

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

By Robert Applegate, Jr.

(Continued from last month)

I WISH I could convey to you what Paul's letter means, and has meant, to me. But the best thing that I can tell you is to read it and re-read it and re-read it (in whatever translation is the easiest for you) until you understand what Paul is saying. For he has something to say that is central to your life, and he knew what he was talking about. While this may sound like religious fanaticism, it is nonetheless true. If this present translation and exposition helps you a little to understand Paul's message, it will have served its purpose.

After saying that the Good News of Jesus Christ is the subject of his letter, Paul goes on to explain why the Good News and its acceptance are so essential. He doesn't mince his words.

"The 'Wrath of God' is revealed from the Spiritual Realm against all irreverence and dishonesty of men, who pervert the Truth. What may be known of God is clear to them, for God has revealed it to them. Although invisible, His Eternal Power and Divinity have been clearly seen since the creation of the world in the things He has made. So men are without excuse. When they knew God, they did not reverence Him as God and were not grateful. They became foolish in their reasoning; their uncomprehending hearts were darkened. Thinking themselves to be clever, they became foolish, they substituted for the glory of the Imperishable God the image of perishable man. . . . They changed the Truth of God into a lie. They revered and served the created thing more than the Creator, who is to be praised forevermore."

This is the story of mankind and the story of every individual man. We all share in the universal apostasy, which (as the historian Arnold Toynbee has shown) is the cause of the decay of civilizations - as well as the decay of individuals. (Paul put in one sentence what Arnold Toynbee spent thirty years of dedicated study discovering - that mankind's ills stem from its putting its trust in, and giving its admiration to something less than its Creator.)

The "Wrath of God" is not an attribute of God; it is not His anger. It is the impersonal outworking of the law of cause and affect. When man cuts himself off from his Source of life and intelligence, then there can be no influx of life and intelligence. Disintegration results. But man's connection with his Source of life is his attitude of reverence and gratitude. When he lets go of this through infatuation with his own cleverness, with his own intellectual discoveries, then he cuts himself off from the Vine, and He disintegrates (although, like a branch that has been recently pruned, he may for a while appear to be still flourishing). This disintegration, which we see all about us now, is what Paul calls the "Wrath of God," a term very familiar to him from the Old Testament, his only Scripture.

God does not punish man. But man brings destruction upon himself through his lack of reverence for God (the product of a cocky self-assertion) and by his dishonest attitude toward His Creator and his fellow men. These hidden attitudes reveal themselves in man's claiming for himself powers that are not his, but God's.

All men have an inbuilt, intuitive awareness of God. The fact of God is so obvious, as Paul says, that no one can be ignorant of Him, though he may cover over his primitive awareness with such a thick crust of reasoning that he loses sight of it and forgets it. This is idolatry. This is self-worship. This is placing our intellect above God. But it is not confined to those whom we consider intellectuals. We are all infected with it. "It seems to me, . . ." we often say; or, "I think . . ." But as Socrates said, "Human thinking is worth little or nothing."

Anthropologists tell us that the very most primitive men had an awareness of One God ruling the universe. It is only when men became a little less primitive and started analyzing their world that they invented polytheism and idolatry. Today their ideas of demons and spirits ruling all things seem incredibly crude to us. Our ideas of natural forces and natural laws will probably seem equally crude to a more enlightened generation.

The primitive man putting his faith in amulets and charms and the modern man putting his faith in scientific research and reform are equally far from the Truth. Both are practicing a form of self-worship, of man-worship. Both are indulging in idolatry.

This is what Paul means when he says, "When they knew God, they did not reverence Him as God, and were not thankful. . . . Therefore their foolish hearts were darkened." It is a severe message, extreme one - that man's greatest intellectual achievements are nothing. But it is true. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The thoughts of the wise are vain. . . . If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know."

Reverence, awe, humility, before God are the only answer. "Except you become as little children," Jesus said, "you shall not enter into the Kingdom."

