

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	112		Gary L.W. Johnson
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### APOSTOLIC LOGIC: (ONCE MORE) HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Most of you will recognize that the question stated above comes directly from the title of the well-known book written by the late Francis Schaeffer. The *Then* is the operative word. Schaeffer was specifically pointing to the truth as expressed in the teachings of the Protestant Reformers.<sup>1</sup> *Since* we serve a sovereign God who has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, we *ought* to live in that light. But there is another important part of this little syllogism. Before the *then* there must be an *if*. The *then* is the second step that presupposes a proper understanding of the *if* (the first step). Thus, the syllogistic steps would look like this: *if this then that*. NOTE: there are *three* major features in this chapter.

A. The Apostle raises *two* questions and builds his argument around his answers.

1. The first question opens the chapter by asking, “What shall we say then?” The Apostle is responding to his critics and their criticism of his “Law-free justification” (cf. 2:1-3, 17-24; 4:1; 9:1-3, 6, 14, 19, 30; 11:1, 11). “What was their criticism? It was not just that Paul’s gospel of justification by grace through faith without works seemed to make the doing of good works otiose. Worse than that, it seemed to stimulate people to sin more than ever. For if, in his understanding of Israel’s story, the law led to an increase of sin, and sin led to an increase of grace (5:20f), then logically, in our story too, we should increase our sinning in order to give God the chance to increase His gracious forgiving. They put it in the form of a question: *Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?* They were implying that Paul’s gospel of free grace actually encouraged lawlessness and put a premium on sin, because it promised sinners the best of both worlds; they could indulge themselves freely in this world, without any fear of forfeiting the next.”<sup>2</sup>
2. The second question (v. 15) builds upon Paul’s answer to the first and asks: “What then?” In each case the Apostle seeks to remind the Romans of something that should be very obvious, “Do you not know . . .” (v. 3 and again in v. 16). In other words, this constitutes a mild rebuke. They should not be in the dark about these matters. There is substantial evidence that what Paul is referring to here is the practice of requiring all candidates for baptism to be thoroughly catechized. As Bishop Barnett notes, “Romans 6 is a window into the practices of the early Christians in regard to *initiation* into the faith. First, this passage reveals that baptism was accompanied by instruction. Paul speaks of the *pattern of teaching (tupeis didaches)* to which [believers] were handed over (v. 17). At the end of the letter he warns the Romans to note those who oppose *the teaching (didache)* which they have *learned*. This is consistent with extensive evidence in the New Testament that new believers were carefully instructed at the time of baptism. Such formulated instruction before baptism must have been widespread, since Paul merely assumes the practice in Rome.”<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *katecheo* means “to teach.” We find the Apostle using language to convey this important practice. He speaks of the saving story of salvation (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 1

Cor. 15:1. Another title by which he designated the same faith – is “the preaching” or “the preaching of Jesus Christ” cf. Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 1:21). Yet another, and more general, descriptive term is “the faith (an objective genitive)” and the related verb. Thus in Col. 2:7 he admonishes his readers to “be established in *the* faith as you have been taught it;” in Gal. 1:23 he reports the churches as saying that “the man who once persecuted us is now preaching *the* faith which he once ravaged;” and, in Eph. 4:5, he clinches his argument about the unity of the body by pointing out that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Finally, it is with an eye to the Gospel as the Church’s witness that he speaks so frequently (cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:1; 1 Cor. 14:36; Gal. 6:6); Phil. 1:14). Of “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord.” “In contradiction to the view that the Apostle Paul was a daring doctrinal innovator, virtually the inventor of Catholic theology, all the evidence goes to prove that he had a healthy regard for the objective body of teaching authoritatively handed down in the Church.”<sup>4</sup> The suggestion has sometimes been made that texts like these merely prove that the faith was tending to assume a hard-and-fast outline towards the end of the first century. The Apostle Paul himself, however, is a witness to the fact that the process was at work at a much earlier stage. Remonstrating with the Galatians (Gal. 3:1), he reminds them that before their eyes Jesus Christ had been “openly set forth crucified.” In 2 Thess. 2:15 he exhorts his correspondents to “hold fast to the traditions which you have been taught.” (The latter verb hints that he has doctrine in mind), and in Rom. 6:17 he speaks explicitly of “the pattern of doctrine” to which they have been committed. The expression points to a body of truth, i.e., a theological framework. In 1 Cor. 11:23 and 1 Cor. 15:3 the same idea of tradition passed down and received (cf. 2 Tim. 2:1, 2). This is underscored with the words “knowing that.” Paul once again recalls their initial grounding in Christian teaching. That teaching relates to the fact that Christ was raised from the dead, never to die again.”<sup>5</sup>

**B.** There are *two* theological themes that occur frequently in Romans 1-6: *Sin* and *Death*, Paul’s repeated emphasis on *sin* has primarily to do, not with individual *sins* (note the singular) but with Adam’s sin (5:12-21). Death, throughout this section in Romans, speaks of *eternal* (and not physical) death (note the contrast between “eternal life” and “death” in 6:23 and 5:21).

