

Romans - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 76. The Flesh (8:13)

We have received two communications, one from "T. J. H." and another from "H. J. T." each seeking light upon the same passages of Scripture, namely, Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Galatians 5:19-21. We have ever to remember, that though we are not in the flesh, as to the ground of our standing, yet the flesh is in us; and, if not kept in subjection by the power of the Holy Spirit, it will cut out plenty of sorrowful work for us. But, blessed be God, Jesus ever liveth. Here is our strength and comfort in all our conflict and exercise of heart. We can count on Him and find Him amply sufficient for the need of every hour.

As to Romans 8:13, the Apostle states the great, broad truth, that to live after the flesh is the way of death, and to live after the Spirit is the way of life. It is worthy of remark, however, that the expressions, "Ye shall die," and "Ye shall live," are quite different in the original from what the English reader might suppose. The former is rendered by two verbs (*μελλετε αποθησκειν*); the latter by only one (*ζησεσθε*). That is rather a contingent proposition, "Ye are about to die!" this, an absolute one, "Ye shall live." In John 4:47, the nobleman's son was "at the point of death" (*ημελλε αποθησκειν*), the same form of expression as "ye shall die."

We have already given our view of 1 Corinthians 9:27. (See our third volume, page 221.) In Galatians 5:19-21, the Apostle sets forth the moral features of the flesh, and declares that those who are characterized thereby shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the Christian is not so characterized, though surely, if not watchful, he will exhibit some of these hideous features. May we be kept ever looking off unto Jesus, that we may not walk after the flesh, or manifest its fruits! Our God has graciously given us wholesome words of exhortation and warning, and we should never think to take off their edge, by any system of interpretation that might tend to make out an easy way for the flesh. Every true lover of holiness will delight in the pungency and power of the Spirit's admonitions.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 134. Law or Christ (7:9)

"A Brother in Christ." Romans 7:9 teaches us that the only thing the law can do with a sinner is to slay him. "I was alive apart from law (*χωρις νοου*) once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." If the law were not in question, a man might go on in ignorance of what is in his heart; but "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and "the wages of sin is death." If I sit in a dark room, I cannot see anything. I may be surrounded with dust, and not be able to see it. Suppose a law made against having dust in my room, and death as the penalty; what then? Why the moment you let in light into my room, I see the dust, and see myself condemned. It is vain to say, that the design of the law is to promote cleanliness; it condemns the very condition in which I am, and does not help me to get out of it. What am I to do? Look to Christ, who bore the curse and paid the penalty for me. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The law will not, and cannot, let any one live. Why? Because no one has kept it. The only way of escape from the law without, and sin within, is death and resurrection. Would that we all entered more fully into this glorious and deeply practical truth!

Handfuls of Pasture: Volume 1, Deliverance (6:2)

IT is a fact obvious, of course, to all, that when a Christian dies and goes to heaven he is completely delivered from the power of sin. It is manifestly impossible that sin can have any power or authority over a dead man then it is not so readily seen or admitted that the believer, even now, is as thoroughly delivered from the power of sin as though he were dead and gone to heaven. Sin has no more dominion over a Christian than over a man who is actually dead and buried.

We speak of the power of sin; not of its presence. Let the reader carefully note this. There is as regards the question of sin this material difference between a Christian here and hereafter. Here lie is delivered only from the power of sin; hereafter, he will be freed from its presence. In his present condition sin dwells in him; but it is not to reign. By-and-by, it will not even dwell. The reign of sin is over and gone. The reign of grace has begun. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under law, but under grace."

And, be it carefully observed, the apostle is not speaking, in Rom. 6, of the forgiveness of sins. This he treats in chapter iii. Blessed be God, our sins are all forgiven—blotted out—eternally canceled. But, in chapter vi., the theme is not forgiveness of sins, but complete deliverance from sin as a ruling power or principle.

