

# POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

## "WHEN THERE IS NO LAW"

Wade L. Webster

The words in the title are taken from a statement made by Paul to the saints at Rome. He wrote, "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (*Rom. 5:13*). Over the course of this lesson we will notice what Paul was trying to convey by this statement. Of necessity, we will have to address how some have tried to lift this passage out of its context to use it to teach the opposite of what Paul by inspiration intended.

On one occasion, Peter spoke of some things that Paul penned which were "hard to be understood" (*2 Pet. 3:16*). The word "hard" means "difficult." The words that are our focus in this lesson certainly fall into the "hard to be understood" or difficult category. Please note that Peter did not say that Paul wrote things that were impossible to understand. Some things simply require serious and steadfast study.

Given the choice, most of us try to avoid difficult things. However, there is a need for sometimes delving into them. For one thing, as Christians, we are supposed to be growing to where we can handle the "strong meat" of the word (*Heb. 5:12, 14*). "Strong" means "stiff" or "solid." We must not be content to stay with the milk. At some point, we must move on to that which requires some chewing. For another thing, we need to study difficult things because these are the things that are so often wrested or twisted to destruction (*2 Pet. 3:16*). By studying difficult

things, we can guard ourselves against being led astray and can help others to find their way home (*2 Tim. 2:24-26*).

The book of Romans is a difficult book. In my opinion, it is the most difficult book in the New Testament. However, like Everest, the rewards of conquering it are rich. The sights from the individual peaks are priceless and the view from the summit is spectacular. Personally, I haven't yet broken camp at the base of the mountain. However, this lesson is challenging me to start the climb. I know that I will be rewarded if I reach the peak in view in this lesson.

## Justification

The book of Romans is a book about justification. It explains in great detail how a man can be just or righteous before God (*Rom. 1:16-17*). The matter of justification is at the heart of the chapter from which this study comes. The fifth chapter of Romans is about justification. In fact, "justified" is the third word in the text (*Rom. 5:1*). "Justified" means "to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent." It further means to be "free" or to "be righteous." Please note that the first verse mentions justification by faith, the ninth verse mentions justification by the blood of Christ, and the eighteenth verse mentions justification by the grace or free gift of God. The context under consideration in this study is clearly about justification.

## Contamination

By being a book about justification, the book of Romans is of a necessity, a book about sin. It is a book about that which contaminates or defiles our souls. Let's face it, without sin there would be no need for justification. As you know, Jesus never sinned. He needed no one to help Him to be just before God. Repeatedly in the book of Acts, He is identified as the Just One (*Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14*). As you know, He is the only man who ever lived without sin (*Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-22*). As the Just One, He can be the justifier of those who are unjust or unrighteous (*Rom. 3:26*). Often, the concept of being justified is explained by the expression, "Just as if I'd never sinned." I think that this is a helpful explanation for most members of the church. It helps them to understand and to remember justification as the process by which God remits or removes our sins. Do you remember the publican who smote his breast, confessed that he was a sinner, and prayed for mercy (*Lk. 18:13*)? Do you remember what the beloved physician Luke records of him as he went down to his house? He went down to his house "justified" (*Lk. 18:14*). He went down to his house just as if he'd never sinned. Over and over again in the book of Romans, we read of that for which we need justification. We read of sin. Over fifty times in the King James Version of the book of Romans the reader comes across the word "sin" and hears the serpent's inherent evil hiss in it. Like

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justification, sin is at the heart of the fifth chapter of Romans. It is mentioned repeatedly (*Rom. 5:8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21*).

### Legislation

Not only is the book of Romans a book about justification and therefore a book about sin, it is a book about law. Just as

justification brings up the matter of sin, sin brings up the matter of law. By definition, "sin is the transgression of the law" (*1 John 3:4*). Paul's very point in the passage before us is that "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (*Rom. 5:13*). The word "imputed" means "to reckon in," "attribute," or "put on account." To understand Paul's point better, let's work in reverse of what we have done up to this point in the lesson. Instead of working from justification to sin to law, let's work from law to sin to justification. If there is no law, then there can be no sin, and if there is no sin, then there is no need for justification. Our government, which can be far from just at times, does not hold men accountable when there is no law against their actions. While certain actions on the part of men may drive legislators to pass new laws, the new laws are only enforced on transgressions that occur after the law comes into effect. Surely God, who is perfectly righteous would not be so unfair or unjust as to hold men accountable to a standard or law that has never been given. Mark this down the Judge of all the earth will do right (*Gen. 18:25*). The fact of the matter is that since the beginning of time, there have been laws (*Gen. 2:16-17*), these laws have been broken (*Gen. 3:1-6*), and justification has been needed (*Gen. 3:15*).

