much graciousness.

There is a difference between being a failure and experiencing failure. You can fail without being a failure. We can learn much more from our failures than from our successes. Failure is successfully finding out what you don't want to repeat. We often think failure is our greatest enemy. To fail is something too awful to face according to some people. If, however, we learn to catch ourselves in the act of failing, that is half the battle. Recognizing our failures is recognizing we are not fully mature in some areas. And that is necessary in order to grow in that area. If you and I had not, by the grace of God, recognized our failure to meet God's standards we would have not sensed the need of accepting Christ as our Saviour. Failure is a very definite part of life, even for a Christian. But what are we doing about our failures?

I would like to suggest some specific steps in learning how to resolve personal failures.

Personal failures are not the end of the road. When we

fail, it does not mean we are finished for the rest of our lives. We must learn to accept our failures and the responsibility to do something about them.

There are many examples in King David's life where he failed very seriously but he did not give up in despair. When David brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 6:6-22) the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached to steady the Ark. But God struck him dead. What did David, who was in charge, do? We read; "And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day." (vs. 8). Here, we have a very common response to when we are suddenly faced with failure and punishment. Later, David realized his wrong approach in bringing the Ark of God. He then brought the Ark the way God had outlined and was successful. David did not give up because of the serious mistake he made.

You may have tried to do something for the Lord, or in your church, and it turned out to be a mistake. People get hurt through it even though it was not intended that way. Are you willing to try again by the grace of God?

David got involved in immorality and, in covering it up, resorted to murder. A very serious mistake and sin against God. He was king of Israel. He was a spiritual leader, also. What did David do about this mistake and terrible sin? He accepted Nathan's rebuke from God and repented. But David did not give up in despair and throw in the towel and quit serving the Lord and his people.

Immorality is sin. But it is forgivable. When God forgives such a sin, who are we to hold it against each other or not forgive ourselves?

David counted his potential soldiers when God had told him not to depend upon his own ability to fight for him. Consequently, God judged David severely and many people died as a result. What did David do? He admitted his sin and said that he would depend on God's mercy to help him go on from there. Maybe we have not committed such far-reaching sins as David, but where we have failed and sinned and others have been affected, what do we do about it? It is not the end of the road. Let's face our failures, receive forgiveness, make restitutions and move on with Christ's enabling.

Personal failures are not the end of the road. Personal failures are forgivable. When it comes to obtaining forgiveness for personal failures, there are three areas where we need to obtain forgiveness:

a). Forgiveness from Jesus Christ.

If we failed Jesus Christ we need to ask Him for forgiveness. Any failure that is sin needs to be confessed to Jesus Christ. (Not all failure is sin). Judas failed Jesus Christ by becoming His traitor. Judas was remorseful, but failed to confess his sin to Jesus Christ. Peter failed Jesus Christ by denying Him three times in one day. He was sorry for his wrong and obtained forgiveness from Jesus. Paul failed Jesus Christ. He repented and obtained forgiveness. We not only need to obtain forgiveness from Jesus Christ where our failures are sin but also:

b). From ourselves.

Forgiving ourselves is one very difficult thing to do. What does it mean? To forgive yourself for your personal failures is not excusing yourself, but squarely facing up to your failures and taking responsibility for them. But it also involves resolving them personally. What does that mean? It means to stop blaming yourself or feeling sorry for yourself. This gets you nowhere but despondency. When you receive Jesus Christ's forgiveness for your failures you can forgive yourself and learn from your failures.

c). We need to obtain forgiveness from others for our failures.

This is sometimes not possible. We can ask individuals we have hurt for forgiveness, but they don't always give it.

When Albert Einstein went to school he faced some hard decisions. He was dismissed from school in Munich because he lacked interest in his studies. Later, he failed an entrance exam for another program in school. When he applied for assistantship in teaching, he was rejected. He tried tutoring boys and was fired. But failures did not keep him defeated. Even though others did not give him a chance, he moved on and became one of the greatest scientists. Beethoven faced repeated rejection. One of his teachers said that Beethoven would never learn anything and, what is more, he never would write anything worthwhile. But, you know as well as I do that, Beethoven wrote many pieces of music that we sing, even today.

