

INTRODUCTION

Every Bible expositor will agree that the epistle to the Romans is the epistle of Christian foundations. But the question remains, how many of us are familiar with those foundations? There are many who tell us that, for them at least, the epistle is "Too deep, too great, too profound. It may be alright for the theologians," they say, "but for ordinary people like ourselves it is far too difficult" . And so the greater majority are robbed of blessing.

Now, with any genuinely humble attitude, particularly in such a matter, we have the fullest sympathy. Romans is immense, its arguments are deep, but the fact remains that these are immensities and deeps to which God Himself has brought us, and into which He Himself is waiting to lead us. We would therefore plead with our brethren not to be turned aside from such a heritage. Rather would we say, "Trust the Holy Spirit; read the letter again and again, pray over it, and let your heavenly Father reveal to you these wonderful foundations of our faith."

And, to supplement our plea, we here submit something which may be a help to you in your own personal and prayerful explorations. 'Exploring the Foundations' is only brief and unpretentious, but herein may lie its appeal and also its usefulness. It is our prayer that the simple outlines of each chapter, and the key-comments given, may enable some of our fellow-explorers to detect and follow some of the main lines of truth which characterise this greatest of all Christian classics. The comments made have been carefully selected as representing the outstanding or governing emphases of each chapter, and there has certainly been no attempt at detailed exegesis. Rather has it been a matter of one fascinated explorer sharing with other explorers what he himself has begun to see, and to enjoy! We can only testify that as we ourselves have dug deep into this letter, we have had to exclaim, again and again, at ever-fresh glimpses given of the majesty of the gospel that has been entrusted to us. O that we might be helped of God to understand that gospel clearly, to preach it faithfully, and, indeed, to love it dearly.

CHAPTER ONE

The unrighteousness of men

I. The writer's introduction. (1-15)

His personal calling and commission. (1-6)

His salutation to the Roman believers. (7)

His longing to visit Rome. (8-15)

II. The announcement of the subject. (16, 17)

The gospel of Christ.

III. The launching of the theme, by a solemn emphasis on man's total depravity. (18-32)

Man's refusal of light as given in the visible creation. (18-21)

Man's deepening darkness in substituting idolatry for true worship. (22, 23)

Man's unchecked corruption, finally glorying in his sinfulness. (24-32)

In many ways, this is a dark and terrible chapter, showing the abysmal sinfulness of man, but it is the necessary beginning for all that will follow. We may say it is the black velvet on which will be placed the jewel of God's gospel. It shows us the pit from which we have been dug (Isa. 51:1), and the Egypt from which we have been redeemed. We may say, too, that the chapter is God's own X-ray report of what we all are inwardly and by nature. Every vileness mentioned is in your heart and mine, and the sins listed are the normal and characteristic expressions of our inherited nature, but held in check, maybe, by social restraints, personal pride, etc. (See Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Math. 15:19; Gal. 5:19-21; etc.)

In particular, the chapter illustrates the extreme danger of refusing God-given light. It explains how God gave a basic revelation of Himself in the splendours of creation (verse 20, see also Psa. 19:15, etc.), but when this revelation was ignored, inward darkness followed, idol worship and mounting immorality. We need to be warned that the same takes place, in principle, whenever we reject God-given light, be it the light of creation, or the light of the gospel, or, for that matter, any further light given to us regarding God's plans and purposes in His Son. To reject any light of that kind always brings in deepening darkness and decline.

CHAPTER TWO

The unexempted moralist

I. The gentile moralist. (1-16)

His equally immoral character. (1, 2)

His false sense of security. (3, 4)

His coming judgment. (5-16)

II. The Jewish moralist. (17-29)

His characteristic haughtiness. (17-20)

His equal sinfulness. (21-24)

His moral uncircumcision. (25-29)

We are shown here that mere knowledge of ethical standards, or the ability to teach those standards to others, does not secure for us any exemption from the condition, or condemnation, mentioned in chapter one. In other words, quickness to detect sin in others is no substitute for our own personal righteousness before God. We cannot hope for some favoured treatment just because we 'know it all'. Our own daily behaviour and our actual heart condition before Him, is what God is concerned about. And it is because of this that we all stand guilty before Him.

