Romans Class 4

Notes

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Romans chapter 7

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--7.1-4 Unlike the law of Moses, which was only binding with regard to earth (thus marriage was only til death do you part), the body of Christ offers that which is eternal. For we have "died to the law" (7.4), that we might bear greater fruit than obedience to the law could provide. For obedience to the law at most (and this would be only if it was perfectly followed) could provide to any one person who obeyed it earthly reward. But Christ perfectly obeyed it and went beyond it to offer and to be our Eternal Reward.

--7.6 "We serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit," hence, no longer works of the "old written code" should be perform, but rather works of "the new life of the Spirit." Hence there is no adverse dichotomy of "faith vs. works" with regard to righteousness, for true faith is a faith that works in the Spirit.

--7.9 This verse is one reason why the Orthodox Church feels very comfortable rejecting ideas such as Limbo or worse still ideas about infants being condemned under sin for electoral or some other reasons, because St. Paul Himself admits of a time when humans are "alive apart from the law," and are innocent, and after a certain point in life, at a certain age "the commandment" comes. Of course, in this interpretation, being "apart from the law" refers to being innocent of any personal violation of the commandment, not to a separation from the effects of the fall.

Yet there is one more truth that we must get from this passage as well. This passage also refers to our potential status as being a member of the human race. "For I was alive without the Law one" says St. John Chrysostom. "When, pray, was that? Before Moses" (Rom. Hom. 12). Therefore, this passage (like many other passages of Scripture), has several layers of truth to derive from it, in this case one from the particular being applied to the general, and one from the general being applied to the particular.

7.15 St. John Chrysostom urges the reader to have extreme caution and discernment when reading these passages. For no man has sinned in complete ignorance of his actions. "Do you not see that if we do not receive his words with the proper caution, and keep looking to the Apostle's objective, that countless incongruities will follow?" (Rom. Hom. 13). This does not refer to complete ignorance, but rather a "dizziness," according to St. Chrysostom, based upon the fact that he has knowledge but acts against his innermost will.

7.17-18 When we subject ourselves to sin it is not us doing the sinning, according to St. John Chrysostom, but rather the sin doing the primary function, and ourselves slavishly following. And is St. Paul saying here that the flesh is evil? No, but rather "the fact that 'no good things dwells in it' does not show that it is evil itself. Now we admit that the flesh is not so great as the soul, and is inferior to it, yet not contrary, nor opposed to it, and it is in no wise evil; but that it is beneath the soul, as a harp beneath a harper, and as a ship under the captain." (St. John Chrysostom, Rom Hom. 13).

7.19-20 St. John Chrysostom: "Do you see how he acquits the essence of the soul, as well as the essence of the flesh from accusation, and removes it entirely to sinful actions? For if the soul does not will the evil, it is cleared; and if he does not work it himself, the body also is set free, and the whole may be charged upon the evil moral choice. Now the essence of the soul and body, and [the essence] of that choice are not the same, for the first two [the essence of soul and body] are God's works, and the other is a motion from ourselves towards whatever we please to direct it. For the ability to will is indeed natural and from God, but the exercising of the will in this particular is our own, and from our own mind" (Rom.Hom. 13). The will is a distinctive faculty of the human person, but is a faculty, not a component, of the person. For the will belongs as an energizing faculty to the human nature, whereas the soul and body, are the basic components of the human person. In other words, the will is the natural energetic possession of each human person; the soul and body are not 'energetic possessions' but are the natural components of the human person himself. This we also saw with our Lord and have the Ecumenical Councils in conjuction with the Scriptures as our lead.

--7.24-25 "Observe how he (St. Paul) shows the necessity of having grace present with us...But when you hear him say 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' do not suppose that he is accusing the flesh. For he does not say 'body of sin' but 'body of death:' that is, the mortal body--that which has been overcome by death, not that which gendered death. And this is no proof that the flesh is evil, but rather that it has undergone a certain marring...it is not the body itself that he wishes to be delivered from, but the mortal body, hinting, as I have often said, that from its becoming subject to suffering, it also become an easy prey to sin." (St. John Chrysostom, Rom.Hom 23)

This realistic dual reality of serving with the mind the law of God but with flesh the law of sin is troublesome, and it is this that we seek to eliminate, that the flesh become subject with the mind to the same law, and not two different opposing patterns of desire, which keep us from the sanity of God and the peace of mind that each man yearns for in life.