Obtaining forgiveness for our failures is very essential to resolving them. We need to obtain Jesus Christ's forgiveness

for failures that are sin. We need to forgive ourselves and not excuse ourselves or feel sorry for ourselves. We also need to get forgiveness from others whenever possible. Thus, to learn to resolve our personal failures:

- the first step is to remember that personal failures are not the end of the road.

- the second step is to remember that personal failures can be forgiven.

- the third step is learning to resolve them.

Personal failures can become stepping stones. That is, squarely facing up to our personal failures and receiving forgiveness helps us, then, to begin reinforcing our areas of weakness. How do I know where I need help, unless I fail to succeed in a given area? So, when you fail in regardless of what area -- personal, physical, emotional, or spiritual-- you know that you need help in that area. In other words, you can become stronger in the area you failed in, if you choose to, by the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

A boy was leading his sister up a rough mountain trail. His sister found it very difficult and complained, "It's not a path at all. It's all rocky and bumpy." "Sure," answered her brother, "the bumps are what you climb on." We, too, can climb on our failures if we honestly face them and resolve them. Edison, working on the incandescent bulb, said of his hundreds of experiments that failed that they taught him many ways that would not work. Often, a failure is a blessing in disguise. Very often, God can use our failures to guide us along new

paths.

The Apostle Paul faced failure in getting from God what he felt he desperately needed. (See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Paul faced failure. That is, he had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan who repeatedly tormented Paul. We don't know what it was, but it seemed to be a repeated problem to Paul, so much so, that he earnestly prayed that God would remove it from him. What did God tell him? (See 12:9). God's grace, moment by moment, would help Paul to resolve this problem that was like an ugly failure. In fact, God said that Paul would experience more of God's power if he accepted this weakness, or thorn, in his flesh.

Now wait a minute. What does that mean? We don't know if Paul's thorn in the flesh was a consequence of his failure, or past life of sin, or not. But whatever it was, God seemed to say, "Don't ask Me to remove it, but ask Me for strength to live within and, thereby, experience more of My power in your life moment by moment." What was Paul's response? (See 2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul says; "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Yes, he even went on to say that he would be content with more than infirmities; he would be content also with reproaches, necessities, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake, for then he would experience God's power in his life.

Conclusion :

Who has not failed seriously in some area of his life? Who is not even now facing consequences because of their failures?

Let's recall how we can learn to resolve our failures:

Step 1: face up to your failures and accept the responsibility for them.

Step 2: work toward obtaining forgiveness from Jesus Christ, yourself, and others for your failures, where need be.

Step 3: change your failure from defeat to stepping-stones, that is, begin to experience God's power in the areas you have failed in.

Jake Balzer

Scripture references taken from the King James Version.

HIS SAVING POWER AND AMAZING GRACE

For unto us a child is born

In the city of David, Christ the Lord.

We're commissioned to tell, and we shall proclaim

That there's life and healing in His holy name.

At the name of Jesus, the chains do break

And the walls come down with a mighty quake

And the captive's freed and the sinner's saved

By His saving power and amazing grace.

So great a salvation that You've given me.

You gave me love to feel and Your light to see.

Oh, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Be exalted high, I praise Your holy name.

Shawn Stevens

GAMBLING

We can all imagine a desert traveler, thirsty for water, climbing over the sand dunes, who, all of a sudden, sees an oasis just over the next sand dune. He rushes to the spot only to find another dry sand dune. What did he see before? It was a mirage. He was seeing what he wanted to see, but it was an illusion. This is an excellent parallel to the man or woman who aspires to become rich through gambling. They have their eyes fixed upon a great mirage. It is estimated that in the United States 500 billion dollars is spent in legal gambling each year. If we were to add to that the illegal gambling, it is estimated to be one trillion dollars per year. Statistically, those who gamble the most are the poor. They are lured in by the advertising promoting the possibility of becoming rich and escaping from their poverty. Sadly, the majority of them are only driven deeper and deeper into poverty by gambling their money away. Today, gamblers make use of the internet to gamble, as well as gambling in giant casinos. They gamble away everything from hard-earned money to their welfare checks. They gamble the money in their hand and the credit from their creditors. Participation in gambling is made easy by the industry itself.

