

Open to Book of Romans Chapter 7:17-25, READ

The Title: The Central Fact of Our Lives

- **Man's powerlessness without God**
- **Recovery is an act of Providence**
- **Faith Without Works is Dead**

Intro: new series on the biblical roots to the fellowship AA

- The medical profession had given up, but some viewed it as a disease, not a moral issue
- The disease concept is now commonly accepted in the healthcare community
- Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope.

AA is not concerned with the afterlife

- Claims to use principles common to all denominations pg. 94
- To dismiss AA as a works-based religion is analogous to dismissing physical therapy as the same, AA provides a proven treatment to alcoholism known today as the 12 steps
- Fundamentalism has an erroneous view of natural revelation that denies science

Man's powerlessness without God

Early AAs did not skimp on the portions of the bible they studied

- One of the co-founders of AA, Dr. Bob, read the bible cover to cover 3 times
- Clarence S. strongly urged sponsees to read the bible cover to cover
- Anne Smith was thoroughly conversant with Scripture

The books the AA pioneers read were primarily concerned with the Bible

- The Oxford Group leaders, that influenced the birth of AA, insisted on bible study
- Frank Buchman was said to be "soaked in scripture", taught to study the bible as follows:
 - Observe accurately, interpret honestly, apply drastically, the 2nd:
 - Write it down, pray in it, live it out
- Sam Shoemaker was known as a bible Christian

The parts of the bible that have had the most influence on AA are as follows:

- Sermon on the Mount, Epistle of James, 1 Cor 13 (chapter on charity), Psa 23, 91
- There are biblical concepts that are central in AA's source books, the Big Book, 12x12
- Biblical names of God: Creator, Maker, Almighty God, God of our Fathers, Father, Spirit

Then there are the concepts in the 12 steps themselves, e.g.

Step 1: We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- It is Jesus Christ who delivers us from the body of death in 2 ways
- His saving work is imputed to those in a forensic sense to those who believe in him
- The saving work of progressive sanctification is performed by the indwelling of his spirit

25b: So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

- The mind - "nous" in the Greek is the "I", the ego that wants to stop drinking, the flesh- "sarx" in the Greek is analogous to what many call "their addict" we will name as disease
- Medical science has shown that addicts have distorted brain cell receptors, which is fair to say is part of the alcoholic's fallen nature
- The preceding verses will shed more light

Romans 7:17-19 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

- The good is derived from Paul's familiarity with the law, which is holy and good
- Paul identifies with his ego with that determinate will that is in agreement with God's law
- He makes a distinction between his own self and the sin that dwells in him and places the responsibility for the sin committed upon the indwelling sin
- **Our motivation to do good is frustrated by sinful distortion of the flesh**

Trusting in Christ delivers one in the following ways, using 3 "P" words:

- We are delivered from the **penalty** of sin, the judge sees Christ and pardons us
- We are delivered from the **power** of sin, we are delivered from a mode of existence that is under the bondage or dominion of sin, not to reform the sin nature, but the indwelling spirit progressively sanctifies the new man, the new creation, that which is "born again."
- Finally, we will be delivered from the **presence** of sin, but this is a future event, at Christ's 2nd Coming, when we receive resurrection bodies.

Rom 7 describes the believers experience

- the AA principle of seeking "progress, rather than spiritual perfection"
- The bible exhorts us to walk in the spirit and not in the flesh
- For example, don't go to slippery places, H.A.L.T, etc.

Recovery is an act of Providence

Who cares to admit complete defeat? Practically no one, of course. Every natural instinct cries out against the idea of personal powerlessness. It is truly awful to admit that, glass in hand, we have warped our minds into such an obsession for destructive drinking that only an act of Providence can remove it from us. Page 21, 21X12

It says only an act of providence can remove the obsession, so are we trapped in a deterministic system, relieved of all responsibility? It's in God's court now?

- We must admit to a paradox in this regard
- It is true that, according to the bible, nothing in this universe occurs independent of God
- Yet at the same time, God fulfills his purposes without violating free will of rational beings
- God, the 1st cause, stirs up secondary causes refactoring them in a way that makes the rational being responsible for the action, yet is still not independent from God.

How do we reconcile this paradox?

Romans 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? 20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

- We stop competing with God for honor realizing that we are mere creatures
- Theologians bane this paradox: God's sovereignty, man's responsibility

A Deep and Effectual, Revolutionary Spiritual Awakening: Chapter 2 There is a Solution

Page 24: The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically non-existent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.

Page 25: There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. *We have found a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed.*

The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.