How do we obtain this immense boon? By death. We have died to sin—died in the death of Christ. Is this true of every believer? Yes, of every believer beneath the canopy of heaven. Is it not a matter of attainment? By no means. It belongs to every child of God, every true believer. It is the common standing of all. Blessed, holy standing! All praise to Him who has earned it for us, and brought us into it. We live under the glorious reign of grace—"grace which reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

This enfranchising truth is little understood by the Lord's people. Very few, comparatively, get beyond the forgiveness of sins, if they have even got so far. They do not see their full deliverance from the power of sin. They feel its pressure, and arguing from their painful feeling instead of reckoning themselves to be won to God tells them they are, they are plunged in doubt and fear as to their conversion. They are

occupied with their own inward self-consciousness instead of with Christ. They are looking at their State in order to get peace and comfort, and hence they are, and must be, miserable. We shall never get peace if we seek it in our spiritual state or condition. The way to get peace is to believe that we died with Christ, were buried with Him, were raised with Him, are justified in Him, accepted in Him. In short that, "As lie is so are we in this world." 1 John 4:17.

This is the solid basis of peace. And not only so, but it is the only divine secret of a holy life. We are dead to sin. We are not called to make ourselves dead. We are so in Christ. A monk, an ascetic, or an ardent striver after sinless perfection, may 'try to put sin to death by various bodily exercises. What is the inevitable result? Misery. Yes, misery in proportion to the earnestness. How different is Christianity! We start with the blessed knowledge find we are dead to sin; and in the blessed faith of this, we "mortify" not the body, but its "deeds."

May the reader enter, by faith, into the power of this "deliverance!"

Short Papers, Reconciled and Saved: Part 2 (5:10)

We have, in a former volume of "Things New and Old," called the attention of our readers to the important distinction between atonement and reconciliation.¹ They are often confounded through lack of attention to the precise terms of holy scripture. The fact is, they are perfectly distinct, though intimately connected—distinct, as the foundation is from the building—connected, as the building is with the foundation. Atonement is the base on which reconciliation rests. Without atonement, there could not possibly be any reconciliation; but reconciliation is not atonement. The reader will do well to weigh this matter thoroughly, in the light of inspiration. It is most needful for all Christians to be clear and sound in their thoughts on divine subjects, and accurate in their way of stating them. It will invariably be found that the more spiritual any one is, the closer he will keep to the veritable language of scripture in putting forth foundation truth. Unfortunately, our most excellent Authorized Version does not help the English reader on the score of accuracy in this matter, inasmuch as we find in Rom. 5:11 The word "atonement" where it ought to be "reconciliation;" and, on the other hand, we have, in Heb. 2:17, the word "reconciliation" where it ought to be "atonement," or "propitiation." However, the two things are perfectly distinct, and it is of real moment that the distinction should be understood and maintained.

Furthermore, we would remind the reader, that there is no foundation whatsoever in the word of God, for the idea that God needed to be reconciled to us. There is positively no such thought to be found within the covers of the Bible. It was man that needed to be reconciled to God, not God to man. Man was the enemy of God. He was not only, as we have seen, "without strength," "ungodly," and "a sinner," but actually "an enemy."

Now it is the enemy—the alienated, the estranged one—that needs to be brought back—to be reconciled. This is plain. But God, blessed be His name! was not man's enemy, but his friend—the Friend of sinners. Such was the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, when on earth. "He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10) It was His delight to do good unto all. He spent His life in doing good to those who, after all, preferred a robber and a murderer to Him, and nailed Him to a cross between two thieves. Thus, whether we look at the life or at the death of Christ, we see, in the clearest and most forcible manner, the enmity of man; the friendship, the kindness, the love of God.

But how is man to be reconciled to God? Momentous question! Let us look well to the answer. The passage of scripture which forms the theme of this article declares, in the most distinct manner, that "We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son." (Rom. 5:10.) Nothing else could do it. The death of the cross—the atoning death—the vicarious sacrifice—the precious priceless blood of Jesus—is the necessary, the absolutely essential basis of our reconciliation to a sin-hating God. We must state this great truth in the most emphatic and unequivocal manner. Scripture is as clear and definite as possible. In order to our being reconciled to God, sin must be put away, and "without shedding of blood, there is no remission." Heb. 9:22.

