

THE PENTECOST

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THE PENTECOST



Suffering is one of those unpleasant realities that take many forms in our lives. How do we understand suffering? In this October, 2013 issue, we will also be continuing our study in the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans. This month, Romans Chapters 2 and 3, will be discussed. God bless you!

Shawn Stevens

Can hope be found in the midst of suffering? How does a person deal with suffering? You may be suffering even now. Know this, you're not alone. Whatever your circumstances are, I hope you'll be encouraged as you read this issue. God bless you!

Ramona Stevens

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SUFFERING – PART ONE

Why me, **why me, why me** is what we hear people asking today. Sometimes we hear it from our own lips. Sometimes we hear it from our own minds. We live in a world of pressure and sometimes the world within is under just as much pressure as the world without. Sorrow, lack, trouble, adversity and calamity are all things that we can relate to. Sometimes we suffer for our own decisions, sometimes for the decisions of others. Suffering is our common and frequent experience. We cry out, “Why?” Often, this is when we look up.

Suffering happens for different reasons. The important thing is that when we suffer, it should be for the right reasons. Suffering can come from wrong choices, selfishness, abusing privileges, abusing rights and from sinful actions. God often lets us receive some of the consequences to our actions, that we would learn from the experience, repent and mature. In the lives of God's own this is called chastening:

5 and ye have forgotten the exhortation which reasoneth with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, Nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him;

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

11 All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 12.5-11

Not all suffering is of this sort. It is common to suffer innocently for doing what is right. Suffering is a part of the life of every Christian and non-Christian. The choice is ours, what we will let suffering produce in us. Suffering produces different things in different people. Jake Balzer is going to share with us some important words on suffering. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

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Scripture references taken from the American Standard Version.

SUFFERING – PART TWO

There are three general attitudes toward suffering:

1. Breaking down - becoming ill and requiring care
2. Breaking out - becoming angry, hostile, and blaming others
3. Breaking through - expressing faith and hope in God who will enable us to become Christ-like as a result of our suffering

We want to briefly examine Peter's pilgrimage in learning how to joyfully suffer for Christ's sake. We have two passages that describe briefly Peter's initial and later attitude toward suffering for Christ. In Matthew 16.21-23, Peter completely rejected the suggestion of suffering. The sufferings of Christ were not acceptable to Peter. The passage reads:

21 From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

22 And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.

What a shock to Peter to discover Jesus rebuking Peter's wrong attitude and saying it is not in keeping with God's plan but man's. Some well-meaning Christian leaders today teach emphatically that all suffering is of the devil and must be rebuked and

rejected. The Bible says in Philippians 1.29; “because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf:”. The Bible further says in II Timothy 3.12; “Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Also, in I Peter 2.21, it says; “For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps:”. We read further in II Timothy 1.8; “Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God;”. Suffering is part of God's plan for His Church, which includes all who have been born from above by the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 22.33, Peter declares himself ready to go to prison and to die for Christ. What does this show us about Peter and what can we learn from these verses?

- Good intentions but Peter does not really know his own heart.

- Peter had not yet learned to heed Jesus warnings of his fall.

- Self-confidence is not sufficient to joyfully suffer for Christ.

- Exposure of self-defeat, shame, bitter tears, and repentance helped Peter move closer to accepting suffering as part of God's will for him.

Often through defeat, agony and shame we turn to Jesus Christ, having gained a new insight into our sinfulness and Christ's mercy and forgiveness. We read:

him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel

and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Acts 2.23-24

and:

But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.

Acts 3.18

What does this show us about Christ and His suffering? It gives us insight into God's will regarding Christ's sufferings. Peter gained insight from the Word of God through the Holy Spirit about God's will for Christ to suffer. We are encouraged to thoroughly study the Scriptures regarding suffering according to God's will, as believers. We need the illumination of the Holy Spirit to help us understand from God's Word that suffering for the believer in Christ is part of living for Christ.

