

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

Introduction:

The awesome depth of this epistle forces any student of it to approach it with a sense of fear and trembling. Anyone who sets himself to this study will soon have the feeling that he has bitten off more than he might be able to chew. It is definitely with this kind of trepidation that we enter upon our study here.

When commencing the study of any book in the Bible it is commendable to ask the question what that particular book adds to our understanding of truth. How big a hole would occur in the body of God's revelation of Himself, if we cut the Book of Romans out of the New Testament? The answer is that we would remove one of the most important parts of the foundation of our Christian faith. In the Gospels we read the statement of the facts about the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ; in Romans we find the application of those facts to the life of every individual. More than any other book in the Bible, Paul's Epistle to the Romans ties the Old and the New Testament together. Paul's Epistle to the Romans has rightfully been called The Constitution of Christianity. Luther, in his *Preface to Romans*, writes: "This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, in its introduction to the epistle, states: "This is the greatest, in every sense, of the apostolic letters of Paul; in scale, in scope, and in its wonderful combination of doctrinal, ethical and administrative wisdom and power. In some respects the later Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians, lead us to even higher and deeper arcana of revelation, and they, like Romans, combine with the exposition of truth a luminous doctrine of duty. But the range of Romans is larger in both directions, and presents us also with noble and far-reaching discussions of Christian polity, instructions in spiritual utterance and the like, to which those Epistles present no parallel, and which only the Corinthian Epistles rival."

J. Sidlow Baxter in *Explore the Book*, states in his introduction to Romans: "This is St. Paul's *magnum opus*. Here we see him at his greatest as a constructive thinker and theologian. The Epistle to the Romans is the complete and mature expression of the apostle's main doctrine, which it unfolds in due order and proportion and combines into an organic whole. For the purposes of systematic theology it is the most important book in the Bible. More than any other, it has determined the course of Christian thought."

Coming back to the question of what we find in Romans, that is lacking or less obvious in other parts of Scripture, we look at some of the key words Paul uses in his presentation of the Gospel.

The topic of this epistle is "the Gospel," *euaggelion* in Greek. It means: "good news." The verb "to evangelize" is derived from it. Paul uses the noun ten times in this epistle.

The most important word is "righteousness." The Greek word *dikaiosune* means literally, "equity." It occurs thirty-six times in this epistle. The Hebrew equivalent is *tsaddiyq*, meaning, "just." *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* defines it as "[the attitude of] him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God, and who therefore needs no rectification in heart or life." In the context of Romans it refers to God's character: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed."¹

The most revolutionary concept in this epistle is the revelation that this righteousness is not acquired by human efforts but given by God to those who put their trust in Him. "To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."²

1. Rom. 1:17

2. Rom. 4:5

Another unique concept is that God deals with mankind through representatives. This is the underlying idea expressed in Chapter Five, verses 12-21. The completion of the unfinished thought in the words “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...”¹ requires the additional statement that righteousness also entered the world through one man, Jesus Christ, who committed the one act of righteousness in His death on the cross by which salvation becomes available to all. This means that, before God, we are all sinners because of one act of sin we did not commit ourselves and we may all become righteous through one act of obedience we did not commit ourselves either. In Paul’s words: “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”²

Then there is the word “law,” *nomos* in Greek, which Paul uses seventy-five times in this epistle in a rather indiscriminate manner. In some instances it refers to the ceremonial Levitical law of sacrifices and purification, in other to moral requirements. In some cases it is used generically, as any kind of force or regulation that may govern human behavior. We trust the meaning of these variations will become clear as we pursue our study.

Paul uses the word *sarx*, “flesh,” twenty-seven times. It has a variety of meanings, the most important one being “sinful nature,” in which sense it is used eleven times.

Another definitive word is “faith,” *pistis* in Greek. In the context of Romans it is primarily used in the sense of reliance upon Christ for salvation. The word occurs forty times in this epistle.

The Greek word *soteria*, “salvation” only occurs five times, but it is obvious that that is what Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is first and foremost about.

Finally, the word “grace,” *charis* in Greek, is used twenty-six times in this letter. The primary meaning in this context is “unmerited favor.”

Paul’s Reason for Writing:

The Epistle to the Romans was, in a way, Paul’s résumé, his way of introducing himself to the church that existed there. Paul had not been involved in the planting of that church. In visiting Rome, Paul deviated from his own principle, expressed in this very Epistle: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.”³ Paul’s goal in visiting the church was to involve the believers in his missionary enterprise. He wanted them to become a catalyst in the evangelization of Western Europe. He writes: “I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.”⁴

But we owe Paul’s Epistle to the Romans to more than the apostle’s desire to enjoy the company of fellow believers in the capitol of the empire. The church at large urgently needed a clear statement of faith that would help the believers to understand the implications of the Gospel in the age in which they lived. Thus far the only source of knowledge of divine revelation had been in Judaism. The Old Testament Scriptures had molded both the Jews and the Gentiles who searched for truth. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, had been a potent medium for the spread of the knowledge of God. There

-
1. Rom. 5:12
 2. Rom. 5:18,19
 3. See Rom. 15:20.
 4. Rom. 15:23^b,24

was, however, a growing awareness that the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant a radical change for Judaism, if not its demise. Paul's Epistle to the Romans would serve as a reliable compass in this sea of confusion.

Date and Place of writing:

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary states about the date of writing: "The letter was written in Corinth during Paul's three-month visit in Greece (Acts 20:2-3). This fact is made evident by reference to the apostle's journey to Jerusalem with a collection for the poor at the time of writing (Rom 15:25-27). Since this collection was emphasized in the earlier letters to Corinth (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15), it is quite evident that these letters were written about the same time. It clearly appears from these considerations that Romans is later than 2 Corinthians because the apostle is about to leave for Jerusalem (Rom 15:25). The second Corinthian epistle was written from Macedonia, and from Macedonia Paul went to Greece. Numerous instances in the Corinthian epistles point to the fact that the epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth not long after Paul penned 2 Corinthians, that is, A.D. 56."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, quoting from an introduction to the Epistle in the Temple Bible, states: "The reader's attention is invited to this date. Broadly speaking, it was about 30 years at the most after the Crucifixion. Let anyone in middle life reflect on the freshness in memory of events, whether public or private, which 30 years ago made any marked impression on his mind. Let him consider how concrete and vivid still are the prominent personages of 30 years ago, many of whom of course are still with us. And let him transfer this thought to the 1st century, and to the time of our Epistle. Let him remember that we have at least this one great Christian writing composed, for certain, within such easy reach of the very lifetime of Jesus Christ when His contemporary friends were still, in numbers, alive and active. Then let him open the Epistle afresh, and read, as if for the first time, its estimate of Jesus Christ—a Figure then of no legendary past, with its halo, but of the all but present day. Let him note that this transcendent estimate comes to us conveyed in the vehicle not of poetry and rhetoric, but of a treatise pregnant with masterly argument and admirable practical wisdom, tolerant and comprehensive. And we think that the reader will feel that the result of his meditations on date and circumstances is reassuring as to the solidity of the historic basis of the Christian faith." As we saw, Paul wrote this epistle in 56 AD. Nero had come to power in 54 AD, but the terrible persecution and the burning of Rome did not occur until 64 AD. Paul did not have much time!

Outline of the Epistle:

Various efforts have been made to divide the epistle into sections. J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore The Book*, gives us the following concise outline:

1. Doctrinal: How the Gospel saves the sinner (i-viii.).
2. National: How the Gospel relates to Israel (ix.-xi.).
3. Practical: How the Gospel bears on conduct (xii.-xvi.).

The author adds: "This threefold structure of the epistle is made the plainer by the fact that Paul winds up each of the three parts with a form of doxology (viii.38,39, xi. 33-6, xvi. 25-7)."

We will follow the outline of *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*:

Part One: The Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1:1--8:39)

- I. Introduction 1:1-17
- II. Condemnation: The Need for God's Righteousness 1:18--3:20
 - A. Guilt of the Gentile 1:18-32

- B. Guilt of the Jew 2:1--3:8
 - C. Conclusion: All Are Guilty before God 3:9-20
- III. Justification: God's Righteousness 3:21--5:21
- A. Description of Righteousness 3:21-31
 - B. Illustration of Righteousness 4
 - C. Benefits of Righteousness 5:1-11
 - D. Contrast of Righteousness and Condemnation 5:12-21
- IV. Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness 6:1--8:39
- A. Sanctification and Sin 6
 - B. Sanctification and the Law 7
 - C. Sanctification and the Spirit 8

Part Two: The Vindication of the Righteousness of God (9:1--11:36)

- I. Israel's Past: The Election of God 9:1-29
- A. Paul's Sorrow 9:1-5
 - B. God's Sovereignty 9:6-29
- II. Israel's Present: The Rejection of God 9:30--10:21
- A. Israel Seeks Righteousness by Works 9:30-33
 - B. Israel Rejects Christ 10:1-15
 - C. Israel Rejects the Prophets 10:16-21
- III. Israel's Future: The Restoration by God 11
- A. Israel's Rejection Is Not Total 11:1-10
 - B. Israel's Rejection Is Not Final 11:11-32
 - C. Israel's Restoration: The Occasion for Glorifying God 11:33-36

Part Three: The Application of the Righteousness of God (12:1--16:27)

- I. Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Duties 12:1--13:14
- A. Responsibilities Toward God 12:1-2
 - B. Responsibilities Toward Society 12:3-21
 - C. Responsibilities Toward Government 13:1-7
 - D. Responsibilities Toward Neighbors 13:8-14
- II. Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Liberties 14:1--15:13
- A. Principles of Christian Liberty 14
 - B. Practices of Christian Liberty 15:1-13
- III. Conclusion 15:14--16:27
- A. Paul's Purposes for Writing 15:14-21
 - B. Paul's Plans for Traveling 15:22-33
 - C. Paul's Praise and Greetings 16

The Text:**Part One: The Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1:1--8:39)****I. Introduction 1:1-17**

*1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God-
2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures
3 regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,
4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection
from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*5 Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all
the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.*

6 And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

*7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our
Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over
the world.*

*9 God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how
constantly I remember you*

*10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to
come to you.*

11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-

12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

*13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been
prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had
among the other Gentiles.*

14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

*16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who
believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

*17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to
last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

The introduction of this Epistle is the longest in any of Paul's writings. This is understandable when we remember that Paul wrote to a church he had never visited before and to people, who were mostly unknown to him. The fact that he sent greetings to a large number of them at the end of the letter¹ seems to contradict this statement, but it remains true that the apostle had no previous personal ties to Rome.

Paul introduces himself as "a servant of Christ Jesus." He uses the same title in the Epistle to the Philippians and to Titus.² C. E. B. Cranfield, in his commentary on *Romans*, states: "For a Greek in the classical tradition it was well-nigh impossible to use a word of the group to which the word here translated 'slave' belongs without some feeling of abhorrence. But in ancient Israel to call a man 'God's slave' was to accord him a title of honor." Writing to people who were steeped in Greek culture, Paul took his chances with this introduction. The Jewish concept of the bond slave dates from the days of Moses and was regulated in the Mosaic Law. Jews knew a permissible form of slavery that redeemed a person who had bankrupted

1. See Rom. 16:1-15.

2. See Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1.

himself. The Hebrew bond slave was a man who chose slavery instead of freedom. He declared: “I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free” and bore the insignia of his love by having his ear pierced.¹ This is the kind of slavery Paul refers to when he calls himself “a servant of Jesus Christ.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this: “A friend of God is high; a son of God is higher; but the servant, or, in the above sense, the slave of God is higher than all; -in a word, he is a person who feels he has no property in himself, and that God is all and in all.” In calling himself a slave of Jesus Christ, Paul merely followed the example of his Master, who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”²

Paul refers to himself as “an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” Paul’s call to the apostleship occurred on the road to Damascus.³ Jesus Himself gave the title “apostle” to the twelve disciples. We read in Luke’s Gospel: “When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”⁴ Soon after Jesus’ ascension, Peter proposed to the believers in Jerusalem to choose someone to replace Judas. The qualifications for this apostleship were that the person must have been with the group since John’s baptism and until Jesus’ ascension.⁵ The believers prayed and “then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.”⁶ The consensus of Bible scholars is that Jesus Himself chose Paul, and not Matthias, to be Judas’ replacement. But it took a while before the early church was convinced that Paul was indeed an apostle of Jesus Christ. At several occasions Paul was called upon to defend his apostleship.

The Greek word *apostolos* means: “delegate.” The apostle is closely connected to the message he is commissioned to convey. Without the Gospel there would be no apostle. Jesus uses the term “apostle” as an equivalent to “servant.” In John’s Gospel, He says to the disciples: “verily, verily, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his lord, nor an apostle greater than he who sent him.”⁷

The mention of the word “Gospel” lures Paul away from his greetings into an extended parenthesis. Actually, Paul does not deviate in elaborating about the Gospel, because the Gospel is what this epistle is all about.

In this introduction, Paul states seven specific points about the Gospel:

1. It has its roots in the Old Testament.
2. It pertains to the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God.
3. It pertains to the Incarnation via the lineage of David.
4. It reveals the sinlessness of Jesus.
5. It reveals Jesus’ divinity by means of the resurrection.
6. It proclaims the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
7. It calls all people to God’s grace.

It would be easy for us, as it was for Paul, to digress into a lengthy statement about the Gospel. Suffice it to state that the message is a Person. Both Old and New Testament give us the revelation Jesus Christ. He is the beginning and the end of creation. His Incarnation, death, and resurrection mean for us salvation and sanctification and ultimately the restoration of all of creation. Paul elaborates these points in this epistle with unsurpassed eloquence.

-
1. See Ex 21:2-5.
 2. Phil. 2:7,8
 3. See Acts 9:1-19.
 4. Luke 6:13
 5. See Acts 1:21,22.
 6. Acts 1:26
 7. John 13:16 (YLT)

“To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” designates more than merely the address of the recipients. Those “loved by God” are particularly the people who had put their trust in Jesus Christ. Paul does not write in order to evangelize unbelievers but to build up believers. God’s love calls them to holiness of life and personal holiness is needed to have a passion for the souls of those who are lost. According to Paul’s own words, the apostle wanted the church of Rome to become involved in the evangelization of Spain.¹ The words “called to be saints” are both an admonition and a promise. God called them to be holy and He would make them holy. We find both in the Book of Leviticus. God told the Israelites: “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy,” “I am the LORD, who makes you holy.”²

The greeting “grace and peace” is a typical formula in all apostolic epistles. The usual Greek greeting was not *charis* but *charein*, from *chara*, meaning: “joy.” Paul takes words that were nothing more than a polite greeting and forged them into a meaningful formula for blessing. In the use of the two terms, Paul combines the best of two worlds, the *charis* of the Greek culture and the *shalom* of the Old Testament. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states that the word “grace” has seven different shades of meaning in the New Testament, according to the context in which it is used. The author then proceeds to give twelve examples(!) *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* gives four, closely related meanings of the Greek word *charis*, “grace”:

1. properly, that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech
2. good-will, loving-kindness, favor: Luke 2:52
3. what is due to grace
 - a. the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace,
 - b. a token or proof of grace, 2 Cor 1:15
4. thanks 1 Cor 10:30

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “grace” as “unmerited help given to people by God.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* calls it: “that most precious of New Testament words, expressing the whole riches of God’s everlasting love to sinners of mankind in Christ Jesus.”

“Peace” is the rendering of the Greek word *eirene*. It means an absence of hostility, a state of harmony, both spiritually and physically. The same word is used in Chapter Five: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”³ A similar meaning is contained in the Hebrew *Shalom*.

The note of appreciation in Verses 8-10 is more than a polite compliment to make the recipients of this epistle feel good. Paul directs his prayer of thanksgiving to God, as he does all his prayers, via the intermediary of Jesus Christ. The fact that this church had a reputation for faith that spread throughout the whole Roman Empire is indeed remarkable. Rome was known as a wicked city. The apostle Peter compared it to ancient Babylon. In his First Epistle, written from Rome, Peter states: “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.”⁴ At one point, the emperor Claudius had evicted all Jews from Rome.⁵ Evidently, at the time of Paul’s writing, this edict had been revoked. That initial dispersion of Jewish Christians throughout the empire would account for the fact that their faith had become known so widely.

Paul was, obviously, in the habit of praying strategically. By this, I mean that he offered systematic prayer for people and places that he considered important in the advancement of the Gospel and in the coming of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. To have a nucleus of Gospel witness right at the emperor’s

-
1. See Rom. 15:24.
 2. See Lev. 11:44; 20:8.
 3. Romans 5:1
 4. I Peter 5:13
 5. See Acts 18:2.

doorstep and even inside the palace was of great importance. One of the purposes of Paul's visit must have been to convey to the believers in Rome this principle of keeping the strategy in mind. Sharing with them the vision for Spain would make them realize their importance of being in the capital of the world.

The fact that Christian witness was flourishing so abundantly in Rome at that time, evidently, caught Satan's attention also. For that reason he raised Nero who would cause an avalanche of fury and cruelty against that center of light in the midst of darkness. But at the time of Paul's writing the church was still at peace.

Luke confirms that Paul had expressed the desire to go to Rome. We read in Acts: "After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'"¹ At the time Paul wrote this in his Epistle to the Romans, he had, evidently, no idea that he would visit Rome as a prisoner.

Bible scholars have argued about the "spiritual gift" Paul mentions in vs. 11. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "Some have understood this as referring to 'miraculous gifts,' which it was supposed the apostles had the power of conferring on others. But this interpretation is forced and unnatural. There is no instance where this expression denotes the power of working miracles. Besides, the apostle in the next verse explains his meaning, 'That I may be comforted together by the mutual faith,' etc. From this it appears that he desired to be among them to exercise the office of the ministry, to establish them in the gospel and to confirm their hopes. He expected that the preaching of the gospel would be the means of confirming them in the faith; and he desired to be the means of doing it. It was a wish of benevolence, and accords with what he says respecting his intended visit in Rom 15:29, 'And I am sure that when I come, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.' To make known to them more fully the blessings of the gospel, and thus to impart spiritual gifts, was the design he had in view."

If Paul had been under the impression that the believers in Rome had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit, are the disciples of John the apostle had met in Ephesus,² he would, undoubtedly, have expressed that in this epistle. The gifts of the Spirit, mentioned in Chapter Twelve of this letter, must already have been operative in the church. In the context of this epistle, it seems more logical to assume that Paul wanted the Holy Spirit to give them a passion for souls. This gift would then be crystallized in their desire to bring the Gospel to Spain. A vision for the lost does not always accompany salvation. When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and kindles in us a desire to become fishers of men, it is usually a fruit that blooms later, as we enter more deeply into a fellowship with God.

That Paul would also be encouraged by this spiritual gift is natural. As we become God's channels to bless others, we are blessed ourselves.

In vs. 13, the apostle seems to go against his own principle not to build upon someone else's foundation. The harvest he had in mind is, probably, not a harvest of souls but a harvest of vision. In the churches of Macedonia and in Corinth Paul generated the gift of generosity. That may be what Paul wanted to accomplish in Rome also.

Paul states: "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish." The Greek reads literally: "To the Greeks (Hellenes) and to the Barbarians, to the wise and the unwise, I am a debtor." The distinction between Greeks and Barbarians was more than racial. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* states: "The Greeks used *barbaros* of any foreigner ignorant of the Greek language and the Greek culture." Paul may have used some irony in using the term to expose the arrogance of the Greeks, who considered themselves superior to anyone else in the world. The "wise" may be the philosophers and the "unwise" the lower class people, of whom most were slaves. The Greek word, rendered "unwise" is *anoetos*, which means: "unintelligent," or "sensual." We find the word in Jesus' conversation with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!'"³ Paul may have had in mind people without spiritual understanding.

1. Acts 19:21

2. See Acts 19:1-7.

Paul's indebtedness was derived from the way in which he was called. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he writes: "When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me."¹ His mission was intercultural. There was a chronology, as is expressed in the words: "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" but there was no limit to his audience. He also wanted to reach, both the upper class and the lower class of society. But again, his vision for Rome was not one of church planting but of imparting a missionary vision to the existing church.

Paul's use of the word "ashamed" seems strange in the context of this letter. We understand better the reason for Paul's statement if we compare it to what he states about the Gospel in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. We read there: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."²

To the Roman mind, crucifixion was the ultimate ignominy. A crucified person was robbed of all human dignity. We often fail to grasp this, since the cross has become the emblem of Christianity. The fact that we were saved by the crucifixion of the Lord of glory makes us forget that the cross was, originally, the cruelest instrument of torture for those who were guilty of the foulest crimes. Those who were condemned to death by crucifixion had all reason to be ashamed. When Christ died on the cross as an expiation for our sins, that cross became God's altar on which the greatest of all sacrifices was brought, a sacrifice that was "a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD."³ In crucifying Jesus Christ, mankind committed its most shameful act in the history of the universe, but God used it to deliver us from all shame.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Good News about Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' death was the lowest point in the history of the world; His resurrection became the highest triumph. That is why the Gospel is the power of God. It is important to understand the meaning of the word "power," because it helps us to understand the implications of our faith. We are in need of salvation and we cannot save ourselves. When God punished our sins by laying them on Jesus Christ, He provided us with power to work out this salvation in a life of sanctification. John concurs with this when he states in the prologue of his Gospel: "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."⁴ Paul uses the Greek word *dunamis*, which means is inherent power, referring to the power God exercises. In John's Gospel, the Greek word *exousia* is used, referring to man's "power of choice." It stands for our freedom of choice. The practical implication of both words is the same. In the Gospel God empowers us to become what we are to be. By putting us on the basis of salvation, we are freed to make the moral choices that lead us to glory.

The key to this salvation is faith. The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The Greek word *pisteuo* is a profound word. Belief in the content of the Gospel is only part of its meaning. Above this, it means trust or personal commitment, to the

-
3. Luke 24:25
 1. I Cor. 9:16,17
 2. I Cor. 1:18-25
 3. Lev. 1:9
 4. John 1:12

extent of handing over one's self to another person. Though belief does involve response to a truth or a series of truths, this response is not mere intellectual assent but rather wholehearted involvement in the truth believed. To believe in Christ is to commit oneself to him. To trust Christ is to become totally involved in the eternal truths taught by him and about him in the New Testament. Such total involvement brings moral earnestness, a dedication and consecration apparent in every aspect of life."

The crucial truths Paul expounds in these verses has been interpreted to mean that salvation was exclusively God's responsibility and that our involvement of working out the details was of no consequence. The fact that God justifies us, not on the basis of what we do but because we trust Him, does not mean that we have no obligations in the matter. It remains up to us what we do with the power God makes available to us in the Gospel. God will hold us responsible for what we do with His empowerment. The fact that we trust the Holy Spirit as we advance on the road to glory does not diminish our share. There is a sense in which God helps those who help themselves. Amy Carmichael wrote these beautiful words: "Upon a death I did not die, upon a life I did not live, I base eternity." Still, it is ours to place ourselves upon this foundation.

Barnes' Notes explains about the words "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes": "This expression means that it is the way in which God exerts his power in the salvation of people. It is the efficacious or mighty plan, by which power goes forth to save, and by which all the obstacles of man's redemption are taken away. This expression implies, (1) That it is God's plan, or his appointment. It is not the device of man. (2) It is adapted to the end. It is suited to overcome the obstacles in the way. It is not merely the instrument by which God exerts his power, but it has an inherent adaptedness to the end, it is suited to accomplish salvation to man so that it may be denominated power. (3) it is mighty, hence, it is called power, and the power of God. If is not a feeble and ineffectual instrumentality, but it is 'mighty to the pulling down of strongholds,' 2 Cor 10:4-5. It has shown its power as applicable to every degree of sin, to every combination of wickedness. It has gone against the sins of the world, and evinced its power to save sinners of all grades, and to overcome and subdue every mighty form of iniquity, compare Jer 23:29, 'Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' 1 Cor 1:18, 'The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.' "

The words "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" are a statement of priority and chronology. They form a recurring theme in Paul's ministry and in this epistle. Jesus Himself set this pattern when He first sent out His disciples to evangelize. He said: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."¹ It was only when Israel began to reject Him that He announced: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."² John states in the Prologue of his Gospel: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."³ Paul strictly followed this example and always began his testimony, that Jesus is the Messiah, by announcing it to the Jews in their synagogues. According to the Book of Acts, he did this in Antioch,⁴ in Iconium, where we read: "At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue."⁵ The same in Thessalonica,⁶ in Corinth,⁷ and in Ephesus.⁸ Only after the Jews rejected the Gospel message, Paul and Barnabas announced: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."⁹ Paul reveals

-
1. Matt. 10:5,6
 2. Matt. 21:43
 3. John 1:11
 4. See Acts 13:14.
 5. See Acts 14:1.
 6. Acts 17:1,2
 7. Acts 18:4
 8. Acts 19:4

later in this epistle how hard this decision was for him. He confesses in Chapter Nine: “I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”¹

Verse 17 states the main subject of the Epistle in a nutshell. It forms the bridge between the introduction and the doctrinal section. “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ ”

We must never get used to the great surprise of this statement. “Righteousness,” in this context, is an unexpected and amazing word. We would assume Paul to say that the Gospel is the Good News about God’s love. It is, of course, but in Paul’s message love is preceded by righteousness. And God’s righteousness is what condemns us. Is that Good News? Yes, it is! Because it draws God’s love out of the realm of mere emotions and places it on a legal basis.

The Greek word, rendered “righteousness” is *dikaiosune*, which basically means: “equity.” Theologians have argued in depth and width the interpretation of this word, especially in the context in which Paul uses it. Some believe that it must be taken as one of God’s eternal attributes, which, of course, it is. Others see it as God’s way of bringing about the salvation of mankind, which it does also. It has been understood to distinguish God’s revelation of justice as opposed to man’s efforts to justify himself by committing acts of goodness, which is true also. Yet we cannot say that the way in which Paul uses the word here is merely the sum of all these interpretations. What complicates the matter is that righteousness does not belong to us in our fallen state, but it is imputed to us as something that comes upon us and in us from outside ourselves. It is God’s righteousness, not ours! Interestingly, *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “equity” as: “justness, impartiality,” and also as: “value of a property or of an interest in it in excess of claims against it.” To apply the last definition to Paul’s use of the word would push the limits of logic a little too far. The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *dikaiosune* is *tsedaqah*. In the Old Testament, the word is found for the first time in the verse: “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”² *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* defines “righteousness” in terms of “purity of heart and rectitude of life; being and doing right.” Some of the Old Testament concept of righteousness is expressed in Jesus’ words: “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.”³ In that context, righteousness simply means the giving of alms. But Paul speaks about the righteousness of God, not the righteousness of man. The ultimate result of God’s righteousness in the Gospel, however, is that God’s righteousness becomes man’s righteousness by the simple fact that man puts his trust in God.

Righteousness is, of course, related to that which is right. The measure of what is right or wrong is the glory of God. The first evidence of God’s righteousness in connection with human sin is that God does not leave sin unpunished. The exceedingly Good News about this revelation is that sin is not punished in the person who commits the sin but in the One who has taken his place, that is Jesus Christ. The Gospel reveals God’s righteousness in that no sin passes without payment being made for it, and payment has been made. Our debt before God is paid! It is the apostle John who gives us the most profound definition of God’s righteousness in the statement: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”⁴ The Greek words “right” and “righteous” are as closely related as the English words. God is just in that He does not demand payment for our sins that have already been paid by

9. Acts 13:46

1. See Rom. 9:1-5.

2. Gen. 15:6

3. Matt. 6:1

4. I John 1:9

the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's righteousness and God's love, which made Him impute our sins upon Himself in His Son, are fused into the word "grace."

Billy Graham once gave a splendid illustration of what God did for us. He was ticketed for speeding and had to appear in court. The judge fined him a certain amount and then proceeded to pay himself for Billy's ticket. That is exactly what God did for us.

II. Condemnation: The Need for God's Righteousness 1:18--3:20

A. Guilt of the Gentile 1:18-32

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

After mentioning the revelation of God's righteousness in the Gospel, Paul proceeds to demonstrate that mankind is devoid of righteousness. In order to prove that point, the apostle first voices a blistering condemnation of those who are outside God's special revelation as it was given to the people of Israel. His observations are made against the background of the Roman world of his time and the Greek culture that permeated it. Paul's main purpose for emphasizing the corruption of mankind is to establish the universal need for salvation.

