

That We Might Bear Fruit For God.

A Series of Studies in the Roman Letter
(Romans 5:12 to 8:39 and 12:1 to 15:13)

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Introduction.

The study for this quarter is entitled "That We Might Bear Fruit for God". This phrase is found in Romans 7:4, which reads as follows:

Romans 7:4. "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God."

Seeing that phrase, "that we might bear fruit for God", we know that in this part of Paul's letter to the Romans he is concerned about Christians' ability to fulfill God's purpose for them, that is, to bear fruit for God. The ultimate purpose of God for His people is that they bear fruit for Him. In this class this quarter, we want to study closely this part of Paul's letter to the Roman Christians. And as we study we will see that the Holy Spirit guided Paul to reveal some very special things to help the Christian who finds frustration in his efforts but who is trying to bear fruit for God.

One of the foremost problems among Christians today is that of frustration due to the seeming ineffectiveness of their work for the Lord. Many Christians strive vigorously "to produce some fruit" for the Lord, only to find the results of their efforts meager or altogether unsuccessful. Frustration takes a high toll from among God's people.

Becoming tired of seemingly endless frustration, some Christians simply abandon all initiative and settle for passive acceptance of whatever is served up to them at worship services by others. Some try "church hopping" thinking that they will have better success by leaving one

congregation and placing membership with another. Some potential Christian leaders, when frustrated in the results of their work, try new methods in human "gimmicks," such as the latest commercial marketing schemes, to extend the borders of God's Kingdom. Some turn their energies from "outreach" to "inward defense" of the Kingdom's borders. This often leads Christians to the building of irrelevant "straw issues" and "straw opponents" against which they can exercise themselves by taking issue. And some lose their faith and abandon the Lord's church altogether.

Many Christians do not realize that such frustration is a common human problem experienced even by the Christians of the first Century, even by the Apostle Paul. The cry of the frustrated Christian today is but an echo of the poignant cry of the frustrated Apostle Paul when he said, "The wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not! ...Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:18, 24). Through the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, Paul wrote this letter to the Romans largely for the purpose of revealing to Christians how to escape the frustration of ineffectiveness and how to become profitable stewards, how "to bear fruit for God".

Paul said, in essence, that the problem lies in the essentially sinful human nature of Christian people, and the answer lies in the righteous spiritual nature which has been made available to Christians in the completed work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Paul's specific goal for a portion of his Roman letter was that the Roman Christians might become more effective in carrying out God's purposes in their Christian lives, or "that we might bear fruit for God." (The portion that speaks specifically to this subject is from chapter 5:12 thru 8:39 and 12:1 through 15:13.)

In this first class we want simply to introduce the subject. And to do that, we need first to survey the entire book. We're going to try to do a very fast survey of Romans in the remainder of this introduction so that next class session we can start a more intense study of the portion of Romans which deals specifically with this subject, namely a portion starting with Romans 5: 12 .

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Saints at Rome. The majority of the Saints at Rome were probably Gentiles, although there were some Jews among them. These Saints probably assembled in several house churches in Rome such as the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila, the church in the house of Aristobulus, and the church in the house of Narcissus. These house churches were mentioned in the last chapter of Romans. Paul had never been to Rome but he pointed out in the letter that he had a plan to come through Rome someday on his way to Spain. In Romans 1:13 he said that he wanted to come to Rome so that he might have "some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles." The idea of "fruit bearing" is introduced here. (Of course, we know that Paul did eventually reach Rome, having been sent there as a prisoner on his way to a hearing or trial before Caesar.)

But in this letter he greeted by name a number of Christians whom he knew were in Rome, Christians whom he had met or had heard about elsewhere. The letter was probably written from Corinth when Paul went there on his third missionary journey. The year was 56 or 57 AD.

The purpose for the letter can be gleaned from careful readings and the discovery of its outline, that is, the outline or plan that Paul might have used in writing the letter. If we can discover a structure and an organization of the letter, then we can better understand the letter's meaning.

The major proposition being advanced and developed in Romans is found initially in Chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. "...The gospel... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

In short form the theme of the letter is "The Righteousness of God is Revealed from Faith to Faith." The letter unfolded to the Christians at Rome the many avenues through which God's righteousness is revealed to people both before and after they turn to God in faith. God is the only righteous One, and people, ever since expulsion from the Garden of Eden, are unrighteous.

People need salvation from the wrath of God which is laid up for the unrighteous. The gospel, the power of God for salvation, reveals God's scheme for accounting righteousness to otherwise unrighteous people so that they may escape the wrath of God and live in the spiritual state in heaven with God where righteousness reigns and only the righteous can live.