Consider Christ's suffering in this passage:

23 And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them.

24 And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is:

25 who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say, Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth set themselves in array, And the rulers were gathered together, Against the Lord, and against his Anointed:

27 for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together,

28 to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council foreordained to come to pass.

Acts 4.23-28

Similar to Christ, the apostles suffered persecution because of Him. Peter and John suffered persecution for Christ. We read of their response on one occasion:

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard.

Acts 4.19, 20

Determination to obey God, rather than man, is a further step in learning how to suffer joyfully for Christ. (See Acts 4.19, 20; 23-31). Here, we see the apostles declaring, to those who can inflict suffering, that the apostles will obey God rather than them. This is taking a stand for Christ's sake. What was the result? They were released with threats only and they went to fellow believers and experienced further filling of the Holy Spirit and

greater boldness to face the next round.

38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown:

39 but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God.

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles unto them, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name.

42 And every day, in the temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ.

Acts 5.38-42

Here, the apostles were beaten and released. Apostles, including Peter, went to their own, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for His Name.

Identification with the resurrected Christ through the power and enabling of the Holy Spirit helped Peter to rejoice in suffering for Christ. What was the rejoicing over?

We can begin to rejoice in suffering for Christ by following His example in sufferings:

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it

patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

1 Peter 2.20-23.

What can we learn from this passage?

Christ suffered innocently - “who did no sin, ... ” (vs 22)

Christ suffered graciously - “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; ...” (vs 23)

Christ suffered patiently - “... when he suffered, threatened not; ...” (vs 23)

Christ suffered confidently - “... but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:” (vs 23)

We also read:

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you:

13 but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy.

14 If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye; because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you.

15 For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or

an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters:

16 but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name.

17 For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?

18 And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

19 Wherefore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 4.12-19

Here, we are encouraged to suffer joyfully for Christ:

- a. because of the glory of God which will be revealed (4.13)
- b. because we are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us (4.14)
- c. in suffering according to God's will, commit yourself to Him. (4.19)

How could Peter, who strongly rejected any suffering, change to strongly encourage us to suffer for Christ's sake?

1. Peter began to understand that suffering for Christ was within God's will for him and all believers, according to God's Word.
2. We need to accept the fact that living for Christ will sooner or later bring suffering for Him, according to God's word.
3. We need to identify with Jesus Christ in all areas of life, including suffering, following His example.

4. We need to keep committing ourselves to Jesus Christ who will one day be the righteous judge of all things.

5. We need to accept the fact that there is fellowship in suffering for Christ, through the enabling of the HOLY SPIRIT.

How To Interpret Suffering In Our Lives

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

24 For in hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?

25 But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

7 *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.

Romans 8.18-27

What would it be like not to feel pain? Pain is a very important part of life. We couldn't really live without it for very long in this world. Have you ever thanked God for feeling pain? We have various kinds of pain: emotional, physical (tells us something is wrong), mental (again an indicator of imbalance), social (strained relationships) and spiritual (guilt, conviction, vicarious suffering). Feeling with others who suffer pain is a very important feeling while we still live in a world of sin. Pain is a result of our first parents' sinning. The Bible seems to say, in Revelation 21.4, that pain will be no more in the new Jerusalem. But between now and then we will always experience pain and suffering. Everyone suffers to some degree in their life. Suffering is feeling pain, rejection, discomfort, irritation, agony, hurt, and so on. How we interpret suffering in our lives will affect our whole Christian commitment and effectiveness for the Lord. We want to suggest several ways we can rightly interpret suffering in our lives so that we will benefit from the suffering that God allows to come into our lives.

1. Learn to accept suffering as a fact of life.

Just as death is universal and no respecter of persons, so suffering is also universal. All people

experience suffering to some degree regardless of age or belief. Christians are not exempt from suffering. In fact, becoming a Christian and being Spirit-filled increases our sufferings.