The Greek word *orge*, translated "wrath" is a violent word. Our word "orgy" is derived from it. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about "the wrath of God": "Wrath, or indignation, against evil is as necessary to our ideal of a perfect human being as is love of good; and therefore we attribute wrath to the perfect Divine Being, using of necessity human terms for expressing our conception of the Divine attributes. When the Name of the LORD was proclaimed before Moses (...Exodus 34:5, etc.), it was of One not only

‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,’ but also ‘that will by no means clear the guilty.’ This last attribute is the same as what we mean by the Divine wrath.”

There is no need for us to find excuses for God’s indignation toward sin as if it is a mere anthropomorphic effort to ascribe human emotions to an immutable God. We may assume, without apology, that our ability for indignation is derived from God’s indignation. The emotion Jesus expressed at the sight of commercialism in the temple in Jerusalem was as much human indignation as divine wrath. We read: “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ ”¹ If we become indignant at the sight of sadism, cruelty, and corruption, how much more will God be incensed by acts that pollute His perfect creation!

The NIV expresses well the Greek grammar in the rendering: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven.” The Greek word “revealed” is in the present tense, which means that it is a continuous action. God is not occasionally angry at human unrighteousness, but always. *Barnes’ Notes* sets out by correctly interpreting the concept of wrath: “The word rendered ‘wrath’ properly denotes that earnest appetite or desire by which we seek anything, or an intense effort to obtain it. And it is particularly applied to the desire which a man has to take vengeance who is injured, and who is enraged. It is thus synonymous with revenge.” But then the *Commentary* continues to argue that we cannot ascribe to God desires for vengeance. Why not? It seems that it is healthy for the soul to consider what happens to *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, as the title of one of Jonathan Edwards’ sermons reads. God is passionately angry at human sin.

The object of God’s wrath is, generically, described as: “all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” Suppressing the truth presupposes an understanding of the truth, or at least an awareness of the existence of truth. One does not suppress truth unintentionally. Human guilt, therefore, is not acquired accidentally. It is true that we can be polluted by sin without seeking sin out in the same way as we can be stained by wet paint by unknowingly leaning against a freshly painted wall. But what Paul described in these verses is overt rebellion. In God’s administration, we are guilty until proved innocent, but we are not innocent.

The first proof of human guilt is found in the interpretation of creation. In Paul’s time, atheism had not been invented yet, and the theory of evolution was not being preached. Charles Darwin had not been born yet. People believed that creation was the work of some divine agency, either a personal God or gods. Even people who did not recognize the God of Israel as Creator, who adhered to some myths, made more sense out of life than the modern atheist who believes that the universe is the result of a series of accidents. Those who maintain that existence makes no sense, but who act as if it does, are just more guilty than those who acknowledge the existence of truth and purposely oppose it.

In a sense, modern man is farther from the truth than the heathen of Paul’s day, or even than the Stone Age savage. As a missionary working among primitive tribes people in the jungle of Indonesia, we found that most of the people who were still living in the Stone Age possessed some knowledge of a Creator.

If the colors of nature, sunrises and sunsets, thunderstorms and snow appeal to our sense of beauty and awe, we ought to find no difficulty in acknowledging that there must be a source beyond creation from which all this can be explained. Even if we are bothered by inconsistencies of creation, by cruelty in the animal world and in human nature, by sickness and death, we reveal to possess a sense of value that allows us to judge what things ought to be but are not. Our sense of value emphasizes our guilt. Paul, therefore, holds us all responsible for what we proclaim not to know. Agnostics are as guilty as atheists and as hypocritical believers in God.

1. John 2:13-16

Sin begins with a lack of gratitude. Paul states: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.” In these verses Paul does not speak about salvation, but about our basic relationship as a creature with the One who created us and the universe in which we live. The manifestations of God attributes in creation and our understanding of them will, eventually, lead to further knowledge of a way out of our predicament of sin. But that is not the point Paul argues here. It helps us to understand, though, why God revealed Himself to Job, primarily as Creator, and not as Redeemer. Job came to know God as his healer after he recognized Him as Creator. Man makes his first “faux pas” when he ceases to acknowledge God’s glory in creation and to thank Him for it.

The first step on the wrong path leads to a diminishing of light. Our body and our soul are created for light. The eye lives for physical light and the heart is built to respond to moral light. It is this inner light that dims and disappears when we make the wrong moral choices. Human nature tries to compensate for this by proclaiming itself bright and wise, while in reality there is darkness and foolishness. This foolishness expressed itself in Paul’s day in idolatry. Man degraded himself by seeking help by creatures that ranked lower than himself in the order of creation. The fact that a bird can fly and a snake can shed its skin does not make an animal superior to a human being. Yet, man stoops to honor that which is below him in order to receive the help he cannot give himself.

If we think that modern man has outgrown idolatry, we fool ourselves. The whole advertising business of modern times is built upon the principle of seeking comfort and security in that which is lower than we are ourselves. Cars, airplanes, and computers are faster than the human legs and brain, but they exist by the grace of the human mind and the human mind exists by the grace of God. Being ruled by that which we made ourselves makes us the creators of our own slavery.

Sin begins with the degradation of the mind and ends in the desecration of the body. Paul traces sexual immorality and homosexuality to an abandoning of the worship of the Creator. He does not differentiate sexual preferences as inborn dispositions, but he declares them to be the result of severing our relationship with God. When man gives up on God, God gives him over to himself and allows him to lose himself in the fulfillment of his own dirty fantasies.

Paul’s statement also bears in itself the seed of redemption. If enslavement to pornography and homosexuality are the results of a broken relationship with God, the restoration of that relationship allows for healing. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”¹

Paul does not specify what this “due penalty for their perversion” comprises. It is possible that “aids” or some similar affliction was the result of unnatural sexual relationships at that time also. There was an aura of official sanction given to those immoral practices by the fact that they were part of some of the idol worship. Prostitution was, in many instances, part of a temple ritual. That fact links sexual immorality to the influence of demonic powers. Human links to Satan are the most degrading of all. In God’s original order of creation, man ranks above angels. If at present we are lower than the angels, it is because of the fall. But in God’s plan we stand on a higher level even than those glorious heavenly beings, how much more than above the fallen angels and Lucifer himself!

Sexual sin is not the only sin and there are other sins that cause even greater harm to our status as human beings than those we commit with our bodies. In verses twenty-nine through thirty-one, Paul mentions several dispositions of the corrupt mind: evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slanderer, hated of God, insolent, arrogant and boastful, ingenuity in doing evil, parental disobedience, senselessness, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. This list does not exhaust the gamut of evil

1. I Cor. 6:9-11

that thrives in the human heart and expresses itself in sinful acts, but the inventory is impressive enough to strengthen Paul's argument that man is in need of salvation.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary provides a detailed analysis of the Greek words used in verses 29-31, from which we copy the following: " 'Being filled with all unrighteousness,' *Adikia*, every vice contrary to justice and righteousness.

'Fornication,' *Porneia*, all sexual contact between the sexes which is beyond the bounds of lawful marriage.

'Wickedness,' *Poneeria*, malignity, that which is oppressive to its possessor and to its object; from *ponos*, labor, toil, etc.

'Covetousness,' *Pleonexia*, from *pleion*, more, and *echoo*, I will have; the intense love or lust of gain; the determination to be rich; the principle of a dissatisfied and discontented soul.

'Maliciousness,' *Kakia*, malice, ill will; what is radically and essentially vicious.

'Full of envy,' *Phthonou*, from *phthino*, to wither, decay, consume, pine away, etc.; 'pain felt and malignity conceived at the sight of excellence or happiness in another.'

'Murder,' *Phonou*, taking away the life of another by any means; mortal hatred; for he that hates his brother in his heart is a murderer.

'Debate' *Eridos*, contention, discord, etc. The Greeks made a goddess of this vile passion.

'Deceit,' *Dolou*, lying, falsity, prevarication, imposition, etc.; from *deloo*, to take with a bait.

'Malignity,' *Kakoeetheias*, from *kakos*, evil and *ethos*, a custom; bad customs, founded in corrupt sentiment, producing evil habits, supported by general usage. It is generally interpreted, a malignity of mind, which leads its possessor to put the worst construction on every action; ascribing to the best deeds the worst motives.

'Whisperers,' *Psithuristas*, secret detractors; those who, under pretended secrecy, carry about accusations against their neighbors, whether true or false; blasting their reputation by clandestine slander and gossip. This word should be joined to the succeeding verse. The whispering is well expressed by the Greek onomatopoeic word *psithuristas*.

'Backbiters,' *Katalalous*, from *kata*, against, and *laleoo*, I speak; those who speak against others; false accusers, slanderers.

'Haters of God,' *Theostugeis*, atheists, contemnors of sacred things, maligners of providence, scorers, etc. All profligate deists are of this class; and it seems to be the finishing part of a diabolic character.

'Despiteful,' *Hubristas*, from *hubrizoo*, to treat with injurious insolence; stormy, boisterous; abusing both the characters and persons of those over whom they can have any power.

'Proud,' *Huperephanous*, from *huper*, above or over, and *phainoo*, I show or shine. They who are continually exalting themselves and depressing others; magnifying themselves at the expense of their neighbors; and wishing all men to receive their sayings as oracles.

'Boasters,' *Alazonas*, from *lazomai*, to assume; self-assuming, vainglorious, and arrogant men.

'Inventors of evil things,' *Epheuretas kakoon*. Those who have invented destructive customs, rites, fashions, etc.; such as the different religious ceremonies among the Greeks and Romans-the orgies of Bacchus, the mysteries of Ceres, the *lupercalia*, feasts of the Bona Dea, etc. Multitudes of which evil things, destructive and abominable ceremonies, are to be found in every part of the pagan worship.

'Disobedient to parents,' *Goneusin apeitheis*. Though filial affection was certainly more recommended and cultivated than many other virtues, yet there are many instances on record of the grossest violation of this great branch of the law of nature.

'Without understanding,' *Asunetous*, from *a*, the alpha negative, and *sunetos*, knowing; persons incapable of comprehending what was spoken; destitute of capacity for spiritual things.

'Covenant-breakers,' *Asunthetous*, from *a*, the negative, and *suntitheemi*, to make an agreement; persons who could be bound by no oath, because, properly speaking, they had no God to witness or avenge their misconduct. As every covenant, or agreement, is made as in the presence of God, so the one who

opposes the being and doctrine of God is incapable of being bound by any covenant; he can give no pledge for his conduct,

‘Without natural affection,’ *Astorgous* from *a*, the alpha negative, and *stergoo*, to possess natural love for blood relatives; without the attachment which nature teaches the young of all animals to have to their mothers, and the mothers to have for their young. The pagans, in general, have made no scruple to expose the children they did not think proper to bring up, and to dispatch (i.e. do away with) their parents when they were grown old or past labor.

‘Implacable,’ *Aspondous*, from *a*, the alpha negative, and *spendoo*, I pour out a libation. It was customary among all nations to pour out wine as a libation to their gods, when making a treaty. This was done to appease the angry gods, and reconcile them to the contracting parties. The word here shows a deadly enmity; the highest pitch of an unforgiving spirit; in a word, persons who would not make reconciliation either to God or man.

‘Unmerciful,’ *Aneleeemonas*; those who were incapable, through the deep-rooted wickedness of their own nature, of showing mercy to an enemy when brought under their power, or doing anything for the necessitous from the principle of benevolence or commiseration.”

Mankind stands condemned on all counts in the court of God’s justice. The most blistering condemnation is found in the words: “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” Knowing what is right and yet applauding what is wrong means a reversal of all moral standards. On the Day of Judgment to come, we all will not only stand condemned but we will all condemn ourselves. The worst of all sins is the celebration of our own wickedness.

B. Guilt of the Jew

2:1–3:8

1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

2 Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?

4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;

10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

11 For God does not show favoritism.

12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

14 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law,

15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

17 *Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God;*

18 *if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law;*

19 *if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,*

20 *an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-*

21 *you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?*

22 *You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*

23 *You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?*

24 *As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."*

25 *Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.*

26 *If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?*

27 *The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.*

28 *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.*

29 *No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

3:1 *What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?*

2 *Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.*

3 *What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?*

4 *Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."*

5 *But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)*

6 *Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?*

7 *Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?"*

8 *Why not say-as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say-"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.*

In this section, Paul does not attack Judaism but hypocrisy. According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* hypocrisy is "a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not; esp.: the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion." Young's Literal Translation renders Verse One: "Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man -- every one who is judging -- for in that in which thou dost judge the other, thyself thou dost condemn, for the same things thou dost practice who art judging." On the basis of the insertion "O man," some Bible scholars believe that Paul addresses hypocrisy in general, not particularly in the Jewish community. The principles Paul touches on apply, of course, to all hypocrites, but it is obvious that Paul focuses primarily on Jews. Why else would he say: "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew?" *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "It is usually said by commentators that, the sin of the heathen world having been established in the first chapter, the second has reference exclusively to the Jews. But this is surely not so. The expressions, 'man' and 'all who criticize'¹ (vers. 1, 3), seem evidently to include *all* who judge others;

1. The *Commentary* has here the Greek words "anthrope" and "pas ho krinoun," written in Greek characters.

and it is not till ver. 9 that any distinction between Jew and Gentile comes in. Nor would the argument have been complete without refutation of Gentile as well as Jewish judges of others. For the philosophical schools especially claimed superiority to the mass of mankind, and would be likely to resent their own inclusion in the general condemnation. Notably the Stoics, whose philosophy was at that time, as well as that of the Epicureans, extensively professed by educated Romans." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, however, observes: "It is quite unnatural to suppose that the apostle is here still treating of the Gentiles-inveighing against the better class of them for condemning the more vicious (as Calvin), or against their magistrates (as Grotius) - and equally so to suppose that he has neither the Jew nor the Gentile particularly in view, but self-righteous condemners and despisers of others in general (as Beza). Nothing can well be more evident than that, having finished his description of the 'ungodliness and unrighteousness' of the Gentiles-against which he had said that 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven' (Rom 1:18) - he is now proceeding to deal with the other great division of mankind-the Jews."

Many Jews had never understood that the purpose of God's election was to make them "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."¹ They failed to realize that the priest is a bridge between heaven and earth, the representative of God to mankind and of man before God. They believed that God's revelation was exclusively theirs for their own enjoyment. They never saw themselves as God's instruments to reach the rest of the world, as the tools of His love and grace. They had divided the human race into two sections: Jews and Gentiles, and they believed God loved the Jews and hated everyone else. This discharged them of the obligation to be worthy of God's call and gave them the supposed right to judge others for not being Jews.

The Greek word that opens this section is *dio*, which means "consequently." Paul begins with the conclusion of what follows and thus links it to the previous section. We can imagine that any Jew, reading Paul's condemnation of the pagan world, would say "Amen" to it. That "Amen" becomes a mirror in which the Jew can see himself.

The difference between the light God had given to the people of Israel and the darkness of the pagan mind was immense. The latter only had the revelation of God's majesty in creation; the former possessed His Word and were partakers of His covenant. In a later chapter Paul states about the Jews: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."² This distinction ought to have made the Jewish believers humble receivers of God's grace. The law, on which the temple service was based, ought to have given them to understand that the sacrifices, that were brought in their behalf, implied that they stood guilty before God and were deserving of death. The fact that another creature died in their place did not alleviate their guilt, only their punishment. No human being has the right to throw stones, but those who are closer to God have even less right than others.

It cannot be maintained that the Jews committed the exact same sins as the Gentiles. The heathen rituals of idolatry and homosexuality were not practiced among the Israelites. But the sins mentioned in verses 29-31 of the previous chapter are part and parcel of fallen human nature. The fact that the Jews covered them with pious masks makes no difference to God. *Barnes' Notes* states: "The design of the apostle, says Calvin, here is to take away the subterfuges of the hypocrite, lest he should pride himself if he obtained the praise of human beings, for a far more important trial awaited him at the bar of God. Outwardly he might appear well to people; but God searched the heart, and saw the secret as well as the open deeds of people, and they who practiced secretly what they condemned openly, could not expect to escape the righteous judgment of God. God, without respect of persons would punish wickedness, whether it was open, as among the Gentiles, or whether it was concealed under the guise of great regard for religion, as among the Jews."

1. Ex. 19:6

2. See Rom 9:4,5.

When Jesus walked the roads of Palestine, He reserved His most vehement condemnation not for prostitutes and tax collectors, but for the Pharisees. He emphasized the dangers of our criticism of others by saying: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”¹ We set the standards for the judgment of our own life by the way we look at others. The reason we tend to criticize is to divert God’s attention from ourselves to others; as if God could be distracted by looking to other people and overlooking us!

God’s judgment is based on truth, that is on the objective facts, not on man’s interpretation of them. God is the only Person who can judge objectively. That is why the Bible advises against our passing judgment on our fellowmen. The NIV inserts here the words “you, a mere man” that were omitted in Verse One. The Greek reads only: “O man.” But the NIV’s rendering emphasizes clearly that a human being is out of place when he takes it upon himself to perform a task that God has reserved for Himself.

The author of the Hebrew Epistle quotations from Deuteronomy and the Psalms, saying: “For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’”² These last words are quotationed in Hebrews in a negative context, but in Deuteronomy and the Psalms the perspective is positive. We read: “The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free.”³ And: “For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.”⁴ Compassion is a vital part of God’s judgment. The word vengeance may suggest to us a mood of violent hatred, but that is not the way in which God judges. He does not lose control of His temper as human beings would when taking revenge. Peter blends well God’s motivations with His judgment when he writes: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”⁵

The people Paul addresses in Chapter Two deceived themselves by thinking that God’s delayed reactions meant that their turn in being judged would never come. The framework of time in which we live tends to make us lose sight of the right relationship between time and eternity. We lose our perspective because we are unable to look over the fence of our life. A short glimpse of God’s Judgment Seat would clear the fog in our mind and change the view of our own life and of the lives of others we are criticizing.

The purpose of God’s delay in judgment is grace. He wants no one to perish. Or, as Paul writes to Timothy: “God our Savior... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”⁶ But those who judge others do not see themselves in need of repentance. They believe they have custody of the truth.

It seems that Paul’s line of argument in Verses 5-11 contradicts the principle of justification by faith alone, expounded in the previous chapter. A superficial reading of this complicated text would make us believe that God rewards people with eternal life on the basis of their good works. Taken out of context, the words: “God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” seem to say that faith in God’s provision for our sins by the atonement of our sins made by Jesus Christ does not enter the picture.

There is a two-fold danger in our interpretation of Paul’s thoughts in Romans; we can go overboard in emphasizing the role of faith to the exclusion of behavior, or we can go the opposite way and stress that it all depends on how good we are whether we will have eternal life or not. One of the problems is that Paul’s

-
1. Matt. 7:1,2
 2. Heb. 10:30,31
 3. Deut 32:36
 4. Ps. 135:14
 5. II Peter 3:9
 6. I Tim. 2:3,4

thoughts in Romans are expressed with extreme conciseness. This tends to make us lose sight of the whole picture. Paul never states that “faith alone” excludes good works. The basic theme of Romans is that faith in God’s promises will endue us with God’s righteousness, and God’s righteousness allows us to live a righteous life. Without faith, righteousness remains out of reach. We have to keep this in mind when reading these verses.

In stating that “God will give to each person according to what he has done,” Paul quotations from the Book of Psalms and the Book of Proverbs. In the Psalms, the words are found in a positive context. David wrote: “You, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.”¹ In Proverbs, the context is judgmental. There, the people are guilty of neglect, causing the death of those who could have been saved. We read: “Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?”² The open-ended character of the quotation suggests that Paul was thinking of the Gentiles who were lost without knowledge of God’s righteousness and the Jews who were guilty of not applying the righteousness they possessed.

The important Greek words in the phrase: “because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart...” are *sklerotes*, meaning “callousness”, and *ametanoetos*, “unrepentant.” We have adopted the first word in our medical vocabulary. “Sclerosis” means an abnormal hardening of tissue. We develop callous skin by continuously rubbing it against a hard surface. The human heart loses its sensitivity by the practice of sin. The Greek word *ametanoetos* combines the negative “a-” with *metanoeo*, to repent. This means a refusal to change direction.

The result of a refusal to repent and make a moral u-turn is a storing up of God’s wrath for the Day of Judgment. The Greek word for “wrath” is *orge*, the same word that was used in Chapter One, Verse eighteen. The expression “storing up” refers to a practice of hoarding articles or possession. No one sins only one time. Sin is a practice, a daily, continuous way of living. When we stand before the throne of God, the measure of our sin will be full to the brim. The counts against us will be so overwhelming that we would like the mountains and the rocks to fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.³

It remains true that: “To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, [God] will give eternal life.” What Paul does not state here is that no one can be persistent in doing good and seeking glory apart from the righteousness of God as it comes to us in the Gospel. This leaves unanswered the question what happens to those who have never come within reach of the Gospel.

There is the principle of God’s priority, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” The expression is the same here as in the Chapter One,⁴ where it was used in connection with the Gospel. Here it refers to judgment. God’s choice of Israel as the people among whom He revealed Himself was not a matter of favoritism, but of priority.

In Verses 12-16, Paul enters into a complicated argument about the place of the law in God’s judgment and the fate of those who are acquainted with the law and those who are not. The section has been subject to various interpretations and scholars have come to different conclusions, some of which are quite opposite of each other. It will help our understanding if we maintain that Paul is addressing the Jews here, who, or course, knew the Law of Moses, and that the Gentiles are only mentioned as an illustration to clarify the position of the Jew. Paul does not clearly state here what the ultimate fate of the Gentiles is on the Day of

-
1. Ps. 62:12
 2. Prov. 24:11,12
 3. See Rev. 6:16,17.
 4. See Rom. 1:16.

Judgment. Toward the end of the argument, in Chapter Three, Paul reveals that the purpose of the law was never to lead us to salvation, but to make us understand our sinful condition. We read: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”¹

Paul starts out by saying: “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.” But in final analysis, all have sinned, which means that all would perish if the law had the last word.

When Paul speaks here about “the law,” he has the moral law in mind. The Jews, in general, never understood the purpose of the Ten Commandments. But the Law of Moses consisted of more than the Ten Commandments and the several moral instructions stipulated in the Pentateuch. A large section of the law consisted in rituals of sacrifice that served to atone for transgression of the moral law. The implication of the ritual law was that all human beings are guilty for not living up to the moral requirements of the law and are in need of atoning sacrifices in order to be saved from the death penalty.

Had Paul been an apostle to some Stone Age tribesmen who lived in the jungles of Papua, Indonesia, as my wife and I were, he would have known that those people knew more about the moral law than we would have expected. An American anthropologist, Dr. Pospisil, studied the legal system of one tribe and wrote a book, entitled *Kapauku Papuans and Their Law*. We discovered that the Kapaukus knew most of the commandments of the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. They would quotation, as if they were proverbs, “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”² Interestingly, the commandment about not coveting was disregarded and that vice was practiced diligently. As a matter of fact, their knowledge of the moral requirements had not kept them from killing, committing adultery, stealing, or lying either.

The above does not disprove any of Paul’s argument. As a matter of fact, it rather confirms it. What else would we expect from an epistle inspired by the Holy Spirit!

Man’s problem is not that he lives in darkness but that he does not obey the light that is given to him. God judges us on what we know, not on what we do not know. The point Paul wants to make is that the Jews, who possessed an abundance of light, did not obey the light. The mention of the Gentiles in this context is more to illustrate that some who have less light may perform better than those who have a great deal of it.

The next Verses 14 and 15 have also been subject to various interpretations. We read: “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”

The Greek word, rendered “by nature” is *phusis*, which means “natural,” or in this context “native disposition.” The same word is used in Chapter One, where Paul, speaking about lesbians, says: “Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.”³ Some Bible scholars interpret it as “instinctively.” Coming back to the phenomenon of the Kapaukus’ knowledge of part of the Ten Commandments, we may assume that most of the stipulations of the moral law existed long before God told Moses to incorporate them into the Ten Commandments. Prohibitions against murder, adultery, etc. must have been known in the days of Noah. And when the people dispersed over the face of the earth after the building of the Tower of Babel, they carried this knowledge with them. Tribes that have lived in isolation for centuries kept it better than those who mingled with others. So the moral awareness of the Gentiles may have been, at least partly, based on what God had revealed in ancient times; it was not all human instinct.

1. See Rom. 3:20.
2. Ex. 20:13-16
3. See Rom. 1:26.

Regarding the words: “they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them,” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “The words accusing... and excusing... answering or defending one another... among themselves, are all forensic or law terms, and refer to the mode of conducting suits of law in courts of justice, where one is plaintiff, who produces his accusation; another is defendant, who rebuts the charge and defends himself; and then the business is argued before the judges. This process shows that they have a law of their own, and that to this law it belongs to adjust differences-to right those who have suffered wrong, and to punish the guilty.”

The Pulpit Commentary makes a strong point of the fact that, in Paul’s writing, the word “law” is sometimes used with the definite article and sometimes without the article. *The Commentary* states that “the law” always stands for the Law of Moses, whilst the word “law,” without the definite article refers to law in the generic sense of the word, pertaining to the human conscience.

The whole point of Paul’s argument here is not that man can be justified by keeping the law, but that both they that have the law and those that do not stand guilty before God. The reason for their condemnation is not the law but their disobedience to God’s revelation, in whatever way this may have come to them. Jews are not lost in the same way as Gentiles, but both are lost.

The last sentence of this section, “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares,” is loaded with, what seems to be, paradoxes. What does the word “Gospel” do in a sentence that bodes nothing but man’s condemnation? How can the exposure of our secret motives be called “Good News?” God’s surprise, that seems to be hidden in these words, is that judgment will not be based upon the evil we have done but upon the payment made for our sins by Jesus Christ. This does not mean that all will be saved automatically, but the criterion for judgment shifts from acts of sin to acts of faith. This corresponds to Jesus’ statement about the coming of the Holy Spirit. We read: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”¹

Having said this, the apostle turns to the Jews to confront them with their transgression of the Law of Moses. We must not forget that this accusation of the Jews if found, not in an epistle sent to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but to Roman citizens. These were people, who were either Jews by birth or proselytes who accepted Judaism. They probably formed the nucleus of the Christian community in Rome, and they were strict observers of the Mosaic Law. It would not make much sense if Paul included, in a letter to Rome, a blistering condemnation of people who were not even living there. Paul addressed his readers, not his non-readers. This is not an academic discussion. Paul was not trying to make friends and influence people in Rome. It is, as stated in his Epistle to the Galatians: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”²

The person Paul addresses here is not merely someone who admits to belong to the Jewish race, but one who prides himself on being a Judaist, a strict observer of Jewish customs and traditions. It is national pride that is being scrutinized here. Relying on the law suggests basing one’s eternity on obedience to the precepts of the moral law. And bragging about the relationship with God pertains to the fact that God revealed Himself to Israel in a way that He did to no other nation. In spite of Moses’ assurance that God had chosen Israel, not because of their supremacy over other races, the average Jew believed that he was superior and that this was God’s reason for choosing him.

1. John 16:8-11

2. Gal. 1:10

Paul mentions five points that genuinely distinguish the Jews from the Gentiles: They are called Jews, they have received the law, they have a unique relationship with God, they know the difference between good and evil, and they are in a position to guide and teach others.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary explains about the name "Jew": "A name applied first to the people living in Judah (when the Israelites were divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah); after the Babylonian Captivity, all the descendants of Abraham were called 'Jews.' The term is used in the New Testament for all Israelites as opposed to the 'Gentiles,' or those of non-Jewish blood."

There can be no doubt about the fact that the Torah God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai was fundamentally different from any existing moral code in the world. Although, as we saw, the laws on the Second Tablet may have existed before, the First Tablet makes the Ten Commandments a vital element of God's revelation on earth. Moses rightfully said: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"¹

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "So far the Jew's own claims on the ground of his own position have been touched on; what follows expresses his attitude with regard to others. We may observe throughout a vein of irony." But C. E. B. Cranfield, in *ROMANS, a Shorter Commentary*, quotations from K. Barth: "[Paul] should not be understood as being merely ironical. While there is an element of irony in each of the items by which the Jew is described, there is also 'a sincere acknowledgment of the position and the mission which the Jews have in fact been given in the Gentile metropolis and in the whole Gentile world.' "

The very words "if you call yourself a Jew" imply more than national pride; they cover the whole scope of Judaic heritage. The Greek text reads literally: "Look, you [who] is called a Jew." The New Living Translation reads simply: "If you are a Jew..." I believe the NIV brings out clearly Paul's intentions. After all, it is about bragging. The Greek word, rendered "brag" is *kauchaomai*, which can have either a good or a bad meaning. The same word is found in the verse: "Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'"² In Paul's text here, the Jew puts the crown on his own head, not at the feet of God.