The structure of the Roman letter seems to me to be illustrated by the following outline:

I. Romans 1:1 through 5:11. The righteousness of God is revealed through the blood of Jesus Christ which justifies sinners who believe.

Here are listed God's provisions and influences to bring sinners to justification from their sins through all time, as mankind has and will dwell upon the earth.

II. Romans 5:12 through 8:39. The righteousness of God is revealed through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which sanctifies the justified sinner to bear fruit for God.

Here are listed God's provisions and influences to overcome the sin principle in us, sanctifying us to make us fruitful servants through whom He can carry out His purposes on earth.

III. Romans 9:1 through 11:36. The righteousness of God is revealed in the history of God's dealings with the Jews.

Here are listed God's provisions and influences throughout past history to bring the Israelite people to salvation and to utilize them for His special purposes on earth.

IV. Romans 12:1 through 15:14. The righteousness of God is revealed in the transformed lives of Christians.

Here are listed God's practical instructions to us to prepare our transformed lives for His purposes as we live on earth.

V. Romans 15:15 through 15:27. The righteousness of God is revealed in the transformed life of Paul.

Here are listed some of the ways God has utilized the transformed life of Paul for His purposes on earth.

VI. Romans 16:1 through 16:27. The righteousness of God is revealed in Paul's expressions of love toward his Christian brethren.

Here, through Paul's salutations and expressions of love, we see God's influence through Paul.

As we study through the first eight chapters of Romans we are amazed to learn of the many influences which God brings to bear on people, first to save them from their sins, and then to make them useful in lives of service to Him. Paul finally sums up these influences with the statement in the eighth chapter which could very well be called the golden text of Romans:

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8: 28) .

God brings influence upon us through so many avenues, many of which appear paradoxical to our worldly minds, Paul finally exclaimed in amazement after revealing the first eight chapters of God's righteousness to us:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ...For in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:31-37).

Then after enumerating in chapters 9, 10, and 11 how God's righteousness caused all things to work together for good during the history of His specially chosen Israelite people, Paul again exclaimed, echoing the prophets of old:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

Then at the very end of the letter, after revealing to faithful Christians probably as much of the mystery of God's righteousness that they could possibly understand, Paul said:

"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 16:25-27).

Now let us notice some other things about Paul's letter to the Romans. (We will touch only the hem of the garment.) The Holy Spirit through this letter tells us that the gospel of salvation has been given to us only through the inherent righteousness of God. We need it (and God saw our need) because of our unrighteousness. This salvation comes to us through faith. "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." And "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." Even the Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk, said, "the righteous man shall live by faith." (Habakkuk 2:4). To have been counted righteous by God was to have salvation. So, salvation came by faith even in the Old Testament time of Habakkuk. In fact, the first chapter of Romans leads us to understand that God has always required the people of the earth to have faith in Him; and lacking faith, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Since the creation of the world, men were unrighteous because they turned away from faith in God. Righteousness was accounted by God only to those who embraced the faith that God made available to them. How did early mankind know enough about God so that they could turn to Him in faith? Romans 1:20-21 reveals that "Since the creation of the world, (God's) invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being

understood through what has been made, so that they (mankind) are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations and their foolish hearts were darkened." You see, since the creation of the world God has required that people have faith in Him for He has shown Himself to them and they have had opportunity to know Him.

I bring this to our attention to make, at this time, only one point. (There are many points that could be made from this remarkable information.) The point for now is that God has always offered salvation to people through faith, the people in the time of the Old Testament patriarchs, the Israelite people during their time, and all of us, both Gentiles and Jews, in these last days when God speaks to us through His Son. The prophet Joel said, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13). When Paul said here in the Roman letter, "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And, how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" he then quoted from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, as his Scripture text to show that there has always been a preacher. Mankind has always known how to call upon God. "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" said Isaiah. That intimates that there has always been a preacher to make God known to mankind. God's salvation is, and always has been, by faith to those who believe.

That fact is an "ambient truth" that supports the entire Roman letter. That is a known truth, or should be, that salvation is by faith to those who believe. The Roman letter goes on from there to tell how faith leads to salvation. Indeed, it shows how faith leads to the bearing of fruit by the Christian. That's the part we will be studying in some depth in this class.

