

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

FROM
SINNERS TO SONS
TO FORM
THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Living Stream Ministry

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Romans is quite a long book, having sixteen chapters. Undoubtedly, Paul did his best to condense into these chapters all the things related to God's salvation. In every kind of writing there is the basic thought upon which the entire writing depends. This is also true of the book of Romans. Since Romans is a long book and covers many points, it is quite difficult for most readers to find the basic thought.

THE BASIC THOUGHT OF ROMANS

Many Christians say that the basic thought of Romans is justification by faith, and others say that it is the salvation of God. These viewpoints are not incorrect, but they are not adequate. The basic thought of this book is that God is making sons out of sinners to form a Body for Christ that He may be expressed. We sinners are the basic material which God is using to produce many sons for Himself. Paul received a revelation of God's eternal plan, God's eternal purpose. God's eternal plan is to produce many sons for

Himself by means of Himself as their life. This means that God intends to work Himself as life into many sinners and that these sinners will become His many sons, after they have been redeemed and saved and have His life. Every sinner who has been born of God and has received God's life has become one of His sons ([John 1:12-13](#)). This, however, is still not the ultimate goal of God's purpose. The ultimate goal of His purpose is to build all these sons together into one Body to express Christ. God is making sons out of sinners to form the Body to express Christ. This is a full statement of the underlying concept of the book of Romans. This thought was deep in Paul's heart and in his spirit when he composed this book. His writing of this Epistle was based upon this. Having this concept as the basic content of Romans, Paul covered so many details relating to it in sixteen chapters. When we get into this book, we see that it reveals that God is working to make sons out of sinners to form the Body to express Christ.

THE MAJOR SECTIONS

Now we need to consider the major sections of the book of Romans. None of the other books in the Bible is as well organized as Romans.

Therefore, it is easy to subdivide it. This book is subdivided into three main sections. Chapters one through eight compose the first section, chapters nine through eleven, the second section, and chapters twelve through sixteen, the third section. In this booklet we shall temporarily set aside the middle section and consider only the first and last sections.

PERSONAL SALVATION

The first section deals with the personal salvation of the individuals who believe in Christ. In other words, it is a section on personal salvation. We do not see the Body in this section. We have the many brothers of Christ, but not yet the many members of the Body. In chapter eight we read of the many brothers of the Firstborn (v. 29). Although the many brothers are undoubtedly the members of the Body of Christ, chapter eight does not refer to them as members, but as brothers of the firstborn Son. In chapter eight the concept has not gone so far as to reach the Body. It is still a matter of the divine life producing the many sons. So the many sons are called not the many members of the Body of Christ, but the many brothers of the firstborn Son.

In the New Testament the Son of God is related to life. If you have the Son of God, you have life (1 John 5:11-12). If you do not have the Son, you do not have life. Because we have the divine life, we have become brothers of the firstborn Son. Now God not only has the unique Son, the only begotten Son, but also the many sons, the brothers of the Firstborn.

THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

The last section of Romans, chapters twelve through sixteen, covers the Body, the church life. The many brothers in chapter eight become the members of the Body in chapter twelve. This is not a matter of life—life is fully covered in the first section—but a matter of function. Being a son is a matter of life, but being a member of the Body is a matter of function. We all must function together as the Body to express Christ.

This Body must be expressed practically in all the local churches. In other words, the local churches are the practical expression of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the expression of Christ, and Christ is the expression of God. God is expressed in Christ, Christ is expressed in the Body, and the Body is expressed in the local churches. Therefore, in chapter sixteen, we have

the churches: the church at Cenchrea ([v. 1](#)); the church in Rome, which met in the house of Prisca and Aquila ([vv. 3, 5](#)); the churches of the nations ([v. 4](#)); and the churches of Christ ([v. 16](#)). We are now in the churches. Hallelujah! The Body is in the churches, Christ is in the Body, and God is in Christ. How wonderful this is! If we see this, then we see the basic concept of this book.

This matter is worthy of our full attention. The first section of Romans covers personal salvation, and the last section covers the Body, which is not a matter of individual salvation, but of corporate function. The first section is on individual salvation, and the last section is on corporate function. This corporate function is the Body, which is expressed in hundreds and even thousands of localities as local churches. This is the reason that Paul wrote [chapter sixteen](#) in such a wonderful way, not in the way of doctrine, but in the way of practical experience, in the way of greetings. Through his greetings, Paul opened a window through which we may look at the churches of the first century. [Romans 16](#) is a window. Praise the Lord for this window! Without this chapter, we could never be so clear what was taking place in the churches at that time.

