

Romans Devotionals-Theodore Epp

ROMANS DEVOTIONALS FROM THEODORE EPP

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One Man's Testimony Romans 1:13-17

In Romans 1:14-16 Paul made three significant statements about himself. First, he said, "I am debtor" (v. 14). He realized he had an obligation because he had seen the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Those of us who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ have a ministry of reconciliation--we have an obligation to take the message to others (see 2 Cor. 5:18-20). When we stand before Christ to give account, our faithfulness to this type of ministry will no doubt be one of the chief concerns.

Second, Paul stated, "I am ready" (Rom. 1:15). It's one thing to sense an obligation and even to be willing, but it is another thing to be ready. Readiness involves a mental attitude--putting ourselves at God's disposal to do His will.

Third, Paul said, "I am not ashamed" (v. 16). He was not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a clear and strong reference to the great doctrine that the Holy Spirit, through Paul, established by irrefutable logic in the succeeding chapters of Romans; that is, the doctrine of justification by faith. Or one may simply call it the doctrine of salvation by grace.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

God Hates Sin! Do We? Romans 1:18-25

There must be no misunderstanding of what God's wrath is. It should never be confused with man's wrath, which is sinful. God's wrath is not a sudden fit of temper; neither is it a desire for revenge. These things are sin, and we cannot attribute sin to God. God's wrath is a fixed attitude of opposition toward all unrighteousness. This attitude never changes. It will culminate in righteous judgment on all who finally and completely reject God's offer of love. God abhors sin, but He loves the sinner. This was clearly manifested when He made a way for the sinner to escape the consequences of sin and provided such a wonderful salvation in Christ. God's attitude toward the sinner is seen in such passages as John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

His attitude toward sin, however, is entirely different. Sin is of the Devil, and God in His wrath is against it. He will never tolerate it, regardless of the circumstances. If a sinner continues in sin, refusing to accept God's gift of eternal life, then God's unchanging attitude of wrath toward sin will be revealed against the sinner. This is the truth stated in John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God [His unchangeable attitude against sin] abideth on him." In other words, when the sinner clings to his sin and refuses God's offer of mercy, then sin and the sinner are one so far as the wrath of God is concerned.

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

Doing and Teaching Go Together Romans 2:17-29

We need to ask ourselves if our lives are good illustrations of what we teach.

We teach that people should not steal, but do we steal? We may never rob banks, but are we guilty of withholding money that rightfully belongs to others? Are we totally honest in preparing our income tax returns?

And stealing involves more than just money--it can also involve time. Are we stealing God's time by doing things with our schedules and energies that God never intended?

Are we placing God first in our lives, not only concerning our finances but also concerning our time? Or do we give God only the finances and the time that are left over?

We should never think that once we have given some money and time to the Lord that the rest is ours to do with as we please. All that we have belongs to God, so He should be taken into consideration in everything we do.

Each of us needs to come to God with an open heart and ask Him to do what David asked of Him: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23,24).

God has given believers the responsibility of spreading the Gospel to all the world, and we need to use all at our disposal to accomplish this task. How serious it will be if, when we stand before the Lord, we must admit that we did far less than we could have.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Life's Most Important Fear Romans 3:9-18

Romans 3:18 is not speaking of a reverential fear of God that a person has who recognizes Him as the great Potentate of all ages and as the Almighty God we serve. Rather, this verse refers to those who have no concern for the existence, character or attributes of God. They do not think that God merits any thought at all. They completely fail to recognize their accountability to Him.

People's basic problem--the root cause of all their trouble--is that they do not know God, and they do not fear meeting God when they die. People speak lightly of death because they do not want to face its realities. People have taken it for granted that God, if He even exists, will overlook what they do and will take care of them, regardless of how they live.

People's refusal to make God the God of their lives is the fountain from which all these evils flow. Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). When people refuse to fear God, or recognize Him for who He is, they lack wisdom, and they experience increasing mental confusion. One needs only to consider the fields of modern music and modern art to see this. And in addition to the absence of wisdom and an increasing mental confusion, there is also moral and spiritual darkness.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

Understanding Your Standing Romans 5:1-5

Our standing before God is in the grace to which we have constant access (Rom. 5:2). We do not need new credentials each time we come to God, because our standing is constant since we come by means of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us. God does not accept us as we are, but as we are in Christ Jesus. God makes His grace abound toward us (2 Cor. 9:8), and we are able to come boldly into His immediate presence (Heb. 10:19). All of this is available to us; our responsibility is simply to act on the basis of what God has made available. We need to follow the principle stated by Jesus: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37). Through grace, God has made all the benefits available to us; we now need simply to appropriate them or to act on the basis of what God extends to us.

