

THE BIBLE CLASS.

PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF GRACE.

(For Aug. 1st—Rom. i. 16, 17. iii. 21-26, v. 1-8.)

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The doctrinal portion of the Epistle to the Romans is contained in the first eleven chapters. This is further divided into Paul's discussion of the doctrine of grace, or "my gospel," as he calls it, comprising the first eight chapters, and his discussion of the problem of the rejection of Israel, contained in the next three. The statement of the doctrine of grace is found in a comparatively brief passage, iii. 21-31, to which the preceding section i. 16—iii. 20 is a logical introduction, and the remainder, chapters iv-viii, a conclusion embracing an historical confirmation of the doctrine of salvation by faith drawn from the experience of Abraham, ch. iv, and a statement of the results of the doctrine in the lives of believers, chs. v-viii.

THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF GOD.

The theme of the Epistle is found in i. 16, 17. Here Paul defines the nature of the Gospel, which he had tested in his own experience, and in which he felt the utmost confidence as a means whereby a lost world might be restored to holiness and to God. To the world this Gospel might seem a weak and foolish device, yet Paul was not ashamed of it, since it embodied the highest manifestation of divine power. Unlike the power of the warrior in which men glory as the most dazzling and coveted title of fame, but which is only a power of destruction, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. This salvation embraces not only a future deliverance from the condemnation which results from sin, but also a present escape from its power in our hearts and lives. That which no man can accomplish for himself the Gospel, as a revelation of the power and love and wisdom of God proposes to do for him, and for the whole human race. Herein lies the proof of its divine origin. For the Gospel is not merely a system of religious truths. It is an energy that has changed the face of the world, that has put an end to practices that seemed inextricably intertwined with the existence of society, and that has wrought moral revolution that seemed impossible. The Gospel does this because it reveals a new way of attaining righteousness, namely, through faith. The righteousness so obtained is of God. This is the great theme with which the Epistle mainly concerns itself.

THE UNIVERSAL FAILURE TO ATTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In opening his great argument Paul shows first of all that a saving righteousness is not attainable by human effort. The entire heathen world rested under the condemnation and "wrath" of God. In proof of its unrighteousness the Apostle sketches a picture of the moral condition of the heathen world so black that it can scarcely be contemplated, and yet it falls short of the actual reality. Nor could a plea of ignorance avail, for heathenism had suppressed the revelation of God in nature and in conscience, and had turned this truth into a lie. Hence the Gentiles who had not the law of God, were yet "without excuse," since they had persistently shut their eyes to the light they had. Nor were the Jews, who counted themselves so much better than the Gentiles, any better than they. They, as well as the adherents of certain philosophical schools among the heathen, claimed superiority to the rest of mankind by sitting in judgment upon them. This would imply, however, that those who judged others were themselves sinless. So far from this being the case, the fact was that they were guilty of the very things which they condemned. Thus the universal sinfulness of the human race is established, and, incidentally, the need of a salvation is shown which shall be effective in rescuing men from the power and guilt of sin. In this respect all men without distinction, Jew as well as Gentile, had failed.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH.

The Apostle was not a preacher of despair. Against the background of universal human failure he exhibits in vivid outlines the doctrines of a new righteousness, which is from God, and which is capable of working redemption for all the race on conditions within the reach of all. It is of grace in that it is wholly unmerited. Man has no claim on God which God is bound to satisfy. Of His own free will and abounding mercy the plan for human redemption was devised and executed. It rests upon the incarnation, suffering death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Through Him God has displayed His own righteousness, that is to say, His utter abhorrence and condemnation of sin, and at the same time His infinite compassion toward the sinner fallen and helpless under the power and guilt of sin. This guilt Christ has borne, and so borne

as to carry it away on behalf of every one who simply trusts in Him. He has broken the power of sin, and now gives to every believer strength to live a new life of holiness. Hence there is a righteousness from God revealed to every believer in which acceptance with God is freely and graciously bestowed through faith in Christ. Thus God remains "just," and at the same time "the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

The results of this justification are most happy. Our relation to God, and God's relation to us are restored to their normal condition. We have peace with God. The joyful confidence of children in their intercourse with a loving father takes the place of the estrangement caused by sin. We have boldness of access into the palace of divine grace, through Jesus Christ who is the Door, and the only passport required is faith in Him. Through faith every hardship of life is turned into a discipline whereby character is purified and perfected. The contemplation of this wonderful redemption is fitted to inspire profound love to God, all the more since the ground of our salvation is not our love for Him, but His unparalleled love for us.

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON V.—PAUL'S MINISTRY AT CORINTH.—Aug. 1.

(Acts xviii. 1-11.)

GOLDEN TEXT—"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,"—I Cor. iii. 11.

TIME AND PLACE—A.D. 52; Corinth.

INTRODUCTION—It would seem that Paul left the care of those who were converted at Athens with Dionysius, when he departed for Corinth. If Paul considered it a failure to preach among the intellectual the doctrines of the Gospel, he had the opportunity of preaching to a widely different class at Corinth. Wickedness prevailed. The Jews rebelled against the truth, and he turned to the heathen Gentiles. At this place he suffered severe inward conflict, concerning his future work, and here the Lord came and comforted him.

VERSE BY VERSE. 1. "After these things."—The events at Athens described in our last lesson. Paul's stay at Athens was not over a month. It was probable that a persecution was threatened against him, and that he hastily left the city, and proceeded to Corinth. Corinth was situated on the isthmus which connects the two portions of Greece. See Dictionary.

2. "Aquila . . . Priscilla."—Most devoted friends of Paul, persons of culture and piety. They are always mentioned together. From this we conclude that they furnish a happy example of harmony and sympathy in Christian life. "Claudius."—The fourth Roman Emperor. "Commanded all Jews to depart."—This took place early in A.D. 52, on account of a revolt in Judea.

3. "Wrought."—Paul labored for his own support in Ephesus and Thessalonica as well as in Corinth. "Tentmakers."—Manufacturers of tents made from hair of native goats.

4. "Reasoned . . . and persuaded."—From the Scriptures, and the personal testimony of eye-witnesses, Paul showed that Jesus was the Messiah, and the Gospel true. The gospel appeals to reason and good sense. Among his converts in Corinth was Epenetus, the first fruit of his labor in Achaia; and the father of Stephanus was next; then Crispus and Gaius.

5. Paul was at Corinth alone, and had been laboring there some two or three months, when Silas and Timothy arrived together, from Macedonia; Timothy from Thessalonica, and Silas from Berea. In view of the news they brought, Paul soon after wrote the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. When relieved from labor, by the support brought by his companions, he had opportunity to give more attention to the preaching of the gospel. He therefore unfolded the whole truth respecting the life of Jesus.

6. "They opposed themselves."—The word implies very strong opposition, as of a force drawn up in battle array. It was an organized opposition. The Jews spoke vilely and falsely of Jesus Christ and His gospel. "He shook his raiment."—Indicating by this that no further union existed between them. "Your blood be upon your own heads."—The responsibility of your spiritual destruction rests with yourselves. When argument and appeal brought no candid thought, Paul said sadly to the Jews in Corinth: "I will trouble you no more." "unto the Gentiles."—In Corinth.

7. "A certain man's house."—Used for teaching and worship. For his own lodging he still remained with Aquila and Priscilla.

8. "Crispus."—His first convert was the ruler of the synagogue he had left. His decided course made the conduct of others equally decided. "Many of the Corinthians."—The idolatrous inhabitants of Corinth.

9. It is likely that Paul was at this time much distressed, by the

*An Exposition of Lesson 31 in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lessons* on "The Three Great Apostles."