

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS :

AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

THIS paraphrase follows the pattern of the paraphrases of Galatians and Colossians recently published in our pages.

I. PROLOGUE. Ch. 1: 1-15

(a) *Salutation.* Ch. 1: 1-7

To all the beloved people of God who live at Rome, called by Him to be holy men and women, this letter comes from me, Paul—slave of Christ Jesus, apostle by divine vocation, set apart for the proclamation of God's good news, the good news which He promised of old through His prophets in the holy scriptures, the good news which tells of His Son, born of David's line as regards His human descent, but effectually designated Son of God by the Holy Spirit in consequence of His rising from the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord. Grace and peace be yours, from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

(b) *Introduction.* Ch. 1: 8-15

First of all, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ on behalf of you all, because your faith is a matter of public report throughout the whole world. I call God to witness—God, whom I serve with my whole spirit in proclaiming the good news about His Son—that I mention you in my prayers unceasingly. I have been praying that now at length, if it be His will, I may have my journeys so ordered that I can pay you a visit. I long to see you, so that I can impart to you some spiritual gift by which you may be the more firmly established—I mean, I hope to receive encouragement from you as well as give it to you when I come among you, by the fostering of mutual confidence between you and me. You should know, my brothers, that I have often planned to visit you, but have always been prevented up to now from carrying out my plan. You see, I should like to have some fruit from my missionary activity among you as well as in other parts of the Gentile world. For I count myself to be a debtor—a debtor to Greeks and barbarians, to civilized and uncivilized alike. So I

am eager to discharge part of this debt of mine by proclaiming the good news to you Romans also.

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

(a) *The Theme of the Gospel: The Righteousness of God Revealed.* Ch. 1: 16-17

Believe me, I have no reason to be ashamed of the good news which I proclaim. No indeed; it is God's effective means for the salvation of all who believe, for Jews in the first place but for Gentiles too. Why? Because in this good news there is a revelation of God's righteousness—a way of righteousness based on the principle of faith, and offered to all men for acceptance by faith, in accordance with the words of the prophet: "He who is righteous by faith shall live" (Hab. 2: 4).

(b) *Sin and Retribution: The Universal Need Diagnosed.* Ch. 1: 18-3: 20.

(i) *The Pagan World.* Ch. 1: 18-32

How necessary it is that such a way of righteousness should be revealed will appear when we consider how plainly God's wrath is revealed from heaven against every form of impiety and unrighteousness practised by men who unrighteously suppress the truth. I say they suppress it, because whatever can be known of God lies open before their eyes: God has clearly shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible essence, His everlasting power and divinity, can be appreciated as it is perceived by means of His works. Men have therefore no excuse for their behaviour. They had received the knowledge of God, and yet did not give Him the glory or gratitude which are His due as God; their reasonings landed them in sheer frustration, and their mind, deprived of true understanding, became shrouded in darkness. They claimed to be wise, but were led into folly; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image framed to represent mortal man, or even birds and beasts and reptiles.

So God gave them over, in accordance with their inward desires, to impurity, to the shameful misuse of their bodies, because they had exchanged His truth for the fundamental falsehood—worshipping and serving created things instead of the Creator, the One who is blessed for ever. Amen. This, I say, was why God gave them over to shameful passions. Women and men alike indulged in unnatural perversions, and reaped in their own bodies the baneful harvest they had sown.

So then, since they did not see fit to retain that knowledge of God which was originally given to them, God gave them over to an abandoned state of mind, which led them into shameful ways of life, characterized by every kind of unrighteousness, malice and evil covetousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malignity. That is why we have the constant spectacle of men and women who are malicious whisperers and slanderers, godless, insolent, haughty, boastful, evil schemers, disobedient to parents, senseless, faithless, completely lacking in affection or pity. They know that God has decreed death as the penalty for such behaviour; yet they not only indulge in it but actually approve of such indulgence.

(ii) The Moralist. Ch. 2: 1-16

In the light of all this, sir, you stand before God with no excuse. Yes, I mean you, whoever you are, when you pass judgment on your fellows; by passing judgment on another you pass sentence on yourself. Why? Because you do the same things as those whom you condemn. We know that God's judgment falls with true impartiality on those who indulge in such behaviour. Do you actually think, sir, that you will escape God's judgment because you condemn those who indulge in such behaviour, when all the time you do the same things yourself? Or do you despise His abundant kindness and forbearance and patience? Don't you know that God's kindness is intended to give you opportunity to repent? But instead of repenting, you maintain a hard and impenitent heart, and thus store up for yourself an accumulation of wrath which will be discharged on the day of wrath, the day when God's righteous judgment is revealed. For God will repay every man according to his works. Those who aim at glory and honour and immortality by perseverance in good behaviour will receive eternal life; those who are contentious, who obey unrighteousness instead of truth, will receive wrath and retribution. I repeat: tribulation and distress will be the portion of every individual who does wrong, Jews in the first place but Gentiles as well; glory, honour and peace will be the portion of everyone who does right, Jews in the first place but Gentiles as well: for there is no favouritism with God. Those who have sinned without reference to a code of law will be judged without reference to a code of law; those who have sinned although they had a code of law to direct them will be judged by the standard of that code of law. It does not help at all to have the law if you don't keep it; it is not those