The Great Fact: an act of providence has given us a deep and effective spiritual experience

- A new life living in the solution and not the problem, that has transformed our minds
- This new life does not reform our flesh, we are never cured of the disease, rather we now walk in the spirit, led by the indwelling of the spirit of God

The Creator of the Universe has initiated a transaction with us

- How could we not be revolutionized by such a transaction?
- How could being indwelt by the Creator not have a profound effect on us?
- Yet it is a spiritual experience, not to be confused by religion

Turn to John Ch 3: 1-12

John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

- Nicodemus was the great teacher of Israel, a great man of religion

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

- Nicodemus came by night, he was a man of religion still in spiritual darkness

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

- The Jews of Jesus' day presumed salvation by ethnicity and religion
- Jesus' Kingdom, is not of this world, but is the realm of God's rule, is open to all mankind
- Water and spirit refers to spiritual birth, which cleanses from sin bringing renewal.
- We receive from God a new heart and transformed mind with this spiritual rebirth
- Spiritual rebirth is required for membership in God's Kingdom

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

- Jesus is drawing an analogy between something that happens in this world, and what happens in the realm where God's spirit operates.
- In this world, the wind is free to blow where it will, in God's realm, the Spirit gives new birth to whomever he will. New birth is an act of God's providence.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

- Jesus confronts Nicodemus with the futility of trusting in religion

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

- Without new birth, one will lack the discernment for spiritual truths

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- We have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe.
- The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous.
- It is the action of the Creator, by grace through faith, not of our own doing
- Recovery, like salvation, is an act of God's sovereign providence

Faith without works is dead

Now we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." page 76 AA

Turn to James 2:14-26 *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*

- These empty words, mere pious lip service, are not indicative of one who has had an encounter of new birth with the creator of the universe.
- This is not what faith looks like in everyday life.
- It is important to note that works are not prescriptive for new birth, rather indicative

Note the verb "show": *17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

- One may claim to have faith, but lacks the resulting evidential works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

- James points out that knowing mere historical facts do not save, not the same as faith.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

- Abraham's work of faith is a witness that manifests a faith brought to maturity

Gen 22:12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

- Note that the angel of the Lord, perhaps a preincarnate appearance of the Son, says, "now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son"
- The key word is the verb "seeing," Abraham demonstrated his faith by this work of faith

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

- Righteousness was imputed to Abraham by his faith, that he believed God, not by his works, rather his work of faith demonstrated his faith, proved his faith.

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

- Rahab the prostitute was not saved by turning over a new leaf, rather she believed in the true God of Israel demonstrating that faith by hiding the Israelite spies from her people
- She became a model of faith completed in works of faith.
- Faith without works of faith is empty and useless.

Yet there is an imperative

Romans 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

- To understand this verse, we will consult the great 17 C Puritan theologian John Owen

Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet

THE next principle relates to the great sovereign cause of the mortification treated of; which, in the words laid for the foundation of this discourse, is said to be the Spirit,—that is, the Holy Ghost, as was evinced.

II. He only is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are as a thing of nought; and he is the great efficient of it,—he works in us as he pleases.

How doth the Spirit mortify sin?

[1.] By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them.

[2.] By a real physical efficiency on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away.

[3.] He brings the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship in his sufferings: of the manner whereof more afterward.

If this be the work of the Spirit alone, how is it that we are exhorted to it?—seeing the Spirit of God only can do it, let the work be left wholly to him.

[1.] It is no otherwise the work of the Spirit but as all graces and good works which are in us are his. He “works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure,” Phil. 2:13; he works “all our works in us,” Isa. 26:12,—“the work of faith with power,” 2 Thess. 1:11; Col. 2:12; he causes us to pray, and is a “Spirit of supplication,” Rom. 8:26, Zech. 12:10; and yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted, to all these.

[2.] He doth not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our obedience. The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.

Working the 12 steps of AA is analogous to mortifying the deeds of the body

- Sanctification is progressive work of the holy spirit, lessening the power of sin
- While our responsibility, it is the work of the spirit, who works upon us, works in us, works with us, not against us or without us.

Does dealing with alcoholism as “sin” make it a moral issue, denying the disease concept?

- Faith based recovery groups tend to make it a moral issue
- It does not have to, disease is simply part of the fallen creation
- While we inherit the sin nature and to that degree we inherit the penalty of sin, we do not inherit the culpability.