God's grace is what He is; therefore, our standing is as sure as God is. Inasmuch as justification is by faith, it is already securely

ours when we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. The benefits, or blessings, that accompany justification are also ours, but in order to enjoy them we must appropriate them for ourselves. To fail in appropriating these benefits is like having money in the bank but refusing to use it or having water immediately available but refusing to drink it. Wonderful as these blessings are, they benefit us personally only as we appropriate them.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1).

Triumph in Tribulation Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Humanly speaking, no one likes tribulation. Within ourselves we react negatively to difficulties. The word "glory" means "rejoice." No unbeliever can do this, but the believer's whole outlook is changed because of his relationship with Christ. A true Christian can look tribulation in the face and say, "I thank God for this difficulty; I rejoice in it."

Notice that Romans 5:3 does not say we rejoice in spite of tribulations; rather, it says we rejoice in tribulations. This is sometimes an extremely difficult thing to learn. Have you learned it? If not, you are missing one of the greatest blessings that God has in store for you. You can rejoice and thank God even for the tribulation you are passing through.

Most believers are familiar with Romans 8:28, which emphasizes that God is working all things together for our good and His glory. God is using everything--whether we would call it tribulation or not--in order to mold us into the image of His Son (v. 29). And it takes difficulties to make us like Christ. In order for us to have the qualities of Christ, we need to pass through difficulties. They teach us valuable lessons in the Christian school of experience.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

One With Christ! Romans 6:1-10

After an individual is justified by faith in Christ, he discovers that he still has a sin nature. This gives him trouble, and he finds himself committing sins that he does not wish to commit. Soon he may become a believer who is dominated by sin. What does God do about this?

The solution to this problem is our identification with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. In this identification God sanctifies, or makes holy, the justified individual (a sinner saved by grace). Whereas justification deals with the guilt of sin, sanctification (identification) deals with the power of sin in the life of the believer. How does God sanctify, or make holy, a believer in daily experience? Romans 6 gives the answer.

The answer is our union, or identification, with Christ. Notice again that everything we have is because of Christ. Being in union with, or identified with, Christ is what is meant throughout the New Testament by the expression "in Christ." Being in Christ simply means that the believer has become one with Christ, or identified with Him.

Christ is not just a partner walking alongside the believer; He actually indwells the believer. Therefore, the believer is identified with Christ because Christ's life is in the believer.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Dead Reckoning Romans 6:11-14

Reckoning is based on absolute truth. We are not called upon to reckon something to be true that is not really true. It is true that Christ died for us and that when we believed in Him as Saviour, we died with Him. That's a fact. In that He lives, we also live. That's a fact. So reckoning is based on facts, not on experience. I do not reckon myself to be dead to sin because I feel dead. I don't reckon myself to be alive to God because I feel alive. Experience is important in its place, but it does not determine truth. But knowing what is true, we must reckon it to be true, and then the proper experience will follow.

Perhaps you say, "But I failed Him after I reckoned on the fact that I had died to sin; therefore, I must not be dead to sin." No, it is still a fact. Even when a believer does not behave as though he were dead to sin and alive to God, these are still accomplished facts. That is what salvation is all about. Being born again means we have passed from death to life. Our identification with Christ in His death is not progressive; that is, we do not die a little bit at a time. Our understanding of the significance of our identification with

Him may come gradually, but the fact of our death with Him has been accomplished once for all. Also, we do not become alive to God a little bit at a time; that, too, is once for all. We passed from death to life the moment we believed (John 5:24) and are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). We need to take God at His word concerning these accomplished facts.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Dead to the Law Romans 7:1-6

Everyone who claims he can keep the Law does not have a proper knowledge about the purpose of the Law. It was not given to save anyone; it was given to show everyone their need of placing faith in Christ.

The Law exhibits and expounds God's law of righteousness, but it gives no power to perform it. All it does is condemn us when we fail God.

God has set us free, however, through Christ, both from the old Adamic nature (Rom. 6) and from the Law (ch. 7). All of this has been done that we might be free to live unto God.

Not only does the Law itself never die, but also God's standards set forth in the Law can never be lowered.

The Law causes the individual to see his sin, and it condemns him because he is a sinner. But it does not help him to live a godly life. It is necessary, therefore, that a person's relationship to the Law be changed.