As I said above, Arnold Toynbee traces the decline of civilizations (of which quite a few have passed away) to man's putting himself and his achievements in the place of God. He also points out, truly, that some form of man-worship - either personal self-seeking, which is the worship of one's own comfort, or nationalism, which is the worship of one's country is the prevailing religion among mankind today, despite our protestations to the contrary.

The handwriting is on the wall. Will we read it?
(To be continued)

SPIRITICITY May 1961

MOTHER

By Alden Truesdell

THE SECOND SUNDAY in May is designated to be a peculiarly American celebration, but a similar practice has long been observed in rural England, where Mid-Lent Sunday is called Mothering Sunday. On this day, children visit their parents, usually taking a gift with them. A youth engaged in this amiable act is said to go a-mothering.

If one commodity or object is distinguished from another by the term mother, it denotes its superiority or importance. In gold mining, we look for the mother lode. In biology, a cell which by division produces other cells is called a mother cell. In map making, a mother map is an original map made from surveys; it serves as a model from which other maps are made. We have mother cities, mother countries, mother lands, and Mother Nature herself. The Mother Principle is so ingrained in the life of man that every walk of life acknowledges it.

On Mother's Day there will be laudation of mothers as indispensable members of the race. Many mothers who are susceptible to flattery will feel entitled to the compliments; others will not be pleased with empty praises. For mothers know their potential greatness. The office of motherhood is limitless in opportunity to influence children for good and to prepare future citizens to take their places among the sons of men. But to tell a mother she should be honored for such a general practice as giving birth is to belittle her understanding. For no mother ever went through the arduous experience of birth without realizing at some given moment that there was an element of complete Divinity in it. This is why it is difficult to flatter a mother who remembers the land whence she came and the "manner of spirit" she is.

If the little person the mother seems to be were to have the demands on her dependent on her own ability, the pressure would be too great. Because of her recent experience with the one Source of greatness, because of the obvious miracle of birth, the mother intuitively knows that nothing is impossible - that the Heavenly Father does the works.

Mothers are often ambitious for their children. It is not unusual for a mother to so identify the child with the Divine Source as to form it into a graven image, to "serve and worship the creature more than the Creator." She may then wonder why it reveals feet of clay. The corrective for this and the method used by wise mothers is to turn the ambitions into aspirations, to render the worship and reverence unto God, and to minister to the child as to a sacred trust.

"He that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

"The first of all the commandments is: . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."

SPIRITICITY May 1961

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?

By Nell Truesdell

"AS THOU hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." (John 17:18)

As God sent Jesus of Nazareth into the world for the purpose of making Himself manifest among men, so, through Jesus Christ, God has sent you and me and all humankind into the world to bear witness to His Universal Presence.

We who are acquainted with Jesus Christ may feel that we are imperfect vessels for such an important appointment. This feeble excuse has kept countless persons in bondage to traits, both good and bad, that characterize man's human nature. Because man has chosen to identify with his human nature, he has kept himself from expressing his latent Divine Nature, the Identity of God in him.

No human being is born into the world by the will of the flesh or the will of men. Each one is born into the world by the Will of God. Endowed with the enduring, unchanging spiritual Light, each one is designed to bear witness to that Light, just as Jesus did while He lived in the world.

Jesus Christ plainly testified to the spiritual Light (Identity of God). He proved that It lies latent in every human being, that each one may consciously associate himself with that Identity and prove himself a son of God, as Jesus Himself did.

Each man's interpretation of the purpose of his being in the world determines his experience in the world. If he believes his is a worldly mission, he sets a goal for himself and works to attain it. That goal may be physical perfection, intellectual acumen, material possessions, religious dedication, or a combination of any of these. The question each person must ask himself is: "Is the purpose worth while?"

The marvelous Jesus saw through the miasmas of worldly attainment. He discerned the falsity of the human nature that clothed His Divinity. Never in His experience in the world did He forget His Self-Identity with God.