A Jew has, in fact, much to be proud of. We refer again to Paul's assessment of the Jewish heritage: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."³ But this heritage ought to make any recipient humble. King David responded with the right attitude to God's grace when he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?"⁴ The man Paul addresses acts as if God owes it to him because of his reliance on the law!

The Jews believed they had a "hotline" to God. Indeed, they had access to God; an access that was not on the basis of their achievements but on the sacrifice, the fact that another creature had died in their stead.

There is no better illustration of the right and wrong attitude in relation to God than in Jesus' *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*. Jesus said: "The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."⁵ The Greek word in the tax collector's plea, "have

-
1. Deut. 4:7,8
 2. I Cor. 1:31
 3. Rom. 9:4,5
 4. II Sam. 7:18,19

mercy” is *hilaskomai*, which means: “be reconciled.” It refers to the sprinkling of the blood of a sacrificial animal on the cover of the ark, the *hilasterion*.

The Jews had abundant reason to glory in their relationship to God. After all it is *whom* you know, not *what* you know that counts. But they had no reason to brag.

The Jews did not merely know the difference between good and evil, they professed to be on the side of good and against that which is evil. Paul states: “You know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law.” That fact did not really set them apart from the rest of humanity. Man may have seared his conscience in order not to feel guilty when he commits a crime, but that does not mean that he does not know the difference. The Jew considered his knowledge superior because it was based upon an objective foundation, not on subjective instinct. In practice, this meant that the Jew would adhere to certain specific rituals of cleansing and submit to certain dietary restrictions. This knowledge showed itself more in outward behavior than in moral choices. A classic example is found in the fact that when they committed the greatest crime in human history, the killing of the Messiah, they carefully avoided entering the palace of the Roman governor because that would mean ritual defilement. We read in John’s Gospel: “To avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.”¹ Ironically, the observation of all the requirements of the moral and ritual law, did not take away a sense of guilt. The author of Hebrews confirms that “the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.”²

We may believe that Paul was serious in this statement, but it is difficult to maintain that there is no sarcasm in verses 19-21: “if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth- you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?”

The accusation is that those who preached did not practice what they preached. Paul asks three rhetorical questions: “Do you steal? Do you commit adultery? Do you rob temples?” The implied answer to all three is affirmative. It would not be difficult to find illustrations to prove the first two points of Paul’s accusation. Josephus confirms Paul’s charges in his writings.

The translation of the Greek word *hierosuleo*, as “Do you rob temples?” is unfortunate. The KJV reads: “Dost thou commit sacrilege?” The reference cannot be to a heathen temple, but it can be applied to the temple of Jerusalem, of which Jesus said: “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”³ The Jews did not go around desecrating pagan places of worship. Those no longer existed in Palestine and if they had, it would have been considered good to destroy them. Some of the Old Testament kings tore down the high places the people used to commit idolatry. We read about King Hezekiah: “He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)”⁴ About King Josiah, we read: “Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the shrines at the gates-at the entrance to the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which is on the left of the city gate.”⁵ These acts gave to those kings the reputation of being on fire for the Lord. What Paul had in mind was the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem by the corruption of the priest cast and by the commercialism that reigned in the outer courts.

-
5. See Luke 18:10-14.
 1. John 18:28
 2. Heb. 9:9
 3. Matt. 21:13
 4. II Kings 18:4
 5. See II Kings 23:8-20.

In the statement, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” Paul makes a hidden reference to David’s sin with Bathsheba. When David was confronted with his guilt and confessed his sin, the prophet Nathan replied: “By doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt.” The same thought is also expressed in Ezekiel: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.”¹ Israel that had been destined to be a kingdom of priests, God’s bridge to the rest of the world, had become God’s greatest enemy by bragging about their election and leaving God out of their lives.

Circumcision is introduced in the Scriptures in connection with the covenant God made with Abraham. At that time God changed the name Abram into Abraham.² Circumcision is an outward token of an inward reality of the same order as water baptism or the wearing of a wedding band. The tokens have no meaning in themselves. The wearing of a wedding band, for instance would not make a single person married. The Bible, therefore, refers to a “circumcision of the heart.” Moses stated: “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”³ Jeremiah told the people of his day: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done--burn with no one to quench it.”⁴ And the same prophet concluded: “The whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”⁵

In Paul’s day, the matter of circumcision was a hotly debated issue; the church was in danger of splitting over it. Paul’s objection was not against the rite but against the fact that circumcision was considered a merit that gave a person credit points so that salvation was no longer a matter of faith in God’s grace alone. As with water baptism, circumcision has only value if it is an outward demonstration of an inner renewal. That is the point Paul makes in this chapter. The danger of circumcision in Judaism was that it gave people status in the eyes of man. It had no bearing on their relationship with God. People who had been circumcised murdered Jesus Christ.

In the first eight verses of chapter three, Paul enters into a very complicated argument that can only be understood if we supply some details that are omitted in the text, but that must have been understood by the recipients of the epistle. Paul’s remarks at the end of the previous chapter could lead to the conclusion that circumcision has no value whatsoever.

The text is written in the form of a dialogue, although Paul is the only one who asks the questions and gives the answers. This first question could be formulated as: “If judgment will ultimately be based on the condition of a person’s heart, what is the point of being circumcised or of being a Jew?” The answer is that the fact that God spoke to the Jews, that He revealed Himself to them, and that He offered them a covenant sets them apart. An illustration in the natural will clarify that. If the President of the United States of America calls me to the White House, or if I receive a personal letter from the queen of England, I become an important person. Jesus’ enigmatic answer to the Jews indicates that the very fact that God addresses a person makes him a god. We read: “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘ ‘I have said you are gods’ ‘? If he called them ‘ ‘gods,’ ’ to whom the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken- what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?’”⁶ The Jews’ personal relationship with

-
1. Ezek. 36:22
 2. See Gen. 17:1-14.
 3. Deut. 30:6
 4. Jer. 4:4
 5. Jer. 9:26
 6. John 10:34-36

the Creator made them the most important nation in the world. It provided them with privileges and opportunities that were out of reach for any other human race.

The translation: “What if some did not have faith?” may lead to confusion. It is true that the Greek reads literally: “What if some do not have faith?” Paul uses the word *apisteo*, *a-*, the negative, and *pisteo*, “faith.” But the meaning “unfaithful” would be more appropriate in this context. As such Paul uses the word in Second Timothy: “If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”¹ The Living Bible’s paraphrase: “True, some of them were unfaithful, but just because they broke their promises to God, does that mean God will break his promises?” is definitely clearest. It is not a matter of unbelief but of unfaithfulness. God had made a covenant with Abraham and in him with the Jews; if they did not keep their part, it does mean that God could be blamed. Yet, the word “faith” is appropriate also, because faith in God’s grace does tend to make a person faithful.

Paul uses the forceful Greek expression *Meé génoito*, “not at all,” (KJV: “God forbid”) four times in this epistle.² The LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses the word in the verse: ‘But Joseph said, ‘Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.’³ It is also found in the answer of the tribe of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who had been accused of idolatry for building an altar resembling the altar of the tabernacle. They said: ‘Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle.’⁴

The words: “Let God be true, and every man a liar” combine quotations from two Psalms: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”⁵ And: “And in my dismay I said, ‘All men are liars.’”⁶ Paul does not enter upon any explanation of the consequences and application of these words. The underlying thought is that, if the veracity of God were doubted, all references to the absolute would become futile. Any flaw in the character of God would result in the collapse of His perfect being and consequently in the annihilation of all of creation.

This truth is the most fundamental of all. Yet, mankind has always doubted God’s motives and truth. On their way to the Promised Land, the Israelites accused God of having ulterior motives. We read: “They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?’”⁷ The thought occurred among other nations that God hated His people and they would say: “Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.”⁸ Throughout the ages, mankind has projected its own flaws, wickedness, and failures upon the perfect character of God. “If God were love...” “Does God care?” etc.

A. W. Tozer, in his book *The Pursuit of God*, defines the character of God (if that is possible) as follows: “He is *eternal*. He antedates time and is wholly independent of it. Time began in Him and will end in Him. To it He pays no tribute and from it He suffers no change. He is *immutable*. He has never changed and can never change in any smallest measure. To change He would need to go from better to worse or from

-
1. II Tim. 2:13
 2. See Rom. 3:4 (2x), 3:6, and 6:2,15.
 3. Gen. 44:17
 4. Josh. 22:29
 5. Ps. 51:4

 6. Ps. 116:11
 7. Num. 21:5
 8. Deut. 9:28

worse to better. He cannot do either, for being perfect He cannot become more perfect, and if He were to become less perfect He would be less than God. He is *omniscient*. He knows in one free and effortless act all matter, all spirit, all relationships, all events. He has no past and He has no future. He is, and none of the limiting and qualifying terms used of creatures can apply to Him. *Love* and *mercy* and *righteousness* are His, and *holiness* so ineffable that no comparisons or figures will avail to express it.”

Let God be true! Even if this makes every man a liar. To turn this around would mean the end of all human existence. God’s absolute veracity qualifies Him perfectly to judge man’s actions.

The idea that the contrast between man’s sin and God’s holiness would enhance God’s status is, of course, ludicrous. The slyness of this argument only accentuates human corruption. Our sin cannot defile God’s holiness; neither can it enhance His glory. Paul, correctly, dismisses the thought as slanderous. God cannot but judge human sin righteously. In the words of Abraham: “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”¹

C. Conclusion: All Are Guilty before God^{3:9-20}

9 *What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*

10 *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;*

11 *there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*

12 *All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

13 *"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."*

14 *"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."*

15 *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

16 *ruin and misery mark their ways,*

17 *and the way of peace they do not know."*

18 *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

19 *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.*

20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

In this section, the apostle elaborates the point of: “every man a liar.” He does this with a series of quotations, mostly from the Psalms. In the phrase “are we any better?” Paul uses the Greek word *proechometha*, which is a form of the verb *proechomai* “to excel,” or “to be better.” The NIV adds in a footnote “or worse.” The word occurs only here in the New Testament and Bible scholars have argued extensively about its meaning. The difference in interpretation depends upon whether the verb is considered to be in the passive form or the middle form. Grammatically it can be either. Some Bible scholars take it to mean: “Are we [Jews] worse than the Gentiles?” others: “Are we any better?” Most scholars believe that the latter seems to fit better in the line of Paul’s argument, but either sense could be meant. The sins of people who have more light weigh heavier than the sins of those who have less. Most English versions adopt the sense of: “Are we better?”

Verses Ten through Eighteen that are introduced with “As it is written,” consist of a compilation of six quotations, mostly from the Book of Psalms; one quotation comes from Ecclesiastes and another from Isaiah.

1. Gen. 18:25

The words: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” are based upon David’s words in Psalm Fourteen: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”¹ Similar words are found in Ecclesiastes, where we read: “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit” is an indirect quotation from Psalm Five, that reads: “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.”²

“The poison of vipers is on their lips” is borrowed from Psalm One Hundred Forty: “They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips.”³

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness” comes from Psalm Ten: “His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.”⁴

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know” comes from Isaiah: “Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.”⁵

And the final words: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” refers to Psalm Thirty-Six: “An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.”⁶

The Pulpit Commentary comments on these verses: “These texts are from various unconnected passages of the Old Testament, quoted from the LXX, though not all accurately. They seem to be put together from memory by way of showing the general scriptural view of human depravity. It may be said that they do not establish the apostle’s position of *all* men being guilty; for that they are for the most part rhetorical rather than dogmatic, that most of them refer only to certain classes of men, and that the righteous are spoken of too, and this in the sequence of even the most sweeping of them all (that from Psalm 14...), which does, literally understood, assert universal sinfulness. Any such objection to the cogency of the quotations may be met by regarding them as adduced, not as rigid proofs, but as only generally confirmatory of the apostle’s position. See, he would say to the Jew, the picture your own Scriptures give you; observe their continued testimony to human depravity: and the main point of all the quotations is that which is brought out in the next verse, viz. that they had reference, not to the Gentile world, but to the chosen people themselves.”

In Verses 19 and 20, Paul concludes his argument about the universal sinfulness of the human race by stating that the purpose of the law was to reveal sin, not to cure it. Although the references that were given as proof were taken from those parts of the Old Testament that we would not call “the Law,” Paul calls them so here. Jesus also followed the popular division of the Old Testament when He called it: “the Law and the Prophets.”⁷ The reference to the law here is, obviously, the moral law, not the ritual law.

The first application of this truth pertains to the Jews, since they had been the recipients of the law. This is expressed in the words: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the

-
1. See Ps. 14:1-3 and Ps. 53:1-3.
 2. Ps. 5:9
 3. Ps. 140:3
 4. Ps. 10:7
 5. Isa. 59:7,8
 6. Ps. 36:1
 7. See Matt. 7:12,11:13,22:40.

law.” But when Paul states: “so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God,” he includes the Gentiles who, supposedly, were ignorant of the written revelation of God’s will. This point is not explained or elaborated here, since the purpose of this part of the epistle is to prove the guilt of the Jews, not of the Gentiles. C. E. B. Cranfield, in *Romans, a Shorter Commentary*, observes: “The thought behind the final clause **in order that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world stand guilty before God** is that, if the Jews, the people who might seem to have reason to regard themselves as an exception, are in fact no exception, then without doubt the entire human race lies under God’s judgment. The reference to the stopped mouth evokes the image of the defendant in court, who, when given the opportunity to speak in his own defense, remains silent, overwhelmed by the weight of the evidence against him.”

Paul does not prove the guilt of the Gentiles in these words, but that was not necessary in an argument that primarily intends to prove the guilt of the Jews. The question of the universal knowledge of the moral law is not touched upon here, but in the reference to the knowledge of God as Creator, which he made in the earlier part of the epistle, the guilt of the Gentiles had already been established. Also, as we mentioned earlier in the example of the Papuan tribe in Indonesia, vital elements of the moral law are common knowledge even among those who do not have the written law. There is a universal code in every country that citizens and foreigners alike are subject to the law of that country. Ignorance of the law does not constitute innocence. The preamble of the constitution of the Netherlands, for instance, reads: “Every Dutchman is supposed to know the law.” Ultimately, on the Day of Judgment, every human being, created in God’s image and likeness, will pronounce his own condemnation when he compares himself to the original, which is the character of God.

Moses’ words: “And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness”¹ may have contributed to the misunderstanding that righteousness could be achieved by obeying the moral law. But Moses’ reference to the law included the ritual law also, which provided righteousness by means of atoning sacrifices for those who had transgressed the moral law. The fact that there exists a ritual law proves the guilt of those who try to obey the moral law. In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul expresses the truth as follows: “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”²

III. Justification: God’s Righteousness 3:21--5:21

A. Description of Righteousness 3:21-31

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-

26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,

1. Deut. 6:25

2. Gal. 3:24

30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Paul introduces this section with the words: “But now...” Those are redeeming words for mankind that finds itself in the position of standing guilty before God. When we have come to the end of our rope, the words “but God...” spell redemption. Jesus expressed this contrast between man’s impossibility and God’s possibility when He said: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”¹ We are like criminals condemned to death, to whom God extends His pardon and freedom.

The words: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known” are parallel to what was stated in the first chapter of this book: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.”² As we observed in connection with the use of the word “righteousness” in Chapter One, Bible scholars have argued about the meaning of these words almost ever since Paul wrote them. Some believe that “righteousness” here means God’s attribute, others that it is the righteousness God imputes to man.

Simply put, God’s righteousness is His acting in the right way. The guilt of mankind demands payment. The punishment for sin is death, because sin means the cutting of the lifeline with God. Where life is cut off, death enters. God’s love demands that man be saved from death. God’s righteousness reveals itself in that God accepts death by substitution as a complete payment for all sin. Since Jesus Christ made payment in full for the sins of the whole world, God is righteous when He credits the account of the whole world with payment made. It would be unrighteous if God would accept payment twice. That is why the apostle John states: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” The word “just” in that verse comes from the same root as “righteousness” in Romans.

When Paul states that the righteousness God provides comes “apart from the law,” he, obviously, means that this righteousness cannot be obtained by obedience to the moral law. The testimony to this righteousness by the law and the prophets comes, as far as the law is concerned, from the ritual law. It is the righteousness that is produced by atonement. This is all put rather concisely. It would be difficult to understand if the apostle would not elaborate on the points he makes in the following chapters.

As mentioned before, “the law and the prophets” stand for the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. From the moment sin entered the world, God made His righteousness known to Adam and Eve by providing them with a covering for their sin. Adam’s fig leaf did not cover anything, but the skin of the sacrificial animal God provided allowed the first human couple to continue life on earth. As revelation grew, so did the concept of atonement. It was understood that the rituals of the law were symbolic of a greater reality, which remained hidden from view throughout the whole Old Testament period, but which provided the hope that kept mankind alive. The poetical books and prophets of the Old Testament provide a wealth of material that points to the consummation of God’s righteousness, too plentiful to examine within the scope of this study.

In following chapters, Paul makes clear what is meant by “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Here it is simply stated that the key to acquire God’s righteousness is believing that it is provided for us in Jesus Christ, that is, in His death and resurrection.

Sin has a self-accusatory element in it. When Cain killed his brother Abel, he said to God: “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”³ Cain’s own heart condemned him. Satan, the author of sin, makes a point of condemning every sinner. That is why he is called “The accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night.”⁴ We may take comfort in

1. Matt. 19:26

2. See Rom. 1:17.

3. Gen. 4:13,14

John's wonderful assurance: "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."¹ Instead of believing the voice of the devil or the accusatory voice of our own heart, we may put our faith in Jesus, who when He died on the cross, said: "It is finished."²

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the verb "believe": "The present participle makes it clear that this is a life-long committal to Christ seen in the day-by-day response of trust."

Up to this point, the apostle had created a good deal of tension by equalizing Jews and Gentiles as being both guilty before God. Now this tension finds its solution in the fact that this equalization allows God to extend His grace and pardon to the whole human race, regardless of the light of revelation they had received previously. All have sinned and all are justified freely!

Paul's definition of sin is: falling short of the glory of God. The Greek word rendered "fall short" is *hustereo*, which means "to be later," or "to be inferior." Bible scholars differ in their interpretation as to the meaning of these words. Some understand them to mean that men do not glorify God as they ought to because of their sin. Others believe it means that God does not praise them because of their sinful condition. It seems more logical to read that God's glory is the standard for judgment. We tend to think of sin in terms of committing murder, or adultery, of stealing and lying. Those acts do, in fact, constitute sin. But even if we would never commit any of those sins, we would not measure up to God's absolute glory.

The fact that God uses His own glory as the standard for our life is, at the same time, our despair and our hope. It makes our condition hopeless in that we will never be able to live up to it, just as we are unable to reach the stars. Our hope is that God intends to make us as glorious as He is. God's goal with the human beings He created is perfection: the absolute glory of His holiness.

We, who fall short of God's glory, "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Those words are pregnant with meaning. God gives away His glory to us in Jesus Christ. As He became a human being, He was what God wanted man to be. John testifies about Him: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."³

This glory comes to us by means of the redemption Jesus Christ provided for us. The Greek word for "redemption" is *apolutrosis*, which means: "deliverance." This deliverance is effectuated by the paying of a ransom. Jesus referred to this payment when He said that: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁴ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "ransom" as: "Something paid or demanded for the freedom of a captive." Jesus' sacrifice of Himself is the price that was paid for our freedom from the slavery and captivity of sin and death. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."⁵

The Greek word, which is translated "sacrifice of atonement," is *hilasterion*. It means literally the cover on the Ark of the Covenant. As such it is used in Hebrews.⁶ The use of this word ties the atonement effectuated by Jesus Christ to the Old Testament rituals performed on the Day of Atonement. The KJV calls this cover: "the mercy seat."

-
4. Rev. 12:10
 1. I John 3:19,20
 2. John 19:30
 3. John 1:14
 4. Matt. 20:28
 5. Heb. 2:14,15
 6. See Heb. 9:5.

The Ark of the Covenant with its content and cover are full of deep symbolic significance. God said to Moses about the cover: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”¹ It was the place of residence of God’s Shechinah on earth, the place of revelation. It was also the cover of the two tablets on which The Ten Commandments were engraved by the finger of God.² It was the place where Aaron, the high priest, sprinkled the blood of the animals that were sacrificed on the Day of Atonement.³

This picture of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross makes Him, at the same time, the sacrifice, whose blood was sprinkled, the high priest who sprinkled the blood, and the place where reconciliation with God is effected, the “Mercy Seat.” He was also the scapegoat, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”⁴ This may appear to us as a confusion of metaphors, but in reality, it clearly depicts the various aspects of God’s solution to the problem of human sin.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary puts this beautifully: “Jesus Christ is the great propitiation, or propitiatory sacrifice, typified by the hilasterion, or mercy-seat, under the law. He is our throne of grace, in and through whom atonement is made for sin, and our persons and performances are accepted of God, 1 John 2:2. He is all in all in our reconciliation, not only the maker, but the matter of it—our priest, our sacrifice, our altar, our all. God was in Christ as in his mercy-seat, reconciling the world unto himself.”

Jesus Christ is not only the antitype of the Mercy Seat, but the whole ceremony of the Day of Atonement foreshadows His ministry of atonement in our behalf. As the writer of Hebrews states: “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”⁵

Our salvation rests on the fact that the blood of Jesus Christ is applied to the throne of God in heaven as well as to our hearts. Paul writes: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.” These words depict the two sides of the covenant: God presents Christ to us as our sacrifice of atonement and we accept the atonement by faith. That means that propitiation is ours if we believe it, put our trust in it, identify ourselves with it.

The full picture of the atonement made on the Day of Atonement was expressed in two goats, one to be sacrificed, one to be sent away alive as the scapegoat. The goat that was sacrificed, the blood of which was sprinkled on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, depicted God’s side of it; the scapegoat portrays the human experience. About the latter we read: “[Aaron] is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head.”⁶ This laying of hands on the head of the goat meant identification with the animal. Aaron expressed symbolically that what happened to the goat, actually, happened to all the people. They all died when the animal died and the sin of all was taken away when the scapegoat carried it off. In the image, it took two animals to represent what happened in reality in one person who died and was raised from the dead. Therefore, “faith” not only means “holding for true,” but also “identification.” Jesus became my sin when He died on the cross.

Paul covers in one sweeping motion the whole history of the human race when he writes: “[God] did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies

1. Ex. 25:22

2. Ex. 25:21

3. See Lev. 16:14,15.

4. See John 1:29.

5. Heb. 9:11,12

6. Lev. 16:21

those who have faith in Jesus.” Up to the moment Jesus died on the cross, the sin of the whole world had been dealt with in a provisional way. The blood of the animal sacrifices only covered sin temporarily. The Hebrew word, used in the Old Testament is *kaphar*, which primarily means: “cover.” The word is first used in connection with Noah’s ark. God said to Noah: “So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and *coat* it with pitch inside and out.”¹ The Greek equivalent in the New Testament is *katallage*, which means: “exchange,” or “restoration.” God kept all of human sin under cover until the time Jesus took away the sin of the world.

We illustrate this as follows: If I am expecting the visit of important guests to my house and, at the approach of these dignities, I discover that my cat has used the place under the couch as a litter box, I am facing the dilemma of either cleaning up the mess while my guests enter, or temporarily covering it with dirt to make the smell disappear. During the visit no unpleasant smell can be noticed because the cause of iniquity remains covered up. But after the guests leave, I will make a point of removing the offensive item permanently. God kept human sin under cover for centuries in order to remove it at the appropriate moment.

Paul calls this “justice.” God did not compromise His holiness when He accepted animal sacrifices instead of human lives during the Old Testament dispensation, and He is just when He forgives our sins when we identify ourselves with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

This means that there is nothing left for anyone to brag about. The NIV reads: “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.” This rendering obscures the fact that Paul uses the word “law” in different ways, with different connotations. The Young Literal Translation reads: “Where then [is] the boasting? it was excluded; by what law? of works? no, but by a law of faith.” TLB captures well the sense of Paul’s thoughts with: “Then what can we boast about doing to earn our salvation? Nothing at all. Why? Because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds; it is based on what Christ has done and our faith in him. So it is that we are saved by faith in Christ and not by the good things we do.”

Paul bases his argument upon three facts: The nature of human acts, the unity of the human race, and the oneness of God.

Obedience to the Ten Commandments can never produces justification because of the condition of the human heart. In Chapter 8 of this epistle Paul explains that the law had become powerless because of our sinful nature.² Even if a person would outwardly obey the law, he would be condemned because of the condition of his heart. Jesus explained that outward obedience does not constitute absence of guilt when He said: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”³ It is not the outward act but the absence of glory that constitutes sin. As long as the law is carved on tablets of stone, it will be unable to bring salvation. When, however, salvation is obtained by faith in Christ’s sacrifice, the law will be written on the heart. Jeremiah prophesied: “ ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ”⁴

Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus does not abolish the moral law. As a matter of fact, all the commandments of the Stone Tablets are repeated in the New Testament, with the exception of the Sabbath command. The difference in function of the moral law between the Old and the New Testament is that in the Old Testament the law embodied God’s demand for holiness, in the New Testament it is the fruit of holiness. The heart that loves God is synchronized to God’s will.

1. Gen. 6:14

2. See Rom. 8:3.

3. Matt. 5:27,28

4. Jer. 31:33

Some confusion arises from Paul's indiscriminate use of the word "law." "The law" in Paul's writing does not only represent the moral law, as we saw earlier, but also the ceremonial law, as well as the working of the Holy Spirit. In Chapter 8, for example, Paul uses the term: "the law of the Spirit of life."¹

The unity of the human race is indisputable. Even the Greek philosophers did not object when Paul stated at the Areopagus: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."² There is only one Creator and one human race.

Since God is the Creator of the whole human race and all stand guilty before Him and are in need of justification, God's plan of salvation must include all. The Greek text reads literally: "Since one [is] God who shall declare righteous the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through the faith."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "It is of importance to grasp St. Paul's idea in his assertions of the *unity* of God. It is not that of *numerical* unity, but what may be called the unity of *quality*; *i.e.* not a mere assertion of monotheism as against polytheism, but that the one God is one and the same to all, comprehending all in the embrace of his own essential unity."

Paul uses the words "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" for those who are circumcised, that is the Jews, and those who are not circumcised, the Gentiles. The same idea is expressed in his Epistle to the Philippians, although there it pertains to the meaning of circumcision, not to the recipients. We read: "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh."³ The purpose of Paul calling the Jews and Gentiles that way is to introduce the theme of the next chapter about Abraham's justification by faith.

Most Bible scholars consider that the use of two different prepositions, "by faith," and "through faith" does not indicate a basic difference in mode of justification. But *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The difference is not of essential importance, 'faith' being the emphatic word. But it is not unmeaning. *Ek*⁴ expresses the principle of justification; *dia*⁵, the medium through which it may be had. The Jew was already in a position for justification through the Law leading up to Christ. He had only to accept it as *of faith*, and not *of works of law* (ver. 20). The Gentile must attain to it *through faith*; *i.e.* his faith in the gospel now revealed to him."

B. Illustration of Righteousness Chapter 4

1 *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?*

2 *If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God.*

3 *What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

4 *Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.*

5 *However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

6 *David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*

7 *"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

8 *Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."*

9 *Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.*

1. See Rom. 8:2.

2. Acts 17:26

3. Phil. 3:3

4. Greek for "out of."

5. Greek for "by means of."

10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

12 And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

14 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless,

15 because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."

23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,

24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

The point Paul wants to make in this chapter is that circumcision cannot be a prerequisite for justification but that it is the symbol of it. In order to prove his point, he goes back to Abraham. The Hebrew word for "righteousness," *tsedaqah*, is found for the first time in the Bible in Genesis, in the story of Abraham's justification. We read: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."¹

The NIV circumvents the linguistic and theological problem, presented by the Greek text, with the rendering: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?" Young's Literal Translation reads: "What, then, shall we say Abraham our father, to have found, according to flesh?" The problem lies in the connection of the words "according to flesh" with the rest of the sentence. If "according to flesh" refers to "Abraham our father," then the idea expressed must be that Abraham is our natural father and we are his descendants. Paul uses the same expression in connection with Jesus Christ in the introduction of his epistle: "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh."² If, on the other hand, "according to flesh" is linked to what Abraham discovered in his body, it pertains to the place of circumcision in his justification.