That is exactly what takes place when an individual trusts Christ as Saviour and thereby appropriates his death with Christ. The individual is no longer under the condemnation of the Law but is free from its curse and is free to please Jesus Christ.

God does not free us from the Law in order that we might sin without condemnation; He frees us from the Law in order that He might live out His righteousness in us. God has set us free not only from the sin nature but also from the law of condemnation.

This, then, makes it possible for Christ to live His life in us, and thus we live a godly life.

"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God" (Gal. 2:19).

The War Within Romans 7:23, James 4:1-3

James was well aware of the fact that conflict among believers comes from the personal war that goes on within each person. This conflict within the believer is also referred to in Romans 7:23: "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Also, Peter warned, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

James's reference to killing was not necessarily referring to taking a person's life but to destroying someone's character. Previously, James dealt with the viciousness of the tongue. When the tongue is out of control, it can be a lethal weapon used for character assassination.

These are sobering words from the Bible, and today more than ever we need to carefully examine our lives. Much bitterness is displayed not only among the unbelieving world but also among those who call themselves Christians. Sometimes, in the name of Christ and in a desire to be separate from sin, Christians commit sin by bitterly attacking fellow believers. We are to take a stand against sin, but we must guard our hearts so that the old nature does not take over, allowing the bitterness of hatred to grip us. Even though we may totally disagree with what another person is doing, we are still commanded as believers to seek that person's highest good.

"He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Prov. 10:18).

Your Debt to God's Spirit Romans 8:6-17

It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is sinful to allow oneself to be drawn away and to yield to the temptation. So at the time when temptation arises is the moment to apply Romans 8:13--to mortify the deeds of the body through the Holy Spirit. And notice that it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can effectively do this.

This calls for a new attitude. We must recognize that we are personally responsible. We cannot escape our responsibility by saying, "Well, it is the Holy Spirit's job to take over, so I am not responsible." The Holy Spirit will not and cannot work if our minds are not determined to hate sin and to refuse to fulfill what our evil natures urge us to do. It is not just a matter of feeling hatred for sin, but it's a determination of the will. The mind is the seat of the will, and we must use our thinking capacity to choose that which is right and to refuse that which is wrong. God assists even in our willing, or choosing, for Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." But God will not bypass our wills. If we choose to do wrong, He will not force us to do right. Our wills must be in complete submission to Him.

The person who knows Jesus Christ as Saviour has "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). By God's Word, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we know what Jesus Christ would think about a given matter; therefore, as we seek to honor Him, we think the same way. This is why we should not yield the members of our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness but should yield them to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13).

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

Not Imitation but Incarnation Romans 12:1-5

Christ wants to live His life through us. He wants to use our eyes to behold the world situation as it is today. He wants to use our ears to hear the cry of the unsaved and the cry of those who are in need. He wants to use our lips to tell others the Gospel. He wants to use our hearts to express compassion and love to everyone. He wants to use our minds to think through situations and to have something to say to the people involved. He wants to use our hands to do His work and our feet to get to the places He wants to go to help others through us. The body also includes the soul, which is the seat of the intellect, the emotions and the will. God not only wants the physical aspect of our bodies, but He also wants our intellect, emotions and will.

Christ wants to think His thoughts through us, and He wants to bring our minds under His control. Second Corinthians 10:4,5 says, "(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Jesus Christ also wants our emotions so He might express Himself through us to a lost and dying world. The Lord Jesus Christ also wants our wills through which to make decisions that will honor Him.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

No Room for Envy in the Church - Romans 12:6-16

What a shame when there is a spirit of envy among the members of the Body of Christ. Instead, there should be praise for the way God is using each one. One translator paraphrases Romans 12:3: "Now I have a warning for you, prompted by the divine grace bestowed on me--and I address it to all who are among you:--do not be uplifted with unjustifiable notions of your importance. Let your thoughts tend to sober views, proportioned to the measure of faith which God has allotted to each man" (Way).

When we become lifted up with feelings of importance because of the particular gift we have, we should remember that it is a gift. The Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts on believers as He chooses (1 Cor. 12:11), not according to what the individual wishes. So when we criticize a person who is exercising another gift, we are actually criticizing the Lord who gave that gift to the person. The other Christian is also part of the Body of Christ, and we need him just as he needs us. All of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Saviour are members of the Body of Christ (v. 27).