One lady who was suffering extensively in the hospital was becoming bitter toward God who allowed her to suffer so much. In fact, she could not understand how a God of love could allow her to suffer so much and for so long.

2. Try to discern God's will in suffering.

We do not always know the reason for our suffering. I believe it is important for us, as believers in Jesus Christ, to seek God's mind about our suffering. We may not always receive a satisfactory answer but it is important to discern as much as possible what God is trying to say to us through our sufferings.

There are various reasons for suffering and I will just mention a few.

1. Suffering may come through our own actions:

a) Maybe we have sinned and failed to repent of our sins. Ask God, by His Holy Spirit, to reveal any unconfessed sin in your life and deal with it. But don't prolong the agony and self-introspection. Deal with it believing the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind any unconfessed sin in your life.

b) Maybe we are not living right, that is, we have some bad habits of eating or drinking, or other indulgences that are causing us to suffer. Again, deal with them and trust the Lord for victory from them.

c) Maybe it is some physical disorder you are

suffering from. Get a thorough physical examination and try and have it corrected through prayer and medicine.

d) Maybe we are not learning to rest in the Lord. We are inflicting ourselves and worrying and being overly anxious. Again, remember as you learn to rest in the Lord that He will give the peace of mind and heart you long for.

May I reiterate, when you are seeking God's enabling to understand the purpose for your suffering, start with yourself and trust the Holy Spirit to help you deal with any form of sin in your life, or any physical or emotional problem you have that you have brought on yourself. Believe that the Lord can help you deal with it and rejoice in Him.

2. What others do to you may also cause sufferings.

This is somewhat more difficult to deal with. We have some practical advice in dealing with this source of suffering in I Peter 4:12-19. Painful trials are a way in which we participate in Christ's suffering. Being insulted for Christ's sake by others is evidence that the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. We must not suffer because of wrong doings. We need to learn to commit ourselves to God, our faithful Creator, and continue to do good. One of the most effective ways of dealing with sufferings inflicted by others is to commit ourselves to God and to pray for them, allowing God to deal with them in His own way.

3. We suffer because of what God allows to take place in our lives.

God allows Satan to buffet us and to cause us to

suffer intensely. Paul suffered greatly from a thorn in his flesh. Satan used this (whatever it was) to really create repeated sufferings in Paul's life. Paul prayed to God to remove it three times. But then Paul realized that God allowed this thorn to continue but promised to give Paul grace and strength to triumph over it. Job was a man of God. But God allowed Satan to really create havoc in Job's life. Job learned through much suffering and loss that he could not understand what was happening but that God allowed it and Job became more spiritually mature through suffering intensely.

Furthermore, God allows suffering as a witness to the unsaved. Many unsaved people have turned to Jesus Christ when they witnessed how a Christian suffered intensely, yet trusted God to glorify Himself through their life of suffering. F. B. Meyer said that the child of God is often called to suffer because there is nothing that will convince onlookers of the reality and power of true religion as suffering will do, when it is born with Christian fortitude. Everyone cannot be trusted with trial. All could not stand the fiery ordeal.

There are various ways you and I, as believers, can respond to suffering:

We can break down and give up.

We can break out and complain bitterly

We can break through and grow spiritually.

4. Focus on the hope in suffering.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Romans 8.19-22

Creation is expressing the hope in sufferings. Creation has been forced into suffering because of sin entering the human race. Creation is eagerly awaiting the release from suffering when all believers will experience transformed bodies without sin, when Jesus returns. Believers express hope in suffering. This is because God has given us the first fruits of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that He is dealing with sufferings now and, one day, will totally remove all sufferings. Yes, even now God wants us to live in His enabling and not live according to our sinful desires. He is able and willing to transform us, moment by moment, as we submit to Him in this life. We have that blessed hope that Jesus Christ is returning one day and we will be like Him. Therefore, we now seek to live cleansed and Spirit-filled lives to become more and more like Him here.