In the context, Paul was not suggesting that there had actually been a time when there was no law and therefore no sin; although, this passage is sometimes so wrested by those who are unlearned and unstable (*2 Pet. 3:16*). Since the beginning of time, men have been under law (*Gen. 2:16-17*). While it is true that the legislation came "at sundry times and in divers manners" (*Heb. 1:1-2*), it nonetheless came. "Sundry" means "in many portions, i.e. variously

as to time and agency (piecemeal)." As noted often in lessons on inspiration, the Bible was written over the course of about 1600 years and employed approximately 40 different penmen. Of course, the actual giving of the legislation stretches beyond this time and these individuals. It stretches from the legislation given in the Garden of Eden to Adam (*Gen. 2:16-17*) to the legislation given to John as the New Testament canon was completed (*Rev. 1:1-3*). When John put down his inspired pen, the book of Revelation, as well as all sacred revelation was complete (*Rev. 22:18-19*). Today, we are under the legislation of the New Testament, the law of Christ (*Gal. 6:2*). Not only did legislation come at "sundry times," it came in "divers manners" (*Heb. 1:1*). "Divers" means "in many ways, i.e. variously as to method or form." God spoke personally to men like Noah and Abraham (*Gen. 6:13; 12:1-3*). He spoke through prophets like Moses (*Ex. 20:22*) and Jeremiah (*Jer. 1:17-19*) and through preachers like Peter (*Mt. 16:19; Acts 2:14-40*) and Paul (*Gal. 1:11-12*). Messages were spoken and written. For our lesson, the important thing is that they came, and not necessarily the manner in which they came.

Since the beginning of time, the way of man has not been in himself (*Jer. 10:23*). Man has never been able to direct his own steps; nor, for that matter, has he been permitted to do so (*Num. 15:39; Deut. 12:8*). Although man has been a creature of choice since the beginning of time, he has never been free to do that which is right in his own eyes. Man has always been held accountable for his choices. While it is true that there have been times when men did that which was right in their own eyes, it has always been done in rebellion to God and His law (*Judg. 21:25*). Furthermore,

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I might add, it has been done with disastrous effects.

### Imputation

Not only is the book of Romans about justification, contamination, and legislation, it is about imputation. Just as justification brings up the matter of sin and sin brings up the matter law, law brings up the matter of imputation. When we break the law, a mark is placed on our record. For example, if you exceed the speed limit and get a ticket, the ticket goes on your record. Should an employer or insurance agent then check your record, they would see the speeding infraction listed against you. Obviously, to prevent serious and costly repercussions, drivers want the mark on their record removed. They want it to be just as if they had never been guilty of speeding. Thankfully, some states allow this opportunity through traffic school. In like manner, when we commit sin, a mark is placed on our record. As you know, very serious consequences can follow. All of us should long for the mark of sin to be removed from our record. In the fourth chapter, Paul quoted a precious passage from the Psalms dealing with imputation. We read, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (*Rom. 4:6-8; cf. 4:11, 22-24*). Again, in the fifth chapter, imputation is brought into focus (*Rom. 5:13*). The heart of the matter that I have been asked to address in this assignment

deals with this matter. Please note the verse under consideration again: "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (*Rom. 5:13; cf. 4:15*). As noted earlier, imputation deals with reckoning, attributing, or putting something on someone's account. It should be noted that both good and bad can be put onto someone's accounts (*Jam. 2:23; 2 Sam. 19:19; Lev. 7:18; 17:4*). There are credits and debits. Although physically you may be successful by simply having more credits than you do debits, such is not the case spiritually. Sadly, some think that all that you have to do to enter heaven is to do more good than you do evil, to have more credits than you do debits. However, this is not the case. Jesus spoke of two categories - those who had done good and those who had done evil (*John 5:28-29; cf. Mt. 25:31-33*). He did not speak of those who had done more good than evil. We must abstain entirely from every form of evil (*1 Thess. 5:22*). Spiritually speaking, we must be "unspotted" from the world (*Jam. 1:27; cf. Rom. 12:1-2*). Of course, "unspotted" means "without spot" or "unblemished." It is not enough for us to be less spotted than those in the world; nor, is it enough for our garments to be more unspotted than they are spotted. Sin defiles us and keeps us from being able to enter heaven (*Mt. 15:18-20; Rev. 21:27*). Please understand that I am not suggesting that we as children of God have never sinned. We have (*Rom. 3:23*). Things have been imputed against us. However, when we were baptized, these things were washed away (*Acts 2:38; 22:16*). Our record was clean again. Likely, since the time that we became Christians, we have transgressed God's law and again had