Thus the matter stands, if we are to be taught simply by scripture. No blood-shedding, no remission—no remission, no reconciliation. Such is the divine order, and let men beware how they tamper with it. It is a very serious thing to touch the truth of God; we may rest assured that all who do so will meddle to their own hurt.

We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son. It is not by His incarnation—that is, His taking human nature upon Him. Incarnation could not reconcile us to God, inasmuch as it could not blot out our sins. Incarnation is not atonement. It is well to note this. There is a subtle way of playing upon the word atonement, which consists of a false division of the syllables—as though the word were "at-one-ment;" and this at-one-ment is referred to the incarnation, as though, in that mysterious act, our Lord took our fallen human nature into union with Himself. Against this we solemnly warn the reader. It is fatally false doctrine. It is an effort of the enemy to displace or set aside altogether the atoning death of Christ, with all those grand foundation truths which cluster round that most precious mystery.

Is it that we do not hold, as a cardinal truth, the incarnation of the eternal Son? Nay, it forms the foundation of that great mystery of godliness of which the top stone is a glorified Man on the throne of God. "And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. iii. 16.) We hold incarnation to be an integral part of the faith of a true Christian, nor could we own as a Christian any one who denied it. But it is one thing to hold a truth, and another thing altogether to displace it. It is a constant effort of Satan, if he cannot get men to reject a truth, to displace it, and in this way he gains some of his greatest apparent triumphs. Thus it is with the essential doctrine of incarnation. Assuredly, the Son of God had to become a man to die; but, then, becoming a man is one thing, and dying upon the cross is another. He might have become a man; He might have lived and labored for three and thirty years on this earth; He might have been baptized in Jordan, and tempted in the wilderness; He might have ascended from the mount of transfiguration to that glory from which He had come, and winch He had with the Father from before all worlds. At any moment, during His blessed life, He might, so far as He was personally concerned, have returned to that heaven whence He had descended. What was there to hinder Him? There was no necessity laid on Him to die, save the necessity of infinite and everlasting love. Death had no claim on Him, inasmuch as He was the sinless, spotless, holy One of God. He had not

come under the federal headship of the first man. Had He done so, He would have been under the curse and wrath of God all His days, and that not vicariously, but in virtue of His connection with the first Adam. This were an open and positive blasphemy against His Person. He was the Second Man the Lord from heaven, the only fair untainted grain of human wheat on which the eye of God could rest, and, as such, we repeat, He could, at any point between the manger and the cross, have returned to the bosom of the Father—that dwelling-place of ineffable love.

Let the reader seize, with clearness and power, this great truth. Let him dwell upon it. It is a truth of the very last possible importance. Jesus stood alone in this world. He was alone in the manger; alone in the Jordan; alone in the wilderness; alone on the mount; alone in the garden. All this is in perfect keeping with his own memorable words in John 12: " Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here is the grand point—"If it die" Unless He was to return to glory alone, He must die. If He was to have us with Him, He must die. If sins were to be remitted, He must die. If sinners were to be saved, He must die. If a new and living way was to be opened for us into the presence of God, He must die. If the veil was to be rent, He must die. That mysterious curtain remained intact when the blessed One lay in the manger of Bethlehem—and when He was baptized—and when He was anointed—and when He was tempted—and when He was transfigured—and when He was bowed in Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood—and when He was scourged before Pontius Pilate—through all these stages of His marvelous life, the veil was unrent. There and thus it stood to bar the sinner's approach to God. Man was shut out from God, and God shut in from man; nor could all the living labors of the eternal Son—His miracles—His precious ministry—His tears, His sighs, His groans, and His prayers—His sore temptations and His untold living sorrows—not any nor all of these could have rent the veil. But the very moment that death was accomplished—we read, " The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."