5. Focus on our Helper in suffering.

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.

Romans 8.26-27

One common experience we all have in suffering is that we feel weak and helpless many times. We don't understand fully the reason for suffering. We don't fully discern God's will in our suffering. We find it so hard to rejoice in the fact that one day all suffering will be no more. It is in these times that we need to be reminded of what God says in this passage. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. In our weakness, we can either become more and more distrustful toward the Lord or, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we can become more and more trusting in God, even though we are so weak and helpless. What will make the difference? If you and I accept our weakness in relation to not knowing the mind of God in our suffering, yet believing that the indwelling Holy Spirit is always there ready to pray for us to God, and even though we do not understand how He does it, we believe the Holy Spirit intercedes for us to God, if only we allow Him. The most reassuring fact is that when the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, He does so according to the mind and will of God. Therein, we can rest assured. The Spirit knows what God's will is in our suffering and we may not know, but we can rest assured that the Holy Spirit is praying in us, and through us, to God in accord with God's will and God will give us the strength we need to be alleviated from the suffering, or to receive grace to

grow spiritually as a result of the suffering He is allowing in our lives.

Don't ask "WHY ME, GOD?" but learn to ask "Why not me, God? What I really want is Your perfect will to conform me to becoming more and more like Christ. Therefore, whatever You allow to come into my life, I know You will give me the grace to benefit spiritually from it and be a blessing to others because of what You are doing in my life." Suffering is a fact of life.

How we interpret sufferings in our lives will greatly determine our spiritual maturity and of us becoming more and more like Christ.

Again, in conclusion :

1. Accept suffering as a fact of life. Christians are not exempted. In fact, the Bible says all that will live godly shall suffer persecution. Did you realize that after the disciples were Spirit-filled, in Acts, their sufferings increased greatly and became more frequent than before they were Spirit-filled?

2. Try to discern God's will in your sufferings and make sure you are not suffering because of unconfessed sins in your life. Realize suffering may come from others. Sometimes it is because of our own doings and sometimes suffering is because of our stand for Christ. Commit yourself and others who cause you suffering to Christ by praying on a regular basis. Suffering is a vital part of living for Christ when it comes as a result for our obedience to God's word.

3. Focus on the hope in suffering. Creation is looking for our redemption. We are longing for our redemption. Jesus has assured our redemption. One day, suffering will be no more.

4. Focus on the Helper in suffering. We can triumph in suffering like Joseph, Paul, Peter and Jesus, Himself. The Holy Spirit is praying for us when we are so weak and unable to sort out our problems. Count on it. Rejoice in it. And believe that God is doing all things well.

Jake Balzer

REFERENCE :

Scripture references taken from the American Standard Version.

ROMANS CHAPTER 2

OUTLINE :

I God's Judgment On Hypocritical Jews 2.1-24

II Circumcision And Being A True Jew 2.25

I God's Judgment On Hypocritical Jews

In the last Chapter (1), Paul dealt with the pagan world living in overt sin. Now, in Chapter 2, he deals with those who are hypocritical, those who are judging others for things they themselves are doing the same. There is a special context to Jews but broader

applications can be made. The culprit here is the hypocrite who lives to some degree an outwardly virtuous life. Many Jews of the day believed in a system of good works by which they would be rewarded and penalized but that their salvation rested in being a natural Jew and in circumcision. Paul confronts this error. Paul confronts those who rest in the fact that they have the Law yet don't keep it and still judge others like themselves. The secret hope of the hypocrite is that God will judge him in a superficial way, in the same way that most of his friends judge him. We read; "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (vs 4 KJV).

Living a double life is despising God's kindness, forbearance and longsuffering. The word "goodness," here, in the Greek is "chrestoes," meaning "goodness of heart, kindness."¹ The word "forbearance," here, in the Greek is "Arecho," meaning "hold back," or "delay of punishment."² The word "longsuffering" in the Greek is "makiothymia," meaning "patience."³ Rather than asking how come bad things happen to good people, ask how come anything good happens to us at all? Who of us are truly good? God's kindness and goodness does not ignore wickedness; it does lead us to repentance.