sin imputed against us. However, when we repented of our sins, confessed our sins, and prayed for the forgiveness of our sins, He cleansed us again of all unrighteousness (*1 John 1:9*). Our record was again clean. To enter into heaven, we must keep our records clean by walking in the light as He is in the light (*1 John 1:7*).

Now that we have a better understanding of these four things - justification, contamination, legislation, and imputation, we want to address how some individuals wrest these things to their own destruction and to the destruction of others. From the fifth chapter of Romans, some individuals argue that there was no imputation of sin from Adam to Moses. They argue that there was no imputation of sin during this time because there was no legislation or law during this period. Although the fourteenth verse speaks of those that had not sinned, it qualifies the statement with the words, "after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (*Rom. 5:14*). Although men didn't sin after the likeness of Adam's transgression, they did sin. The fact of the matter is that it was impossible for men to sin after the similitude of Adam's sin. After all, man could not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because God had barred access to the garden (*Gen. 3:23-24*).

The fact of the matter is that sin existed between Adam and Moses. In fact, the world became so exceedingly sinful during the days of Noah that it was destroyed by water (*Gen. 6:5-8*). As you know, Noah lived between Adam and Moses. His story is recorded between the third chapter of Genesis and the twentieth chapter

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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Phone (662) 393-2690

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of Exodus. Surely, no one could reasonably argue that God did not impute sin to those of Noah's generation. The flood says otherwise. The inspired record uses the following words to describe how God "saw" or viewed the world of Noah's day wicked (*Gen. 6:5*), evil (*Gen. 6:5*), corrupt (*6:11-12*). How could a righteous God view the people of Noah's day this way if no sins had been imputed to them? How could a righteous God destroy them if no sins had been imputed to them? The fact of the matter is that He could not. It is clear from the context of Genesis and other contexts that those of Noah's day were counted as sinners by God. Later, Peter would clearly use the example of Noah to picture the washing away of sins (*1 Pet. 3:20-21*). Peter clearly thought of those of Noah's day as sinners. Within the context Peter spoke of how that Christ suffered for "sins" and then described those of Noah's day as being "disobedient" (*1 Pet. 3:18, 20*). To what were they disobedient? Were they merely disobedient to their own hearts or were they disobedient to God? Consider what Peter would write a little later: "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a **preacher of righteousness**, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (*2 Pet. 2:5*). Notice that Peter described them as "ungodly." They were disobedient to God. Furthermore, please note that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." Righteousness is right doing. Within the context of Genesis, right doing is clearly defined as obeying the commandments of God (*Gen. 6:22; 7:1, 5*). You see, God gave

Noah and those of his day commandments. There was legislation from God. When men broke God's legislation, contamination resulted (*Gen. 6:5*). Man needed justification. Through the grace of God, Noah found it (*Gen. 6:8*). He was counted as a just or righteous man (*Gen. 6:8-9; 7:1*). Sadly, others didn't seek the grace of God (*Mt. 7:7-8*). They were busy seeking other things (*Mt. 24:38*). Unlike Noah, the mark of sin remained on their records and they faced judgment unprepared.

Sadly, some today continue to argue that some are not under law by asserting that some are not amenable to the law of Christ. They claim that the alien sinner is not amenable to the law of God. For example, they argue that God's marriage law doesn't pertain to those in the world (*Mt. 19:9*). However, Jesus made clear that His law was for every creature (*Mk. 16:15-16*). In fact, He could not have been plainer on the subject. Consider these words from John's gospel: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (*John 12:48*). The fact of the matter is that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (*Rom. 3:23*). Sin has been imputed to our account and we need justification to remove it (*Rom. 3:24*).

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