We tend to forget that Jesus of Nazareth was born into the world just as you and I; that He grew up as a resident in one of the most despised areas in Palestine; that He worked at a carpenter's trade (one of the lowliest of that time); that, like all the strong young men of His community, He was impressed by the Roman authorities into forced labor; that He refused to bury Himself in misery and hate, but performed willingly all the menial tasks assigned to Him. How do we know this? We know it by observing His responses to the demands that were made upon Him - responses that are revealed through His words to His disciples and the crowds that later gathered around Him. For no teacher can teach any truth that He has not already proved in his personal experience. Read with a new view Jesus' instructions. They shine with such brightness that they veil the mean conduct of those in authority over Him and also the human behavior of His townsmen. For example:

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, while, thou are in the way with him"; "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain"; "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven"; "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life"; "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world." We could copy many more allusions to the weight of burdens that man has to bear in the world. Jesus Christ knew that the human experience is the testing ground for all men alike. He proved that whoever chooses to know God in all his experiences eventually will shed the cloak of mortality.

God has given us one assignment: to demonstrate within the limits of our present human experience that we are sons of God. God also gives us freedom to choose or to reject this assignment.

It is at this juncture that the majority of persons turn away and set for themselves some goal in the world that they believe they are more capable of attaining. This deceptive and easy choice draws man over the hardest road of human experience, taxes him with burdens grievous to bear, and proves to be most unrewarding, regardless of his apparent success. Instead of raising God's Identity in him as a monument to the Most High God, man settles for the privilege of raising a monument of worldly achievement to himself and ends up with his name carved on a headstone.

Kings of old, who regarded themselves as gods, raised colossal stone statues of themselves and placed them among the portrait reliefs of their ancestors. Other men now search the debris to rescue fragments of the images, shattered by earthquakes, erosion, and vandalism.

Are we not following the same pattern as the ancient kings? Do we not apply ourselves with unremitting one-pointedness to some transient goal that robs us of our true destiny? I do not suggest that we are to quit work, so that we may sit in the shade while we meditate on God. Nor do I mean that we must don priest's robes, to go out to evangelize the world, and draw other persons into the darkened understanding we believe to be "the light."

While in the doing phase of His existence Jesus kept His heart a sacred shrine where He communed with His Father in heaven. While we are in a similar doing stage in human existence, we should do as Jesus did - train our attention steadfastly toward God in our heart-center and make God our goal.

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SPIRITICITY, May 1961

FOR BEGINNERS:

Q. I have been a truth-seeker for years; still I feel that I have not found God. Why?

A. YOU HAVE BELIEVED that God is far away from you and that you have to look for Him. Zephaniah reported: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty." He referred to Jerusalem, the city that symbolizes the center of consciousness in man, the inner chamber of peace, the secret place within man, where he and God may commune.

Notice that when you look for anything, you look out or search with your eyes, and you are tense in your effort. The act of looking may have a pushing-away effect so that what you seek will elude you. If you are still, what you seek will reveal itself as already present with you. Learn to watch toward God in your midst - in your heart-center. "Watch," said Jesus. When you watch, you are still. Be still as a stone.

Q. How did man lose his God-given powers? How can he regain them?

A. MAN LET HIS attention drift outward, away from the Source of Power in his midst. In his search for satisfaction, he employed his own efforts to fulfill the demands of his lusts. He wanted to express himself. When lust conceived, it brought forth a confused state of mind and man became double-minded.

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

The God-given powers still belong to God. If man wishes to recover his privilege to let the God-given powers work through him, he will have to return to, and align himself (his attention) with, God. His scattered forces will then converge and unite with the Power of God in his midst.

Q. What is the most important thing all of us must learn?

A. THIS DIFFICULT QUESTION cannot be answered precisely. I suggest (and have found) that a most important practice is that of giving attention to God completely, unreservedly, in times of prayer and communion, then to carry over the practice throughout the activities of the day. If we do this our heart is cleansed, selfishness dissolves, we breathe the cool, pure Breath of Spirit, and joy wells up from inside us to quicken and restore our vital forces.