OUR DEEDS EXPOSED

Let us now consider some of the matters found in the first section. In this section, Paul firstly exposed us in our doings. I do not have the words to express how dirty, evil, dark, and ugly are the things exposed by Paul in the opening chapters of this book. It is not the persons that are exposed in these chapters, but their doings. We should observe this principle in preaching the gospel. Do not quickly expose what people are. You need to first expose what they do—their deeds, behavior, and activities. For instance, as you preach the gospel, you may ask a person what he was doing last night at ten o'clock. We have done this many times. Once, while preaching the gospel in the presence of the Holy Spirit, I pointed to a certain young student and said, "Do you know what you did? You stole chalk from school and brought it home." When I pointed my finger at him and said those words, he said within himself, "That doesn't mean anything." Immediately I responded, "Are you saying that this doesn't mean anything?" That frightened him. Then I said, "You brought the chalk home and drew circles on the floor." That was exactly what he had done. After the message, he was the first

to stand up and accept Christ. With trembling he said, “Brother Lee pointed out exactly what I did. I stole chalk from school, and I brought it home. When he told me that I was saying that it didn’t mean anything, that was just what I was saying. And I did draw the circles, just like he said.” This young man was exposed in his deeds. Do you believe that you can stand God’s exposing? If God were to expose all we have done in the past, we would not be able to stand it, for what we did was dirty, ugly, evil, and dark.

CONSTITUTED SINNERS

Beginning in [5:12](#), Paul exposes not what we have done, but what we are. We are constituted sinners ([5:19](#)). Before we ever sinned, we had already been constituted as sinners. Take an apple tree as an example. Before it bears apples, it is an apple tree already. It bears apples because it is an apple tree. If it were not an apple tree, it would not be able to bear apples. Likewise, we commit sins because we are sinners. Do not think that we became sinners by committing sins. No, we commit sins because we are sinners, just as the apple tree bears apples because it is an apple tree. Do not say, “I am not a sinner, for I don’t do evil things. I am always very good.” Although you may

be good, you are still a sinner, for you were born a sinner. You were constituted a sinner before you were even born. When we came into the world, we came as sinners. Do not think that you became a sinner after you were born. No, you were constituted a sinner in Adam long before you were born. This is Paul's concept. Thus, in our behavior we are sinful, and in our being we are constituted sinners.

Furthermore, we also are short of God's glory (3:23). The thought of coming short of God's glory may sound strange to many. No human concept takes account of this. People can understand us when we tell them that their deeds are sinful, and they can be convinced that they have been constituted sinners. But if we tell them that, as constituted sinners who do evil things, they are short of God's glory, they will say, "What do you mean? What is God's glory?" God's glory is God Himself expressed. Whenever God is expressed, glory is seen. We were made by God in His image that we might express His glory. But we have sinned. Now instead of expressing God, we express sin and our sinful self. Hence, we are short of God's glory. We are sinful in what we do, we are constituted sinners in what

we are, and we are short of God's glory. This is our situation, our condition.

RIGHTEOUSNESS RECKONED TO US

How can God make sons out of such sinners? He can do it only by three things—by His righteousness, holiness, and glory. In Romans Paul tells us that God has put His righteousness upon us and that He has reckoned His righteousness to be ours (4:22-24). This means that God has given us His righteousness. Because we are clothed with God's righteousness, we can say, "I am righteous because I am in God's righteousness. I have been completely covered with His righteousness." How is this accomplished? How can God's righteousness be accounted as ours? It is through the redeeming death of Christ. Since God's righteousness has been reckoned to us through the death of Christ, our sinful deeds have been erased from the account, and God's righteousness covers our whole being. This is God's righteousness given to us as our covering through the redeeming death of Christ. Christ died on the cross that we might obtain the righteousness of God. God has put His righteousness upon us just as the father put the best robe on the prodigal son who returned. In that

parable in [Luke 15](#) the father told his servants, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him” ([v. 22](#)). This robe signifies the righteousness of God, which is Christ. Praise the Lord that the righteousness of God has been put on us! God’s righteousness deals with all we have done. Through the redeeming death of Christ, this has been fully accomplished.

HOLINESS WORKED INTO US

In addition to this, God is now working His holiness into us. God’s holiness is not upon us; it is being worked into us. This is not a matter of merely an outward covering, but an inward imparting. As we have seen, holiness is God’s nature. God works His holiness into us by imparting His nature into us. He does this by coming into us to be our life. God comes into us as life so that He may saturate all the inward parts of our being with what He is. Even now God is saturating every part of our being with His element. In this way, God makes us holy. This is not outward righteousness; it is inward holiness. It makes us holy not only positionally, but also dispositionally. This is sanctification.