There are pros and cons in both interpretations. If Paul were addressing only Jews, the words "Abraham our father" indicates physical descent. But the Epistle to the Romans was addressed to a motley crowd, which consisted of Jews and Gentiles, with probably more of the latter than of the former. Paul also

1. Gen. 15:6

2. See Rom. 1:3 (NKJV).

considers those who have inherited the faith of Abraham to be his children. In this very chapter, he states: “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.”¹ And in his Epistle to the Galatians, we read: “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”²

In choosing as an example Abraham’s justification, Paul goes back to before the giving of the Mosaic Law. In the previous chapters, Paul had dealt with the Jewish argument that obedience to the Law of Moses was the basis of their justification. This principle could not apply to Abraham, since that law had not yet been given. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* illustrates this point anachronously by stating: “One is not usually charged with speeding if the state has no speed limit, if there are no posted limits along the road, and if there appears to be nothing unreasonable or improper about one’s driving.”

The only ground for Abraham’s boasting could have been that when God said to him: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you,”³ he had obeyed. But the Bible states that the basis for Abraham’s justification was that he believed the LORD. “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”⁴

To the Jewish mind, if anyone had reason to boast, it was Abraham. A closer look at Abraham’s life, however, shows that Abraham’s achievements were not reached by his extraordinary pioneer spirit, but by his trust in God. God told him that He showed him where to go and what to do, and Abraham believed Him.

The chapter in Genesis that deals with Abraham’s justification by faith follows the one in which Moses describes Abraham’s rescue of his nephew Lot from the hands of the Babylonian kings who had invaded Canaan. Almost single-handedly, Abraham had attacked and vanquished the large armies of “Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim.”⁵ He had met Melchizedek, king of Jebus and had given him the tithe of the spoil. After this great victory, this almost supernatural feat, God came to Abraham, while he was sitting in his tent in the evening and said: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”⁶ In the context of the battle Abraham had just fought and the spoil he had taken, those are very remarkable words.

Abraham’s reaction to God’s promise seems very down to earth. It sounds as if he said: “What does it matter; I cannot take it with me.” God answered with the promise that Abraham will have more children than can be counted. God then gave him an object lesson by taking him outside and making him look up in the starry sky and God said: “So shall your offspring be.”⁷ Abraham responded to this by believing God. And God answers Abraham’s faith by declaring him righteous. Although that is not specifically stated, God must have told him this. The promise of countless offspring is followed by a promise of possession of the land. These promises are sealed by a covenant between God and Abraham, a covenant that is concluded in such a way that Abraham is treated as God’s equal.

The most amazing part of the verse in Genesis is the use of the word “righteousness.” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Neither for merit and justice, nor as a proof of his probity; but unto and with a view to justification, so that God treated him as a righteous person, not, however, in the sense that he was now

1. See Rom. 4:16.
2. Gal. 3:6
3. Gen. 12:1
4. Gen. 15:6
5. See Gen. 14:1.
6. Gen. 15:1
7. Gen. 15:5

‘correspondent to the will of God both in character and conduct,’ but in the sense that he was now before God accepted and forgiven, which ‘passive righteousness,’ however, ultimately wrought in him and ‘active righteousness of complete conformity to the Divine will.’ ”

Abraham was not justified on the basis of his victory over the Babylonians but on the basis of his trust in God’s promise. The imputed righteousness means that God treated Abraham as if he were righteous.

Verses 4 and 5 in this chapter stand out as some of the most radical statements in this epistle. The Greek is more concise and powerful than most translations can render. The words “when a man works” are the rendering of one Greek participle, used as a noun: *ergazoménoo*, “the worker.” The same is the case with “the man who does not work,” which simply reads *mè ergazoménoo*, “the not-worker.” Paul’s point, of course, is not to emphasize activity or non-activity but work for the purpose of obtaining salvation or justification. God does not pay us for the good we do by allowing us entrance in heaven. Salvation is God’s work, not ours. The example is taken from the business world. A laborer has a claim to his salary, since it is part of the contract that both the employee and the employer signed. We have no claim to salvation in that sense of the word. Paul does not say that our work has no value at all, or that God does not remunerate, but in the context of justification and salvation, there is nothing a human being can contribute.

This statement is followed by an even more revolutionary one, saying that God justifies “the wicked.” The Greek word *asebes* means literally “impious” or “ungodly.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: “This to the Jews was a scandal of no mean proportions. To them it was unthinkable that God should acquit a guilty, godless man.” The implication is that Abraham was ungodly and wicked. He certainly was when God called him in Ur, when he was still involved in idolatry. But a closer look at Abraham’s everyday life reveals that he lied several times to save his life. He had no qualms sacrificing Sarah for the purpose of saving his own neck. Both to Pharaoh and Abimelech he stated that she was his sister, instead of his wife, allowing the two monarchs to take her into their harem.¹ Those were not acts of a godly person!

In saying this, Paul does not focus primarily on Abraham. In the previous chapter he had already concluded: “There is no one righteous, not even one,” and that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”² Now he makes it clear that ungodliness is the prerequisite for justification. Only the ungodly will be justified. This means that when a person considers himself to be good, or even half-good, he does not qualify for God’s justification in Jesus Christ. Salvation is for those who know themselves to be lost. In order to be saved, we have to declare our own bankruptcy. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* puts it more bluntly: “The apostle in this verse expresses himself in language the most naked and emphatic, as if to preclude the possibility of either misapprehending or perverting his meaning. The faith, he says, which is counted for righteousness is the faith of ‘him who worketh not.’ But as if even this would not make it sufficiently evident that God, in justifying the believer, has no respect to any personal merit of his, he explains further what he means, by adding the words, ‘but believeth on Him who justifieth the ungodly;’ those who have no personal merit on which the eye of God, if it required such, could fasten as a recommendation to His favor. This, says the apostle, is the faith which is counted for righteousness.” *Geneva Notes* adds: “That makes him who is wicked in himself to be just in Christ.”

The apostle interrupts his argument of justification, not by works but by faith, based on the example of Abraham, with a quotation from one of David’s Psalms.³ *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “It is to be observed that these verses represent and suggest the general tenor of the Book of Psalms, in which human righteousness is never asserted as constituting a claim to reward. ‘My trust is in thy mercy,’ is, on the contrary, the ever-recurring theme.”

1. See Gen. 12:11-20; 20:1-13.

2. See Rom 3:10,23.

3. Ps. 32:1,2

In David's Psalm, we read: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." The Hebrew word *'esher*, "how happy!" is the equivalent of the Greek *makarios*. Happiness is the human reaction to God's justification. Calvin comments on this verse: "By these words, we are taught that justification with Paul is nothing else but pardon of sin." In quoting David, Paul affirms that justification by faith was already a valid principle in the Old Testament.

Back to Abraham, Paul investigates when Abraham's justification took place. It appears that his circumcision had nothing to do with it, or at least, that it could not be the basis for it since it occurred after the fact. In his *Preface to Romans*, Luther writes: "Now if the work of his circumcision did nothing to make him just, a work that God had commanded him to do and hence a work of obedience, then surely no other good work can do anything to make a person just. Even as Abraham's circumcision was an outward sign with which he proved his justice based on faith, so too all good works are only outward signs which flow from faith and are the fruits of faith; they prove that the person is already inwardly just in the sight of God."

The timing of Abraham's justification makes him the father of all believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, whether Gentile or Jew. As far as the Jews are concerned, Paul adds the provision: "who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised." This means that, without faith in God's act of justification of the ungodly, circumcision has no value. If circumcision, like baptism in the New Testament dispensation, is not an outward sign of an inward spiritual renewal, it has no value. As Jesus said to the Jews: "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did."¹

Justification can never be detached from sanctification. God continues to demand holiness from those He justifies. At the same time, God provides what He demands. We read in Leviticus that God says: "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy."² The fruit of faith is sanctification. In a later chapter, Paul clarifies the process by stating: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."³ Obedience of the law does not lead to justification, but through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives, justification will lead to obedience of the law.

Paul's statement that God promised Abraham that he would be heir of the world is a remarkable extension of what we find in the Genesis account. In the initial promise, God had told Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."⁴ This was followed by another promise regarding his offspring. We read: "[God] took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'"⁵ And finally God changed his name, saying: "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."⁶ Paul's

1. John 8:39

2. Lev. 20:7,8

3. See Rom. 8:1-4.

4. Gen. 12:2,3

5. Gen. 15:5

6. Gen. 17:5

interpretation of these promises is enlightening. It corresponds with Jesus' Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."¹

Paul describes the God in whom Abraham believed with the words: "God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were." This describes both the essence of God's being as well as the content of Abraham's faith. The immediate application is, of course, to the birth of Isaac. Both Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age where they could have children. Their rejuvenation was similar to a resurrection from the dead. But it seems that the apostle goes beyond an immediate application to the physical condition of Abraham and Sarah by referring, inclusively, to the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. The suggestion is that what Abraham and Sarah experienced in their bodies was a foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection, as if the birth of Isaac was a prophecy that was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead. There are in this Epistle to the Romans several hidden references to the resurrection. In Chapter 8, for instance, we read: "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."² The renewal of Abraham's and Sarah's body adds another aspect to Jesus' statement: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."³

Another feature of Abraham's faith that proves that he believed in God who "calls things that are not as though they were" was that his offspring was non-existent when God showed him the starry sky and told him: "So shall your offspring be."⁴

As far as God is concerned, death is non-existent. This is obvious from Jesus' description of the Father: "But about the resurrection of the dead-have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁵ God's calling things that are not as if they were, refers to the creative quality of His Word. We read in The Book of Psalms: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."⁶ Both of the elements mentioned here are related to the tension that exists between time and eternity. God treats things that are not now as they will be later because He is not limited by the framework of time as we are. God exists in eternity, which is outside time. "Now" and "then" are time-related concepts, which are non-existent for God. The fact that this is beyond our grasp is due to the fact that we do not understand what eternity is. It is not, as we often think, endless time.

By introducing the elements of resurrection from the dead and the creative power of God's Word in relation to Abraham's faith and the birth of Isaac, the apostle Paul also widens the horizon of our faith. Abraham was so overwhelmed by the presence of God who spoke to him that, all of a sudden, the impossible no longer seemed impossible. Paul calls this aspect of faith "hope."

The Genesis record does not really back up Paul's statement that Abraham "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God." In the chapter that follows the one in which Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness, we read the story of Abraham's marriage to Hagar and the birth of Ishmael. Evidently, even faith that is credited as righteousness can have its ups and downs.

God's way of justifying Abraham is a paradigm of all justification. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* explains: "The proper object of this believing is a divine revelation. The revelation to Abraham was concerning a Christ to come; the revelation to us is concerning a Christ already come, which difference

-
1. Matt. 5:5
 2. Rom. 8:23,24
 3. John 8:56
 4. Gen. 15:5
 5. Matt. 22:31,32
 6. Ps. 33:9

in the revelation does not alter the case. Abraham believed the power of God in raising up an Isaac from the dead womb of Sarah; we are to believe the same power exerted in a higher instance, the resurrection of Christ from the dead.” Our faith rests upon the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead after He made the payment for our sins. The one fact is as important as the other. Jesus’ death in our stead wipes clean our slate; His resurrection exonerates us. Our faith consists in holding these facts for true and acting upon them.

With this last statement, the apostle builds a bridge to the next chapter which deals with the benefits of righteousness.

C. Benefits of Righteousness 5:1-11

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

10 For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Bible scholars have debated extensively whether the text should read “we have peace with God” or “let us have peace with God.” The difference is caused by the fact that some of the most authoritative ancient manuscripts have a different letter “o”¹ in the Greek word for “have.” Since the practical difference is not fundamental, we are save to follow the more modern interpretation that considers “have peace” to be a statement of fact, not an exhortation. On the other hand, it is important that we have peace with God experientially if we have it positionally. But the apostle Paul can hardly have meant to express both truths in one word without using two different letters. Jesus expressed both the position and the experience when He said to His disciples: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”² And *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes: “There is more in this peace than barely a cessation of enmity, there is friendship and loving-kindness, for God is either the worst enemy or the best friend.”

The apostle packs several wonderful truths in the first five verses of this chapter. There is our justification by faith, peace with God, access into His grace, rejoicing in the hope of glory. According to a footnote in the NIV, the verb “rejoice” can also be translated: “let us rejoice.”

1. þ instead of ÿ.

2. John 14:27

The Greek word, translated “access” is *prosaogoe*, which literally means: “admission.” The word only occurs three times in the New Testament. The other two verses are found in the Epistle to the Ephesians: “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit,” and “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.”¹ The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews elaborates the topic of our access by comparing it to the ritual on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest entered through the veil into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. We read: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”² *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states about this: “We have received this access. It was only through Christ that we could at first approach God; and it is only through Him that the privilege is continued to us. And this access to God, or introduction to the divine presence, is to be considered as a lasting privilege. We are not brought to God for the purpose of an interview, but to remain with Him; to be His household; and, by faith, to behold His face, and walk in the light of His countenance.”

Paul had earlier defined sin as “falling short of the glory of God.”³ Our justification and our entrance into fellowship with God bring glory into our reach. There is a sense in which God’s glory is already positionally ours. In Chapter Eight, the apostle puts our participation in God’s glory in the past tense, as if it is already an accomplished fact. We read: “Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”⁴ And in his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul writes: “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”⁵ We have, in a way, already received a down payment of the glory to come by the fact that Jesus Christ makes His abode in us through the Holy Spirit. The seed of glory has already been planted in us if we have surrendered our life to God.

Paul seems to have anticipated some objections to his last statement about rejoicing in the glory to come. Some of his readers will have looked around and inside their own lives and have come to the conclusion that reality does not vindicate Paul’s declaration. Present suffering seems to outweigh the glory of the future. Things that are close-by always seem bigger than those that lie beyond. The tree in front of our eyes may block the light of the sun, but that does not mean that the tree is bigger than that heavenly body. Paul draws our attention to the result of suffering. It produces perseverance, perseverance builds character and character is needed to sustain hope. The German poet Goethe has said: “A talent is built in stillness, but a character in the strong currents of the world.”

The Greek word, rendered “character” in the NIV is *dokime*, which literally means “test.” The same word occurs in the verse where Paul, speaking about the churches in Macedonia, says: “Out of the most severe *trial*, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”⁶ *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “Patient endurance of trial produces experience. The word rendered ‘experience’ *dokimeen* ... means trial, testing, or that thorough examination by which we ascertain the quality or nature of a thing, as when we test a metal by fire, or in any other way, to ascertain that it is genuine. It also means approbations, or the result of such a trial; the being approved, and accepted as the effect of a trying process. The meaning

-
1. See Eph. 2:18;3:12.
 2. Heb. 10:19-22
 3. See Rom. 3:23.
 4. Rom. 8:30
 5. Col. 1:27
 6. II Cor. 8:2

is, that long afflictions borne patiently show a Christian what he is; they test his religion, and prove that it is genuine. Afflictions are often sent for this purpose, and patience in the midst of them shows that the religion which can sustain them is from God.”

The apostle Peter corroborates this thought in his First Epistle: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”¹

In Paul’s writings, the word “hope” often refers to the resurrection, as in the verse: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”² It also points to the Second Coming, as in the verse: “We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”³

The NIV’s reading “hope does not disappoint” is weaker than the Greek. The word used is *kataischuno*, which means “to shame,” or “to make blush.” The same word occurs in the verse: “When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated,” which reads in the KJV: “And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed.”⁴ Those who build their hope upon Jesus Christ, upon His Second Coming, and the resurrection of their body will not be humiliated, but vindicated. The whole gist of Paul’s thought in this section is that we build our faith on something that the eye cannot see; it cannot be scientifically proven. For all outward appearances, it is like a pie in the sky. But the experience of God’s love in our hearts infused by the Holy Spirit is so real and convincing that any doubt about the promises of God is out of the question. The Holy Spirit promises us continuously that our hopes will be realized, however adverse our circumstances may be.

Paul fortifies the assurance of hope by tracing back to the time when God manifested His love toward us. If God had turned to us in love after we turned to Him, it would make God’s love conditional upon our behavior. The fact that God demonstrated His love, while we were still turned away from Him, makes it unconditional. The Greek word *asthenes*, rendered here “powerless,” has basically the meaning of “sick” or “weak.”

“Christ died for the ungodly.” The word is the same as in the verse: “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the *wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness.”⁵

The words “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die” has been the object of much controversy among Bible scholars. Due to the lack of a definite article before “righteous” some have interpreted it to mean “a righteous cause.” The thrust of the thought seems to point into the direction of persons, rather than causes. Paul obviously intended to say that there is a possibility of someone willing to die for a worthy person, however rare the case may be, but never of one in which a righteous person willingly takes the place of someone who is unworthy of the sacrifice.

“Christ died for the ungodly.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “Four times in this section the preposition *hyper* occurs (vv. 6,7,8). It has such broad meaning that no one English word can convey it. It really involves in one unit the ideas of ‘for the benefit of,’ ‘on behalf of,’ and ‘instead of.’ If these ideas are put into the English word ‘for,’ then the full significance of Christ’s death ‘for’ us begins to dawn.” Christ’s death for us at the time when there was nothing in us that made us acceptable to God is the ultimate proof of His love.

-
1. I Peter 1:6,7
 2. Rom. 8:23,24
 3. Titus 2:13
 4. Luke 13:17
 5. See Rom. 4:5.

Having stated that our justification is in the past, Paul turns to the future. In Greek the sentence: “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” begins with the words “how much more.” The idea is that if God did so much for us in the death of Jesus Christ in our behalf when we were enemies, what will He do for us now that we are His friends! The word “wrath” refers to the condition revealed in the beginning of this epistle: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men ...”¹ But it also points to the Day of Judgment to come at the last day of world history.

It is important to note that the Greek text uses the preposition *en* in the words “by His blood” and “by His life.” The actual meaning therefore is “in His blood” and “in His life.” Our justification is based on the fact that we were included in His blood, when it was poured out and we were also included in His life when He rose from the dead. The key to our justification and glorification is in our identification with what He did. God included us in the death of His Son and in His resurrection. It will be ours experientially, if we identify ourselves with it. As the person who brought a sacrifice in the Old Testament dispensation laid his hand on the animal that was to be sacrificed, he indicated to accept that what happened to that animal, in principle, happened to him. That is the meaning of Christ’s substitution for us in His death on the cross. In God’s eye, we were crucified, we died, were buried, and rose from the grave. The experience is ours for the claiming. The new life that is ours after our being born again is the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. The Day of Judgment is behind us.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary makes this significant statement: “By the death of his Son, much more, being (‘having been’) reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. Here let the reader observe that the whole Mediatorial work of Christ is divided into two grand stages—the one already completed on earth, the other now in course of completion in heaven. The first of these is called ‘Justification by His blood,’ in the one verse, and in the other, ‘Reconciliation to God by the death of His Son;’ the second is called ‘Salvation from wrath through Him,’ in the one verse, and in the other ‘Salvation by His life.’ What the one of these imports is plain enough; but the other - ‘Salvation from wrath through Him’ - may require a word of explanation. It denotes here the whole work of Christ toward believers, from the moment of justification, when the wrath of God is turned away from them, until the Judge on the great white Throne shall discharge that wrath upon them that ‘obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;’ and that work may all be summed up in ‘keeping them from falling, and presenting them faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy’ (Jude 24); thus are they ‘saved from wrath through Him.’ Now the apostle’s argument is, that if the one has been already done, much more may we assure ourselves that the other will be done.”

The final note in this section is one of joy. Our reconciliation through His death and our sanctification through His life is ample reason for us to rejoice in God. The fact that, in our everyday life, we are connected to the most important Person in the universe ought to fill our days with radiance and exuberant joy. In the words of Nehemiah: “The joy of the LORD is your strength.”² It is our stronghold, our place of refuge, our shelter, the place we must run to and hide when the pressures of life overwhelm us.

D. Contrast of Righteousness and Condemnation 5:12-21

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-

13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.

1. See Rom. 1:18.

2. Neh. 8:10

14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Most Bible scholars consider this passage to be one of the most difficult to interpret in the whole New Testament. The problem begins with the fact that Paul does not finish the first sentence of his argument. The words "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned..." leave us with an incomplete thought. Bible scholars have endeavored to complete the phrase, without coming to a final conclusion. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The natural one to the first clause of the sentence would have been, 'So through One *righteousness* entered into the world, and *life* through righteousness;' and such may be supposed to have been in the writer's mind. But, after his manner, he goes off to enlarge on the idea expressed in the second clause, and never formally completes his sentence." The gist of Paul's thought is, however, quite clear. Paul compares Christ to Adam, stating the similarities, differences in, and the results of their acts. The Greek uses the word *tupos* for Adam, making him a type of Christ, but only as far as their representation of the human race is concerned. The comparison between what Adam produced and what Christ did is a direct opposite.

Both Adam and Jesus Christ are presented as representatives of the whole human race. The unity of the human race has never been disputed. Even naturalists and evolutionists agree that there must be one common source for all human life on earth. No one contradicted the apostle Paul when he stated before the Greek philosophers in Athens: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."¹

In order to understand the principle upon which God bases His condemnation and salvation of the human race, it is important to understand that He considers all of mankind as one single person. The original representative was Adam, who declared war upon God. The new representative is Jesus Christ, who made peace with God.

We can understand God's principle better if we look at the way human governments conduct matters of war and peace. If one country is in a state of war with another country, all the citizens of the one are considered to be enemies by the other, and vice versa. An individual who finds himself in enemy territory will be incarcerated by that government because he belongs to the other side, although he had not personally declared war. Citizens abroad are treated on the basis of their government policies, not on the basis of their personal actions. Since Adam broke off relations with God, all who are born of Adam are considered to be God's enemies. In our natural condition, we are all at war with God. The way Paul proves

1. Acts 17:26

this point is by showing that it was Adam's sin that caused death to enter into the world and affect mankind as a whole. We all die, not because of the sins we have committed ourselves, but because of the sin of Adam. We do not die because of our transgressions of the law, for people began to die long before the law was given. We die because we are human, the descendants of Adam, the one who sinned.

This may seem unfair to us, yet it is the best solution to our personal sin problem. If God would condemn us to death because of sins we had committed ourselves, there would be no way to obtain justification, since we have no way of paying for our sins, except by death. But if our condemnation is based upon substitution, our salvation can also be brought about on the basis of substitution. *Barnes' Notes* quotations Calvin in connection with vs. 15, but the quotation actually pertains to this verse. We read: "The inference is plain, that the apostle does not treat of actual sin, for if every person was the cause of his own guilt, why should Paul compare Adam with Christ?" Calvin continues: "For we do not so perish by his (Adam's) crime, as if we were ourselves innocent; but Paul ascribes our ruin to him because his sin is THE CAUSE of our sin."

Having stated the principle of similarity, Paul proceeds to depict the difference between the work of the two representatives of humanity. What Adam did as head of the human race is called in Greek *paraptoma*, which, in this context means "a willful transgression." The Greek word for "gift" is *charisma*, which has a wide meaning in the New Testament, ranging from a natural ability to a spiritual gift. In the context of Paul's text it is the expression of God's grace, His unmerited favor by which we are saved.

Paul's thought in vs. 15 is not easy to sort out, mainly because it is not worked out in detail. The problem is that, if the sin of Adam caused the death of all, how can salvation in Jesus Christ have a greater effect than that? There is no greater number possible than all. We can therefore conclude that, since Paul's words cannot be interpreted quantitatively, they must be understood as qualitatively. God's gift to mankind in Jesus Christ does not restore us to the kind of life Adam possessed before he sinned, but to a life of incomparable greater quality. Jesus states: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."¹ We hold it for self-evident that Paul does not teach here that the whole human race will be saved automatically, as if conversion is no prerequisite for salvation. He, obviously then, speaks about the quality of life for those who come to God on His terms and accept the free gift of salvation.

In vs. 16, the comparison is more clearly stated, for there is an obvious difference between condemnation and justification. A verdict of guilty, as it was pronounced on Adam, and on us all in him, is not the same as "not guilty" for those who are in Christ Jesus. The picture is taken from a human court of law. A not guilty verdict does not always mean that there is no guilt, but that guilt cannot be legally proved. Some murderers go free because of a technicality. Justification in Christ does not mean that we have never committed sin, but that God does not hold us legally responsible. Paul does not mention sanctification in this context, but that is the process that what will root out sin and guilt from our life after justification has been applied to it. God will, ultimately, not accept us without inner cleansing. But that point does not fit in the argument here.

In vs. 17, Paul makes the superlatives abound. Not only is the verse packed with "much more" and "abundant," but man who was the victim of death became the king in life. Death is here personalized as an absolute dictator who exterminates his subject indiscriminately. The grace of God and the gift of righteousness not only free us from death's dictatorship but they reverse the roles. God's grace not only liberates but it exonerates and glorifies. When God created Adam, He intended Adam to be the lord of creation. By his disobedience, he became its slave. In the redemption in Jesus Christ, God picks up where Adam left off and He brings His original plan to fulfillment. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* explains what the conditions for our kingship are: "Reigning in life is the consequence of receiving the grace and gift. Therefore, receiving the grace is a necessary qualification on our part for reigning in life; and this necessarily implies our believing in Christ Jesus, as having died for our offences, receiving the grace so freely offered us; using the means in order to get more grace, and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit."

1. John 10:10 (NKJV)

God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness means not only the forgiveness of our sins and a verdict of not guilty, but endowment with royalty, power, and glory that is difficult for us to imagine in our present condition.

It is obvious that reigning in life stands for more than exercising power during the short time we spend on earth; it pertains to eternity also. But people who know that they are destined for the throne will look upon life on earth from a different perspective than those who live under the sentence of death. Although Paul does not mention the resurrection in this context, the concept is obviously very present. We, who have accepted God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness can look death in the face during our life on earth and say: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"¹

In verses 18 and 19 Paul recapitulates what he stated previously. The consequence of Christ's obedience means life for all. This does not mean that all will take advantage of this provision. Paul does not say that *all* will be made righteous, but *many*. Only volunteers will enter heaven, just as in hell.

When Paul states that "through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners," he does not refer to the guilt imputed on mankind as a whole, because of the sin of our representative, but to the fact that, again in Calvin's words: "we do not so perish by his (Adam's) crime, as if we were ourselves innocent." It does not take much research to discover that we all practice sin. This being the case, being made righteous through the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, must mean that, once we have accepted Christ's substitution for us, we will begin to practice righteousness. If sin is our old nature, righteousness will be our second nature.

Verse 20 reads in the NIV "The law was added so that the trespass might increase." The Greek text uses the word *pareiserchomai*, which means "to come in stealthily." "The law sneaked in," would be a valid translation. The suggestion is that the law has a limited function for a limited time. Paul cannot mean here that the law is to be blamed for human sin, but that the law was given for the purpose of revealing sin. If, for instance, a student has a workbook that has not been checked by the teacher, the student does not know if there are mistakes in his work. But as soon as the teacher checks the book and uses his red pencil, the mistakes are revealed. Paul stated the same truth when he wrote earlier: "through the law we become conscious of sin."² Most Bible scholars understand "law" here to mean the Ten Commandments.

Most Bible commentators, reflecting on this passage, emphasize that the law was a temporary measure, introduced to reveal individual sins. Although this appears to be the case, according to Paul's argument, we must not lose sight of the fact that the law is also the expression of God's will and perfect character. As such it is not temporary but eternal. God's moral requirements are not abolished in the redemption of Jesus Christ; they are fulfilled in us who have received the Holy Spirit.

Before the coming of Christ, people did not understand that God's purpose in the giving of the law was to bring about conviction of sin. Without conviction of sin forgiveness will not be sought. We must all come to the place Isaiah came to when he cried out "Woe to me! I am ruined!"³ If we do, we will discover that God's grace more than covers our sins, it washes them away. As our awareness of sin increases, our appreciation for grace will increase also. It is difficult to exhaust the depths of Paul's words here. J. B. Phillips' paraphrase of the passage helps bring out the beauty: "Now we find that the Law keeps slipping into the picture to point the vast extent of sin. Yet, though sin is shown to be wide and deep, thank God his grace is wider and deeper still! The whole outlook changes—sin used to be the master of men and in the end handed them over to death; now grace is the ruling factor, with righteousness as its purpose and its end the bringing of men to the eternal Life of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In the last verse of this section, Paul reintroduces the paradox of grace reigning through righteousness. We saw this apparent contradiction already in the beginning of this epistle, where Paul stated:

1. I Cor. 15:55
2. See Rom. 3:20.
3. Isa. 6:5

“In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.”¹ We tend to interpret grace to mean forgiveness of sin and righteousness punishment. That is correct in the sense that our sins have been punished in Jesus Christ. God is righteous in that He does not demand double payment for the same crime. The fact that this frees us from guilt is called “grace.” The fine has been paid, the sentence was pronounced and the execution of the guilty party has taken place. The matter is behind us. That is grace!