In this chapter, hypocrites are warned; "but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" (vs 5). The American Standard Version, here, uses the word "impenitent" for "unrepentant." This is a terrible mis-translation. Penitence is a Catholic term for sacramental works assigned after confession. This is not the meaning here at all. Unrepentant is "anetanos" in the Greek and is a refusal to turn from sin. 4

II Circumcision And Being A True Jew

For circumcision indeed profiteth, if thou be a doer of the law: but if thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become uncircumcision. (vs 25)

Physical circumcision means a cutting-away of the male foreskin and was commanded by God (See Genesis 17.11) as a sign of His covenant with the Jews. Many Jews trusted in circumcision to make them right with God. However, Paul says that circumcision is profitable only if you keep the Law. No one perfectly keeps it. If you break God's Law, natural circumcision becomes uncircumcision. However, there is another kind of circumcision, circumcision of the heart; this is required. We read; "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (vss 28-29). To have the circumcision of the heart is to be a born-again child of God. This is a spiritual experience entered into at conversion. It comes about by repentance and putting faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.

So, in this good, but heavy, chapter, Paul has strong warnings and rebukes for hypocrites who live outwardly a somewhat virtuous life but are corrupt and, in fact, live a double life. Because of God's mercy, goodness and forbearance, there has been a holding-back of His judgment. May we never despise God's goodness, forbearance and longsuffering and may these things lead us to repentance. May repentance lead us to faith, if we do not have it already, and may we have circumcised hearts.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES :

1. Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 44.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 45.

4. Ibid., 47.

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Earle, Ralph. *Word Meanings in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974.

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Scripture references taken from the American Standard Version and the King James Version.

ROMANS CHAPTER 3

OUTLINE :

I Advantages To Natural Jewish Heritage 3.1 - 4

II God's Righteousness Not Manipulated 3.5 - 8

III All Have Sinned 3.9 - 20

IV Righteousness Through Faith 3.21 - 31

I Advantages To Natural Jewish Heritage

Many would think that Jewish heritage is not an advantage considering the history of their persecutions, such as:

- slavery in Egypt 400 years

- Northern Kingdom decimated by Assyria with only a remnant taken to Assyria

- Southern Kingdom 70 years in Babylon

- conquered by Greece

- Roman occupation - tens of thousands of Jews crucified - over 1 million killed in the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Josephus

- Byzantine branch of Roman Empire persecuted them

- King Louis IX banished them from France

- Nazi - 6 million Jews killed

- today surrounded by hostile Arab nations

After establishing that natural Jewish heritage does not, in itself, guarantee salvation, Paul does say that there is an advantage to natural Jewish descent and, that is, that they have been given God's Words.

11 God's Righteousness Not Manipulated

Paul teaches here that God is faithful to the Jews even if they are not faithful to Him. Then he says that God being faithful to the Jews, under these circumstances, only further demonstrates His righteousness. Paul goes on to defend against those who would try to argue, something like this; "Well, then let's be unfaithful to God to show Him faithful and righteous."

III All Have Sinned

10 as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none that understandeth, There is none that

seeketh after God;

12 They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one:

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; With their tongues they have used deceit: The poison of asps is under their lips:

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways;

17 And the way of peace have they not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Romans 3.10-18

What does righteousness mean? It means “right standing with God.” We are told; “There is none that understandeth, ...” . (vs 11). (Also see Psalm 14.2; 53.3). Man doesn't naturally understand spiritual things without God enlightening him. I believe that even a man's conscience is a way that God uses to enlighten him to truth. We read; “ ... There is none that seeketh after God;” (vs 11). This is humbling considering that millions are occupied practising false religion. Many have zeal, but not a real searching after God. Jesus promised; “for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7.8). Yet, generally, mankind is still running from God, rather than seeking Him. Paul's words, “ ... There is none that doeth good, ...” (vs 12) are taken from Psalm 14.1.