How we should thank God, then, that He Himself has devised a way for us to be fully approved and justified! This is to be explained in the chapters that follow, but the blessedness of that unfolding will only be realized when we have first seen ourselves helpless and undone before God. The point of this chapter is to show us how futile it is just to be able to boast of some superior ethical knowledge and how offensive to God when we use that so-called knowledge to point the finger at others. As we shall see a little later, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is the only way! (See Luke 18 :9-14).

It is most significant that this early and foundational chapter concentrates so strongly on the matters of pride and self-righteousness. These are matters that God specially abominates (see Prov. 6:16, 17; 16:5, etc.), and it was against people of this kind that Christ pronounced His most devastating 'woes' (Math. 23).

CHAPTER THREE

Man's ruin and God's remedy

I. The particular plight of the Jewish people. (1-11)

Their special advantages. (1, 2)

Their ingenious excuses. Vain attempts at exonerating themselves. (3-8)

Their equal sinfulness. All under sin; none righteous. (9-11)

II. The awful condition of humanity as a whole. (12-20)

Faithfully shown in Old Testament Scriptures. (NB. throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, eyes) (12-18)

Proved and established by the terms of the law. (19, 20)

III. The great glory of the gospel (21-31); six facts about God's wonderful gift of righteousness.

1. It is now revealed. (21)

2. It is available to faith. (22, 23)

3. It is based on redemption, i.e. on a wholly righteous basis. (24-26)

4. It eliminates all boasting. (27, 28)

5. It is available to all. (29, 30)

6. It fully honours the law. (31)

Here begins to be seen the divine remedy for the condition described in the opening chapters. God Himself has planned and provided a sure and perfect way to a wholly righteous standing in His presence. Righteousness by simple faith in Christ. And the provision is completely lawful for it is based on the work of redemption accomplished by our Saviour on the cross. All is now available to those who are prepared to take the sinner's place and put their whole trust in a living and a loving Christ. Such will find the sinner's pardon and, indeed, the sinner's new perfection, a wholly righteous standing before God in the spotless righteousness of Christ Himself. The law, by itself, was never able to accomplish anything like this, because of our law-breaking natures, but it did a good preparational work by proving us guilty indeed, and thus confronting us with our urgent need of mercy and outside help. This new gift of righteousness is step one towards actual daily victory and holiness. The believer now stands legally justified before God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a glorious beginning!

CHAPTER FOUR

The case of Abraham

I. The basis of Abraham's justification. (1-8)

- He too, was justified by faith. See Gen. 15:6; quoted in Rom. 4:3.
- David, also, sang about this blessing. See Psa. 32:1, 2; quoted in Rom. 4:6, 7.
- So this is not a 'New Testament Way of Salvation', but an 'All-Time Way of Salvation'.

II. The time of Abraham's justification. (9-12)

- It happened before his circumcision; that only came two chapters later, in Gen. 17.
- So circumcision is not necessary pre-requisite for justification, so that it is evidently available to Gentiles also.

III. The significance of Abraham's justification. (13-18)

It provides the true meaning of the great promise that Abraham would have a vast world-wide family, or offspring. That promise evidently relates, first and foremost, to the family of faith, the justified ones.

IV. The lesson from Abraham's justification (19-25)

- This original case is intended to be an example to us all. (see 23, 24).
- We also must be strong in faith; not counting up the earthly possibilities, but counting on the heavenly promises! (20)

This chapter shows that justification by faith is not a new doctrine. It is the only way God has ever had of receiving men into fellowship with Himself. We should realize that the Calvary-work of Christ is something that has been eternally known and evaluated in the heart and mind of God (see Rev. 13:8) and even in Old Testament times it was already God's secret basis for receiving and justifying those who were prepared to believe His Word. This is how Abraham was justified (Gen. 15:1-6); also Noah (Heb. 11:7); and even as far back as Abel (Heb. 11:4). Whether they themselves knew much or little, or even nothing of God's secret, their actual acceptance was still based on that Calvary-work of Christ. Its efficacy became theirs because they simply and humbly believed God. Yet we need to notice that their faith, even in those days, was something very living and very active. It was not just theoretical, or superficial, but genuine and real. And that is the faith that justifies us; faith from the heart (Rom. 10:9), and faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6).

