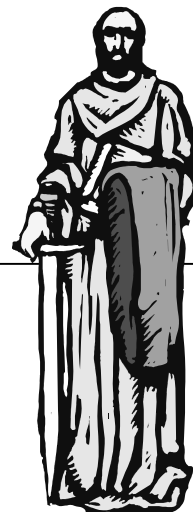


The Year of St. Paul



The Letter to the Ro-

The diligence of historians seeking to bring the past perfectly to the present is found in St. Paul's attempt to reconstruct (make known perfectly) God's saving action, and the restoration of all mankind to its original intent and plan (as God so designed it). As with the efforts of all historians, the completeness of the past cannot be found. There is always something not quite the same.

In this letter to the Romans, Paul is trying to show the Christian, the believer in Christ then and now, that God's plan of salvation in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus, leads to certain gifts, a new way of life — what was planned by God from the beginning of time.

For Paul, and for us, the struggle is in our lack of knowledge and understanding, leaving us incapable of grasping the full gift of the freedom God offers us as his children. So while the fullness of life in and with our God is ours to have, we find it difficult to take it as our own and maintain in our lives.

An historian attempts to return to what was, creating the situation, time and space, as best as possible. Paul cannot do this. Nor is it his plan to do this. The time and space is now. Justification through the death and resurrection of Jesus — in

Jesus' time as God and man — happened then, but continues to be poured out even to this day. The cross, the giving, was an event in time but the purpose and effect continues today in our time through the Jesus who is beyond time and space. So we do not seek to go backwards in time and space, but seek to realize that the gift has not

deteriorated nor diminished in its power and potential, remaining strong and active today. What occurred then is occurring now, calling all believers to faith.

So when we accept in faith, when we truly believe, that the "love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (5:5), is happening now,

we find a peace within, "a peace the world cannot give." (5:17)

This peace endures and cannot be removed from us, anymore than it can be removed from time and space lived since the resurrection. For many, this is difficult to accept. But so is the belief that God supersedes time and space as we know it.

It is this gift of peace, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that enables hope to come alive and the believer to move in faith despite the difficulties and struggles of this world. Hope leads to the expectation and anticipation of seeing the "glory of God" which cannot be fully realized in this lifetime.

The present salvific moment is defined in and through the continuous outpouring of the Holy Spirit which allows us to live as children — sons and daughters — and not slaves. We are heirs of God in, with, and through Christ Jesus.

All Have Sinned; All Are Saved

We need to remember that all of this letter, and most of everything Paul wrote, is seen in light of Salvation History. This is most evident in how Paul moves from Adam, who sinned, and therefore brought all mankind into sin, to Jesus, the Savior who brings all mankind into saving grace, restoring life as it was intended by God.

Paul takes us from the old Adam, to the New Adam, Jesus the Christ. Christ alone can destroy the power of sin which enslaves us. Christ alone can break the sinfulness that invades the heart and mind. Christ alone can make us new creations, with a cleansing that destroys death and offers life. (5:21)

We need to be constantly aware of our sinful-

Overview of Romans Chapters 5-8

The gospel and freedom (5:1-7:25)

What God has done in Christ (5:1-11)

Adam and Christ (5:12-21)

Freedom from the power of sin and death

(6:1-11)

Freed for obedience to God (6:12-23)

Freed from the Law (7:1-6)

Sin and the Law (7:7-11)

Life under sin and the Law (7:12-25)

The gospel and life in the Spirit (8:1-39)

Life in the Spirit (8:1-11)

Children of God (8:12-17)

Waiting in hope (8:18-25)

The Spirit and prayer (8:26-27)

God is for us (8:28-39)

The above overview is taken from *Meeting St. Paul Today*, by Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, Loyola Press, Chicago

GOD FIRST

Year Three, Part 28

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ness, but also of our salvation. Where there is sin, there is also an abundance of grace to overcome sin.

Christian Baptism

Is it ritual of action? We need to again remember that Paul is bringing history alive. The individual seeking life in Christ is doing the same. Paul is saying that God, who brought humankind to life through Adam, now is bringing new life, restoring life as it is meant to be, through the New Adam. Baptism does this by drawing us in to a share of the salvific actions of the death and resurrection. The effect of the saving actions of Jesus Christ are ours today — for those who truly seek the power and life offered through the Holy Spirit. Faith is required.

Thus, the newly baptized is a new creation, born again, by the Holy Spirit, and has deliberately chosen to live this new life throughout his/her life. The newly baptized must choose to live in Christ's death and resurrection, becoming alive for God in Christ Jesus.

This passing from death to life which takes place in the baptism of an individual, is a life-long journey of becoming perfectly one with God through Jesus Christ. It is not a now-or-later proposition. Such a thought would be found in those who believe they can save themselves and control God in their own time and space.

New Life and Law

Chapter seven of Paul's letter to the Romans wants to emphasize that no law is going to bring us salvation. Jesus Christ has overcome sin not by fulfilling a law, but offering love and life. Law cannot justify mankind to God! And God does not justify man to himself through a law. No law can dictate to God. As long as we live our lives because of laws, we will forever be bound by sin. Until we choose to live loving relationships with all people and God, we will never come to know either. There is no freedom. The law will always dictate, and we will be forever "meeting requirements." In this understanding, acceptance of salvation in and through Jesus Christ will always be tempered. It will be conditional.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Justification is through Jesus Christ alone.

Baptism makes us as new creations through Jesus' actions of justification (death and resurrection).

Law binds rather than allows for freedom.

Freedom is required for justification to be accepted rather than be a required action.

The Holy Spirit brings us to understand the justification and the new life that calls us to union in and with Jesus as heirs of the glory of God.

This simple progression brings us to Paul's

emphasis in chapter eight. Needless to say, we've seen many references in Paul's letters concerning *life in the Spirit*. *It is not an observance. It is a life, a way of becoming who we are meant to be, and at the same time, the giving over of who we think we are to be. In this life in the Spirit, we freely choose to accept the gifts God provides, and feely choose to live them in the sharing and building up of life.*

Having become a "new creation" through baptism, we are meant to find that interior source of strength to overcome the many obstacles that keep us from realizing the life of Christ within.

Life in the flesh is opposed to life in the Spirit. The two cannot coexist. Either we allow the Spirit to direct our actions, our thoughts, our words, or we continue to allow the desires of the flesh to permeate our daily existence. One life leads us to a faith that we can overcome the other through the grace of God. The other life leads us to accept the division we create in ourselves as we attempt to justify our own actions that are opposed to the salvific actions of Jesus Christ, happening in this time and space.



POINTS TO PONDER

1. St. Paul would have the believer see redemption happening through our liberation from sin in this world. Other early Church writers seem to indicate that the world as we know it is heading to total destruction, with a new earth being created for the proven faithful. In either understanding, faithfulness is required. As a faith-filled person, how do you see it, and why?
2. In this letter Paul writes the beautiful hymn of perfect confidence (8:31-39) "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" It implies the believer is in perfect harmony with the mind of God. Can we trust as much as this hymn seems to imply?
3. What is Paul saying about our own disposition entering into prayer when he says that the Spirit intercedes on our behalf since we do not know how to pray?
4. How well do I pray for the gifts of the Spirit (learned in preparing for Confirmation) to become part of my daily existence and my prayer life?