Again, Paul says that they have all turned aside (see vs 12). Turned aside is “ekklino,” in the Greek, meaning “leaning in the wrong direction.” 1A This is like a

soldier running in the wrong direction while deserting. It is possible to run from God and God's way. 1B In Acts 9.2, the gospel is called “the Way. ” We read; “and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Also, we read; “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53.6 KJV). It is human nature to run from God's way and turn to our own way. Yet, despite our nature, we do not have to accept this as our final course.

By saying they have together become unprofitable (see vs 12), Paul means they have become spiritually useless, useless to the kingdom. Paul says; “ ... There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one:”. Here, “doeth good” is “chrostotes” in the Greek, meaning, “upright,” “moral,” “good.”²

We read:

Their throat is an open sepulchre; With their tongues they have used deceit: The poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

vss 13 -14

(Also, see Matthew 12.34-35; 18).

It presents a vivid picture to say that the throat is an open grave (see vs 13). An open grave reveals the corpse inside. We are told of the wicked in this passage, that their feet are swift to shed blood (see vs 15). Violence is an ongoing problem in our world. Statistics tell us that a child born in any one of the fifty largest American cities has a 1 in 50 chance of being murdered. We read that destruction and misery are in the ways of

the wicked (see vs 16). They are destructive. They suffer destruction. They suffer self-destruction, also. As well, the way of peace they have not known (see vs 17). There is no peace on this life-path.

Paul sums up this section; “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (vs 18). We read elsewhere, in Psalms; “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes.” (Psalm 36.1). This is speaking of reverential fear. We are emphatically told; “for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;” (Romans 3.23).

IV Righteousness Through Faith

21 But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction;

23 for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;

24 being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God;

26 for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.

27 Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? of works? Nay: but by a law of faith.

28 We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also:

30 if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.

31 Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.

Romans 3.21-31

Here, Paul teaches on the righteousness of God apart from the law. This righteousness, Paul says, is witnessed by the Law (see vs 21). It is witnessed by the Law but it is not produced by it. It is not man making himself righteous by keeping rules; it is man made righteous by the grace of God and it is experienced through faith (see vs 22). It is for all who believe (see vs 22).

When Paul says “being justified freely by His grace ...” (vs 24), “justified,” here, is “Dikaioo” in the Greek, which means “declared righteous.”³ God's declaration of the justification of a man or woman puts all accusation to rest. God imputes perfect righteousness to the believer by faith. We read; “... through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” (vs 24). The word “redemption,” here, is “apolytiosis” in the Greek and it appears only ten times in the New Testament. It has been defined as “release effected by payment of ransom.”⁴ We also read; “whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, ...” (vs 25). The word, “propitiation,” here, is “hilaslerion” in the Greek. Joseph Thayer claims it means “an expiatory sacrifice.”⁵ The word has the idea of appeasing by sacrifice.

In this great chapter, Paul teaches us about sin and righteousness by faith. All have sinned against God. All fail to understand. All run from God. All have become unprofitable. Yet, no one has to accept this as their final life-course. Instead, God has made a way for us to be righteous. God has made a way for us to have right standing with Him. This righteousness is being justified freely by His grace. It is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is a result of what Jesus has done by dying for us and it is experienced by faith in Jesus Christ. It is for all who believe.

Shawn Stevens

ENDNOTES :

1A. John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : Romans 1-8* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1991), 185. (Copyright held by John MacArthur Jr.)

1B. Ibid.

2. Ibid., 187.

3. Ibid., 208.

4. Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 80.

5. Joseph Thayer, quoted in Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 81.

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Scripture references taken from the American Standard Version and the King James Version.