CHAPTER FIVE

Fruits and roots of justification

I. The fruits of justification. (1-11); five outstanding fruits are mentioned, but there are many more.

1. Peace with God. (See Isa. 32:17) (1)
2. Entrance to a whole realm of grace. (2a)
3. Happy anticipation of coming glory. (2b)
4. A new ability to rejoice in times of suffering. (3-10)
 - Knowing that suffering develops character. (3-5)
 - Knowing that God is now fully on our side. (6-10)
5. A worshipful joy in God Himself. (11)

II. The roots of justification (12-21); two main roots are indicated.

The grace of God (see verses 15 and 17). (12-17)

The obedience of one Man, Christ (contrasted with the disobedience of Adam). (18-21)

What wonderful blessings come into our lives when once we are justified! First and best, there is a beautiful peace with God Himself (verse 1). The old estrangement and enmity have ceased; through Christ we are reconciled (see also verse 10). And this is but the beginning of a whole life-time of receiving everything from a gracious God by simple faith, for we have been brought into, and are now continually standing in (2a), the grace of God. We are consciously living in a new world of infinite grace and, on that basis, may receive all that we shall ever need, be it for salvation, or sanctification, or service or anything else! As John puts it, we receive grace upon grace; like successive waves of the sea breaking in on the sea-shore (see also Psa. 68:19; Lam. 3:22, 23, etc.).

In connection with the latter section of the chapter (verses 18-21), it is helpful to realize that the death of one Man, Christ, was more than adequate to atone for the sins of millions, in so far as those millions are really only one man (Adam) in multiple expression. They are all Adam's offspring and were in him when he was created and when he sinned. Christ is now the second man, dying for the sins of the first man (see also 1 Cor. 15:45-47). Even on that ground, then, the death of Christ is more than adequate, to say nothing of the higher fact that He is also the Son of God.

CHAPTER SIX

Dead unto sin and alive unto god

I. A great revelation regarding the cross. (1-10)

We have died with Christ to all the demands of our old master (sin). (1-7)

We have been raised with Christ to the service of our new Master (God). (8-10)

II. A great response in the light of the cross. (11-23)

The response of 'reckoning' (counting on the truth revealed). (11, 12)

The response of 'yielding' (dedicating to another service). (13-23)

The epistle now takes up the matter of our practical daily victory over sin, and we see that this, too, is assured to us by the cross.

The key thought in the whole chapter is laid down in verse seven, reminding us of the simple fact that, once a person is dead, he obviously cannot sin. This position of being dead is something which we ourselves may now claim in view of the fact of our own judicial share in the death and dying of Christ (verses 2, 3, 6, 8, 11).

Let us remember that when we are told that our old man is crucified (verse 6), this refers in 'the first place to God's estimate of what took place at the cross. God sees that Christ died not only as our substitute (i.e. instead of us), but also as our representative (as us, i.e. we died there in Him). "If one died for all, then all died," says the Word (2 Cor. 5:14). Now we are simply to reckon (verse 11) as God reckons, and enter into the associated blessings.

so this essential and longed-for victory is also by simple faith! When we earlier believed 'that Christ died for us, we received forgiveness. Now we correspondingly believe that Christ died as us (meaning we died in Him) and, hiding in that death and claiming we have participated in it, we experience a daily deliverance from that old tyrant, sin. According to our faith, even in this matter, so is it unto us. (Math. 9:29).