What is gambling? Isn't it true that the general, and most broad, meaning of the word is simply to take a risk? Life is full of risks. In fact, you can't go through one day of your life without taking some sort of risk. However, this is not

what I am talking about. When I speak out against gambling, I am talking about the game of gambling in which money or possessions are betted in some game of chance. It is not a moral issue whether, or not, you put knee pads on when you bicycle in town but it may be a moral issue if you game-your-money-away in legal or illegal gambling.

Why may it be a moral issue to gamble? Does the Bible say, "You must not gamble"? Not in those emphatic words. However, there are principles that gambling violates and vices that gambling supports. Some principles that gambling violates are:

1. Stewardship – In God's kingdom we do not own a thing, not even ourselves. Everything we are, and have, belongs to God. God expects a return on what He allows us to manage during our lifetime. Is gambling a responsible use of God's money?
2. A spirit of contentment – God has given us so much. We are to be thankful for this. However, the spirit of gambling is one of discontentment and greed. It is actually materialism which fuels the game.
- 3) Responsible care for ones family – Families need the security that a wage earner brings to a home. That security and provision allows spouses and children to be fed, clothed and provided for in many ways, including educationally and in terms of medical

expenses. How much will your children need for their future education? What medical conditions may your spouse develop and for which they will need expensive medical care? These are uncertain requirements. Wages are needed for families but, sadly, many families are coming up short due to the gambling habits of wage earners.

What evils does gambling support?

1. Organized crime – It has long been known that the criminal world is deeply involved in the gambling industry. In fact, casinos are like magnets for criminals of all sorts. Consider that since the city of Atlanta legalized gambling in 1976, the crime rate has risen 380%. Consider that the state of Colorado had to double its police force when five casinos opened. Las Vegas boasts one of the highest crime rates in America. It can be observed, again and again, that when casinos are brought into a city, prostitution, drug and violent crime quickly begin to rise. This is because the criminal world is, and has always been, deeply involved in this industry. I realize that organized crime is involved in many businesses through money laundering, and otherwise. It is impossible to prevent your involvement in it 100%, but the gambling industry has been seen to foster crime to such an extent that it should be reconsidered as a legal industry.

2. Addictions - Gambling is addictive. We are told that there are 2.5 million pathological gamblers in the United

States. Usually when people hear the word “addiction,” they think of drugs or alcohol. Gambling is also very addictive. It does not take long before people move from experimenting with gambling, to occasional gambling, to regular gambling and then to compulsive gambling. Those in the first three stages mentioned often deny having a problem with gambling. Those in the last category can't stop on their own.

3) Exploitation of the poorest and weakest in society – The poor have been the largest contributors to this industry. They are simply sucked in by the advertising. They will continue to be sucked in and exploited as long as this industry is permitted in our nation. Teens and the elderly are also sucked in by its advertising. Casinos are now even building children's theme parks to desensitize children and families to gambling.

Dear reader, if you are involved in gambling, I hope that what you have read here challenges you to re-think your involvement. The chances are that you are chasing a mirage. You are being lured into giving up hard-earned money which is needed in God's kingdom and in supporting your family. The future security of your family is being laid out on the poker table and is being fed into slot machines. Friend, God has blessed us and we have much to be content with. God has given us funds to provide for our families, for their security, for

their education and for their health. Greed and materialism is the motivation for gambling and the wealth that you are looking for is just a mirage. Your family is not the only one who needs your resources. The criminal world wants your money, also. They have white-washed something dark and sleazy and now the advertising is there to lure you and your sons and daughters. Gambling may be easy at the beginning. You may have the cash, or credit, to get involved but it is addictive and hard to stop. Friend, please reconsider your participation in gambling.

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