God’s righteousness has been reckoned to us through the redeeming death of Christ, and now

God's holiness is being wrought into us through Christ's living in us. Christ died on the cross so that God's righteousness might be put upon us, and Christ lives within us so that God's holiness might be wrought into us. I praise the Lord that I can stand here and strongly testify, "Through Christ's redeeming death, God's righteousness has been put upon me. I can stand before God without any fear. I am fully at peace in the presence of God because His righteousness is upon me." I can also testify that God's holiness is being wrought into me by Christ living in me. Today Christ is living in the depths of my being to saturate me with all that God is. I am constantly under this process of saturation. Whenever I talk to my wife or children, Christ is working to saturate and permeate me completely and absolutely. Day by day, the divine nature is being infused into me to make me holy dispositionally. I must confess, however, that although this work has been going on quite well, it still is not finished, for certain parts of my being have not yet been saturated with the nature of God. The divine infusion is still taking place.

At times it may seem that this infusion is temporary, that it does not deeply penetrate our being. It may seem like a rainbow that appears

in the sky for a few minutes: if you try to locate it, it disappears. Our holiness is sometimes like this. We may be holy and separated, but only for several minutes. For example, a certain sister may be very saintly right after morning watch. But a few minutes later she may act like the Devil himself. However temporary our holiness may seem to be, it is nevertheless a fact that we are under God's infusing, God's permeating. His saturating work continues to go on. Do not be disappointed. Sooner or later, your devilish behavior will be gone. The time will come when you will not be able to act like the Devil, even if you try your best to do so. You will be one who has been fully sanctified with the nature of God.

GLORIFICATION WITH GOD'S GLORY

But there is even more than this. We may be fully permeated with God's holiness and yet still not be in glory. Remember, the last step of God's working in us is glorification. One day, we all shall be glorified (8:30). We have been justified with His righteousness, we are being sanctified with His holiness, and we shall be glorified with His glory. We all shall be brought into glory. As the glorified sons of God, we shall shine with the glory of God. This is the full salvation for all

who believe in Christ. Everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus will eventually become a glorified son of God bearing the righteousness of God outwardly, being saturated with the holiness of God inwardly, and shining in the realm of His full glory as one of His sons. The day of our glorification will be the time of the revelation of the sons of God (8:19). At that time, we shall all enter into the freedom of the glory of God (8:21). Then there will be no more bondage, limitation, depression, or suppression. Instead, we shall enjoy full liberation and shine with God's glory. That will be full salvation.

THE HEART OF GOD

After Paul shows us the working of God's righteousness, the saturating of His holiness, and the glorifying of His glory, he brings us into the heart of God (8:31-39). God does so much for us simply because He loves us. He loved us eternally. From eternity in the past, God loved us, and He still loves us today. His heart is our stay, our security, and His love is our safeguard. Do not have any doubt about your personal salvation. God loves you, and He assures you that He will accomplish everything on your behalf. If you cooperate with Him, He will accomplish this smoothly. If

you do not cooperate with Him, He will encounter some difficulties, but eventually He will get through. Although you may afford Him some hardship, you cannot frustrate Him. That hardship does not mean very much to Him. Sooner or later, you will say, “Father, I worship You because You love me. You selected me, predestinated me, called me, and justified me. Praise You, Lord, that You have sanctified me and even glorified me. Here I am in glory.” One day we all shall pray in this way. No longer shall we praise the Lord for things such as cars and houses. Instead, we shall praise Him for the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, the glory of God, and the love of God. This is the structure of the first eight chapters of the book of Romans.

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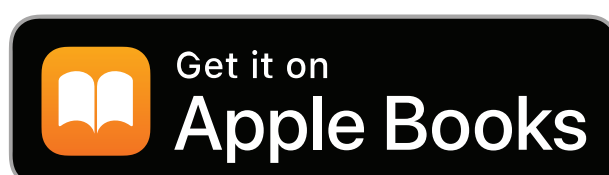
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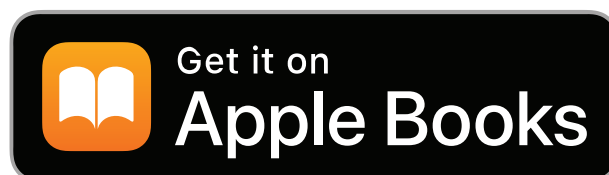
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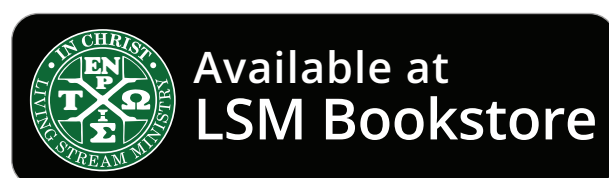
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