Romans Class 2

Notes

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First let it be mentioned that by "the Law," St. Paul refers to the Law given to Moses and is found in the first 5 Books of the Old Testament. Hence the "Mosaic Law" is to be understood in proper context.

Romans

chapter and verse

3.1-2 "What advantage has the Jew..." The value and advantage of the nation of Israel, for to them were ascribed the oracles of God which directly prophecied and prepared the way for the Messiah.

3.3-4 "For what is some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true though every man be a liar." This is the first of questions that atheists put forth: not all believe, especially with regard to people who went thousands of years without evangelization. But also we could point out all those children of Christians who do not believe. The first presupposition is not entirely true. For we know that In India and for sometime in remote parts of what are now Nepal and southern China in the early centuries of Christendom, as well as Mongolia and the borders of Russia later on, there was immense evangelization. Nevertheless, grace is not limited to physical evangelization. Abrogating the primacy of the grace of God in all salvific action for the faith or works of men is nonsense. For even if to say that we are saved by faith and works. Whose faith? Whose works? We are saved by interaction with the grace of God. To deny this in favor of thinking that it depends solely on the human spreading of the letter is a heretical precept that Protestants would grasp onto--the letter cannot save, only God can. For it is true that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," but it is likewise true that "by nature the Gentiles do the things in the law, these, although not having the law [as were the others], have law established within themselves" (Rom. 2.14). Therefore, let us not discount the possibility that to those afar off, God sent His angels to whisper the word in their ear toward the hour of death, and to give them spiritual hearing, when we know quite will that some of us have heard with our ears but have failed with the Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom says of this "where he here says 'by nature' he refers to the reasonings of nature. And he shows that others are better than they, and what is more, better for this, that they hav enot received the Law, and do not have the advantage that the Jews seem to have over them. For on this ground he means they are to be admired, because they required not a law, and yet exhibited all the doings of the Law, having the works, not the letters, graven upon their minds" (Rom.Hom. 5.14). Therefore, let us by no means condemn those whom St. Paul and St. John Chrysostom have called Law-filled. For the Spirit moves whereever He will, and bestows many kinds of graces upon all, even though we know that there are certain graces that belong solely to the Church, in and through it. Life itself is a sacrament bestowed upon all, which finds its end in the Lord, that is, in Communion and union with the Lord Himself, whether in this life or the next.

Grace, therefore, is not dependant upon human action, but upon Divine, and unified with human action only in the Incarnate God. And Grace is the energy of the Holy Spirit, God Himself, who works in His own manner. "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy." "I will write my law upon their minds and hearts" says the Lord. But even many Orthodox today deny this principle, saying rather that "it takes time" and then they lay down all the answers while completely disregarding the Fathers. Some say that "it takes time to let us absorb" some local form of music or cycle. But it does not take time, it takes God. If you think it takes time, then why do you not bow down and worship time? "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord."

3.5-8 "If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?...And why not say 'Let us do evil that good may come'?--as is slanderously reported against us and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just"

There were certain philosophers in ancient times who would argue that if good comes out of something, then that thing is ethical. That became known as "the end justifies the means." Orthodoxy wholeheartedly rejects this theory. For if a work is truly good, then that work has good of itself even if it is a means to a greater good in that God by his grace gave us the will to do good, and delights in the good, and interacts and deifies the good by his interaction. Likewise, if a series of works that are good wind up disasterous, the works themselves were still good, even though disaster might have come. If we believe the "end justifies the means," then we would have to consequently believe that the slaughtering of innocent blood of the martyrs was a moral act on the part of the murderers, because the martyrs went to heaven. But we know that murder is an immoral act even if God uses it for the good. Evil is never the cause of good, but God alone is good, and whatsoever He wills. Evil is the unsubstantial negation of good. Therefore, the end does not justify the means, and God is found true even if every man is found to be a liar. "With a view then of escaping from admonishment, and being useful both to others and to ourselves, let us drive out all iniquity from our soul and choose virtue. For so shall we attain to the blessings which are to come, whereto may it be granted us all to attain by the grace and love toward mankind..." (Hom.Rom.6)

3.9-20 Some are not "better" than others by nature, for all are "under sin." "There is none righteous no not one..." By the standard of the law, all are under sin, but by the grace of God through Christ, as is seen in 3.21ff, there is hope.

3.21-24&ff Thus, the law has condemned us, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe, for there is not difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

3.27-30 Perhaps one of the more misunderstood passages. The reformers mistook it to be refering to faith without works, but we know, rather, that it refers to that "faith working through love" which St. Paul mentions elsewhere (Gal.5.6).

3.31 We do not void the law but establish it by faith in Christ because the fore-witnessing of Christ was the purpose of the Law (Rom.3.21).

4.3 Faith was counted to Abraham for righteousness

4.4-5ff Once again, referring to the attempting to fulfill the Mosaic Law even though Christ has already fulfilled it. Therefore, we must obtain that grace which works of faith by love in Christ who is the fulfillment of the law, not by the law of Moses.

4.8 St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom both say that this verse refers to Christ Himself. Likewise with the first Psalm "blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked..." refers to Christ Himself, and to us only by participation and synergy with Him.

4.13ff "The promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." Likewise here, the promise of blessedness to the seed of Abraham refers to Christ (Gal. 3.16), and to those who are His members, that is, to those who comprise His bride, and thusly "the two became one" by divine grace and the sacraments.

4.16 The promise that Abraham would be the heir to the world "is of faith that it might be according to grace." For because we are mystically but truly members of Christ, and because He is a descendant of Abraham, therefor "Abraham...is the father of us all."

4.25 Christ was "raised for our justification." This is quite the contrast from the middle age Frankish concept that Christ was put to death for our justification. But the term "justification" in the Greek signifies the "making righteous" by synergy with God, and hence refers more to deification, as is evident from this passage. In fact, many translators interchange the terms: "just" and "righteous," because they both refer to the same Greek word. Likewise with "justify" and "bring to righteousness" or "show to be righteous."