A person should not aspire to be something that is not in the will of God for him, because God has made him what he is and has a particular place for him in the Body. Frequently people are dissatisfied with the gift, or gifts, they have. They wish they had another gift or wish they were like someone else. But each gift, no matter how insignificant we may think it is, is useful and worthy in the Body of Christ. That's why God has given each particular gift to someone. We need to realize that God knows what He is doing when it comes to the distribution of gifts.

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love in honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10).

Dealing With Disagreements Romans 12:14-21

It is not our business to repay people for what they do to us. Vengeance belongs to the Lord, even as it is indicated in Deuteronomy

Since vengeance belongs to the Lord, we would be presuming to take the Father's business out of His hands if we tried to repay evil with evil. He takes into full account every injustice done to us, and He Himself will settle the account.

We are to keep on loving with the love with which God has loved us. That love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

When we are misunderstood by others, we need to draw on the Word of the Lord for strength and encouragement.

A passage that Mrs. Epp and I have both found extremely helpful over the years is Psalm 37:5,6: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

From this passage we see that our responsibility is to commit the whole situation to the Lord. If we have been falsely accused, we can count on the fact that God will eventually bring the true situation to light.

I have applied these verses to my life many times, and I know from personal experience that they work. God said it; that's why it works.

Love and forgiveness returned for the evil done to us will often bring a person to his knees and will "destroy" him as an enemy, but it will not destroy his character.

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord" (Heb. 10:30).

Two Burdens Romans 12:4-5, Romans 15:1 Galatians 6:1-10

To speak of bearing one another's burdens and then to say that every man shall bear his own burden appears on the surface to be a contradiction. This really is not the case. Two different words are used in the original language that are translated "burden" in Galatians 6:1-10. The burden spoken of in verse 2 is a burden caused by circumstances. The first verse in this chapter admonishes the spiritual person to restore a brother caught in a fault. Instead of discouraging the guilty and burdened brother, the Christian counselor is to help sustain his spiritual life. We are to help bear the burdens of such a person. We are to put ourselves in his place and make his burdens part of our burden. The burden in Gal 6:5 deals with our responsibilities as Christians. The subject of personal work is raised here and is part of our task as members of the Body of Christ. In such passages as 1 Corinthians 12:18 and Romans 12:4-5, we are told we are members of the Body of Christ, and the function of members in a body is to work. The life of the Body is His life. So each one of us who is a member of the Body of Christ has a responsibility and must bear it, thus proving his own work. To the sinner the Lord Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). But to us he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (vv. 29,30). He wants us to bear our burden of responsibility to God and man. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1).

Submitted but Faithful Romans 13:1-10

It is possible for a believer to be in a situation where he cannot obey the government, but he is to submit to it. Submission refers to our attitude--how we respond inwardly to those who are in authority; obedience refers to our visible actions--how we respond outwardly to those in authority. For instance, Peter and John were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus by the government authorities of that day (Acts 4:18). They could not obey these injunctions, because Christ's command for them to proclaim the Gospel superseded the command of the rulers. However, the apostles later submitted to the punishment that the government meted out and then kept right on preaching (5:18-20). They could not obey the government's commands, but they could submit to the power of the government. When confronted with their disobedience (v. 28), Peter and the other apostles answered: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (v. 29). We see their submission by their willingness to obey as far as possible.

A contrast between submission and obedience is also seen in Acts 5:40-42: "When they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13).

Be Cautious When You Criticize Romans 14:10-13

When we realize that each of us must give an account to God, it will cause us to be more cautious about criticizing a Christian brother.

We will then heed what 1 Corinthians 4:5 says: "So do not make any hasty or premature judgments before the time when the Lord comes [again], for He will both bring to light the secret things that are [now hidden] in darkness, and disclose and expose the [secret] aims (motives and purposes) of hearts. Then every man will receive his [due] commendation from God" (Amplified).

This is advice that Paul gave to the Corinthians, and it applies just as directly to each believer today.

We shall all be judged one day--not by each other's standards and not even by our own standards. We shall be judged by the standards of Christ. Before God alone, we shall give an account for our own actions and not for those of the other person.

I do not have to give an account for you, and you do not have to give an account for me. Before God, I will have to give an account for myself.

No wonder Paul said, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:13). In other words, we should stop turning critical eyes on each other.

This is sometimes a difficult instruction to follow. It is natural to always justify oneself and one's own actions in the face of what others are doing. It is natural to criticize the other person because he does not see or do things our way.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).