Such is the distinct teaching of scripture on this vital question. The death of Christ is the foundation of everything. Is it a question of life? He has given His flesh for the life of the world. Is it a question of pardon? "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Is it a question of peace? " He made peace by the blood of his cross." Is it a question of reconciliation? " We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son." In short, it is through death we get everything—without it, nothing. It is on the ground of death, even the atoning death of Christ, that we are reconciled to God, and united, by the Holy Ghost, to the risen and glorified Head in heaven. All rests on the solid groundwork of accomplished redemption. Sin is put away; the enmity is slain; all barriers are removed; God is glorified; the law magnified; and all this by the death of Christ. " He passed through death's dark raging flood" to settle everything for us, and lay the imperishable foundation of all, the counsels and purposes of the Holy Trinity.

And, now, a very few words as to the effect of the life of Christ in heaven for us. " If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Be it carefully noted that this refers to His life after death—His life in resurrection—His life in heaven. Some would teach us that it is His life on earth—His fulfillment of the law in our room and stead. This is flatly contradicted by the very structure of the passage, and by the entire teaching of the New Testament. It is not life before death, but life after death that the apostle speaks of. In short, it is the priestly life of our blessed and adorable Lord, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. It is by this we are saved through all the difficulties and dangers, the snares and temptations of this wilderness world. We, though reconciled to God by the death of Christ, are, nevertheless, in ourselves, poor, feeble, helpless, erring creatures, prone to wander, ever liable to failure and sin, totally unable to get on for a single moment, if not kept by our great High Priest—our blessed Advocate—our Comforter. He keeps us day and night. He never slumbers nor sleeps. He maintains us continually before God in all the integrity of the position in which His death has placed us. It is impossible that our cause can ever fail in such hands. His intercession is all prevailing. " We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The One who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, now bears our sorrows on His heart upon the throne; and He will come again to bear the government upon His shoulders.

What a Savior! What a Victim! What a Priest! How blessed to have all our affairs in His hand! To be sustained by such a ministry! How precious to know that the One who has reconciled us to God by His death is now alive for us on the throne; and because He lives we shall live also! All praise to His peerless name!

Short Papers, Reconciled and Saved: Part 1 (5:10)

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom. 5:10.

If ever there was a moment in the which it was important to set forth the great foundation truths of Christianity, it is just now. The enemy is seeking, by every means in His power, to loosen the foundations of our faith—to weaken the authority of holy scripture over the heart and conscience—to introduce, in the most specious and fascinating forms, deadly error, in order to draw away the soul from Christ and His word.

It may, perhaps, be said, " This is an old story." No doubt; it is as old as the second epistle to Timothy: second epistle of Peter, and Jude. But it is a new story also; and while we do not feel it to be our work, as the conductors of " Things New and Old," to grapple, in a controversial way, with popular errors and evils, we do believe it to be our sacred duty to set forth and maintain constantly those grand, solid, fundamental truths which are our only safeguard against every form of doctrinal error and moral pravity.

Hence it is that we feel called upon, at the opening of our Volume for 1870, to draw the attention of our readers to that very weighty passage which stands at the head of this paper. It is one of the fullest and most comprehensive statements of foundation doctrine to be found within the compass of the Volume of God. Let us meditate for a little upon it.