It is a wonderful thing when we see, by divine revelation, that our old sinful nature was crucified and put to a real and final death in the crucifixion of Christ. So we are not delivered by struggling and striving, but by seeing ourselves dead ... in Him. This deliverance, however, will only be known by those who hunger for it (Math. 5:6) and who, in their hunger, discover the Calvary way and again put their trust in the Lord. Also, seeing it is now Christ who is our life, all our members have to be handed over for His use, that is yielded to Him for His continuing service to God ... through us!

CHAPTER SEVEN

Married to Another

(This is a further outworking of the message in chapter six, for we have not only died to sin, but we have died to our first husband, the meticulous law, and are now married to our new husband, the risen Christ).

I. The blessedness of the new marriage. (1-6)

It is quite legitimate, for we have died to our former husband, the law. (1-3)

It means fruit for God. This is the great object in view. (4-6)

II. The miseries of the old marriage (7-23), because of:

The high standards of the impeccable law. It is good (verse 12). (7-14)

The low abilities of my feeble flesh. I am carnal. (verse 14). (15-23)

(A clear case of incompatibility!)

III. The relief at the change. (24, 25)

"Who shall deliver"?

"I thank God ... Jesus Christ"

This chapter continues to unfold the wonderful theme of our having died in Christ. In Chapter six we saw that we had died to a powerful enemy (sin). Now, in this chapter, we see that we have died to a would-be friend, the law. There was nothing at all wrong with the law; its standards and intentions were, all good (verse 12); in fact it is referred to as glorious in 2 Cor. 3:7, 9 and 11. The trouble was that our old nature could not rise to those good standards and good intentions—rather the reverse. The marriage, therefore, did not work. The old husband (the law) only humiliated and tormented us. But seeing we have now died in Christ, the old marriage is lawfully annulled and we find, to our joy, that we have already contracted a new marriage, this time with the risen Christ. This is a happy marriage, indeed, and we bring forth fruit unto God!

There has been much controversy over verses 15-25 and the question whether Paul was living a defeated life when he wrote this letter! The final verses of the chapter (24 and 25), however, answer this question with a very decisive no. And so does chapter eight. In any case, we just need to see that Paul is not here discussing his own personal experience as an individual. The 'I' of verses 15-25, and through the chapter, is simply used to identify universal man, or humanity, as under the law and without the influences of the gospel. An individual who has heard and responded to the gospel is in a very different position.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit

I. The present blessedness of those who are indwelt. (1-17)

Ten beautiful features are here listed: No condemnation, made free from the law of sin and death etc. (see, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16).

II. The future glory of those who are indwelt. (18-25)

It will abundantly compensate for all present suffering. (18)

It will herald a great release for the whole material creation. (19-22)

It will be our own coming of age (adoption, full sonship). (23)

The very contemplation of it blesses us even now. (24, 25)

III. The aided prayer-life of the who are indwelt. (26, 27)

The Holy Spirit is given to help our infirmity in this important matter.

(Spirit-filled people will evidently be praying people!)

IV. The assured confidence those who are indwelt. (28-39)

We know that all things are working for our good. (28)

We know we shall be fully conformed to Christ's image. (29, 30)

We know we have the answer to all accusers. (31-34)

We know we cannot be separated from God's love. (35-39)

This chapter introduces the matter of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the word Spirit or spirit being mentioned more than twenty times in all. It is clearly stated that all believers have the Holy Spirit (verse 9 and see also 1 Cor. 12:13). But evidently we must recognize and exploit that glorious possession. Having been sealed by Him at conversion, (meaning marked as God's property, Eph. 1:13), we must go on to be filled by Him (Eph. 5:18) and to know increasingly the blessings of His continual control.

We note that the Holy Spirit is here named the Spirit of Christ (verse 9 and see also John 14:18), so it is evidently by this indwelling that we actually enjoy our share in the resurrection-life of Christ—as previously mentioned (see Rom. 6:11; 7:4, etc.).

