

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – The apostle Paul in Rome – 30 September-6 October 2017

Christ would have us have His faith so that His glory be seen in us by the whole world. Thus Paul says, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Romans 1:8). Reading for our study: Romans 1:7; 15:14, 20-29; Acts 28:17-31; Philippians 1:12; Ephesians 1. This is the first Lesson in this fourth quarter.

Sunday: The apostle Paul’s letter – Inspiration assures us that in all of the epistles of Paul there are “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). Perhaps this is the case with the Epistle to the Romans in a greater degree than with any other epistle. But they are not impossible to be understood, and it is only the “unlearned and unstable” who wrest them unto their own destruction who thus miss the point of Paul’s writings. Romans is simply a letter written to the church in Rome. We cannot suppose that the congregation in Rome differed from the great body of Christians today, and of them we read that: “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). The truest followers of Jesus have always been among “the common people” (Mark 12:37). In the church in Rome there were doubtless common people who understood Paul’s letter, and we may be encouraged to believe that the same class of people can understand it today. Paul’s exhortation and assurance to Timothy form the best guide to the study of all the epistles, and the whole Bible as well: “Consider what I say, for the Lord shall give thee understanding in all things” (2 Timothy 2:7). The Lord gives understanding of His word.

Monday: Paul’s desire to visit Rome – Paul prayed earnestly that he might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to visit Rome. Read the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts, and you will learn just what kind of journey he had. Most people would say that it was not a prosperous journey. Yet we do not hear any complaint from Paul; and who can say that he did not have a prosperous trip? “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). Therefore it must have been prosperous. It is well for us to consider these things. We are apt to look at matters from a wrong side. When we learn to look at them as God looks at them, we shall find that things that we regard as disastrous are prosperous. How much mourning we might save if we always remembered that God knows much better than we do how our prayers should be answered!

Tuesday: Paul in Rome – Notice how Paul’s real desire to visit Rome was met: in bonds, but far better than if he had gone free. If he had gone a free man, he would have entered Rome quietly, and might not in that great city have attracted much attention outside of the narrow circle of the acquaintances of the church in Rome. As it was, he was met outside the city by the brethren, and was escorted not only by them, but by an imperial procession. He was a prisoner of State. He had appealed unto Caesar, and consequently he was brought into the immediate presence of royalty. And so, instead of preaching the gospel to a few obscure people, he preached to all Rome, and had many to help him; for while there he wrote: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14). Thus, although Paul’s prayer was not answered as he expected, it was answered according to his real desire; for his real sole desire was to come to the brethren, “in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:29), and that Christ alone should be honoured. We have no reason to think that at any time Paul was disappointed or discouraged, for let it be noticed that when he prayed it was that he might have “a prosperous journey *by the will of God*” (Romans 1:10), that he might come to them “with joy, by the will of God” (Romans 15:32).

Wednesday: The “saints” in Rome – The reader will notice that the words “to be” in Romans 1:7 are indicated as supplied, so that instead of “called to be saints,” we may read literally, “called saints.” God calls all men to be saints, but all those who accept Him He calls saints. That is their title. When God calls people saints, they are saints. These words were addressed to the church in Rome, and not to the Church of Rome. The Church of Rome has always been apostate and pagan. It has abused the word “saint” until in its calendar it is almost a term of reproach. No greater sin has ever been committed by Rome than the distinction it has made between “saints” and ordinary Christians, making practically two standards of goodness. It has led people to think that labouring men and housewives were not and could not be saints, and has thus discounted true, everyday piety, and has put a premium on pious laziness and self-righteous deeds. But God

has not two standards of piety, and all the faithful people in Rome, poor and unknown as many of them were, He called saints. It is the same today with God, although men may reckon differently.

The word "saints," is used throughout the Bible to denote the people of God, both while they are in this world, and after they have been redeemed. Paul, when on his missionary journeys, gathered money for the poor saints at Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1). In three other epistles he addressed respectively as follows: "To The saints which are at Ephesus" (Ephesians 1:1); "to all the saints in Christ which are at Philippi" (Philippians 1:1); and "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse" (Colossians 1:2). In short, to be a "saint" is generally used as synonymous with "Christian." It serves to give us an exalted idea of what it is to be a Christian.

The Roman Catholic Church, with the arrogance characteristic of it, has vainly assumed the prerogative of making saints. It holds that a saint is far different from the ordinary Christian, and confers the title of "saint" upon men long dead, much as a university would grant a post-graduate degree to one who since graduation has been particularly successful in certain lines of work or study. It is a perversion of the Bible use of the term, for it properly belongs to all who are in Christ.

A saint is one who is sanctified. The two words have a common derivation. Paul addressed his first epistle to the Corinthians, saying, "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Sanctification is not, as some imagine, a special grace bestowed upon certain Christians, but is the condition of all who are truly Christians. All who are in Christ Jesus are sanctified, and for this reason they are called saints. The modern idea that a man may live for years in a justified state before God, and still know nothing of sanctification, is but another phase of the Roman Catholic idea that a saint is an extraordinary Christian – something more than a Christian. To be sanctified is looked upon, not as a necessity, but as a privilege granted to a few; the result is a lowering of the standard of simple Christianity. The word rendered "sanctified," means to consecrate, to devote to religious uses.

To be a saint of God is to be sanctified or consecrated to His service. The process is this: God calls all men. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. ... Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). This call is extended to all men indiscriminately. The Spirit strives with every soul. At the door of every heart Christ stands and knocks. Some hear His voice, and open to Him. This is an invitation for Him to take complete possession. It is a surrender of self to God; a yielding to Him to be His bond-servant. This surrender of self to God, that His will may be the rule in every act, word, and thought, is the act of consecration to God. It must be a voluntary act on the part of the individual, yet it is the love of Christ which constrains to the act. The individual, having counted the cost, has deliberately given up the world with its sinful pleasures, has renounced all purpose and desire to have his own way, and has accepted Christ as his sole Master. He is then devoted to the service of God, and is therefore sanctified, and a saint of God.

From this, sanctification does not necessarily imply perfection of character, in the sense that the expression is commonly used. The individual at first has no Christian character. The character is not changed in a moment from imperfection to perfection; but the yielding of one's self to Christ, for Him to work in the soul that which is good, may be the work of a moment. Old things are now passed away, and a new life begins. Although he does not attain at a single bound to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, he is not condemned, because all his acts are wrought in God. He is not sanctified because he is holy, but he is sanctified because he has put himself into the hands of God to be made holy. Christians are holy on account of Christ who lives in them, and who is their true life. Says the apostle: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3). The Christian life is the only highest life. It is a life in Christ, who sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

Thursday: The believers in Rome – the apostle writing to the believers in Rome, says, "First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:8). In the days of the apostle Paul the faith of the church in Rome was spoken of throughout all the world. Faith means obedience; for faith is counted for righteousness, and God never counts a thing so unless it is so. Faith "worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). This work is a "work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Faith also means humility, as is shown by the words of the prophet, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). The upright man is the just man; the man whose soul is lifted up is not upright or just; but the just man is such because of his faith; therefore only the man whose soul is not lifted up has faith. The Roman brethren, therefore, in the days of apostle Paul, were humble brethren.