IV. Sanctification: The Demonstration of God’s Righteousness 6:1--8:39

A. Sanctification and Sin Chapter 6

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

3 Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-

7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

16 Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. See Rom. 1:17.

In this chapter, Paul draws some practical conclusions from what was stated in the preceding chapters. In the question “What shall we say, then?” we read an appeal to draw logical conclusions from the preceding arguments. The theme of justification by faith and not by works has led some to conclude that holiness of life had no importance whatsoever. If we conclude from Jesus’ words “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick,”¹ that sicker is better, we are sick indeed. It remains true that “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”² We maintain that the actual theme of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is not justification by faith, but that justification by faith is the only means by which we are able to obtain the righteousness and holiness God demands that we demonstrate in our life.

We doubt the sincerity of those who ask the question that Paul formulates in the first verse of this chapter. These are not the words of one who, in all honesty, misunderstands the point of the argument. We see behind the opening words the shadows of a devious mind. The very question “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” makes us think of Jeremiah’s exclamation: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”³ There is, in fact, a real possibility that we twist the truth of God’s grace in such a way that we continue to turn away from it but keep on living a life of sin and destruction.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary outlines this chapter as follows: “In general it has two things in it, mortification and vivification—dying to sin and living to righteousness, elsewhere expressed by putting off the old man and putting on the new, ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.” *The Commentary* then specifies the mortification as,

1. We must live no longer in sin v. 2, we must not be as we have been nor do as we have done.
2. The body of sin must be destroyed, v. 6.
3. We must be dead indeed unto sin, v. 11.
4. Sin must not reign in our mortal bodies that we should obey it, v. 12.
5. We must not yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness, v. 13.

The vivification, or living to righteousness is identified as:

1. It is to walk in newness of life, v. 4.
2. It is to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, v. 11.
3. It is to yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, v. 13.
4. It is to yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God. v. 19.

The wrong conclusion by Paul’s readers could be based on the closing statement of the previous chapter “where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Paul refutes this by referring to the believers’ baptism. We must withstand the temptation to use the text as a justification for baptism by immersion. The real baptism in Jesus Christ is a spiritual matter of which baptism in water is merely a symbol. It is true that, if we understand the meaning of the ritual in water baptism, the essence of the spiritual signification of the application of Christ’s death and resurrection will be the more meaningful to us. But what matters is what happens to our soul, not what is done to the body.

Now, if we declare to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, if we state to believe that when He died, we died with Him and when He rose from the dead, we rose with Him, we are also under obligation to take our sanctification seriously. The problem is that our identification with Christ does not eradicate sin from our life; it puts us on the basis of sanctification, so that sin can wither within us. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, commenting on the possibility of continuing to live in sin, quotations Grotius, who stated: “It is not . . . the entire impossibility, but rather the shamefulfulness of it which is thus expressed, as in Matt 6:28, and Gal 4:9. For shameful, sure it is, after we have been washed, to roll again into the mire.”

1. Matt. 9:12
2. Heb. 12:14^b
3. Jer. 17:9

We note that Paul distinguishes two parts in our identification with Jesus Christ. We are baptized into His death and we are also buried with Him. The two are, obviously, not the same, although the second is an extension of the first. Apart from accidentally being buried alive, or in some cases as a mode of cruel punishment, burials are usually performed for dead bodies only. Even though this is not specifically spelled out, Paul seems to say that our death with Christ is a matter of the past. God included us in the death of Christ before we were even born. But our burial with Him is a present option, depending on our wish or initiative. Admittedly, here the comparison goes somewhat awry. In a case of physical death, burial does not depend on the initiative of the corpse. But to keep within the picture of spiritual death, if we decide not to be identified with Christ in His burial, our body of sin will decompose openly to our own detriment and that of others. In that sense, it means that baptism stands for putting the matter of sin and our sinful nature behind us.

That leaves us with the practical implication of the principle in our daily life. The fact that Christ died for our sins and died in our place ought to mean that we cannot possibly continue to live as if that did not happen. Here the miracle of Jesus' resurrection from the dead begins to become important. When we come to the realization that we do not have what it takes to live a holy life, God reminds us that Christ rose from the dead by the Father's power, not His own. It is God who sanctifies us, if we allow Him to do so. Already in the Old Testament God said: "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy."¹

It is not a matter of our effort in nailing our sins and our sinful nature to the cross. God did that already when Jesus died. It is up to us to accept the matter and draw the consequences. When Paul writes to the Galatians "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,"² he put his being crucified with Christ in the perfect past tense. The purpose being, "So that the body of sin might be done away with."

We must not overlook the psychological bankruptcy that is implied in our identification with Christ crucifixion. It means, first of all, that we agree with God's verdict upon our life that we are guilty and that the death sentence is a proper punishment. It may be much harder for us to agree to than we care to admit. The human tendency is to suppose that there are enough redeeming qualities in us to lighten the sentence. We are rarely willing to underwrite Isaiah's assessment: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."³ We have lost the sense of repulsion and horror the people must have felt when Jesus first said: "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."⁴ Our crosses are made of polished gold or silver; they are no longer the instruments of the cruelest torture reserved for those who were considered to be unworthy to live. Our identification with Jesus' crucifixion means association with His shame. When conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit evokes a sense of shame in us, we come close to understanding the reality of God's revulsion of human sin.

In the reality of crucifixion, death was a slow process. The victims could stay alive for several days and death was considered to be a welcome end to torture. The death of our sinful nature on the cross of Christ will turn out to be a lifelong process, never to be completed until we breathe our last. Speaking about this, Luther remarked that we think we drowned our sinful nature, but "the beast can swim!"

Sin will not die within us because we make a superhuman effort not to sin. What kills sin is the new life of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit is the actual killer of our sinful nature. In nature, the leaves of the trees die and fall in autumn because at the base of the old leaf minuscule buds of spring begin to swell, dislodging

-
1. Lev. 20:7,8
 2. Gal. 2: 20
 3. Isa. 64:6
 4. Matt. 10:38

the old leaves. That is the way our sanctification operates. There is no need for us to pick leaves from trees in order to prepare for spring. The principle of spring is already operative before winter sets in. It is our fellowship with Jesus Christ that will subdue our sinful nature and overcome its outbursts. Paying too much attention to the process will not be of any help. Even if we feel we are making no or little progress, the principle is operative. Oswald Chambers, in *My Utmost For His Highest*, remarks: “We want to be conscious saints and unconscious sinners; God makes us conscious sinners and unconscious saints.”

The Greek in vs. 6 reads literally: “Knowing this, our old man is crucified with [him] that might be destroyed the body of sin, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” The slave who has been put to death is not longer a slave; his master can no longer order him around. Understanding our position in relationship to God and to sin is a key factor in our victorious living.

As we saw, our identification with the death of Christ means acceptance of God’s guilty verdict upon us. This should also lead us to an acceptance of our identification with His resurrection. Paul emphasizes this in vs. 8. The fact that he mentions this specifically indicates that we do not necessarily come to that conclusion on our own.

Christ’s bodily resurrection is difficult for us to understand. His new body that is able to appear and disappear, and that moves through closed doors, is a mystery to us. We cannot imagine what our bodies will be like in the day of resurrection. What is important is the spiritual application to our mortal body, the one we live in at present. Our body will die and decompose, but this has no importance as far as the present spiritual reality is concerned. It does not affect our relationship with God. Returning to the illustration of the tree that loses its leaves in autumn, we know that the tree does not die because the leaves die. As God included us in Christ’s crucifixion, death, and burial, so does He include us in His resurrection. When we die and are raised to life again, it is not the application of a new principle. The principle is there from the day of our conversion and regeneration. Inasmuch as we died with Him, death and sin are no longer our masters. We owe them no allegiance. The fact that the victory was won in the body of Jesus Christ is guarantee that it will apply to our bodies also, if we accept it and act upon it.

Paul’s words in vs. 8, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” do not, primarily, refer to the resurrection of our body in the future, but to our present life on earth. The statement in vs. 9 that, since His resurrection, death no longer has mastery over him, does not mean that death ever ruled over Christ as it rules over us. Jesus submitted to death voluntarily, and thus became subject to death. Verse Ten, “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God” is meant as a comparison from which we are to draw the conclusion for our own life.

Our problem is that we cannot compare our condition to Christ’s in His death to sin. His death was, first of all, voluntary. This is clear from Jesus’ statement “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”¹ This cannot be said about our physical death, but it can apply to our identification with Him in His death. The point Paul wants to make is that Jesus’ death to take away the sin of the world is an event that can never be repeated. Consequently, His resurrection also means a permanent condition of life that is dedicated to the glory of God. It is from that point that we are to conclude that the consequence of our identification with His death ought to produce in us a life of dedication to God’s glory. Paul expresses this more clearly in his second epistle to the Corinthians: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”²

With the words “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” Paul moves into the practical application. The Greek word, rendered “count yourselves” is *logizomai*, which literally means, “take an inventory,” or “to estimate.” The word occurs in the verse “Abraham believed God,

1. John 10:17,18

2. II Cor. 5:14,15

and it was credited to him as righteousness.”¹ We find it also in the story of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment. We read: “She thought, ‘If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.’”² The woman’s thoughts were not an illusion. She was correct as was proved by her being healed when she touched Jesus’ clothing.

If we count ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God, we are not following a figment of our imagination, we are aligning our mind to reality. The words “do not let sin reign in your mortal body” imply that we have the authority to refuse sin entrance into life. We are not only under no obligation to obey our sinful tendencies, but we have been given the power in our fellowship with God to deny sin any access.

Sin demonstrates itself mostly through our physical acts. Paul depicts the consequences of our counting ourselves dead to sin and alive to God as the surrender of our body, part by part. This gives the Greek word *logizomai* a new meaning as in the sense of “taking an inventory.” Paul states the same thought in Chapter Twelve, where he advises: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”³ The Greek word, rendered “spiritual” is *logikos*, from which our word “logical” is derived. It will be helpful and stimulating for us, in the use of our authority over the power of sin in us, to make a detailed list of the members of our body and of the functions they have and present the inventory to God in an act of surrender. This will change the way we think, see, hear, speak, act, and walk.

We exchange the control of sin over our life with the control of grace. We may wonder why Paul draws “the law” into this. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes correctly about the law: “That law which exacts obedience, without giving power to obey; that condemns every transgression and every unholy thought without providing for the extirpation of evil or the pardon of sin.”

A more penetrating comment on this is given in *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, where we read: “The sense and force of this profound and precious assurance all depends on what is meant by being ‘under the law’ and being ‘under grace.’ Mere philological criticism will do nothing to help us here. We must go to the heart of all Pauline teaching to discover this. To be ‘UNDER THE LAW,’ then, is first, to be ‘under its claim to entire obedience on pain of death;’ and so, secondly, to underlie the curse of the law as having violated its righteous demands (Gal 3:10). And since any power to fulfill the law can reach the sinner only through Grace—of which the law knows nothing—it follows, lastly, that to be ‘under the law’ is to be shut up under an inability to keep it, and consequently to be the helpless slave of sin. On the other hand, to be ‘UNDER GRACE,’ is to be under the glorious canopy and saving effects of that ‘Grace which bringeth salvation’ and reigns ‘through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord’ ... The curse of the law has been completely lifted from off them; they are made ‘the righteousness of God in Him,’ and they are ‘alive unto God through Jesus Christ.’ So that, as when they were ‘under the law,’ Sin could not but have dominion over them, so now that they are ‘under grace,’ Sin cannot but be subdued under them. If before, Sin resistlessly triumphed, Grace will now be more than conqueror.”

In order to avoid misunderstanding as to the implications of his previous statements, Paul repeats the question that opens this chapter, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” In vs. 1, the connection was with the thought that God countered an increase of sin with an increase of grace. Here, the suggestion applies to the condition of being under the law or under grace. Paul does not want his readers to come to the erroneous conclusion that grace gives freedom to sin.

F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (part of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*) writes: “The man who is ‘under grace’ is the man who shares the life of Christ. As the life of Christ was and is characterized by spontaneous and glad obedience to the Father’s will, so the life of those who are ‘in Christ’ will be characterized by the same obedience. ‘Love God, and do as you please’ is a maxim which, in those who have God’s love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, can only result in their doing those

1. Rom. 4:3
2. Mark 5:28
3. See Rom. 12:1.

things which please God. To make being ‘under grace’ an excuse for sinning is a sign that one is not really ‘under grace’ at all.”

The clear concept of the law in the New Testament is that the fact that we are no longer under the law does not mean that the law has been abolished. Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels is clear: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”¹ It is not a conflict between the law and grace but between our sinful nature and our new nature. Before God’s grace was poured into our hearts, our relationship with the law was as someone who hits his head against the wall. The law aroused our sinful nature, as poking an animal with a stick provokes it. It used to be a matter of our will over against the will of God. Conversion and regeneration create in us a new mentality in which our will coincides with the will of God. Our love of God will bring us to joyful obedience of His will. Jeremiah expresses this clearly: “ ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ”²

Paul illustrates his point with a reference to slavery, as it existed among the Jews. The reference is not to slavery in general as it was found in the Roman Empire, because the apostle speaks about voluntary slavery. “When you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves...” refers to a person who sells himself to a master in order to be able to pay off his debts. The law on this kind of slavery was given when Israel was at Mount Sinai. We read in Exodus: “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.”³ But voluntary slavery also demanded absolute obedience to the master’s will. Applying this illustration to our relationship to sin or to grace makes us understand that both are voluntary. We sin because we choose to sin. We may not intend to become sin’s slave but in reality we become that anyhow. In modern terms we could say that a person who uses drugs does not believe he will become its slave, but drugs are cruel masters. The truth is that we all are what we are on the basis of our own choices.

The other side of the coin shows what slavery to righteousness means. The comparison is, of course, only partly correct. The point is that we have the choice to obey God or Satan. Our decision to obey God will involve total obedience just as slavery to sin demanded obedience. The great difference between the two is that in slavery to sin, the human will becomes powerless. Satan never lets his slaves go free. He drags them down to a subhuman level. If we pledge total obedience to God, however, Jesus says: “I no longer call you servants [slaves], because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”⁴ Enslavement to God leads to true freedom. Jesus also said: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”⁵ Our pledge of obedience to God is our response to the liberation Jesus provides for us in the payment of our sin. The Psalmist says: “O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains.”⁶

-
1. Matt. 5:17-19
 2. Jer. 31:33
 3. Ex. 21:2
 4. John 15:15
 5. John 8:34-36
 6. Ps. 116:16

The phrase: “You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted” is interesting. The Greek word for “form” is *tupo*, which literally means “a die.” The image is of wax being poured into a form. The teaching of righteousness is the teaching that forms us and gives shape and content to our lives.

Bible scholars have interpreted differently the words “I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves.” *Darby* translates this: “I speak humanly on account of the weakness of your flesh.” The difference in interpretation depends on whether we consider the phrase to be connected to what preceded or to what follows. If we look at it in connection with the illustration about slavery, we could read in Paul’s words a kind of apology for making the comparison, giving the reason that their spiritual understanding was not developed enough to do otherwise. If we regard the words to be linked to what follows, it means that Paul suggests that they consider themselves slaves in order to bring their natural weakness, their carnal inclinations, under control. We are in good company if we accept this latter view. Although Jesus does not call us slaves, we do well to keep on considering ourselves as slaves. Jesus advises us: “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”¹

In Verse 19, Paul repeats the words he used in Verse 13 about offering the part of our body to God as instruments of righteousness to show the result of such a sacrifice. Giving our body over to sin leads to impurity and wickedness; surrendering our body to God will lead to holiness. The use of the word “free” in Verse 20 is interesting. People use the word “free” to indicate that they act as they please, whilst in reality, they are slaves of sin. The freedom of slaves to sin is a freedom from righteousness and holiness; it is a freedom from eternal life. In that sense, we could say that a dead person who is free from life! Once we are saved from that kind of “freedom” we will feel shame when we think back of what we used to be. Being God’s slave will lead to eternal life and to friendship with God. Remember that Jesus said: “I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends.” “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in [or through] Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin pays with death, which means that we pay for ourselves with our own life. God’s gift, God’s grace is free, because He paid for us with His death.

B. Sanctification and the Law Chapter 7

1 Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.

3 So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

4 So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

1. Luke 17:10

- 9 *Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.*
- 10 *I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.*
- 11 *For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.*
- 12 *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*
- 13 *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*
- 14 *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.*
- 15 *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*
- 16 *And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.*
- 17 *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.*
- 18 *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*
- 19 *For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing.*
- 20 *Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*
- 21 *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.*
- 22 *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;*
- 23 *but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*
- 24 *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*
- 25 *Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

For our understanding of this chapter, it is imperative that we see it as a bridge between the preceding chapter and the following. In Chapter Six, Paul expounded that our identification with Christ's death and resurrection gives us freedom from sin. In this chapter, the point made is that it frees us from the law as an instrument of condemnation. God said to Moses: "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out."¹

For centuries, Bible scholars have debated whether, in this chapter, Paul speaks about a present condition or about a state of mind before the conversion and the experience of God's grace. The debate centers, primarily, on verses 13-25, the core of it being the words "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"²

Martin Luther, in his *Preface to Romans* writes: "St. Paul shows how spirit and flesh struggle with each other in one person. He gives himself as an example, so that we may learn how to kill sin in ourselves. He gives both spirit and flesh the name 'law,' so that, just as it is in the nature of divine law to drive a person on and make demands of him, so too the flesh drives and demands and rages against the spirit and wants to have its own way. Likewise the spirit drives and demands against the flesh and wants to have its own way. This feud lasts in us for as long as we live, in one person more, in another less, depending on whether spirit or flesh is stronger. Yet the whole human being is both: spirit and flesh. The human being fights with himself until he becomes completely spiritual."

The Adam Clark's Commentary observes: "It is difficult to conceive how the opinion could have crept into the church, or prevailed there, that 'the apostle speaks here of his regenerate state; and that what was, in such a state, true of himself, must be true of all others in the same state.' This opinion has, most pitifully and most shamefully, not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character. It requires but little knowledge of the spirit of the Gospel, and of the scope of this

1. Deut. 27:26

2. Rom. 7:24

letter, to see that the apostle is, here, either personating a Jew under the law and without the Gospel, or showing what his own state was when he was deeply convinced that by the deeds of the law no man could be justified, and had not as yet heard those blessed words: ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit,’ Acts 9:17.”

In the opening illustration, Paul seems to combine the Law of Moses, particularly the Ten Commandments, with law in general, or particularly Roman law. Roman law, *Lex Romana*, has been the foundation of most constitutions in western civilization up to the present. When, therefore, Paul states “I am speaking to men who know the law,” he may refer to Romans and their famous judicial system. Some Bible scholars, however, believe that Paul addressed, particularly, Jewish members of the church in Rome and that he refers here, principally, to the Law of Moses. But, as far as his illustration is concerned, the law that binds husband and wife together “till death do us part” is not a law that is unique to the Ten Commandments. But the application of the illustration, obviously, refers to the moral law of the Old Testament. Scholars have debated to what law Paul’s question “Do you not know, brothers” refers. Most scholars take this to refer to the statement in the previous chapter “you are not under law, but under grace.”¹ That, however, is not the only possible inference. Because the principle, that the law only governs the lives of people who are alive and not of those who have died, is universal.

Marriages are, by law, binding for the duration of the life of spouses. A person, who marries a second partner while the first marriage is still binding, commits bigamy. This part of the application is not emphasized here; Paul spoke from the perspective of a man’s world in which women were given in marriage and a man married a woman. A woman, who married a second husband while her marriage to her first husband was still legally binding, was considered to commit adultery. To the Roman mind, as well as to the Jews, the illustration was clear enough.

In the application of the illustration, believers are identified with the widow. The distinction of the sexes between the two partners is here not part of the illustration. The male partner in the second marriage is Christ. In his book *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis lets one of his characters say: “What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.”

In order to understand Paul’s thought, we must see that the reason we want to be free from the law is not that the law is evil, but that we are evil and that the only thing the law can do is condemn us. The moral law is like a mirror that shows us how dirty we are, but it does not provide us with the means of cleaning. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states: “The law, by commanding, forbidding, threatening, corrupt and fallen man, but offering no grace to cure and strengthen, did but stir up the corruption, and, like the sun shining upon a dunghill, excite and draw up the filthy steams. We being lamed by the fall, the law comes and directs us, but provides nothing to heal and help our lameness, and so makes us halt and stumble the more.”

In the application of the illustration we see again one of Paul’s agile jumps from one thought to another. Without making any apology, the apostle reverses roles. In the illustration, the death of the husband freed the wife from the law that legally bound her to him. In the application it is the woman who dies and who, consequently, is no longer subject to the demands the law put upon her during her life. Evidently, it is the principle of the limitations of the law to those who are alive that Paul intends to apply and not who plays which role in the application of the illustration. It is not the law that died, as some interpreters have wrongly concluded, but we who had been subjected to the law’s power and condemnation. The fact that, in God’s economy, we died when Jesus Christ died, frees us from the jurisdiction of the law. This is, obviously, what is meant with the words “through the body of Christ.”

From as far back as the beginning of church history, Bible scholars have tried to explain the logic of Paul’s role reversals. Paul’s habit of jumping from one thought to another demands no explanation. If we need one, though, we may suggest that Paul thought of the absolute unity of two persons in marriage that

1. Rom. 6:14

makes husband and wife to be one person. In that sense, when the husband died, the wife died also. After her husband's death, she was no longer a wife, but a mere woman. This thought is reinforced by the truth that, in principle, we died when Christ died. Christ died as the last Adam, which looses us from our relationship with Adam as our representative. And it was "the old Adam" within us that made us "kick against the goads."

Our identification with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection does not free us from the law's demands, but from its condemnation. Not being under the law, but under grace, does not mean that we become lawless. Paul elaborates this point in greater detail in the next chapter. After our conversion, the Holy Spirit takes over and applies the demands of the law inside us. We are no longer under the law, because the law is within us. As Jeremiah stated: "'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'"¹ The effect of grace in us will be an ardent desire to please God and obey Him totally.

It is this principle that governs our new relationship with Christ. In the illustration, the person who dies is not the one who marries again. In the application, the miracle of our resurrection with Christ enables us to enter into a new relationship after we have died.

The fact that Paul presents this to us as a second marriage implies that there has to be a marriage proposal and an acceptance. Jesus Christ invites us to enter into a new relationship with Him and it is up to us to say "yes." Our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection were God's doing. We were not even born yet when this was established. Entering into a relationship of love, obedience, and intimacy with Jesus Christ is our decision. It is our response to His initiative.

Paul represents the result of both unions as the offspring that is the result of a marriage relationship. The children of our first marriage were "the things you are now ashamed of."² In our second marriage, we are giving birth to acts of righteousness and love.

Paul's question "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?" is the third in a series of questions that are introduced by the words "What shall we say?" The first two questions are found in the previous chapter: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"³ This third question penetrates to the core of our relationship with the law.

The statement "the commandment put me to death" could easily lead to the question "What is wrong with the law?" There have been and there still are wrong laws in this world. In Hitler's Nazi empire, for instance, there the law forbade marriage between an Aryan and a Jew. The laws that regulated and protected slavery in the United States were bad. We could make a long list of laws that must have had their origin below instead of from above. The law of God is an expression of God's character; it is, therefore, good. In the words of David: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."⁴

The Matthew Henry's Commentary observes: "Laws are as the law-makers are. God, the great lawgiver, is holy, just, and good, therefore his law must needs be so. The matter of it is holy: it commands holiness, encourages holiness; it is holy, for it is agreeable to the holy will of God, the original of holiness. It

1. Jer. 31:33

2. See Rom. 6:21.

3. See Rom. 6:1,15.

4. Ps. 19:7-11

is just, for it is consonant to the rules of equity and right reason: the ways of the Lord are right. It is good in the design of it; it was given for the good of mankind, for the conservation of peace and order in the world. It makes the observers of it good; the intention of it was to better and reform mankind. Wherever there is true grace there is an assent to this—that the law is holy, just, and good. The law is spiritual (v. 14), not only in regard to the effect of it, as it is a means of making us spiritual, but in regard to the extent of it; it reaches our spirits, it lays a restraint upon, and gives a direction to, the motions of the inward man; it is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, Heb 4:12. It forbids spiritual wickedness, heart-murder, and heart-adultery. It commands spiritual service, requires the heart, obliges us to worship God in the spirit. It is a spiritual law, for it is given by God, who is a Spirit and the Father of spirits; it is given to man, whose principal part is spiritual; the soul is the best part, and the leading part of the man, and therefore the law to the man must needs be a law to the soul. Herein the law of God is above all other laws, that it is a spiritual law. Other laws may forbid compassing and imagining, etc., which are treason in the heart, but cannot take cognizance thereof, unless there be some overt act; but the law of God takes notice of the iniquity regarded in the heart, though it go no further. Wash thy heart from wickedness, Jer 4:14. We know this: Wherever there is true grace there is an experimental knowledge of the spirituality of the law of God.”

Paul sets out to prove that it is not the law that is sinful but we are, by showing the result of the application of the law to our life. God’s perfect law reveals our imperfections. We would not have recognized our true sinful nature without the comparison the law provides of our character with the character of God.

In order to illustrate his point, Paul chooses one of the Ten Commandments that reveals a sin that, to one’s mind, is least obvious to be sin, the sin of coveting. The problem is that it is natural for the human heart to long for things, and not all longing is bad. Interestingly, in the example of the Kapauku tribe in Papua, Indonesia, we used earlier, the law against coveting is the only one of the commandments the tribe had retained throughout the ages, which they had chosen to forget. The law Paul refers to is the last of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”¹

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes: “Law is only the means of disclosing this sinful propensity, not of producing it; as a bright beam of the sun introduced into a room shows millions of motes which appear to be dancing in it in all directions; but these were not introduced by the light: they were there before, only there was not light enough to make them manifest; so the evil propensity was there before, but there was not light sufficient to discover it.”

The same *Commentary* then quotations some other Bible scholars on this section, quotations that are worth copying. “Mr. Locke and Dr. Taylor have properly remarked the skill used by Paul in dexterously avoiding, as much as possible, the giving offence to the Jews: and this is particularly evident in his use of the word ‘I’ in this place. In the beginning of the chapter, where he mentions their knowledge of the law, he says ‘Ye’; in the 4th verse he joins himself with them, and says ‘we’; but here, and so to the end of the chapter, where he represents the power of sin and the inability of the law to subdue it, he appears to leave them out, and speaks altogether in the first person, though it is plain he means all those who are under the law. So, Rom. 3:7, he uses the singular pronoun, ‘why am I judged a sinner?’ when he evidently means the whole body of unbelieving Jews. There is another circumstance in which his address is peculiarly evident; his demonstrating the insufficiency of the law under color of vindicating it. He knew that the Jew would take fire at the least reflection on the law, which he held in the highest veneration; and therefore he very naturally introduces him catching at that expression, Rom 7:5, ‘the motions of sins, which were by the law,’ or, notwithstanding the law. ‘What!’ says this Jew, ‘do you vilify the law, by charging it with favoring sin?’ ‘By no means,’ says the apostle; ‘I am very far from charging the law with favoring sin.’ ‘The law is holy, and the commandment is holy just, and good,’ Rom 7:12. Thus, he writes in vindication of the law; and yet at the same time shows:

1. Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21

1. That the law requires the most extensive obedience, discovering and condemning sin in all its most secret and remote branches,
2. That it gives sin a deadly force, subjecting every transgression to the penalty of death, Rom 7:8-14. And yet,
3. supplies neither help nor hope to the sinner, but leaves him under the power of sin, and the sentence of death, Rom 7:14, etc. This, says Dr. Taylor, is the most ingenious turn of writing I ever met with.”

Ever since sin entered the world, coveting has been preoccupying the human heart. Covetousness and jealousy are identical twins. Cain killed Abel because Abel had something he did not have. Evidently, David experienced the sin of coveting in his own life, for which reason he wrote: “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong.”¹ And Asaph must have known the same problem, since he wrote: “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”²

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “[Paul] presents to us a vivid picture of a man supposed at first to be without law, and therefore unconscious of sin; but then, through law coming in, acquiring a sense of it, and yet unable to avoid it. The man assents in his conscience to the good, but is dragged down by the infection of his nature to the evil. He seems to have, as it were, two contrary laws within himself, distracting him. And so the external Law, appealing to the higher law within himself, good and holy though it be, is, in a sense, killing him; for it reveals sin to him, and makes it deadly, but does not deliver him from it, till the crisis comes in the desperate cry, ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ (ver. 24). But this crisis is the precursor of deliverance; it is the last throes preceding the new birth; the Law has now done its work, having fully convinced of sin, and excited the yearning for deliverance, and in ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ the deliverance comes.”