According to the chapter, the possession of God's Spirit introduces us right now to an entirely new element, or dimension, of living. Mysteriously, yet truly, we are in the Spirit (verse 9), even as the Spirit is in us. Comparable, perhaps, to a coal being in a fire and the fire in the coal; or, shall we say, a shell in the sea and sea in the shell! How wonderful to have our whole being in God, even now! And the chapter certainly shows us that there are undreamed-of blessings awaiting the 'indwelt ones' in the ages that are to come (e.g. verse 17, 18, 23 and 30). Indeed, in all respects. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (verse 37).

CHAPTER NINE

Israel and God's great sovereign

(By sovereignty we mean God's absolute and unquestionable rights to do just as He Himself wills, in any place, at any time.)

I The early expression of God's sovereignty: Choosing and enriching Israel; the nation that will bring forth Christ. (1-5)

II. The elective operation of God's sovereignty. God's sovereign plans for a person are sometimes fulfilled in one chosen section of that person's offspring. Three examples are given regarding this. (6-13)

1. There is now a chosen Israel (i.e. Jewish believers) taken from the wider national Israel. The word of promise, then, is not without effect. (6)

2. There was such a chosen representative from Abraham, i.e. Isaac. (7-9)

3. There was such a chosen representative from Isaac, i.e. Jacob. (10-13)

III. The unlimited rights of God's sovereignty. (14-29)

This is shown in the Bible. (14-18)

- The statement of Moses. (15)

- The case of Pharaoh. (17)

This allows of no questions from the clay to the Potter. (19-21)

This consistently manifests the divine glory. Be it expressed in judgment or in mercy, the divine character is revealed. (22-26)

This leaves God free to save many or few as He chooses. (27-29)

- Isaiah speaks of only a few saved from a vast national Israel. (27)

IV. The revealed requirement of God's sovereignty. (30-33)

It has become evident that God has chosen to save all those who will believe, whatever be their race. This itself is a matter of God's own sovereign plan and design.

This section of the epistle (Chapters 9, 10 and 11) is focussed, particularly, on the nation of Israel, and answers questions that could arise in connection with God's dealings with that nation, -in view of the present Gospel offer to 'all men everywhere' (Acts, 17.30). The chapter outlined above certainly leaves us worshipping at the feet of our Sovereign and Saving God, Who has all nations under His hand at all times, and who works all things after the counsel His own will (Eph. 1.11).

Being absolute Sovereign, God certainly has all rights to accept or reject whomsoever He will. But our chapter shows that He has personally elected to bless and save unworthy sinners, whoever and wherever they may be, provided they will believe. There is, of course, no moral merit in this believing, all the merit is in the One believed. Those who take the proffered gift are still only sinners, but simply availing themselves of a wholly undeserved pardon, and appropriating a completely unearned bounty. Sovereignty and grace, then, have combined to save us, be we Jews or Gentiles, but always on the same simple basis of genuine faith. In view of all this we bow and worship.

CHAPTER TEN

Israel and the Christian gospel

I. The apostle's prayer for Israel, that they might be saved. (1)

II. The blind zeal of Israel. Trying to establish their own righteousness. Ignorant regarding the gift of God's righteousness. (2, 3)

III. The great gospel to Israel (as also to the Gentiles). (4-17)

A Divine offer of salvation by faith alone. (4-11)

A Divine offer made to all men equally. (12-13)

A Divine offer that requires worldwide proclamation. (14-17)

IV. The shameful rejection by Israel. (18-21)

In spite of having heard the offer. (18)

In spite of a special provocation, i.e. despised Gentiles entering into the joy of God's salvation! (19, 20)

In spite of God's own personal pleading with them. (21)