In examining the context in which this passage stands, we find four distinct terms by which the inspired writer sets forth the condition of man, in his unconverted state. He speaks of him as " without strength." This is what we may call a negative term. Man is utterly powerless, wholly incapable of doing aught toward his own deliverance. He had been tried in every possible way. God had tested him and proved him, and found him absolutely good for nothing. When placed in Eden, in the midst of the ten thousand delights which a beneficent Creator had poured

around him, he believed the devil's lie rather than the truth of God. (Genesis hi.) When driven out of Eden, we see him pursuing a career of evil—"evil only"—evil continually—until the judgment of God falls upon the whole race, with one solitary exception—Noah and his family. (Gen. 6—viii.) Further, when in the restored earth man is entrusted with the sword of government, he gets drunk and exposes himself to contempt in the very presence of his sons. When entrusted with the holy office of the priesthood, he offers strange fire. (Lev. 5) When entrusted with the high office of king, and enriched with untold wealth, he marries strange wives and worships the idols of the heathen. 2 Chron. 11

Thus, wherever we trace man—the human race, we see nothing but the most humiliating failure. Man is proved to be good for nothing—"without strength."

But there is more than this. Man is "ungodly." He is not only powerless as to all that is holy and good, but also without one single moral or spiritual link with the living and true God. Examine the unrenewed heart, from its center to its circumference, and you will not find so much as one true thought about God, or one right affection toward God. There may be a great deal that is amiable and attractive in the way of nature—much that is morally lovely in the eyes of men—many social virtues, and excellent qualities. Human nature, even in its ruins, may exhibit much of all these; just as the visible creation—this earth on which we live—displays, spite of its ruined and groaning condition, many splendid traces of the master hand that formed it.

All this is perfectly true, and perfectly obvious; and moreover, it must ever be taken into account, in dealing with the great question of man's standing and condition. There is an ultra way of speaking of the sinner's state which is much more likely to stumble and perplex the mind than to convict the conscience or break the heart. This should be carefully avoided. We should ever take account of all that is really good in human nature. If we look at the case of the rich young ruler, in Mark 10, we must see that the Lord recognized something lovable in him, for we read that "Jesus beholding him, loved him," though we have no warrant whatever to suppose that there was aught of divine work in his soul, seeing that he turned his back upon Christ, and preferred the world to Him. But there was evidently something most attractive in this young man—something very different indeed from those gross, coarse, and degraded forms in which human nature oftentimes clothes itself.

Now, we cannot but judge that the man who, in writing or discoursing upon the sinner's moral and spiritual state, would ignore or lose sight of those moral and social distinctions, does positive damage to the cause of truth, and neutralizes the very object which we must believe he has in view. If, for example, we approach an amiable, upright, frank, and honorable person, and, in a sweeping manner, reduce him to a dead level, or place him in the same category with a crooked, cross-grained, scheming, dishonest, contemptible character, we only drive him away in irritation and disgust. Whereas, on the other hand, if we recognize whatever is really good; if we allow—as scripture most surely does—a sufficient margin in which to set down all that is morally and socially excellent even in fallen humanity, we are, to speak after the manner of men, much more likely to gain our end, than by injudiciously ignoring those distinctions, which, inasmuch as they clearly exist, it is the height of folly to deny. Still, it holds good—and let the reader solemnly consider the weighty fact—that man—the very best, the very fairest specimen—is "without strength," and "ungodly." Nor is this all. The apostle does not rest in mere negatives. He not only tells us what man is not, but he goes on to tell us what he is. He gives us both sides of this great question. He not only declares that, "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" but he adds that, "God commend-eth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Here, then, we have the positive activity of evil—the actual energy of self-will. For, be it remembered, sin is doing our own will, in whatever line that will may travel, whatever form it may assume. It may present itself to our view in the shape of the grossest moral pravity, or it may array itself in the garb of a cultivated and refined taste; but it is self-will all the while, and self-will is sin. It may be only like the acorn—the mere seed; but the acorn contains the wide spreading oak. Thus the heart of the newly born infant is a little seed-plot in which may be found the germ of every sin that ever was committed in this world. True, each seed may not germinate or bring forth fruit; but the seed is there, and only needs circumstances or influences to unfold it. If any one be kept from gross outward sins, it is not owing to a better nature, but simply to the fact of his surroundings. All men are sinners. All by nature do their own will. This stamps their character. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." From the days of fallen Adam to this moment—well nigh six thousand years, there has been but one solitary exception to this solemn and terrible rule—only One who never sinned—never did His own will, and that is the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who, though God over all blessed forever, yet, having become a man, He surrendered His own will completely, and did ever and only the things that pleased His Father. From the manger to the cross, He was ruled, in all things, by the will and the glory of God. He was the only perfect spotless man that ever trod this sin-stained earth—the only fair untainted sheaf that ever appeared in the field of this world—"the man Christ Jesus," who died for us "sinners"—"suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God."