In stating: “I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death,” Paul refers to the words of Moses regarding the law: “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”³

Paul seemingly contradicts himself by suggesting that the law could bring salvation. Earlier, he had stated: “through the law we become conscious of sin.”⁴ In order to understand the implications and the complications in the struggle between sin and the law, we must go back to the source, to the time the law was originally given. The law of God was introduced into this world when God placed Adam and Eve in paradise. We read: “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”⁵ At that time, sin had not made its appearance yet, because man had not yet chosen. God’s purpose in giving the command was not to prove man’s tendency to sin but to lure him to the tree of life and eat of its fruit. In that sense, the commandment was intended to bring life.

The true meaning of the words “For apart from law, sin is dead” is difficult to pin down. Paul, obviously, does not mean that the law produced a literal resurrection of something that was dead in us. The law is like a stick that wakes up a sleeping dog. Without the poking of the stick, the dog would keep on sleeping. Death, in this context, cannot be taken literally as a physical or spiritual condition. It cannot mean more than a form of inactivity. If we say that the dog comes to life when poked with the stick, it does not mean that the animal was literally dead when asleep. When God gave the first commandment to Adam, the

1. Ps. 37:1
2. Ps. 73:2,3
3. Deut. 32:46,47
4. See Rom. 3:20.
5. Gen. 2:16,17

law did not cause Adam's death; it only provided him with a choice. As was mentioned earlier by one of the commentators, if there are no speed limit signs on a road, no one can be caught speeding, however fast they go.

It is, of course, not literally true that man was ever without any law at all. From the very beginning of human life, man's understanding of the character of God was sufficient to help him make the right choices. The prohibition to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge was given at the beginning of human life on earth. The fact that Satan could use God's law in order to bring man over to his side is a mystery to us. Adam and Eve did not have a sinful nature at the time of their temptation as we do now. Their response to Satan's temptation is inexplicable. If Satan had overpowered them against their will, they could not have been held responsible for their actions; but they were. The fall of the first human couple caused their offspring to be born with a sinful nature that gives Satan a willing sounding board in every temptation. Sinning has become our second nature. But the fact that Satan uses God's law for the achievement of his own goals does not make the law sinful. It is not God's law that kills; it is sin within us.

But then, if Satan can use God's law to our detriment, so can God use it to our salvation. The way He does this is by allowing us to hit our heads so often and so hard against the wall of the law that we cry out for help.

Sin tends to distort reality. It did so the first time Eve faced temptation. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."¹ There was nothing good, pleasing, and desirable in the fruit Eve saw; that beauty was all in the eye of the beholder. Even when the Scriptures tell us: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked,"² they did not see reality. Their nakedness was not physical but spiritual. The fact that they covered their bodies with fig leaves did not cover the nakedness of their soul.

All this to say that God allows us to fall and get stuck in sin so that we would come to the point of calling on Him for salvation. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."³ Paul states in his Epistle to the Galatians: "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."⁴ Sin cannot be dealt with properly unless it is recognized as sin. Only those who, like Isaiah, cry out: "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips"⁵ can be cleansed.

It is difficult to enter into the last section of this seventh chapter without opening a can of worms. Almost from the time the words were written, theologians have debated what Paul is saying here. A complicating factor is that a copying error may have slipped into the text of vs. 14. Paul contrasts "spiritual" with "unspiritual," as the NIV reads. The Greek words are *pneumatikos* and *sarkinos*. Most Bible scholars, however, agree that *sarkinos* should be *sarkikos*. The first word generally stands for the fleshy material of which organs are made, but the latter describes the sinful human nature.

The main question, however, is not Paul's use of words that may have been interchangeable, but whom he means when he states: "I am unspiritual," or "I am carnal." Is Paul speaking about his former condition, of the time before his conversion and regeneration, or does he speak about his state of mind after having been born again? Could the inward struggle he describes be part of one who is a new creation in Christ? *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* rejects such notion out of hand. We read: "It is difficult to conceive how the opinion could have crept into the church, or prevailed there, that 'the apostle speaks here of his regenerate state; and that what was, in such a state, true of himself, must be true of all others in the same state.' This opinion has, most pitifully and most shamefully, not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character. It requires but little knowledge of the spirit of the

-
1. Gen. 3:6
 2. Gen. 3:7
 3. See Rom. 10:13.
 4. Gal. 3:24
 5. Isa. 6:5

Gospel, and of the scope of this letter, to see that the apostle is, here, either personating a Jew under the law and without the Gospel, or showing what his own state was when he was deeply convinced that by the deeds of the law no man could be justified, and had not as yet heard those blessed words: ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit,’ Acts 9:17.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, however, suggests a different approach: “The ‘I’ here is of course not the regenerate man, of whom this is certainly not true; but (as will presently appear) neither is it the unregenerate man-from whose case the apostle has passed away. It remains, then, that it is the sinful principle in the renewed man, as is expressly stated in Rom 7:18.” But can we really disassociate ourselves from the principles that govern our behavior?

To accept any of the two suggested interpretations would imply that sanctification in each of us is always instantaneous and complete, which we know it is not. There will always remain in each of us the tension between what we are before God positional and what we experience in our daily walk. That which is complete in the eyes of God forms the basis upon which we grow by constantly denying our sinful nature the freedom to assert itself within us. We must cling to the truth that God crucified us with Jesus Christ to the death of our sinful nature, but our daily experience will always be, as Luther discovered, that “the beast can swim.” To refer all sinful tendencies to the state of an unregenerate person, allows for more spiritual insight than such a person can be credited with. It is usually the born again person who comes to the conclusion that he really does not know himself. And it is the conflict between what we hate and, at the same time, love that will bring us to the point of surrender to God on a deeper level in order to experience the blessing of the Holy Spirit in a more penetrating way.

It is helpful to observe that in the sentence of vs. 15 “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do,” Paul uses three different Greek words that are all translated “I do” in English. The first word *katergazomai* refers to a complete action, meaning, “to accomplish,” or “to finish.” The second word, *prasso* refers to a habit, meaning, “practice.” The third word is *poieo*, meaning simply “to do.”

None of what Paul states in this section is put in the past tense. And although Paul seems to make a distinction between his sinful nature and himself, he cannot disassociate himself from his sinful nature. My sinful nature is I, whether I like it or not. We need faith in Christ to be saved; we also need faith in Christ to be sanctified. As Don J. Kenyon states in *The Glory of Grace*, a commentary on Romans, “The point is not that every man’s experience is identical, but that every man’s experience is a discovery that he cannot save himself, nor can the law save him. *He needs Christ!*”

Part of our problem is that we want our sanctification to be a conscious process. As far as that is concerned, sanctification is as elusive as humility. When we feel humble, we are farthest away from it! A person, who feels holy, has a longer way to go than the one who is conscious of his sin. The Scottish novelist Bruce Marshall captured the irony of that condition well in the opening sentence of his book *To Every Man a Penny*: “The cardinal always found it difficult to feel holy on a hot day.”¹

Having said all this, we must confess that Paul seems to say more about his sinful tendencies than would have been obvious from his life as a born again apostle of Jesus Christ. Describing his sinful nature, he may have thought of his past life, while he was persecuting Christians and Jesus asked him: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”² The fury with which he carried out his campaign can only be explained by his own inner doubts. In persecuting the saints, Paul was in fact hunting down his own conscience. The ox that kicks against the goads only hurts itself. But then to think that Paul was immediately transported to the other extreme of the spectrum requires more than a stretch of the imagination. Even the great apostle cannot have known instantaneous and complete sanctification. The very fact that he told the Corinthians “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”³ is an indication that he tried to pay off a debt that had already been forgiven him. It is part of the recognition that Christ is our righteousness

1. Quoted from memory.
2. Acts 26:14
3. I Cor. 9:16

that makes us realize that, apart from Him, there is nothing good in us. Even if we consider ourselves dead to sin and believe that our old man has been crucified with Christ, the old man's ghost will keep on haunting us after our conversion. No one is able to draw a complete line of separation between his present and his past. God will not remember our past sins, but we do.

In a way, it is good for our spiritual health not to blot out those memories. If we cease to remember where we came from, God's amazing grace will lose its edge for us. If Paul had forgotten his past he would never have been able to write to Timothy: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."¹

It would be easy to draw the wrong conclusions from Paul's statement in thinking that we cannot be held responsible for our sinful acts, because, in principle, we do not agree with what we are doing. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* correctly observes: "It is hardly necessary to say that the apostle means not to disown the blame of yielding to his corruptions, by saying, 'It is not he that does it, but sin that dwelleth in him.' Early heretics thus abused his language; but the whole strain of the passage shows that his sole object in thus expressing himself was to bring more vividly before his readers the conflict of two opposite principles, and how entirely, as a new man-honoring from his inmost soul the law of God-he condemned and renounced his corrupt nature, with its affections and lusts, its stirrings and its outgoings, root and branch. 'The acts of a slave (says Hodge, excellently) are indeed his own acts; but not being performed with the full assent and consent of his soul, they are not fair tests of the real state of his feelings.'"

There is in sin a self-condemning principle that always asserts itself. Paul may have thought of the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall and compared himself, in his present state, with what God originally meant man to be. He concluded that his sinful tendencies and acts were incongruent with the image of God in which he was created. Adam and Eve themselves had come to this conclusion after they sinned. Their feelings of shame because of their nakedness attest to this.

All the factors Paul mentions in this section speak of the deceitfulness of the human heart that tries to pin the blame for its own acts on something or someone else. We cannot blame the law for our transgressions, nor can we put everything on the account of our sinful nature, as if we were not the account holder. Trying to worm our way out of our predicament only makes our condition worse.

Paul depicts our condition very graphically with his cry of despair: "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" He sees himself as going through life carrying a cadaver on his back. I once had a dog that killed a chicken. In order to teach him not to do it again, I tied the chicken on his back at a place where he could not tear it off. After carrying the dead chicken for a while, he decided never to commit that crime again. God allows us to carry this body of death for a while in order to put the fear of the Lord in us and make us decide that we better turn to Him and let Him free us from our burden.

The solution of the dilemma is, obviously, given in the words "Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The Greek uses the single word *charis*, "grace," for "thanks be," or "I thank." So the phrase could also be rendered, "The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" This makes the brooding themes that sound a minor key in this chapter end in a major key trumpet blast as a signal of victory. How this victory is celebrated and how it can be applied is worked out in the following chapter. In the last words of this chapter, the dichotomy is not completely resolved, but the way out is indicated. God's grace will have the last word, but it will not sound until we enter glory.

C. Sanctification and the Spirit Chapter 8

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

1. I Tim. 1:12-14

- 2 *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*
- 3 *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,*
- 4 *in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*
- 5 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*
- 6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;*
- 7 *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*
- 8 *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*
- 9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*
- 10 *But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.*
- 11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*
- 12 *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.*
- 13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,*
- 14 *because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*
- 15 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*
- 16 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*
- 17 *Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*
- 18 *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*
- 19 *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*
- 20 *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope*
- 21 *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*
- 22 *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*
- 23 *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*
- 24 *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*
- 25 *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*
- 26 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*
- 27 *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*
- 28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*
- 29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*
- 30 *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter Eight of Paul's Epistle to the Romans is, undoubtedly, the glorious summit of this whole treatise. Starting out from the trumpet blast of victory "Thanks be to God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!" at the end of the last chapter, Paul leads us now to the place where we can say "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Paul shows us step by step how our identification with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection that he began to develop in Chapter Six, leads us to the experience of Christ's victory over our sinful nature through our daily fellowship with Him. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states beautifully: "In this surpassing chapter the several streams of the preceding arguments meet and flow in one 'river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,' until it seems to lose itself in the ocean of a blissful eternity."

The radical statement that opens this chapter, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" is apt to take away our breath. The word "therefore" suggests both a conclusion of and a link to all that preceded. But actually, it refers more to what follows than to what was said earlier. The theme of our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection in Chapter Six and the struggle between the Spirit and the flesh in Chapter Seven do not naturally lead to a conclusion of "no condemnation." Yet, Jesus Himself made the same pronouncement in John's Gospel: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."¹

In Jesus' words we find the conditions for that identification that seem to be lacking in Paul's statement. There is no condemnation for those who hear and believe. One could argue on the basis of Paul's words that no one would be condemned because God included the whole of mankind in Christ Jesus when He laid the sin of the whole world upon Him. It is clear, however, that without our acceptance of that fact, identification cannot be an experience for us. But, as Paul specifies in vs. 9, we only belong to Christ if we are being controlled by the Spirit of Christ. It is probably in order to avoid that kind of wrong conclusion that older Bible translations, such as the KJV add the words "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" to the end of this verse. Text criticism asserts that those words, which do occur in vs. 4, are out of place in vs. 1. They are, evidently, not found in older, more reliable manuscripts.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments on "no condemnation": "It is the unspeakable privilege and comfort of all those that are in Christ Jesus that there is therefore now no condemnation to them. He does not say, 'There is no accusation against them,' for this there is; but the accusation is thrown out, and the indictment quashed. He does not say, 'There is nothing in them that deserves condemnation,' for this there is, and they see it, and own it, and mourn over it, and condemn themselves for it; but it shall not be

1. John 5:24

their ruin. He does not say, ‘There is no cross, no affliction to them or no displeasure in the affliction,’ for this there may be; but no condemnation. They may be chastened of the Lord, but not condemned with the world. Now this arises from their being in Christ Jesus; by virtue of their union with him through faith they are thus secured. They are in Christ Jesus, as in their city of refuge, and so are protected from the avenger of blood. He is their advocate, and brings them off. There is therefore no condemnation, because they are interested in the satisfaction that Christ by dying made to the law.”

It should be noted that, in the first four verses, Paul uses the word “law” four times to refer to three different entities. The law of the Spirit of life, is obviously, not the Law of Moses, neither does “the law of sin and death” fit that description. But the law that was powerless to save and that is fully met in us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit refers to the Ten Commandments.

It may seem strange to us that Paul uses the word “law” to describe what the Holy Spirit administers in the heart of the believer. But the use of the word helps us to understand that genuine freedom does not consist in an abandonment of rules but in a willing surrender to them. *The Pulpit Commentary* clarifies this: “The expressions used bring out strikingly one essential distinction between Law and Gospel, viz. that the principle of the former is to control and discipline conduct by requirements and threats; but of the latter to introduce into man’s inner being a new principle of life, whence right conduct may spontaneously flow. Coercion is the principle of the one; inspiration of the other.” The person who is a slave to sin rebels impulsively against the requirements of the law of God. But he who has made himself a slave of God has received a new heart through regeneration, a heart on which the law of God is written. His new nature makes obedience to the law the fulfillment of his innermost cravings.

So what Paul is actually saying is that, since we have been born again by the Holy Spirit, obedience to God’s will is no longer a wall against which we hit our heads, the goads against which we kick, but the most satisfying experience of our heart. It is the love of God that urges us to obey. In Jesus’ words: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”¹

The law from which we have been set free, therefore, is not the moral law of God, but the evil principle of sin that governed my thinking and desires, that made me rebel against the requirements of God’s will because I did not answer God’s love for me with my love for Him.

The law that was powerless is the expression of God’s character, the Law of Moses as embodied in the Ten Commandments. What that law was powerless to do was to save me from the condition in which sin had led me. The moral law had no power to save me from my immorality. But there was another part of the Law of Moses that foreshadowed that salvation: the ceremonial law that provided temporal relief from the consequences of sin through substituting sacrifices. But those sacrifices were only a picture of a reality to come. The fact that Paul calls the Law of Moses “powerless” does not mean that it had no power, but that it could not save me from myself. “Powerless” does not refer to the character of the law but to the limited function the law had in the realm of human behavior. Two illustrations can clarify what is meant. When I look in the mirror and see that my face is dirty, I do not use the mirror to clean myself. That is not what mirrors are for. The mirror merely reveals the need; soap and water will do the cleaning. Secondly, when a housewife boils a piece of meat until it falls apart, she will not be able to use a large fork to lift the meat out of the broth. The fork may be made of stainless steel, but the meat will fall off it because of its condition of having been cooked so long. It is my sinful nature that makes the law ineffective as far as a change in that nature is concerned.

Paul explains then how God went about to save us from the power of our sinful nature that made the law powerless. The Greek text reads literally: “For what could not do the law in that it was weak through the flesh, God His own Son sending in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” The NIV uses the words “to be a sin offering” as a substitute for the literal rendering of the Greek “and for sin.” Although this is theologically sound and the text, obviously implies this, it could be argued that the translators have taken more freedom than should be allowed. We know, however, that the purpose of

1. John 14:15

Christ's becoming man was "to give his life as a ransom for many."¹

Jesus became a human being, with the same kind of body we have inherited from Adam. His body, like ours, was subject to fatigue, hunger, sickness, and death. But the fact that His body looked like ours does not mean that He acted like we do in our bodies. Jesus never used His body or His mind to commit sin.

He could ask, without hesitation or hypocrisy "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"² When Adam committed his first sin, his spirit, the organ, which allowed him to commune with God, died. The spirit in the body we inherited from Adam at our birth is dead. It is brought to life when we turn from our sins and we are born again by the Spirit of God. Jesus was not born with a human body in which the spirit was dead. He did not inherit a sinful nature from His Father, as we do. The body, which His mother gave Him, was like our body, but the spirit He inherited from His Father was unlike ours. This qualified Him to model for us a life of victory over sin and to die a death in which sin and its author were defeated. Thus He became the ultimate Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, of which all the animal sacrifices were a shadow. God laid on Him our sin and then condemned Him to death. Since the death penalty has been paid for our crimes, we do no longer owe God anything legally. All we owe Him is a life of gratitude.

The important next step that is hidden in the statement that "the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us" demands a closer look. The theme of Paul's Epistle to the Romans is not merely justification by faith. An overemphasis of that topic tends to blur our understanding of Paul's main thought, which is that we obtain God's righteousness. It is not so that, since we have been declared "not guilty," we can no longer be legally persecuted, but our moral guilt remains. We are not like a criminal who is off the hook because his case was dismissed because of a legality. The fact that "in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed" means that the Gospel makes us righteous. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This, then, is the purpose of Christ's victory over sin — that the requirement of the Law in us too may be fulfilled; which evidently means more than that his victory may be *imputed to* us, on the ground of our faith only, while we remain as we were. The expression, 'righteousness fulfilled,'³ and also the condition appended at the end of the verse, imply that the 'Spirit of life' must so dominate over the flesh in ourselves that the Law may forfeit its claims over us. The sinful propensities of the flesh remain in us still (as the verses that follow distinctly show); but the Spirit that is in us is strong enough to overcome them now."

Living "according to the Spirit," in this context means that the Holy Spirit guides us step by step through the implications of the details of our changed condition. It is the Spirit of God that prompts us to stop doing what we used to do and to begin doing the things that we never thought of before. If regeneration does not reveal itself in that we pay back the money we borrowed, or apologize for the hurt we caused an individual, or the mending of a broken relationship, there may have been no regeneration at all. The Holy Spirit helps us to take the step from justification to sanctification. It needs no argument that we will not achieve sinless perfection in this life, but there must be a move in that direction if justification is a reality for us. As the nineteenth century senator Carl Schurz once said: "Ideals are like stars; you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny." That is what living "according to the Spirit" means.

Paul then proceeds to show the contrast between keeping in step with the Holy Spirit and following the flesh. It is obvious that what is meant is not "mind over matter," but the control of the Holy Spirit over our life as opposed to being manipulated by a sinful nature. In a way this is the same thought that Paul expressed in Chapter Six: "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your

1. Matt. 20:28

2. John 8:46

3. The *Commentary* uses the Greek words with Greek characters.

body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”¹

Paul uses the Greek word *phroneo* to describe the activity of the sinful and of the sanctified mind. The word conveys the idea of an exercise of the mind, of occupying oneself with the things that interest him. The New Living Translation renders the verse: “Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit renews our thinking. Later in this same epistle Paul urges us to surrender to the Spirit’s prompting in this domain. We read in Chapter Twelve: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”²

The consequences of failure to allow the Holy Spirit to control our thinking are mentioned as spiritual death, continuation of hostility toward God, rebellion against the law of God, and inability to please God. The last stands for falling under God’s judgment.

Allowing the Holy Spirit control over our thinking does not amount to spiritual suicide as some accuse us. That supposition is based on the assumption that we are able of independent thinking if left to ourselves. Ever since Eve yielded to the serpent’s temptation, independent thinking has no longer been an option to mankind. Our mind is either blocked from the truth by sinful influences, or it is liberated by the Spirit of God. It is the devil who makes us commit intellectual suicide. Jesus offers to set us free. He has said: “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”³ If the consequences of sin’s control are death, hostility, rebellion, and judgment, then the liberating control of the Holy Spirit will mean life, peace, submission, and salvation. Accepting salvation by believing that Jesus’ death is a substitution for our death, accepting Him as our Savior, includes accepting Him as our Lord. It is true that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,”⁴ but unless we submit to His Lordship and show our love for Him by our obedience, by allowing the Holy Spirit to dictate what we think, we do not belong to Him.

We may deduct from Paul’s use of the terms “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ in you” that they are interchangeable. All three express the same truth as well as the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Belonging to Christ means that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our life, that Christ lives in our heart.

Bible scholars have interpreted differently the verse “But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” Some see in the word “body” the equivalent of “the sinful nature,” mentioned in the previous verses; others connect it to the following verse in which Paul mentions the resurrection of our physical body. We admit that the conciseness of Paul’s phrase opens the door to possible misunderstanding. But since Paul tends to repeat his thoughts in his other epistles, it is not too difficult to trace his line of thought. In First Corinthians, for instance, we read: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”⁵ There cannot be any doubt that Paul speaks there about the bodily resurrection. The sin that causes our body to die, therefore, is the sin of Adam. This thought was introduced in the beginning of Chapter Five. The righteousness that assures the life of the spirit is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is applied to our lives.

Verse 11 gives us the guarantee of our own resurrection because of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit, in this context, is the Spirit of God the Father. Paul states this same truth also in his

1. See Rom. 6:13,14.
2. Rom. 12:2
3. John 8:36
4. Matt. 20:28
5. I Cor. 15:21,23

First Epistle to the Corinthians: “By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.”¹ Some theologians stretch this truth to the point where they make it a basis for claiming physical healing.

In Verse 12, Paul progresses from justification to sanctification. This transition is of great importance, because it shows that Paul never intended our justification by faith to be an end in itself. If our justification does not result in our sanctification, it is void in itself. It also proves that sanctification is not automatic. God does not make us holy against our will. The application of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our lives is dependant upon our choices. God respects our privacy. In a way our choices are passive actions; they are choices of surrender. As in a marriage, partners surrender their bodies to one another, so in our relationship with Jesus Christ, we allow the Spirit of God to take possession of us. A physical relationship that one person forces upon another is called rape. There is an enormous difference between a marriage relationship and rape. God does not force Himself upon us against our will as Satan does.

It could be argued that, in this verse, Paul does not endorse a doctrine of eternal security. He makes it sound as if we could lose our salvation if we are not careful. This is not the place to bring the Calvinists and Armenians into the picture. We must state, however, that the security of our salvation is, obviously, just as much a matter of faith as is our salvation. If we know we are saved by faith, we can also know that we are kept by the same faith. It is a healthy position to believe that we are eternally secure in God’s keeping of our soul and, at the same time, live as if we can lose our salvation.

The Greek text, rendered in the NIV “we have an obligation” reads literally “we are debtors.” Paul uses the word *opheiletes*, which means “someone who owes something.” Sometimes this is rendered “a sinner.” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments on this: “We are not debtors to the flesh, neither by relation, gratitude, nor any other bond or obligation. We owe no suit nor service to our carnal desires; we are indeed bound to clothe, and feed, and take care of the body, as a servant to the soul in the service of God, but no further. We are not debtors to it; the flesh never did us so much kindness as to oblige us to serve it. It is implied that we are debtors to Christ and to the Spirit: there we owe our all, all we have and all we can do, by a thousand bonds and obligations. Being delivered from so great a death by so great a ransom, we are deeply indebted to our deliverer.”

“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” deserves a closer look. In the Greek the words “you will die” and “you will live” are not in the same future tense as they are in English. In the first case, the future is a continuation of a present condition. Those who live according to the sinful nature have already begun to die and their future is a confirmation of their present state. The Greek word rendered “deeds” is *praxis*, which refers not merely to a single act or series of acts, but to a practice. *Praxis* often covers the whole complex of acts of a lifetime, as in the verse: “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”² Or in “Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.”³

We also ought not to interpret “the misdeeds of the body” as only sexual immorality. Sins such as arrogance, hatred, and duplicity rank higher on God’s list of culpability than giving in to the urges of our body. We know that all sins make us fall shorts of the glory of God, but some bring us down further from the goal than others. Putting to death those sins, or as other versions read, “mortify” those sins, is the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot overcome our sinful nature by our own efforts. A preacher friend of mine once used the illustration of a person who went to the doctor and was told that he had a tumor that ought to be removed. He did not go home to remove the cancerous growth with his own hands, but asked a specialist to operate on him. The only way to overcome sin is by appointment at the Great Physician’s office.

1. I Cor. 6:14
2. Matt. 16:27
3. Acts 19:18

Paul's wording of the subject makes it clear that it is a matter of choice whether, after having heard the Gospel and receiving the invitation for salvation, we continue in the rut in which our sinful habits had led us, or make a clean break by deciding to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Paul states that following the leading of God's Spirit is an indication of spiritual growth. From spiritual infants we become sons of God. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments "[For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.] No man who does not have divine assistance can either find the way to heaven, or walk in it when found. As Christ, by his sacrificial offering, has opened the kingdom of God to all believers; and, as a Mediator, transacts the concerns of their kingdom before the throne; so the Spirit of God is the great agent here below, to enlighten, quicken, strengthen, and guide the true disciples of Christ; and all that are born of this Spirit are led and guided by it; and none can pretend to be the children of God who are not thus guided." *Barnes' Notes* adds: "[As are led] As submit to his influence and control. The Spirit is represented as influencing, suggesting, and controlling. One evidence of piety is a willingness to yield to that influence, and submit to him. One decided evidence of the lack of piety is, where there is an unwillingness to submit to that influence, but where the Holy Spirit is grieved and resisted. All Christians submit to his influence; all sinners decidedly reject it and oppose it. The influence of the Spirit, if followed, would lead every man to heaven. But when neglected, rejected, or despised, man goes down to hell. The glory belongs to the conducting Spirit when man is saved; the fault is man's when he is lost. The apostle here does not agitate the question how it is that the people of God are led by the Spirit, or why they yield to it when others resist it. His design is simply to state the fact, that they who are thus led are the sons of God, or have evidence of piety." What all this is saying is that our following the leading of the Holy Spirit in our life is evidence of spiritual growth and maturity. The apostle John corroborates this: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."¹

Paul also indicates that the realization of being led by the Spirit will bring us into a more intimate relationship with the Father. Mark introduces the word "Abba" in the scene of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. We read: "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"² Paul uses the same expression in his Epistle to the Galatians: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"³ "Abba" is Aramaic for "father." A modern equivalent would be "Daddy." Aramaic was the daily language of the Jews in Jesus' day. Those who had returned from the Babylonian Captivity no longer spoke Hebrew; they had switched to the language of their captors. Prayers were probably still said in the old Hebrew tongue, which was forgotten by most. Adding "Abba" to a prayer would draw it closer into a daily-life experience. Some Bible scholars suppose that the words "Abba, Father" had made their way into the Christian vocabulary of prayer through the distribution of Mark's Gospel.

The Greek text rendered in the NIV "a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear," and "the Spirit of sonship" reads literally, "a spirit of bondage," and "the spirit of adoption." That is also the rendering of the KJV. The New Living Translation paraphrases this: "So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family--calling him 'Father, dear Father.'"

Paul expressed some of this fear in the previous chapter in the words: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"⁴ The Holy Spirit eradicates this fear in us by making us understand that our being born into the family of God allows us to fellowship with God by means of the use of terms of endearment. Having become the recipients of God's love, we can respond to Him with love.