As we said, this section of the epistle has special application to the nation of Israel; a nation that rejected God's Son and still rejects God's gospel. But it is also appropriate to all who have what we might call the Israelitish mentality, i.e. an undue confidence in some hereditary standing before God. (It is essential to realize that while Israel, as a nation, was chosen for a special function in the overall Divine plan and programme, this did not carry with it any special standing as regards Divine righteousness). We, too, can be deceived by thoughts of hereditary advantage and religious privilege. With such things in mind we can be jealous to establish our own righteousness before God. How much better to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God, and humbly believe Him for our salvation! Indeed this is the only way! Those who do this will actually experience in themselves God's wonderful salvation, and may then have a privileged share in the worldwide proclamation of this gospel. On the other hand, how terrible to be faithfully forewarned, as Israel was, and yet lost. O that we might learn this lesson!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Israel and the ancient covenants

I. The encouraging significance of Israel's converted minority. (1-6)

They portray God's continuing covenant faithfulness to Israel; He has not cast them away (see verse 5).

As did the similar few in Elijah's day (see verses 2-4).

II. The positive function of Israel's blinded majority. (7-16)

Their present darkness is leading on to fuller blessing for all in the end. Note the designed process: Their fall makes way for the present Gentile entrance. (11)

This Gentile entrance provokes Israel to jealousy. (11 end)

This jealousy brings in Israel's fullness, i.e. the provoked quest leads to much spiritual blessing and salvation within the nation; many Israelites saved. (12)

This spiritual revival in Israel will ultimately bring much blessing to the world, too, and this will be the true fulfilment of the ancient covenants. So, even now, God is wonderfully using Israel, even in her blindness. (12-16)

III. The complete impossibility of Gentile pride that they are the ones now being saved. (17-24)

Four good reasons are given why such pride would be unreasonable. Trace them.

IV. The happy prospect of Israel's spiritual recovery, i.e. a great gospel harvest within Israel, following a preceding Gentile harvest or 'fullness of the Gentiles'. (25-32)

This was foretold in the Old Testament. (25-27)

This fulfils, and indeed glorifies, their original election by God. (28, 29)

This all takes place by believing the gospel and receiving God's mercy. (30-32)

V. The resultant overflow of the writer's heart. (33-36)

Reviewing and appraising these age-long operations of God's gracious sovereignty.

This is a somewhat longer outline, but it should facilitate a grasping of the heart stirring message of the chapter. What a wonderful God we have! Truly He is the King of Nations. (See Rev. 15'3 Margin), and has "the whole wide world in His hands" !

The reader will be helped if he bears in mind that the point mainly in view throughout this section is that of God's sovereign attitudes to nations, rather than His saving dealings with individuals, though that, of course, is involved and implicit. This apprehending of nations relates always to allotted privilege in God's unfolding purposes. It is mainly a matter of God securing to Himself suitable and appropriate instruments for the scheduled outworking of His redeeming intentions in the world and, in the end, is calculated to obtain a fuller entrance for, and acceptance of, His gospel.

The field surveyed is indeed a vast one, and we need not mind if we do not grasp it all immediately. Indeed, the whole passage heads up in the clear statement that God's judgments are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out (11:33). It certainly takes us out of our own depth and leaves us worshipping.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Man's responses to God's mercies

(All the exhortations of this chapter are based on the mercies of God (verse 1). These mercies have been progressively unfolded in the preceding chapters.)

- I. The response of full surrender; your bodies a living sacrifice. (1)
- II. The response of otherworldliness; not conformed, but transformed. (2)
- III. The response of sober-minded humility, for even our faith comes from God. (3)
- IV. The response of interrelated service, for we are members of one body. Salvation inseparable from incorporation, and co-related service. (4-8)
- V. The response of brotherly kindness; The 'welfare-family'; each living for the others. (9, 10)
- VI. The response of practical diligence in business, in prayer and in generosity to others. (11-13)
- VII. The response of godliness in adversity, for that is ever the ultimate in Christian experience and testimony. (14-19)

Here begins the application and outworking of all that has gone before regarding God's gospel and His way of salvation.

The responses listed may be seen as the emanations of the Christ-life now resident and active within us. Viewed together, they form a single composite picture of the beautiful and balanced character of our Lord. Chapter eight told us that we were to be conformed to His image (verse 29) and, evidently, the conforming work begins right now, as we respond to the wonderful mercies of God. Our blessed Lord begins to be seen in those responses.