Right in the beginning of the Roman letter, Romans 1:5, Paul stated that he had "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." That's a statement of the task that the Holy Spirit gave to Paul. It's based on the known factor that salvation is by faith. The Holy Spirit gave Paul the task of bringing about

“obedience of faith” among the Gentiles. Then in the very last part of the letter, Romans 16:25, which I read a while ago, Paul recorded his prayer giving glory to the only wise God for the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ... leading to “obedience of faith.” Thus, with such an introduction and closing, emphasizing “obedience of faith,” we should expect to find in the Roman letter an underlying purpose to lead the Roman Christians to render “obedience of faith” toward God. In fact we do find that everything that is revealed and explained in the Roman letter about the "mysteries" of God's actions and purposes through the ages is followed by admonition to specific practical steps of “obedience of faith” to accomplish God's purposes in the Christians’ lives.

Paul's use of this phrase, “obedience of faith,” leads us to understand that the concept of faith always involved actions of obedience. Indeed, Paul presented “obedience of faith” as an imperative for the saving of those who heard the gospel, and for the bearing of fruit in the lives of Christians. To Paul the concept of faith always involved steps of obedience.

Paul wrote the Roman letter to people who were already Christians. So Paul does not approach his audience of readers as he would have approached people who were not already baptized Christians. Paul does not, in this letter, outline the steps of obedience of faith that people need to take to first become united with Christ. He does not call on them to take the steps of belief, repentance, confession, and baptism because they have already done that. In Romans 6:3 he asked, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into His death?" The people to whom he wrote had already been baptized. So he did not again admonish them to take steps of obedience of faith leading to baptism. But he reminded them of those steps culminating in baptism in order to admonish them to further steps of obedience of faith that would enable them to bear fruit for God in their Christian lives. That's what we want to concentrate on in this class, how to exercise our faith "that we might bear fruit for God."

For next week I urge you to read the entire Roman letter through. There may be passages that you don't understand. But read on through the

entire letter. Sometimes a broad look at the whole letter will bring an understanding of some of the details. Read the entire letter several times if you can. If you have a tape recording of the letter, sit down and listen intently to it. Each reading will only take about 30 minutes. Take it in to your soul through the senses of your eyes. Then take it in through the senses of your ears. Familiarity will bring an ever deepening appreciation of the infinite meaning of this Holy Spirit inspired letter. Read the outline of the book. See if you agree with the way I have outlined it.

Especially check to see if you see the change of pace that occurs in the middle of the fifth chapter. In the first 4 ½ chapters the subject is "sins", plural, which mankind has committed (past tense), and for which the blood of Christ shed on the cross has offered justification. Then, beginning at chapter 5 verse 12, the subject changes to "sin", singular, as if "sin" is personified, as if "sin" is a "principle" (or "law") to which everyone is subject, even Christians who have been justified by the blood of Christ. We might say, as the song says, God has cleansed us from both the guilt and the power of sin. (The song "Rock of Ages," has the phrase "Be of sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power.") The first part of the Roman letter is about God's cleansing us of our guilt for sins we have committed. The next part, beginning in Romans 5:12, is about God's ridding us of the continuing power of sin in our lives, even after we have become Christians.

Now about this idea of "bearing fruit", Paul used the metaphor "that we might bear fruit for God" in Romans 7:4. And I am basing this study we are starting on the understanding that is what this part of Romans beginning in chapter 5:12 is about. What is the meaning of "fruit" in this context?

The preeminent passage on "bearing fruit" are the words of our Lord in John 15:1-16. Jesus' words start out (in verses 1 and 2), "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." Then in John 15:16 Jesus said, "I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that

your fruit should remain, ..." What does the word "fruit" stand for in these words of Jesus? Is this word "fruit" used in the same way in Romans 1:13 where Paul wrote "that I might have some fruit among you?" And in Romans 7:4 where Paul wrote "that you might bear fruit for God?" In Colossians 1:6, Paul wrote that "the gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing. ..." If it is the "gospel" which "bears fruit," what did Paul mean when he wrote "that we might bear fruit for God?"

Doesn't it appear that what one does, when he goes forth to "bear fruit", is to preach the gospel? For it is the gospel which "bears fruit." When Jesus told His apostles, "I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit", was he not telling them to go and preach the gospel? That is what the whole book of Acts is about, isn't it? Preaching the gospel and, through the gospel, "bearing fruit for God?"

So, when Paul writes in Romans that God's righteousness has imparted something to us that enables us "to bear fruit for God," what does that mean? It means to pay attention because God wants to tell us something that is necessary for us to know in order that we can serve God in "the bearing of fruit". So we want to study this that Paul has written for the purpose "that we might bear fruit for God."

See if you agree with this outline. Then look over the questions I have given to you on chapter 5:12-21 and see if you can find answers. This is homework! Did we ever learn much of anything in school without homework? If you will consider these questions before the next class, you will certainly gain more than if you don't. I'm not going to grade you on this homework, but I suggest you consider these questions. We will discuss them in the next class session.