-
1. John 1:12
 2. Mark 14:35,36
 3. Gal. 4:6
 4. Rom. 7:24

The testimony of God's Holy Spirit to our human spirit gives us not only the assurance of salvation but it also makes us the recipients of the enormous blessings of that salvation. Paul earlier defined sin as falling short of the glory of God;¹ here he states that God shares His glory with us as part of our heritage. The thought that, one day, we may be as glorious as God is, is difficult for us to envision. It may actually be better not to dwell too much on that topic in our present condition.

Paul does not elaborate on what is meant with our sharing in the sufferings of Christ. It is, obviously, not a reference to Christ's experience in His atonement for our sins. We cannot contribute anything to the price He paid for our redemption. Some of us may suffer the consequences of our identification with Jesus in terms of persecution or ostracism. But Paul probably had in mind that Christ took upon Himself the weaknesses and limitations of our sinful bodies, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ... the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," to quotation Shakespeare's Hamlet.

If Christ is called the heir of God's glory, we understand this to refer to His humanity, not His divinity. As the Second Person of the Trinity, He possesses eternal and infinite glory. As a human being, sharing our humiliation, He prayed that God would give Him the glory of His divinity. In His last prayer together with the disciples prior to His crucifixion, He prayed: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."² This glory was restored to Him at His resurrection, when He became "the firstborn from the dead."³ Paul does not mention the resurrection of our body at this place, but we may conclude that this is implied here, as the remainder of this chapter proves. We read: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."⁴

The glory of our inheritance is foreshadowed in God's word to Aaron. "The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.'"⁵ The essence of our glory will be our intimate relationship with God as experienced in the body of our resurrection.

Having spoken of our present condition and the suffering that is part of our humanity, Paul puts the two on the balance and he concludes in vs. 18: "that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed *in us*." The Greek preposition rendered "in" is *eis*, which requires movement or direction. "Into," or "toward" may be better translations. Also the word "are comparing" are not in the Greek text. It is as if Paul puts both our present suffering and our future glory on the scales and invites us to see for ourselves which is heavier. This thought is also expressed in Second Corinthians: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."⁶ *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "The spirit of the whole statement may be thus conveyed: 'True, we must suffer with Christ, if we would partake of His glory; but what of that? For if such sufferings are set over against the coming glory, they sink into insignificance.'"

Bible scholars agree on one point concerning the following statement in vs. 19 that it is one of the most difficult passages in the whole New Testament to interpret. The problem hinges, primarily, on the translation of the Greek word *ktisis*, which can be rendered "creation," or "creature." Some believe that "the creature" is the new man within the Christian that waits for the revelation of glory; others see "the creation" as the sub-human world that suffered from man's fall. Since in the following verses Paul distinguishes

-
1. See Rom. 3:23.
 2. John 17:5
 3. See Rev. 1:5.
 4. Rom. 8:29
 5. Num. 18:20
 6. II Cor. 4:17

between the groaning of the whole creation and the groaning of the believers, we take “creation” here to mean the latter.

In the transition from vs. 18 to vs. 19 Paul takes “a giant leap for mankind,” as astronaut Neil Armstrong said when he set foot on the moon. Since Adam lost his crown as lord of creation, we rarely see anymore the relationship between ourselves and the rest of creation. It is an overwhelming thought that our salvation has such a dramatic and far-reaching impact upon the whole universe. David rediscovered this link when he wrote in the Psalms: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.”¹ Another translation reads: “Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!”² When man fell into sin, the whole world fell with him. His restoration to glory will mean the restoration of everything God created. We are God’s kingpins. When our inheritance of glory will be bestowed upon us, the whole animal world will bask in our glory. In Isaiah’s words: “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”³

The world as we know it now is subjected to frustration. The Greek word, rendered “frustration” is *mataiotes*, which can be translated “inutility,” or “vanity.” The NKJV uses the word “futility.” TLB paraphrases it: “thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay --the things that overcame the world.” The reference is probably to the curse God pronounced as a result of Adam’s sin. According to the Genesis account, God said to Adam: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.”⁴ Ever since that day, harmony has been disturbed and one animal devours another.

This interpretation also explains by whose will this subjection to vanity was brought about. It was God who ordained this frustration for the purpose of kindling hope in the heart of every living creature. The sense of eternity is not only in every human heart; even those creatures that are not conscious of it possess it. Paul’s insertion of “hope” at this point may be a reference to the Greek myth of the Pandora Box. According to Greek mythology, “Pandora was the first woman on earth. When Prometheus bestowed fire on mankind, Zeus in revenge had a woman constructed out of earth. She was called Pandora, the ‘All-gifted,’ because each of the gods gave her some gift with which to win men’s favor and work mischief. She brought with her a box containing every kind of ill; this was opened, and the ills escaped and spread all over the earth, hope alone being left at the bottom of the box.”⁵

Bondage to decay or corruption are excellent words to describe creation’s present condition. The fact that creation will again share in man’s future glory means that man will again wear the crown of being lord of the earth.

“We know” expresses that there is no need for explanation of the fact. It cannot be contested that all of creation is subject to sickness and death. Human beings and animals suffer and die alike. Paul compares this suffering to childbirth. The labor pains of childbirth are related to man’s fall into sin. It was after Adam and Eve had sinned that God said to Eve: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.”⁶ But labor pains are not pains of sickness and death; they accompany life. The

-
1. Ps. 8:3-5
 2. New American Standard Bible- Updated Edition
 3. Isa. 11:6-9
 4. Gen. 3:17,18
 5. Text from *The American Peoples Encyclopedia*.

most victorious statement in the Genesis account of man's fall is "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living."¹ Jesus uses the same image in His last discourse with the disciples on the eve of His crucifixion: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world."² It has been observed that all sounds animals produce are in a minor key. But the new song to be sung is in a major key.

The dichotomy of our present condition, this mixture of misery and hope, is expressed in the words "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." The fact that our spirit has been brought back to life in our regeneration and that the Holy Spirit has taken His abode in our heart does not exempt us from physical suffering and death, or even mental and emotional agony. We all suffer the consequences of sin and are experiences the labor pains of giving birth to a new creation.

It is amazing, to say the least, that Paul equates our adoption with the resurrection of our body. The Greek word rendered "adoption" is *huiothesia*, which literally means, "placing as a son." In the New Testament, the word is found five times, only in Paul's epistles, three times of which are in Romans.³ *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states, "there is no Hebrew word to describe the process of adoption."

Paul, evidently, borrowed the concept from a specifically Roman practice. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes: "In Rome the unique nature of paternal authority, by which a son was held in his father's power, almost as a slave was owned by his master, gave a peculiar character to the process of adoption. For the adoption of a person free from paternal authority, the process and effect were practically the same in Rome as in Greece. In a more specific sense, adoption proper was the process by which a person was transferred from his natural father's power into that of his adoptive father, and it consisted in a fictitious sale of the son, and his surrender by the natural to the adoptive father." According to *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "In the eyes of the law, the adopted one became a new creature; he was regarded as being born again into the new family—an illustration of what happens to the believer at conversion." The same *Dictionary* observes: "Taking the Scripture teachings as a whole, adoption, it appears, while not the same as our justification, is necessarily connected with it, as forgiveness would be empty without restoration to the privileges forfeited by sin. Adoption and regeneration are two phases of the same fact, regeneration meaning the reproduction of the filial character, and adoption the restoration of the filial privilege."

The details of Paul's thinking about our adoption as God's legal children are not worked out in this epistle, but we understand that it involves a growing process. In Verse Fifteen, the apostle stated that we "received the Spirit of sonship." The Greek reads literally "the Spirit of adoption." This brings us into a relationship with God where we call Him "Abba, Father." But when we enter adulthood and become the recipients of our divine heritage, our bodies will become immortal and glorious beyond anything that we can imagine at present. The adoption will involve much more than the restoration of the crown that was taken from Adam's head at the fall. Adam's body proved to be mortal. Our bodies will be like the body of our glorious Lord, of whom it is said: "since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him."⁴

The NIV reads: "For in this hope we were saved." The KJV translates the text: "For we are saved by hope." In the Greek, "hope" does not carry a separate preposition with it; it is implied in the dative mode of the object. "In hope," therefore, is obviously the better rendering. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary*

6. Gen. 3:16

1. Gen. 3:20

2. John 16:21

3. See Rom 8:15,23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph.1:5.

4. See Rom 6:9.

observes: “Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust. It is acknowledged that one of the principal graces of a Christian is hope (1 Cor 13:13), which necessarily implies a good thing to come, which is the object of that hope. Faith respects the promise, hope the thing promised. Faith is the evidence, hope the expectation, of things not seen. Faith is the mother of hope.” The author of Hebrews defines the relationship between faith and hope in the statement “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”¹

Two thoughts occur in connection with Paul’s statement about the function of hope in our salvation. The first is that, in our modern use, the word “hope” has lost its sharp edge. In the context of daily life, hope gives us no assurance. When we say, “I hope so,” we mean, “It may happen, or it may not.” The biblical concept of hope is wrought with assurance. “Hope” in the Bible is the great stimulus to persevere. That “hope” is not a mere wish but an expression of certainty in Paul’s thought is expressed in the words: “We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”²

The second thought is the surprise that Paul points to the promise of our bodily resurrection as the reason for wanting to be saved. I admit that the future condition of my mortal body never played a role in my search for salvation. The reason for this is probably that the threat of death, that equalizing factor that robs life of its meaning and purpose, seems to be best dealt with by ignoring it. Even in getting older, we tend to push the thought of death in the background. Since our spirit, by its very nature, cannot die, our search for immortality must be a physical phenomenon. If we seek immortality, we seek bodily resurrection, whether we are aware of this or not. The glory that will be revealed in us, the glorious freedom of the sons of God, is expressed in our bodies. The body we indwell at present is the seed out of which our new body will develop. If that is not hope, what is?

The very essence of hope places it, inevitably, in the future. The logic of “hope that is seen is no hope at all” is irrefutable. The fact that we live in a framework of time makes the future invisible and, in a way, uncertain for us. The only solid evidence of hope’s reliability is in the character of God. That is why the author of the Hebrew Epistle calls it appropriately “an anchor for the soul.” We read: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”³ Faith gives us the assurance that God can be trusted and this lays the foundation of our hope. If our hope is thus secure, we can afford to wait, to be patient.

In this respect also the Holy Spirit proves to be all that His Name, *Paracletos*, stands for. He is the one who is called to stand at our side, not only to refute Satan’s accusations against us but also to walk us through the details of life’s complications. Here we are, forgiven sinners, born again believers, God’s newly adopted children. How do we communicate with our Heavenly Father? The Holy Spirit promises to do the talking for us. The weakness Paul refers to is the weakness of our communication with God, the feebleness of our prayer.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “The weakness referred to is our inability to analyze situations and pray intelligently about them.” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, even more penetratingly, observes: “As to the matter of our requests, we know not what to ask. We are not competent judges of our own condition. Who knows what is good for a man in this life? Eccl 6:12. We are shortsighted, and very much biased in favor of the flesh, and apt to separate the end from the way.”

Paul states “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” The Greek word rendered “groans” is *stenagmos*, which means “a sigh.” It can also mean, “to pray inaudibly.” We find the same word in the text “[Jesus] looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means, ‘Be opened!’).”⁴ It has been pointed out that there are three who groan in these verses. The

-
1. Heb. 11:1
 2. Titus 2:13
 3. Heb. 6:19,20
 4. Mark 7:34

whole creation groans, we who groan as people who are saved by God's grace, and the Holy Spirit groans in prayer within us. God's groaning is both emphatic and sympathetic. The Holy Spirit is the only person who can groan and do something about it. The intensity of the Holy Spirit's praying within us reveals God's compassion and participation in the suffering sin has caused in God's creation. We understand that God not only groans with His fallen creation and with us who are on our way to glory, but that He stooped under the heavy weight of sin in order to carry it away for us in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit's groaning in prayer within us links our prayers to the cross and signs Jesus' Name to our petitions.

Paul's words also reveal something about the mystery of prayer. We hardly know what we are doing when we pray. Prayer is one of the most complicated forms of communication of our human spirit with God; yet it is as easy to perform as uttering a sigh. We may not understand how the Holy Trinity is involved in every prayer we send up to heaven, but that ought not to keep us from practicing prayer. We read that Jesus Christ intercedes for us,¹ the Holy Spirit prays for us in our hearts, and the Father searches our hearts to hear those prayers. One does not need to understand the nature and workings of electricity to flip a light switch, yet any hand can do it.

The Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express, or as the NEB renders: "Through our inarticulate groans." J. B. Phillips paraphrases this beautifully: "His Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which never find words." Eugene H. Peterson in *The Message*, states that God's Spirit "does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs and aching groans." Some people interpret this to mean prayer in the spirit, that is praying in tongues. But although this may be included, it certainly does not exhaust the meaning.

The text tells us as much about prayer as about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the mystery of the human soul. Our words are always imperfect vehicles for the expression of our thoughts and emotions. We usually convey more clearly what goes on inside us in a smile, a glance of the eye, and in our body language in general than what we can convey in words. The Spirit of God goes beyond our words into the deepest recesses of our mind and in God's mind in order to bring the two together. Nothing helps us more over the hurdles of our imperfections than the knowledge that God's Spirit in us reaches that which is beyond our own reach. The Spirit of God brings us up to the level of the greatest intimacy with God. God makes His face shine upon us when we pray; we can see His smile and experience His embrace.

The fact that the Father searches our hearts states the matter in human terms. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."² God does not have to search for that which "is uncovered and laid bare." Paul used those words to assure us of God's keen interest in that which goes on inside us. When we pray, leaning on the Holy Spirit, we have God's undivided attention.

The Greek text is actually more concise and, in a way, more intimate. The Greek does not state, "the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will," but simply "the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God."

Verse 28 is probably one of the most quoted verses in this Epistle to the Romans. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." The verse is rendered differently in different versions. KJV reads: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." TLB paraphrases: "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans." The Greek reads literally: "And we know that to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose all things work together for good."³

1. See Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25.

2. Heb. 4:12,13

3. I changed the word order in order to make it more readable in English.

This verse is often quoted by well-meaning people to those who experience apparent setbacks or who grieve the loss of loved ones. We must be careful how we comfort those who pass through trials we have not experienced ourselves. We must also be careful to keep Paul's words in the context in which he put them. The experiences of daily life do not prove that all things work together for good; the opposite is more often evident. Paul speaks about prayer and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our fellowship with God. He also gives two qualifying conditions: our love for God and God's call for our lives. The latter implies our obedience to that call. This verse does not apply to those who do not love God and who have not obeyed His call or submitted their lives to His purpose.

The best illustration of one who understood that God works for good in all things is found in the life of Joseph. God had given young Joseph a vision of the goal He wanted to reach with his life: a position of authority and glory. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, when Potiphar's wife accused him of sins he had not committed and when he spent years in prison, he did not lose this vision. He demonstrated his love for God in doing everything for His glory, whether as a slave or as a prisoner. At the end, Joseph could say to his brothers who, at one time, had wanted to kill him: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."¹

Paul introduces his statement with the words "We know." Paul did not try to comfort those who were passing through experiences he had not had himself. He had been in the valley of the shadow of death himself. Remembering his beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks and other sufferings, he could say: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

If we make the glory of God our priority in life, if we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, we will understand that God never takes a step back in our life. Our setbacks and sufferings become stepping-stones to glory. If we understand that God works for our good in our experiences of hardship, it will make all the difference in the world for us. My twelve-year old grandson died from a cancerous brain tumor. When he was diagnosed with the sickness, he said to his father: "God is in this!"

In Verses 29 and 30, Paul clarifies what is meant with being "called according to His purpose." The words "those God foreknew he also predestined" have become the basis for an endless controversy between those who believe in the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and those who do not. Digging into the meaning of Paul's words here, inevitably, opens a can of theological worms. The two Greek words rendered "foreknew" and "predestined" are *proorizo* and *proginosko*. *Proorizo* means "to know beforehand," or "to foresee." *Proginosko* can be rendered "to predetermine," or "to limit in advance." The English word "prognosis" is derived from it.

One problem in determining the meaning of the words in the context of Paul's epistle is that they are both related to our concept of time and applied to eternity. To state that God knows ahead of time, presupposes that God lives in time as we do, which is not true. Since we cannot conceive of eternity otherwise than in terms of an endless past, present, and future, we are lacking a dimension that would help us understand the problem. When Paul ascribes foreknowledge to God, he projects, in a way, human limitations on God for the purpose of helping understand our present condition and our hope for the future.

It is difficult for us to approach Paul's thoughts here without having any preconceived ideas. If our thinking is influenced by Calvin's doctrine of predestination, we will tend to see Vs. 29 as proof of that doctrine. If, however, we tend toward the Armenian side, we will look for alternate possibilities. We may want to entertain the possibility that Biblical truth about the subject could lie somewhere in the middle. If we understand what it means that we live within the limitations of time and that God, the Creator of time, lives in eternity, we may come to the conclusion that our salvation is rooted in something that existed before time was created.

It may be helpful to see how Paul uses the same ideas that are expressed here elsewhere. If we turn to his Epistle to the Ephesians, we read: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."² The author of Hebrews speaks about "the blood of the eternal covenant." We

1. Gen. 50:20

read: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”¹ And in Revelation, it is stated that “the Lamb was slain from the creation of the world.”² These statements confirm that the whole plan of salvation was conceived before the creation of time, or rather before creation. It is, evidently, part of God’s eternal character. The question as to when God knew and when He decided, therefore, becomes redundant. Paul uses the words “foreknew” and “predestined” for us to understand how God’s eternal plan of salvation is applied to our existence in time. We experience a condition of lostness, we come to repentance and go through a new birth, our life is being changed under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and finally we enter into glory. As far as God is concerned, we are conformed to the likeness of His Son, we are justified and glorified; our salvation is complete. We look forward to what is for God an eternal present.

One of the great marvels in this is that God subjected Himself to our experiences in time and space by becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. The author of the Hebrew Epistle formulates this as follows: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”³ We, who have put our trust in Jesus and have surrendered our lives to the control of the Holy Spirit, are on our way to glory. We may consider it done, since God considers it done. The experience will be ours when we see the glory of Jesus Christ and enter into His presence. As the apostle John states, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”⁴ This assurance is the North Star of life that guides us to our destination.

In introducing the closing verses of this chapter, *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states beautifully: “The apostle closes this excellent discourse upon the privileges of believers with a holy triumph, in the name of all the saints. Having largely set forth the mystery of God’s love to us in Christ, and the exceedingly great and precious privileges we enjoy by him, he concludes like an orator: What shall we then say to these things? What use shall we make of all that has been said? He speaks as one amazed and swallowed up with the contemplation and admiration of it, wondering at the height and depth, and length and breadth, of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. The more we know of other things the less we wonder at them; but the further we are led into an acquaintance with gospel mysteries the more we are affected with the admiration of them. If Paul was at a loss what to say to these things, no marvel if we be.”

Paul addressed his question to people who were suffering persecution and hardship. They faced death every day because of their faith in Jesus Christ. They were “considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” Their condition makes this declaration of the victory of faith so much the more moving and convincing. As the darkness in life intensifies, the light of God’s Word shines brighter. It was in the hell of a Nazi concentration camp, that Corrie ten Boom stated: “More than conquerors... It was not a wish. It was a fact. We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute—poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not ‘we shall be.’ We are! Life in Ravensbrück took place on two different levels, mutually impossible. One, the

-
2. Eph. 1:4
 1. Heb. 13:20-21
 2. Rev. 13:8
 3. Heb. 2:10,11,14,15
 4. I John 3:2 (NKJV)

observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.”¹

C. E. B. Cranfield, in *Romans, A Shorter Commentary*, writes: “The statement ‘God is for us’ is a concise summary of the gospel. God is on our side, not of course as a subservient ally, who can be mobilized for the accomplishment of our designs, but in the way indicated by the gospel events, as our Lord who has claimed us for Himself.” The name Immanuel, “God with us,” implies that God is for us. Paul’s statement takes us for a moment to the end of times, to the Day of Judgment. Paul wrote this epistle to people in Rome, people who realized that the whole Roman Empire was against them. They lived in the darkness of persecution and death threats. It is as if Paul wanted to say, “imagine what your condition will look like in the light.” A court of Roman justice might condemn them; standing before the judgment seat of Christ, they will be cleared.

As always, Satan, the accuser, finds grounds in our lives for his accusations. We are reminded of Zechariah’s courtroom vision in which he stated: “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?’ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.’ Then I said, ‘Put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.”²

Neither this world’s legal authorities, nor our guilty consciences will be able to stand up against God’s “Not Guilty!” verdict that is based upon our justification by faith in Christ Jesus. God, the ultimate authority, has spoken; our case has been dismissed.

Paul proceeds to demonstrate that the basis of God’s love for us is His justice. The proof of His love is also the proof of His justice. God did not use any substitute sacrifice to atone for our sin, He became this sacrifice Himself in Jesus Christ. The Greek has one little word of emphasis that is difficult to render in English, *ge*, in the phrase “He who did not spare his own Son.” We could read, “He, even He...” The very source of our salvation is God Himself. As Paul places us upon the solid basis of God’s righteousness and love, he also opens the vista of our heritage. The fact that God sacrificed that what is most precious for our salvation guarantees that we will inherit all else that is less in comparison with the price God paid for our redemption. Since God gave us Christ, He will give us “all things.”

Christ is the judge in the Day of Judgment. In a human court, it would be inconceivable that a judge could preside over a case in which the accused is an intimate relative. A father could not judge his son without being considered prejudiced. In heaven our case is dismissed because of prejudice in the most literal sense of the word. We have been pre-judged! Our case was heard more than two thousand years ago, our sentence was pronounced, the death penalty was executed, and our guilt is gone. The judge paid the penalty for us.

Paul describes Christ as the one “who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” To be accused by Him is a sheer impossibility.

Paul’s mention of Christ’s intercession for us goes beyond the courtroom scene. It refers to the protection of our faith in our present condition. Predicting Peter’s denial, Jesus said: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”³ Jesus’ intercession did not keep Peter from betraying his Master, but it brought him to repentance afterward, thus assuring his salvation. The author of Hebrews gives

-
1. From *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill.
 2. Zech. 3:1-5
 3. Luke 22:31,32

us a similar assurance by stating: “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”¹

This brings us to the present. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Bible scholars have argued about whether “the love of Christ” refers to our love for Christ or Christ’s love for us. The majority tends to lean to the latter interpretation. The severity of our circumstances can dim our love for the Lord, but not His for us. We are reminded of the hymn Paul quotations in his letter to Timothy: “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”²

The implication of Paul’s statement is that trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword will remain realities of daily life even for those who trust Christ. Paul wrote to people who lived at the center of the Roman Empire, the place where Nero fed the followers of Jesus Christ to the lions, where he burned them alive as torches for his orgies. The Christians could easily have come to the conclusion that God had abandoned them and that the enemy had won the war. I do not know what kind of grace God gives in martyrdom. Not every sheep that went to the slaughter went singing hymns. But even if they did, their relatives and friend could easily have construed that God did no longer love them. The question, “Where is God when it hurts?” must have been on the lips of many.

Paul uses seven words to describe the condition of the Christians during the reign of Nero: trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword. “Trouble” is the rendering of the Greek word *thlipsis*; meaning, “pressure.” Jesus uses the word in reference to the “Great Tribulation,” as in “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”³ The Greek word, rendered “hardship” is *stenochoria*, which means literally “narrowness.” We could describe it “being between a rock and a hard place.” *Diogmos* is Greek for “persecution.” We find it in the text: “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”⁴ The root verb of the noun is *dioko*, which means, “to flee.” *Limos* (famine) simply means, “scarcity of food.” *Gumnos* means, “nude.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* refers to it as “having one’s limbs only, being totally unclothed.” *Kindunos* (danger) is rendered “peril” in the KJV. And finally, *machaira* literally means “a knife,” or “judicial punishment.” We find the word in the text “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”⁵ Paul’s catalogue of suffering would give a fitting description of conditions during the reign of the Antichrist.

Verse 36 is a literal quotation of Psalm Forty-four, verse Twenty-two. The NIV actually modifies the text with the reading “For your sake we face death all day long.” The Greek word used is *thanatoúmetha*, which means, “we are killed.” The NKJV, therefore, is closer to the original with: “For Your sake we are killed all day long.” But it is, of course, factually impossible to be killed more than once, let alone “all day long.” Obviously, the intent is the danger of death, as David expressed to Jonathan after Saul’s attempt to pierce him to the wall: “Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”⁶ Another possibility is to read: “For your sake killings are taking place among us all day long.” *The*

-
1. Heb. 7:25
 2. II Tim. 2:11-13
 3. Matt. 24:21 (KJV)
 4. Acts 8:1
 5. Rom. 13:3,4
 6. I Sam. 20:3

Pulpit Commentary observes: “This quotation of Psalm 44:22 may be introduced as showing that such trials have ever been the lot of God’s servants, and did not separate the saints of old from God.”

Over against the mentality of the sheep going to the slaughter, Paul sounds the battle cry, the trumpet blast of victory. We are not defeated; we are “more than conquerors.” The Greek calls us *hupernikoómen*, “hyper-conquerors.” Corrie ten Boom’s word in her book *The Hiding Place*, illustrates well what this means in practice. Writing about her experience in a Nazi concentration camp, she states: “More than conquerors... It was not a wish. It was a fact. We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute—poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not “we shall be.” We are! Life in Ravensbrück took place on two different levels, mutually impossible. One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “We not only conquer in spite of them; we conquer all the more because of them.” And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds: “So far are they from separating us from Christ’s love, that it is just ‘through Him that loved us’ that we are victorious over them.” And finally, *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments magnificently: “We are more than conquerors. In our patiently bearing these trials we are not only conquerors, but more than conquerors, that is, triumphers. Those are more than conquerors that conquer, First, With little loss. Many conquests are dearly bought; but what do the suffering saints lose? Why, they lose that which the gold loses in the furnace, nothing but the dross. It is no great loss to lose things which are not-a body that is of the earth, earthy. Secondly, With great gain. The spoils are exceedingly rich; glory, honor, and peace, a crown of righteousness that fades not away. In this the suffering saints have triumphed; not only have not been separated from the love of Christ, but have been taken into the most sensible endearments and embraces of it. As afflictions abound, consolations much more abound, 2 Cor 1:5. There is one more than a conqueror, when pressed above measure. He that embraced the stake, and said, ‘Welcome the cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life,’—he that dated his letter from the delectable orchard of the Leonine prison,—he that said, ‘In these flames I feel no more pain than if I were upon a bed of down,’—she who, a little before her martyrdom, being asked how she did, said, ‘Well and merry, and going to heaven,—those that have gone smiling to the stake, and stood singing in the flames—these were more than conquerors.”

All this is implied in Jesus’ words to Peter: “Upon this rock I will build my church; and all the powers of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹

Paul’s certainty about the solidity of Christ’s love for us is introduced with the words: “I am convinced.” This is the conviction of faith. Paul mentions nine influences that might be regarded as obstacles to keep us beyond the reach of Christ’s love and he concludes that they would utterly fail in their objectives. We must look at them in the context of the persecution of Christians at the time Paul wrote this epistle. *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “The words evidently refer to times of persecution; and it was not uncommon for persecutors to offer life to Christians, on condition of their renouncing attachment to the Savior, and offering sacrifice to idols. All that was demanded in the times of persecution under the Roman emperors was, that they should throw a few grains of incense on the altar of a pagan god, as expressive of homage to the idol. But even this they would not do. The hope of life on so very easy terms would not, could not alienate them from the love of Christ.”

It seems strange that Paul mentions angels as agents that could separate us from Christ’s love. Since demons are placed next to angels, we understand that they could not be fallen angels. Paul may be speaking of the influence of false doctrines, as in his Epistle to the Galatians, in which he writes: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”²

1. Matt. 16:18 (TLB)

2. Gal. 1:8

On the other hand, the translation “demons” for the Greek *arche* seems arbitrary. The word means literally “beginning.” It can also be rendered “magistrate,” or “principality.” It may, therefore, be that Paul does speak here of fallen angels as spiritual powers that would try to block the influence of Christ’s love upon our souls and of worldly authorities who would try to hinder our fellowship with God by means of persecution. We find the word “powers” at different places in different Bible versions, according to the Greek text that was used for the translation. Bible scholars have not been able to explain this varying word order so far. We will, therefore, not try to add to the confusion.