It is important to notice that this key chapter on outworkings revolves around the matter of our present incorporation into Christ as members of His body (verses 4-8) and our relationships together as brethren (verses 9 and 10). This accords with the whole Bible emphasis on the fact that God is ever working towards the securing of a united people; a body, a bride, a house, etc. Individual salvation, then, and personal sanctification, are but the beginning. God is only fully satisfied when we are living and serving together as the members of His Son. This undoubtedly requires further inworkings of the cross, but that also is for our good and His glory! And it definitely highlights the need for Christ-governed local churches where Christ is all and in all and where His fullness may be revealed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Guidelines for Christian living

I. The need for civil obedience. Let every soul be subject ... no exceptions. Rulers are ordained of God; ... so it is a spiritual issue. (1-7)

II. The need of a heart of love. (8-10)

Love is our universal debt. (8a)

Love is the fulfilling of the law. (8b-10)

III. The need of preparing for the day. (11-13)

We must awake out of sleep. (11)

We must put on the armour of light (right living, Living N.T.) We evidently awake to a spiritual warfare; comp. Eph. 6:11, 12. (12-13)

IV. The need of being clothed with Christ. (14a)

Our true day-time attire! Also to be worn by us in these pre-dawn hour.

V. The need of denying the flesh. (14b)

No provision for it, i.e. no expectations that it will overcome us.

The emphasis in chapter twelve was on our relationships with individuals. But here we are reminded of our responsibilities to the state (something we could be tempted to neglect, especially in places like Rome, and other heathen countries.)

And what helpful keys are here provided for us; keys for Christian behaviour in its many and varied settings. First we are shown that the fulfilling of all obligations is really rooted in and compassed by the practice of love. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (Ch. 5:5). Then we are deeply provoked by the reminder of the soon-dawning of an entirely new day, surely at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally there is the presentation of the wonderful fact that even now we may put on the Lord Jesus Christ, experiencing Him as our day-by-day enablement for every demand. Here is help indeed for the Christian citizen.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

More Guidelines for Christian living

I. The need for tolerance in ceremonial matters. (1-5)

Food problems. (1-4)

Special days. (5)

II. The need of recognising each other's heart attitude, to the Lord Himself. (6-9)

Divergent actions often flow from uniform motives. (6)

It is this inner attitude to Himself that the Lord really looks for. (7-9)

III. The need of recognising each other's accountability to God. (10-13)

We shall all stand before His judgment seat. (10-12)

We ourselves must not assume the role of judge (see also verse 10.) (13)

IV. The need of brotherly consideration and care; never stumbling a brother unnecessarily. (14-21)

V. The need of the confidence test as regards our own behaviour. (22, 23)

What is not of faith (done confidently) is sin.

The focus of this chapter is on the nature of our relationship with our fellow-believers, particularly those who are young and only emerging from binding traditions and established customs. We are reminded that our final responsibility, as theirs, is to the Lord Himself, and that in such cases the real test of any action is how much it contains of genuine devotion to the one great Master of us all. And we are urged to let love dictate all our attitudes to such brethren. Above all, we must be sure that, in our own behaviour, nothing is admitted or allowed concerning which we have inner doubts.

How remarkable that the great apostolic writer could manifest such deep concern for the new beginners and advocate such considerate and patient attitudes. This is another expression of the Christ-life.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Final appeals to the Romans

I. An appeal for Christian unity (1-7), characterized by:

Sacrificial Service to our brethren. (1-4)

God-glorifying oneness with each other. (5, 6)

Open-hearted reception of each other. (7)

II. An appeal for world concern, i.e. an outreach with the gospel to, all nations. (8-29)

This will be stimulated by considering:

The fundamental outreach of Christ Himself. (8-14)

The corresponding outreach of the writer. (15-29)