who *hear* the law who are righteous in God's sight, but those who *do* it. When Gentiles, who no such law as the Jews have, do by natural instinct the things which the law prescribes, they are, as it were, a law for themselves in spite of having no law. In fact, they make it plain that the form of conduct which the law enjoins is engraved in their hearts and attested by their conscience, while they either accuse or excuse themselves by the ethical arguments in which they engage with one another. Thus they too anticipate that day when God will judge the hidden secrets of men's hearts—and He will do that through the agency of Christ Jesus, according to the good news which I proclaim.

(iii) The Jew. Ch. 2: 17-3: 8

But if you bear the honoured name of "Jew", if you rely upon your possession of the law, if you glory in your knowledge of the true God and are conversant with His will, if you approve the better course because you are instructed by the law, and confidently believe yourself to be a guide of the blind, a light to those who walk in darkness, a trainer of the foolish, a teacher of babes, since you have in the law the pattern of knowledge and truth—what have I to say to you? This! You teach others; will you not teach yourself for a change? You proclaim "Thou shalt not steal"; do *you* ever steal? You say "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; is your own record clean in this respect? You abominate idols; do you ever enrich yourself at the expense of heathen temples? You glory in your possession of the law; but do you bring God's name into disrepute by the way you break the law? Why, the Scripture says that "God's name is blasphemed among the heathen because of you" (Isa. 52: 5).

Now listen: there is real benefit in being sealed with the sign of Abraham's covenant, provided that you keep the law. But if you break the law, you are no better than any uncircumcised Gentile. Conversely, if an uncircumcised Gentile keeps the law, is he not as good as any duly circumcised Jew? Of course he is; and a Gentile by birth who keeps the law will condemn you if you break it, even if you have been circumcised according to the strict letter of the law. You see, it is not a question of being a Jew in virtue of natural descent and a bodily mark. The word "Jew" properly means "praiseworthy"; and so the true Jew, the man who is truly praiseworthy, is he whose heart is pure in God's sight, whose circumcision is not literal but spiritual—the circumcision of the heart, as the prophets called it. He is a true Jew in the

proper sense of the word, but his praise is not a matter of human applause but of divine approval.

Well then, you say, is there any advantage in being a Jew? Does it help at all to belong to the circumcised people? Most certainly, from every point of view. First of all, it was to them that the oracles of God were entrusted. But says someone, they proved unfaithful to their trust, did they not? I admit they did, but does anyone suppose that their faithlessness will nullify God's faithfulness? Perish the thought! Let God's truth abide, though every man should be found a liar—as the Scripture says, "that Thou mayest be vindicated when Thou speakest, and win the case when Thou enterest into judgment" (Ps. 51: 4). What shall we say then? If our sin establishes God's righteousness, is God unjust when He exacts retribution for our sin? (Pardon the expression; for the moment I indulge in a merely human argument.) Of course not; if that were so, how could God perform His proper function as Judge of the world? But the objector persists: if my falsehood (he says) makes God's truth shine more brightly by contrast, and thus redounds to His glory, why am I condemned as a sinner? Since the end—God's glory—is good, does that not justify the means, which in this case is my sin? As a matter of fact, some people slander us by saying that this is what our good news amounts to: "Let us do evil, so that good may come of it". But that slander is such a contradiction in terms that it stands self-refuted.

(iv) All Mankind under Condemnation (3: 9-20)

Well then, we who are Jews may have advantages which Gentiles lack, but are we any better than they are? No, not at all. We have already charged all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, with being sinners. The situation might well be summed up in the words of Scripture:

No one is righteous, no, not one;
 There is none who understands,
 None who seeks God.
 All have turned aside and become unprofitable;
 No one does good, not even one (Ps. 14: 1-3).
 Their throat is a yawning grave;
 They have practised deception with their tongues (Ps. 5: 9).
 Inside their lips is the poison of asps (Ps. 140: 3).
 Their mouths are full of bitter cursing (Ps. 10: 7).
 Their feet make haste to shed blood;
 Ruin and misery mark their paths,
 And the way of peace is unknown to them (Isa. 59: 7 f.).
 They have no fear of God before their eyes (Ps. 36: 1).

Let no one say that these words apply to Gentiles only; they come from the sacred law of the Jews, and we know very well that the law addresses itself to those who are under the law. The purpose in all this is to shut everyone's mouth, and bring in a verdict of guilty at God's judgment bar against the whole world of mankind. By the works of the law "no human being will be justified in His sight" (Ps. 143: 2); the law brings men's sin to light and teaches them that they are sinners.

(To be continued)