Romans 5:18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation;

- Citing the theologian Geerhardus Vos: Adam’s first sin is representatively our sin... it is only *reatus poenae* [meaning liability to punishment], that is transferred, not the *reatus culpae* [meaning the liability of guilt]

Sin is the transgression of God’s law in an absolute sense, but for alcoholics seeking to live in the solution and not the problem, it is not helpful to make it a moral issue.

- While we are born with the fallen nature that tends to sin as well as alcoholic genetics that sentence us to alcoholism, we are not born guilty of the sin of Adam, nor are we born guilty simply because we have alcoholic genetics.
- With that in mind, alcoholics are afflicted by a disease, not moral weakness
- Think of sin as destructive behavior that leads to chronic bondage unless arrested

From How it Works, Chapter 5 of AA

Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves.

- As we have been saying, recovery as with salvation, is an act of God’s providence.

Romans 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

- This is why you hear many AAs say when seeing one in the grips of alcoholism, *therefore but by the grace of God go I.*

We might object, God does not work that way!

- What about the parables of Jesus?

Matthew 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

- Jesus spoke in parables administering judicial blindness on those who had rejected him

We might object, God does not work that way!

- What about Wisdom as God personified?

Proverbs 1:24 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; 25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: 29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: 30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

- The bible is one big anthropomorphism, meaning it can be understood in all ages by ancient man as well as modern man.
- Such is the nature of this proverb, God is without parts and passions
- The point is that the Bible teaches that there is a point of no return
- Don't assume you can procrastinate God's counsel
- Don't assume that if you go back out drinking, that you can always come back.

Turn to Romans 1:18ff

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

- There really are no atheists, men simply suppress the truth in unrighteousness

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

- God has implanted this knowledge upon their conscience and hearts
- As we have just read, They are without excuse

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

AA's Step 3 reads as follows: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.

- The phrase *as we understood him* is often abused in AA. The phrase speaks to one's understanding of the revealed truth of God. Far too often in practice, AAs speak not so much of God as we understood him, but a god of their imaginations, crafted to their liking
- This is tolerated and not to be argued for, but to craft a god of one's liking is not the same thing as one's best attempt to understand the truth of a revealed God.

There is a 3-fold refrain, God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them over...

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

- Note that God gave them up, removing his restraint, and for what reason?
- For exchanging the truth for a lie, for not giving God thanks, for glorifying him not
- They have fashion of god of their own liking, not of their understanding
- Worshiping the creature, themselves really, not the creator

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections:

- God gave them up to vile affections, for what reason?
- They refused to worship God as God, instead worship themselves & their vile affections

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 God gave them over to reprobate mind, to all sorts of sociopathic behavior

- These passages show that rejecting God leads to a downward spiral to chronic bondage
- That there can be a point of no return.

With this in mind, do not presume that if you go back out drinking that you can always return

- To borrow from the seemingly cruel language of Proverbs, God may laugh at your calamity, instead seek his counsel early.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

- The Eternally Begotten Son tunneled down through time and space
- Taking the form of a man born of a woman to further reveal God to us
- He is true God, that he can free us from the bondage that will destroy us
- True man, he can represent us, being one of us, as that God that we can relate to.

He is the great healer, frees us from bondage of things that hurt us, eventual destroy us

- Salvation is realizing that we cannot free ourselves, when we trust in His help
- Salvation happens when we stop competing with God for honor and glory
- Admitting that our ego and pride has kept us in bondage
- Coming to realize that God is benevolent to us through the Gospel of His Son
- Being convinced of that truth, turning our will and our lives over to His care

Alcoholics today usually cannot relate to gods of religion

- Jesus, as God, reveals the God we can relate to, a God as we can understand.
- Yet from reading the early source documents of AA, there is no doubt that early AAs believed in the God of the bible
- Ironically, Dr. Bob, a co-founder of AA, would find himself not very welcome in today's AA that is often quite hostile towards the Bible and Jesus Christ.

AA is great for alcoholics too rebellious to accept the God of the Bible

- Who can accept a watered down version of Xtianity palatable until they are bludgeoned into humbly accepting the God Creator God, the alpha and Omega.

Those AA's who trust in idols such as doorknobs, or lightbulbs, as their higher power

- **or those who refuse to recite the Lord's Prayer because it is a Xtian prayer** better be sure that Jesus did not rise from the dead, because if Jesus did rise from the dead it is advisable to heed his words:

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 abideth on him.

- God did give us Jesus not as a religion to follow, but as a provision to save those powerless to save themselves.
- Sadly, all many AA's will be able to muster at the Great White Throne judgement is a feeble appeal, "Lord, Lord, at least I'm sober" of which the Lord will reply, "*depart from me, for I never knew you.*"