What marvelous grace! what soul-subduing love! what amazing mercy! Oh! how it should melt these hearts of ours! Think, dear reader—think deeply of this love, this grace, this mercy. Dwell upon it until thy whole soul is absorbed in the contemplation of it. We are painfully insensible and indifferent. Indeed there is nothing more humbling than our culpable, our shameful indifference to a Savior's love. We seem content to take salvation as the result of His cross and passion—His agony and grief—His ineffable sorrow, while, at the same time, our hearts are cold and indifferent to Him. He left the bright heavens, and came down into this dark and sinful world for us. He went down into the gloomy depths of death and the grave. He endured the hiding of God's countenance, which involved more intense anguish to His precious soul than all that men and devils, earth and hell could do—He sank in deep waters, and went down into the horrible pit and into the miry clay—all this He did for us "sinners," when we were "ungodly," and "without strength;" and yet how little we think of it! How little we dwell upon it! How little we are moved by the record of it!

The remembrance of this should humble us in the dust, before our precious Savior-God. The hardness of our hearts in the presence of the profound mystery of the cross and passion of our Lord Christ is, if possible, a more signal and striking proof of our depravity than the sins for which He died.

But we have rather anticipated what may yet come before us in the further unfolding of our subject; and we shall close this paper with a brief reference to the fourth term by which the apostle sets forth our condition in nature. This is contained in the verse which forms our present thesis: "We were enemies." What a thought! We were not merely powerless, godless, sinful; but actually hostile—in a state of positive enmity against God.

Nothing can possibly exceed this. To be the enemy of God gives the most appalling idea we can possibly have of a sinner's state. And yet such is the actual condition of the unconverted reader of these lines. He is an enemy of God. He may be amiable, polite, attractive, refined, cultivated, educated, moral, and even outwardly religious. He may occupy the very highest platform of religious profession—be a church member—a regular communicant—a worker in the vineyard—a Sunday school teacher—a preacher—a minister, and all the while an enemy of God.

How awful the thought! Oh! beloved reader, do pause and consider, we beseech thee. Give this solemn question your undivided attention, just now. Do not put it aside. We appeal to thee, with all earnestness, as in the presence of Almighty God, of His Son Jesus Christ, and of the Eternal Spirit. We adjure thee, by the value of thy immortal soul, by the dread reality of the judgment seat of Christ, by all the horrors of that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, by the worm that never dies, by the awful fact of eternity—an eternity in the gloomy shades of hell—by the unutterable agony of being separated forever from God, from Christ, and from all that is pure and lovely—by the combined force of all these arguments, we do earnestly and affectionately beseech thee to flee, this moment, to the Savior who stands with open arms and loving heart to receive thee. Come to Jesus! Come, now! Come, just as thou art! Only trust Him, and thou art safe—safe forever—safe as He.

(To be continued, if the Lord will.)

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 10. Romans 4:25 (4:25)

In reply to "V. T. S." we would say that we know no better rendering of Romans 4:25, than that given in our excellent authorized version. The doctrine of the passage is simply this: Christ, having died under the full weight of "our offenses," was laid in the grave, and there was an end to all that was or could be against us. Wherefore, inasmuch as every claim had been fully met, God entered the scene, and "raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;" and all who believe in Him are justified from all things. A risen Christ is the grand proof that there is nothing against the believer. Biblical criticism would not comport with the character and object of this magazine; but we should hail with delight an article from some able pen, on the power and use of the Greek preposition.

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