III. An appeal for prevailing prayer. (30-33)

Paul pleads with the Roman Christians that they agonize (lit.) with him in prayer over four specific matters:

Deliverance from religious enemies. (31a)

Acceptance of his ministry to the saints. (31b)

A visit to Rome. (32a)

Resultant refreshing in his own spirit. (32b)

Paul's ultimate burden in this epistle is the same as that which was manifested by Christ in his great prayer of John seventeen. In both cases there is the deep concern that, *a.* God's people may be one and, *b.* that the world may know ... (see John 17:21-23). These are ultimate matters indeed and the second is clearly dependent on the first. How often we have to be reminded that it is the demonstrated oneness of God's people that makes possible an effective impression on the lost (see also Ezek. 36:23b, etc.).

All that has preceded in Romans, then, is expected to bring us to a great family fellowship which will manifest itself in a great missionary outreach. And all is to be encompassed in a great ministry of prayer. Summarizing the chapter, we could say, we are to look to our brethren, we are to look to a lost world and, most of all, we are to look to God in earnest believing prayer.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Farewell greetings, commendations, and warnings

I. The message concerning Phebe, who had succored many; commending her to the love and care of the saints at Rome. (1-2)

II. The greetings to sundry believers. (3-16)

Twenty six are personally named with appropriate comments in each case. What a shepherd Paul was!

III. The warning against schism makers; Mark them and avoid them. (17, 18)

IV. The commendation of Christian obedience in the church at Rome. It causes gladness, and assures victory. (19, 20)

V. The greetings from Paul's companions. (21-24)

Eight are mentioned; each a valued helper in his own way.

VI. The closing benediction. (25, 27)

Concerning One who has power to establish us; to him be glory through Jesus Christ forever and ever, amen.

This chapter sets before us an impressive and heart-warming picture of true Christian relationships and we do well to notice this beautiful example of mutual appreciation and deep concern one for another. The great apostle himself seems so approachable, so affectionate and so bound up with his brethren. He even sends his classic letter in humble fellowship with his little-known companions and under their signatures. This underlines the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is not some massive entity which virtually obliterates the needs and interests of individuals; rather is it a spiritual family which appreciates and takes full account of each contributing component. How right that such a chapter should contain a warning against division makers, lest this precious testimony be spoiled. And how appropriate it is that the great monumental letter closes with its special emphasis on God Himself and His power to establish us ... according to this precious gospel. Indeed, indeed, to such a God be everlasting glory through Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

As we now look back over these chapters, we are constrained to say with the hymn-writer:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of 'the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled.*

God has indeed done a wonderful thing for us in His Son and this letter to the Romans is the place where it is most clearly set before us. The epistle begins with a God who is too holy to behold iniquity and then goes on to portray that same God as the all-gracious One who has made provision for lost sinners to be forever justified in His sight; and all through simple faith. Next, He is shown as the God who supplies to His justified ones a complete newness of life, as we reckon ourselves crucified with Christ and sharers in His resurrection. We learn too that by giving us His Holy Spirit to indwell us, God has positively baptized us into Himself, making Himself our new sphere of living and our ever-present sufficiency for worthy testimony, both individual and corporate. All this takes place against the background of the ancient covenants which God is now faithfully keeping in ways we would never have dreamed of. At the end of the letter, this great redeeming God shows us how His marvellous plan of salvation works out in terms of practical daily behaviour, all to the praise of His glory.

The whole inspired document seems to find its central focus in the exultant words:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33)

And this, notice, leads straight into the great exhortation:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice ... which is your reasonable service." (Rom 12:1)

Surely, all of us who have joined together in these explorations of the great foundations of our faith will feel the Spirit's urge to identify with this Christ of the gospel as never before. Let us then come immediately to the altar of His cross and there present ourselves to live henceforth for God and God alone. Whether or not we have really seen these foundations, and the founder Himself will be shown by whether or not we are genuinely surrendered to this wonderful Christ and are abidingly available to Him.

Let us pray, fellow-explorers, one for another. And to God be the glory!