We must learn to give rather than to get. What can we give? 1) Our attention to God; 2) Freedom to others. These, perhaps, are the two most important gifts we may dispense. They cost nothing and yield everything. These gifts fruit into the spiritual Power that, of Itself, performs miracles of healing, protection, and prosperity in overwhelming demonstrations of God's and Love and Care.

God is never in a hurry, but He is never too late. - NT

Q. I have to prepare a paper for my class in Religious Philosophy. Will you please give me some definitions of prayer?

A. I shall quote from THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER by H. B. Jeffery:

"THE FIRST PRAYERS of man were made entirely in the interest of satisfying his needs for the physical body. His prayer was like the attitude of any child of today - a demand upon the powers that be to give him more food, more life, more strength, more skill."

"Let us become more conscious of prayer. Let us study it further, so that we may be able to use it to a greater extent and to a higher degree. For prayer is a science; prayer is an art. . . . Prayer is the mode or method, we might say, given us by the Divine Spirit, through which we may increase our awareness of God until we shall know, in full realization the One Real Being and our own perfect relation with that Source of all life."

"We need but to know that He is near. When we know this, our prayer ceases to be a reaching outward, a begging, or a loud beseeching. It is transformed into an inward realization of God's Presence and a joyful declaration of His Truth."

"We are in the Presence of God now, every instant, whether we pray or not. Prayer is the way to realize His Presence, not to try to make Him come near and be present. Prayer is the acknowledgment and the love and the joy and the praise of the Divine Presence, and its answer is the fullness of that Presence in our consciousness and in all our ways."

"Our prayer is a state of intense inner activity, though we experience it in stillness. The outbound perception is stilled and all the outer senses are quiet, inert, inactive. But within, there is the intense action of the Spirit, which is the living energy, the mighty force, the moving power of the Divine Presence."

"The true prayer of purification is the declaration of man's sonship to God, the declaration that his nature is after the Nature of God, that God has put His Spirit in him."

"The prayer of power is not a reaching out toward anything above or around or beneath. It is a knowing that you are one with All there is. It is an understanding that the substance of your being is the one and only substance there is in the universe."

"Prayer . . . is an intimate realization of the Divine Presence. Thus it establishes the sense of at-oneness with the Universe. The devotee of Christian prayer receives a reactionary effect that unifies his being and integrates and centralizes his mind and body. Prayer is a conscious union with the All-in-all."

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Alphabet Of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day Of The Month

MAY 1961

1. Let thine ear now be ATTENTIVE.
2. BELOVED let us love one another.
3. I Am CONTINUALLY with thee.
4. It is good for me to DRAW near to God.
5. The Lord my God will ENLIGHTEN my darkness.
6. Let the whole earth be FILLED with His glory.
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8. Thou shalt GUIDE me with Thy counsel.
9. Thou HAST HOLDEN me by Thy right HAND.
10. Take fast hold of INSTRUCTION.
11. My soul shall be JOYFUL in the Lord.
12. I KNOW whom I have believed.
13. I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy LIKENESS.
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15. God MAKETH MY way perfect.
16. Blessed be His Holy NAME for ever.
17. OBTAIN joy and gladness.
18. As for God, His way is PERFECT.
19. In QUIETNESS . . . shall be your strength.
20. I will behold Thy face in RIGHTEOUSNESS.
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22. God is the STRENGTH of my heart.
23. I Have put my TRUST in the Lord God.
24. The meditation of my heart shall be of UNDERSTANDING.
25. This is the VICTORY, even our faith.
26. WHOM have I in Heaven but Thee?
27. Our land shall YIELD her increase.
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29. See my ZEAL for the Lord.
30. Teach me good judgment and knowledge.
31. Remember me, O my God, for good.

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

SPIRITICITY is the working Power of the Spiritual Principle,
As electricity is the working power of the electrical principle.