**C.** Paul’s language and imagery. He depicts the relationship a slave has to a master and underscores the great transition from Satan’s Kingdom to Christ’s (cf. also Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9). The emphasis is on the status of the *new* slavery; from bondage to liberty. The point the Apostle is drawing home revolves around the believer’s *Union* with Christ in His death and resurrection. It is here that Paul’s logic is irrefutable:

1. We receive forgiveness of sins through Christ.
2. This reception involves being united to Christ.
3. The Christ to whom we are united died to sin.
4. Since we are united to Him, we also have died to sin.
5. If we have died to sin, we cannot continue living in it.
6. Therefore, we cannot continue in sin that grace may increase. Shedd put it best when he wrote, “The Apostle Paul teaches, with great cogency and earnestness, that trust in Christ’s atoning blood is incompatible with self-indulgence and increasing depravity. The two things are *heterogeneous*, and cannot exist together. The proof of this is derived: (1) From the unity of the believer with Christ, in respect to Christ’s work of atonement, verses 1-14; and (2) From the nature of the human will and of voluntary agency, verses 15-22.”<sup>6</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** This chapter of Romans has been the source out of which all sorts of misguided concepts of the “higher” Christian life or “second blessing” teaching claim support. One of the results has been a profound misunderstanding of Paul’s language. These views have *imported* into the text that reflect decidedly alien concepts, the likes of which never occurred to the Apostle. J. Gresham Machen, a first-rank NY scholar who devoted most of his life to the study of Paul<sup>7</sup> makes this very perceptive observation. “Those who discard theology in the interests of experience are inclined to make use of a personal way of talking and thinking about God to which they have no right.”<sup>8</sup> What Machen is objecting to also concerned the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Listen carefully to his words, “Let me emphasize this again. This is not something subjective or experimental; the Apostle is not thinking of that here. That is where many go wrong in their exposition of this chapter; they persist in regarding it from the experimental standpoint. It is one of the chapters constantly used in *holiness meetings* and in addresses on sanctification, for that reason. But that is not what the Apostle is dealing with here; he is dealing with the grand objective fact. It is not something we feel, but something that is true of us, equally true of us is that we sinned in Adam. You do not *feel* that you sinned in Adam; you believe it because God’s Word tells you that it is true. We can see the results and the consequences as they become evident experimentally. In exactly the same way, at this point Paul is simply concerned about the fact, the great objective fact, that because of this union with Him, when Christ died to sin we died to sin with Him. This is the point, it seems to me, that is missed by so many, not only in this chapter but in so much Christian thinking. Take, for instance, our hymnbooks. It is extremely difficult to find appropriate hymns to illustrate this theme we are discussing. Our hymns tend to be so subjective. I went through the entire section of hymns on the Christian Church in *Congregational Praise* and I found that, as is the case with other hymnbooks, they simply deal with the fellowship that we enjoy in the Church, the fellowship we enjoy with one another. It is almost impossible to find hymns that bring out this great doctrine of our union with Christ, and our position in Him. We are so subjective that we miss this glorious truth, this objective truth, this great thing that has happened outside us – our position. This is very sad, but nevertheless true.”<sup>9</sup> Both Machen and Lloyd-Jones have put their finger on a problem that needs to be addressed, which is the tremendous degree to which outside factors control or determine *how* we approach the Bible. The Apostle’s emphasis throughout his epistles is centered on doctrinal certainties. Note this point made by Gleason Archer, one of my former professors, “Liberation from sin by death is final and irreversible. Only as we could illusion as real – the illusion that sin is too strong for us despite the power of the indwelling Christ – do we fall back under the power of sin, and the flesh can *lust against the spirit . . . so that we cannot do the things that we would* (Galatians 5:17). What this paragraph teaches us is that we have permanently left Egypt never to return there. a. (:8) Because we have been identified with Christ in death, we are identified also with his death-conquering, sin-overcoming life for all eternity.”<sup>10</sup> I close with a word of wisdom from the great Puritan commentator John Trapp: “we are said properly to live, when our regeneration is perfected in heaven. To live here is but to lie a dying.”<sup>11</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer's book *True Spirituality* (Tyndale, 1971), is, in my opinion, a classic. It also deals with this theme.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1994), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> The Book of Acts refers to the apostles' "teaching" (*didache* – 2:42; 5:28) and other New Testament writings refer to "teaching" (*didache* – 2 John 9) or "doctrine" (*didaskalia* – Rom. 12:7; 15:4) and "the confession" (*homologia* – Heb. 3:1; 10:23). In time these teaching "outlines" assumed a "trinitarian" shape from which early versions of the "Apostles'" and "Nicene" creeds developed, both of which were originally used at baptismal services and only later became church creeds. Cf. Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God's Righteousness* (Christian Focus, 2003), p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Longmans, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Barnett, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on Romans* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1979), p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> Machen's major work was his *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (McMillan, 1921).

<sup>8</sup> J. G. Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Zondervan, 1972), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> G. L. Archer, *The Epistle To The Romans: Shield Bible Study Series* (Baker, 1977), p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> John Trapp, *A Commentary On The Old and New Testament V* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 2022), p. 499. Trapp was the only Puritan to write a commentary on every book of the Bible.