“Present” and “future” probably represent the known and the unknown. Fear of what might happen is often an important factor in our doubt about God’s love for us. Paul tries to reassure us that the love of Him who knows the future ought to dispel our fears.

Whether “heights nor depth” are physical or spiritual entities is difficult to determine. One wonders if Paul thought of these since he personally suffered from acrophobia. *The Pulpit Commentary* paraphrases Verses 38 and 39 for us: “For I am persuaded that no powers or circumstances whatever, external to ourselves, will ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, or consequently bar our attainment of our final inheritance.”

The same *Commentary* observes about the gist of this last section: “In these two concluding verses the thought is distinctly extended from *circumstances* of trial to all *powers*, human or superhuman, that may be conceived as assaulting us through them, or in any way opposing us. But it is still adverse powers and influences, not our own failure in perseverance, that are in view. It is not necessary to define what is exactly meant by each of the expressions in these verses.”

The love of Christ is our inspiration for perseverance and our stimulus for overcoming all obstacles to the reaching of our goal. We are more than victors in Him who said: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”¹

Part Two: The Vindication of the Righteousness of God (9:1--11:36)

- I. Israel’s Past: The Election of God 9:1-29
- A. Paul’s Sorrow 9:1-5

1 I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-
2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,
4 the people of Israel. theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.
5 theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about this chapter and the following two: “This section is not necessary for the main argument of the Epistle, which would have been complete without it for an exposition of God’s righteousness, ch. 12 following naturally the conclusion of ch. 8., and these intervening chapters having no immediate connection with the preceding or succeeding context. But it was a subject too deeply fixed in St. Paul’s mind to be left unnoticed. And besides, what he had said at the beginning of his treatise, and afterwards implied, seemed to call for some explanation in the face of existing facts. For he had said ... that the gospel ‘was the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; *to the Jew first*, and

1. John 16:33

also to the Gentile;⁷ and throughout he has regarded it as the fulfillment of the peculiar promises made to the Jews themselves, who were to have precedence, though not monopoly, in the inheritance of its blessings. How, then, was this view consistent with the fact that the Jews in general, even more than any others, were now *excluded* from this inheritance? The apostle has already, even in the course of his argument, paused to meet certain supposed difficulties of this kind in the short section, ... Romans 3:1-8; but now he takes up the whole subject formally, and considers it in all its bearings.”

And Luther, in his *Preface to Romans* gives the following introduction to this part of the epistle: “In chapters 9, 10 and 11, St. Paul teaches us about the eternal providence of God. It is the original source which determines who would believe and who wouldn’t, who can be set free from sin and who cannot. Such matters have been taken out of our hands and are put into God’s hands so that we might become virtuous. It is absolutely necessary that it be so, for we are so weak and unsure of ourselves that, if it depended on us, no human being would be saved. The devil would overpower all of us. But God is steadfast; his providence will not fail, and no one can prevent its realization. Therefore we have hope against sin.

But here we must shut the mouths of those sacrilegious and arrogant spirits who, mere beginners that they are, bring their reason to bear on this matter and commence, from their exalted position, to probe the abyss of divine providence and uselessly trouble themselves about whether they are predestined or not. These people must surely plunge to their ruin, since they will either despair or abandon themselves to a life of chance.

You, however, follow the reasoning of this letter in the order in which it is presented, fix your attention first of all on Christ and the Gospel, so that you may recognize your sin and his grace. Then struggle against sin, as chapters 1-8 have taught you to. Finally, when you have come, in chapter 8, under the shadow of the cross and suffering, they will teach you, in chapters 9-11, about providence and what a comfort it is. [The context here and in St. Paul’s letter makes it clear that this is the cross and passion, not only of Christ, but of each Christian.] Apart from suffering, the cross and the pangs of death, you cannot come to grips with providence without harm to yourself and secret anger against God. The old Adam must be quite dead before you can endure this matter and drink this strong wine. Therefore make sure you don’t drink wine while you are still a babe at the breast. There is a proper measure, time and age for understanding every doctrine.”

Luther sounds here more Calvinistic than Calvin! Obviously, the great reformer wrote this on the assumption that Paul spoke about God’s election of individuals, not of His choice of one whole nation as the vehicle of His revelation. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* takes a more balanced view of Paul’s intent. We read: “It is observable that, agreeably to his delicate manner of writing, and his nice and tender treatment of his countrymen, he never mentions their rejection—a subject extremely painful to his thoughts—otherwise than in a wish that he himself were accursed from Christ for them, or to prevent them from being accursed from Christ (Rom 9:3), until he comes to chapter 11, where he has much to say in their favor, even considered, as at present, rejected. But it is very evident that his arguments in this chapter rest on the supposition that the main body of the Jewish nation would be cast out of the visible kingdom of God; and it is for this reason that in this and the two following chapters he considers the reception of any people into the kingdom and covenant of God under the relative notion of inviting and choosing, or of calling and election. The Jews were rejected and reprobated; the Gentiles were chosen and called, or elected. As this is most obviously the apostle’s meaning, it is strange that any should apply his doctrine to the particular and unconditional reprobation and election of individuals.”

In the first part of this epistle, Paul expounded the objective and subjective facets of God’s righteousness as it pertains to all men. In this chapter and the following two, the apostle looks at the subject from a historical point of view. It is obvious that, since God had chosen the nation of Israel to be the vehicle of His revelation on earth, the Jews were to be the primary recipients of salvation. At the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, God had said to Moses: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”¹ It is true that the realization of God’s purpose

with Israel was contingent upon their obedience, but God's intent was clearly stated, that Israel occupy a privileged position in this world on the basis of God's choice. Their rejection of the Messiah, therefore, seemed to be a double failure: not only did Israel fail to be what God intended them to be, but God Himself seems to have failed in the reaching of His goal with mankind.

It is important to observe that Paul wrote this to the Christians in Rome who were, at least for the greater part, non-Jews. They owed their privileges to the fact that the Jews had rejected God's grace. These gentile believers could easily have drawn the wrong conclusion. They could have made the inference, as the Jews had, that God had chosen them on the basis of their being superior to the rest of humanity. Paul wanted to make sure that they understood that the Jews still occupied a place of priority in God's dispensation. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews."¹ But, as John states in the Prologue of his Gospel: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."²

Being a Jew himself, Paul experienced his people's rejection of the Messiah as an intense emotional pain. He understood their attitude because he himself had regarded Jesus of Nazareth as an imposter and had tried to root out the group of people that proclaimed His resurrection. His conversion had never changed his Jewishness. Standing before the Sanhedrin, he could truthfully say: "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."³ Having been in darkness and having come into the light, he felt the more keenly the tragedy of those for whom the truth of the Gospel remained hidden.

His opening words "I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit" constitute an oath, confirming beyond doubt the deep and continuous sorrow he carried with him for his compatriots. His pain for them was so deep that he was willing to give up his salvation if that could save them. Paul knew, of course, that this was impossible but it expressed well how deep was his hurt for his fellowmen. In this he resembled Moses, who after having discovered that the people had made the golden calf and fallen into idolatry went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."⁴

Verses 4 and 5 clearly sum up the privileges of being a Jew. First of all, the name "Israel" refers to Jacob's victory when he wrestled with the angel at Peniel. The angel had said to Jacob: "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."⁵ The very name points to God's transforming grace.

Paul states that God adopted Jacob's offspring as His own sons. The ultimate meaning of this adoption is that God chose the people of Israel for the purpose of His own incarnation. For that reason God instructed Moses to say to Pharaoh: "This is what the LORD says: 'Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ' 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' ' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' „⁶

The "divine glory" is probably a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire that guided the Israelites through the desert. We read in Exodus: "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide

-
1. Ex. 19:5,6
 1. John 4:22
 2. John 1:11
 3. Acts 23:6
 4. Ex. 32:31,32
 5. Gen. 32:28
 6. Ex. 4:22,23

them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.”¹ The same cloud later rested upon the tabernacle and the temple.² *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The later Jews gave to this glory the now familiar name of the ‘Shechinah.’” The Hebrew word *Shechinah* means literally “to let one’s self down,” or “to dwell.” As such it contains a reference to the incarnation.

“The covenants” obviously does not refer to the law since that is mentioned separately, but to God’s covenant with Abraham. This covenant was renewed various times throughout the Old Testament period. “The temple worship” includes more than the ceremonial law. David enhanced the rituals significantly in his appointment of the Levitical singers and their orchestra.³

“The promises” include the promise to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, David and many others.

“The patriarchs” are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on whom the Jews built their claim to superiority. The Jews boasted proudly to Jesus: “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.”⁴

Paul’s list is crowned by the mention of the Jews’ most valuable asset, the real ground for their boast, namely that they were instrumental in the coming into the world of the savior of the world, the Christ. Bible scholars have argued over Paul’s statement “Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!” According to the punctuation of the sentence, it can be read: “Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised!” Or “Christ. God who is over all be forever praised!”⁵

B. God’s Sovereignty 9:6-29

6 *It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*

7 *Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."*

8 *In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.*

9 *For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."*

10 *Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.*

11 *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand:*

12 *not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."*

13 *Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

14 *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!*

15 *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

16 *It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.*

17 *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."*

18 *Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

1. Ex. 13:21

2. See Ex. 40:34; I Kings 8:10,11.

3. See I Chron. 15:16-22.

4. John 8:33

5. Footnote in the NIV.

19 one of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath-prepared for destruction?

23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory-

24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

26 and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."

The main question in the opening verses of this chapter is whether Israel's rejection means that God failed in breaking His promise and in stating that His covenant with Abraham was everlasting. As we read in Genesis, God said: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."¹ *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments on this: "Now the difficulty is to reconcile the rejection of the unbelieving Jews with the word of God's promise, and the external tokens of the divine favor, which had been conferred upon them. This he does in four ways: -

1. By explaining the true meaning and intention of the promise, v. 6-13.
2. By asserting and proving the absolute sovereignty of God, in disposing of the children of men, v. 14-24.
3. By showing how this rejection of the Jews, and the taking in of the Gentiles, were foretold in the Old Testament, v. 25-29.
4. By fixing the true reason of the Jews' rejection, v. 30, to the end."

The important thing to keep in mind in this section is that Paul wrote this to gentiles in Rome who were in danger of falling victim to the same mistaken conclusion as the Jews had concluded when God chose them to be His treasured possession, that God's election of them as a group was based on their own superior qualities. Moses had tried to clarify this to the people, but that was the part of the covenant they had decided to ignore. We read in Deuteronomy: "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt."²

Therefore, it was not God who had failed or who had made the wrong choice, but the people of Israel had not lived up to their election. They overemphasized the importance of their circumcision. Believing that a circumcised person could not be lost, they thought that only the circumcised ones would enter paradise and that the one who sinned excessively in life would return to a state of uncircumcision at death. According to *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, the Midrash has several entries to that effect, stating that

1. Gen. 17:7
2. Deut. 7:7,8

“Abraham sits at the entrance of Gehenna and he allows no circumcised ones from the Israelites to enter into it” and “when an Israelite goes into his eternal house, an angel is sitting over the heavenly garden of Eden, who takes each son of Israel who is circumcised for the purpose of bringing him into the heavenly garden of Eden.”

Paul places God’s covenant with Abraham and Israel in the larger context of the whole world and all the nations. God had said to Abraham: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*”¹ And to Israel He said: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. *Although the whole earth is mine,* you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”²

Paul had earlier answered the objections of the Jews regarding the importance of circumcision. We read in Chapter Two of this epistle: “Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”³ In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul explains the spiritual meaning of circumcision. He wrote: “It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”⁴

This spiritual facet of the covenant of circumcision and the meaning of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants are recurring themes in several of Paul’s writings. Both in Romans and in the Epistle to the Galatians Paul states: “And [God] is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”⁵ “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”⁶ “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”⁷

Although this is not mentioned specifically, the supernatural element of grace working through faith is what characterizes the illustrations used. The birth of Isaac was a natural impossibility. People in their nineties do not give birth to children, not even in Abraham’s time.

The example of Jacob and Esau deserves a closer look. It seems as if Paul is saying that God chose arbitrarily, that Esau did not have a chance in life because God had chosen to hate him. In both the illustrations of Abraham and Isaac the point of importance was that there were two sons. Abraham had actually other sons beside Ishmael and Isaac. We do not know when this happened in his life, but he married a concubine by the name of Keturah who bore him six sons, but they do not enter into the picture.⁸ The birth

-
1. Gen. 12:2,3
 2. Ex. 19:5,6 (Italics are mine in the last two references).
 3. See Rom. 2:25-29.
 4. Phil. 3:3
 5. Rom. 4:12
 6. Gal. 3:7
 7. Gal. 4:28
 8. See Gen. 25:1,2.

of Ishmael was the fruit of a carnal effort by both Sarah and Abraham to speed up the fulfillment of God's promise.

The pregnancy of Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was a different matter. We read that Rebekah was barren and did not become pregnant until Isaac prayed for her. It may seem strange to us that Isaac had to pray for his wife so that God could fulfill the promise He had given to Abraham and that, eventually, the nation of Israel could come into existence and the Messiah could be born. A closer look at Isaac's life reveals that it took him about twenty years before he prayed this prayer. There seems to have been a spiritual struggle going on in Isaac's life, and maybe also in Rebekah's, before God could give them what He had wanted to give them all the time.

Stranger even is the pre-natal war that went on in Rebekah's womb before her twins were born. We get the impression that Rebekah's womb was the battlefield of a war between God and Satan that was fought out in the two fetuses. It seems that Jacob's holding of Esau's heel was more than a symbol of the fact that he grew up as someone who made a practice of tripping up his opponents; it was also an expression of God's victory over those who opposed Him. Since Paul gives us the story in an extremely condensed form, we may miss the spiritual significance of God's choice and the basis upon which it was founded.¹

The two Scripture references Paul uses are actually miles apart. The first is found in the first book of the Old Testament and the second in the last. We read in Genesis: "The LORD said to [Rebekah], 'two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'"² And in Malachi we read: "'I have loved you,' says the LORD. 'But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' the LORD says. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.'"³ In the first reference the issue was the oldest son's birthright, which went to the younger instead of to the older boy. In Malachi's prophecy it was a matter of God's blessing or the withholding of it, on the basis of the attitude of the peoples involved. Edom, although related to Israel, became the target of God's wrath because it had behaved as Israel's archenemy.

The Pulpit Commentary explains about the meaning of "hated" in the reference from Malachi: "As to the necessary force of the word in the Hebrew (*sane*'), we may compare ... Genesis 29:30, 31, where in ver. 30 it is said that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and in ver. 31, as meaning the same thing, that Leah was hated; and ... Deuteronomy 21:15, 'If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated.' In both these passages the same verb is used as in Malachi, and need not, in either case, mean more than disregarding one in comparison with another who is loved."

In the phrase "Yet, before the twins were born" the Greek text omits the word "the twins." The point being that Paul does not speak about God's choice of individuals but of His plans for nations. God chose Israel to be the vehicle of His revelation on earth, not Esau or any other people. The whole gist of Paul's argument in these chapters is not about personal salvation but about God's attitude toward those with whom He had made a covenant. Jesus told the Parable of the Tenants of a Vineyard as a prophecy of what God would do with Israel after they rejected their Messiah. He concluded with the words: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."⁴

Paul's quotation of God's Word to Moses is from Exodus where Moses had asked to see God's glory. God answered that he would be physically unable survive the experience but that God would place him in a protected place and Moses would be allowed to see some of the afterglow after God had passed. We

-
1. See Gen. 25:21-26.
 2. Gen. 25:23
 3. Mal. 1:2,3
 4. Matt. 21:43

read: “And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’”¹ When God actually passed Moses, He proclaimed His Name with the words: “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”² In that context God’s mercy and compassion are clearly linked to man’s behavior. The point brought out in those verses is that God chooses to be forgiving. There is no question about Him choosing some people to be saved and some to be lost without any reference to human behavior or responsibility. We cannot, therefore, interpret Paul’s words “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” to mean that human desire or effort would not play a role but that salvation is not based upon what we do but upon what God does.

Turning the limelight upon the Pharaoh of Egypt who opposed Israel’s exodus does not change this principle. The fact that Pharaoh was lost because he resisted God does not mean that he had no choice in the matter. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the reference to Pharaoh: “The expression cannot mean, either that God had brought Pharaoh originally into existence for the sole purpose of destroying him, or that he had from the first irresistibly incited him to obduracy in order to condemn him, and so destroy him. The Lord says in effect to him, ‘Thou art now great and powerful; but it is I that made thee so, or still keep thee so; and this, not that thou mayest accomplish thine own will, but subserve mine, and that my power to work out my own purposes of mercy or of judgment may be the more notably displayed.’ For how is God’s purpose in so raising Pharaoh up defined? ‘That I might show in thee my power, and that my Name might be declared throughout all the earth;’ *i.e.*, as is evident from the history, by the deliverance of Israel in spite of Pharaoh’s opposition through the judgments sent on him and his people to that end. There is plainly nothing in the original history to imply Pharaoh’s individual reprobation with regard to his own eternal salvation, but only his discomfiture in his opposition to the Divine purpose of mercy to Israel. But still, with a view to such execution of his purposes, God himself is said to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart; and it is to this that the apostle draws special attention in conclusion, as denoting that which it is his design to show. It is thus certainly declared that this hardening was from God. But even so, it is nowhere said that God had made Pharaoh’s heart hard from the first, so that he had been all along incapable of acting otherwise than he did. The inference rather is that, after willful resistance to appeals, final obduracy was sent on him as a judgment. And it is further to be observed that in some verses in Exodus (8:15, 19, 32; 9:34) Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart, with the addition, in ... Exodus 9:34, of ‘he sinned yet more;’ while in others (...Exodus 7:14, 22; 9:7, 35) it is only said generally that ‘his heart was hardened.’ The two forms of expression seem to denote two aspects of final obduracy in man — according to one as being self-induced, according to the other as judicial.”

And also, the words “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” ought not to be interpreted as meaning that God hardens soft hearts in order to prevent from being saved people who are willing to repent and who long for salvation.

Ironically, the illustration of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is applied to the nation of Israel after their rejection of the Messiah. Jesus’ emotional outburst over the fate of Jerusalem is proof of the fact that the people of Israel did not reject their Messiah because they had no choice in the matter. We read in Luke’s Gospel: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’”³ And “O Jerusalem,

1. Ex. 33:19

2. Ex. 34:6,7

3. Luke 19:41-43

Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”¹

Paul’s answer to those who try to blame God for their own rebellion is a reminder of what it means that God is the Creator and we are creatures. Isaiah and Jeremiah use the image of a potter and the clay. The point of the illustration is that we surrender to God like clay in the hands of the potter. The image does not depict resistance, but submission. Paul quotes Isaiah in the words “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ ” But he omits Isaiah’s introductory words “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!” The whole text in Isaiah reads: “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me’? Can the pot say of the potter, ‘He knows nothing?’”² We know that clay cannot talk back. The point of the parable, therefore, is to show how ridiculous our tendency to argue with God really is. Jeremiah’s words bring out the same ludicrous notion: “Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘He has no hands?’”³

In all this it is important to keep in view Paul’s purpose in using these illustrations. He is speaking about God’s election of a nation as a vehicle of His revelation on earth, not about individual salvation of persons. God does not create a person for the purpose of destroying him. As *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes correctly: “No potter will take pains to make a vessel merely that he may show that he has power to dash it to pieces.”

F. F. Bruce, in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*,⁴ states: “It may be granted that the analogy of a potter and his pots covers only one aspect of the Creator’s relation to those whom He has created, especially to men, whom He created in His own image. Pots are not made in the potter’s image, and they do not in any case answer him back or find fault with his workmanship. Men, just because they are made in the image of God, insist on answering back. But there are different ways of answering Him back. There is the answering back of faith, as when a Job or a Jeremiah calls out for an account of God’s mysterious ways with him. Even the Christ upon the cross could cry: ‘Why has thou forsaken me?’ But when the man of faith cries out like this, it is precisely because the righteousness of God, as well as His power, is the major premise of all his thinking. There is, on the other hand, the answering back of unbelief and disobedience, when man tries to put God in the dock and sit in judgment upon Him. It is a man like this whom Paul rebukes so sternly and reminds of his creaturely status. Paul has been misunderstood and unfairly criticized through failure to recognize that it is the God-defying rebel and not the bewildered seeker after God whose mouth he so peremptorily shuts. God, in His grace, does abide His people’s question; but He will not be cross-examined at the judgment-bar of a hard and impenitent heart.”

Verse 22 is a difficult verse. Softening the impact of the word “wrath” by studying the use of the Greek word *orge* in its various contexts does not diminish its force. For instance in his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul calls people in their unconverted state “children of wrath.” “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”⁵ God’s wrath seems to be linked with our lost condition. As Jesus stated to Nicodemus: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects

1. Matt. 23:37
2. Isa. 29:16
3. Isa. 45:9
4. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 6.
5. See Eph. 2:1-3 (NKJV).

the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."¹ The obvious meaning, therefore, is that unless we accept God's salvation in Jesus Christ, we remain lost.

In the larger context of the text, which is God's choice of a nation or nations through which He can reveal Himself on earth, it seems to mean that those who reject His revelation reject salvation at the same time.

The doctrinal problem in verse 22 revolves around the objects of God's wrath and the objects of His glory. It is generally felt that the principle that governs God's treatment of either ought to be the same. That means that if the objects of God's glory do not contribute to their own glorification, the objects of wrath cannot be held responsible for their own perdition either. It is obvious that a rigid application of this principle leads to great difficulty. Because it would mean that God would arbitrarily condemn people to hell, regardless of their disposition or behavior. This, we know, cannot be true. It would be inconsistent with the biblical testimony that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."²

Another problem is linguistic. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the Greek word *kateertisména*, "prepared for destruction": "Some Bible students, taking the participle to be in the middle voice, have translated: those who have been in a state of preparing themselves for destruction. Others have regarded the participle as passive and have said: those who have been in a state of being prepared by God for destruction." The middle voice seems to be the preferred interpretation, although most commentators do not lean toward that meaning of the Greek text.

The point Paul wants to make is not God's wrath but God's glory. This glory demonstrates itself, not only in "the objects of His mercy," but also in "the objects of His wrath." Toward the latter this is evinced in His great patience. The implication is that swift and immediate punishment of the sins these "objects of His wrath" committed would certainly have been in order. In the case of Pharaoh, this is demonstrated in the words God told Moses to say: "By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."³ According to Peter, the purpose of God's patience is His desire for salvation. We read: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."⁴

It is important to bear in mind when reading chapters nine through eleven, that God's rejection of Israel as the vehicle for His revelation is based on their rejection of the Messiah and that the result of this is not their immediate and total annihilation but the reconciliation of the Gentiles with God. Paul backs this up by quotations from Hosea and Isaiah. The interesting feature in the quotation from Hosea is that, in the context of that book, the words apply exclusively to Israel, the Northern Kingdom. It was because of Israel's idolatry that God disowned them. Hosea's promiscuous wife, Gomer, bore him three children. The second was a girl, whom Hosea had to call *Lo-Ruhamah*, "no mercy," and the third a son, whom Hosea was told to name *Lo-Ammi*, "not My people." We read that God told the prophet at the birth of his daughter: "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them."⁵ And after the birth of the third child, God said: "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."⁶ And after the announcement of the coming exile and subsequent restoration, we read: "I will show

-
1. John 3:36
 2. I Tim. 2:4
 3. Ex. 9:15,16
 4. II Peter 3:9
 5. See Hos. 1:6.
 6. See Hosea 1:9.

my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’ ”¹

F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*², writes: “What Paul does here is to take this promise, which referred to a situation within the frontiers of the chosen people, and extract from it a principle of divine action which in his day was reproducing itself on a world-wide scale. In large measure through Paul’s own apostolic ministry, great numbers of Gentiles, who had never been ‘the people of God’ and had no claim on His covenant mercy, were coming to be enrolled among His people and to be the recipients of His mercy. The scale of the divine action was far wider than in Hosea’s day, but the same pattern and principle were recognizable. Through the Gentile mission, in those lands where the people of God had once been unrepresented, there were now many believers who were acknowledged as ‘sons of the living God.’ ”

The quotations from Isaiah are taken from the chapters 10:23 and 1:9. Isaiah, speaking about Israel’s captivity to Assyria, states: “Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return.”³ Paul changes this into “only the remnant will be saved.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Paul’s quotations: “The force of all the above quotations is much enhanced, if we remember that they are not mere isolated texts, but suggestive specimens of many prophetic utterances to the same effect. All familiar with the prophetic writings are aware that main ideas constantly recurring are: First, judgments to come upon the chosen people, painted often in many consecutive verses without relief; but secondly, after such denunciations, a dawn of hope and comfort appearing, and culminating in unutterable blessing under the Messiah’s kingdom; and thirdly, this dawn of hope being for a remnant only of the race, compared in one place to a gleaning of the grapes when the vintage is done (... Isaiah 24:13); and fourthly, the association with this remnant, not only of the ‘outcasts of Israel’ gathered from all lands, but also of a multitude of Gentiles, who should be gathered into the Messiah’s kingdom (cf. ... Zephaniah 3:12, etc.; ... Zechariah 13:9; ... Amos 9:9; ... Joel 2:32; ... Isaiah 6:13; 56:6; 60.).”

The question in verse 30 “What then shall we say?” is addressed to the recipients of this epistle, that is to the church in Rome, which consisted mainly of Gentiles. We bear in mind that Paul’s purpose with the statements made in these three chapters is to warn the Gentiles not to take on a haughty attitude toward the Jews. The fact that the Jews lost most of the privileges of God’s revelation ought not to be a reason for the Gentiles to pride themselves on those privileges and thus losing them themselves.

Verses 30 and 31, “That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it” must be considered a key to the understanding of this whole epistle. In the first chapter, Paul had stated that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of God’s righteousness. We read: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’ ”⁴ This means more than that the Gospel makes us right with God; it makes us righteous. The implication is that faith in Jesus Christ, accepting His sacrificial death as a payment for our sins, does not abolish our need for right living. If faith does not express itself in righteous living, it is not faith. Paul has explained in depth that righteousness cannot be the fruit of our own efforts. “To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”⁵ This means that if we say: “I cannot do it; God will have to do it for me,” God makes us people who act righteously. The problem with the

1. Hosea 2:23
2. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 6.
3. Isa. 10:22
4. See Rom. 1:17.
5. Rom. 4:5

Jews was that they believed they could do it themselves. By trying to be righteous they failed because they put their trust in themselves instead of in God.

Paul closes this chapter with another combination of quotations from Isaiah: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” One part is a quotation from Isaiah Chapter Eight, where we read: “And he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”¹ The second is from Chapter Twenty-eight: “So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.’”²

Jesus referred to a verse in Psalm 118, when He said to the Jewish leaders: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”³

Peter combines all these quotations into one statement in his First Epistle. We read: “For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”⁴

The KJV uses the words “a stumbling stone and rock of offence” which is the literal translation of the Greek words *lithos proskomma* and *skandalon*. The stumbling block means an occasion of apostasy. The word *skandalon* made its way into the English language as “scandal.” Paul uses the word *skandalon* in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where he writes: “We preach Christ crucified: a *stumbling block* to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”⁵

It was not only the Jews’ confidence in their own ability to please God by keeping the law, but the scandal of the cross, the fact that their Messiah became the reject of society that made them declare that Jesus of Nazareth was an imposter.

B Israel Rejects Christ

10:1-15

1 Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.”

-
1. Isa. 8:14
 2. Isa. 28:16
 3. Matt. 21:42-44
 4. I Peter 2:6-10
 5. See I Cor. 1:23.

6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:

9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

The tenth chapter begins with the same expression of heartache as the ninth. Paul's heart's desire is for the salvation of Israel. The reason he became an apostle to the Gentiles was not that he had written off his own people, but his obedience to the Lord's direct command. When Paul was arrested by the Roman soldiers in their effort to save him from being lynched by the mob in Jerusalem, he made a public speech in which he said: "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" ¹

Paul characterizes the Jews' popular attitude toward God as: "they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." TLB paraphrases this: "I know what enthusiasm they have for the honor of God, but it is misdirected zeal." The Greek reads literally: "They have zeal for God but not according to knowledge." The Greek word rendered "according to" is *kata*, which has a wide variety of meanings, according to its place and function in the sentence. The Greek word for "knowledge" can also be translated "discernment." The gist of Paul's words could be rendered as: "They have an abundance of zeal, but they don't know what to do with it." J. B. Phillips translation reads: "I know from experience what a passion for God they have; but, alas, it is not a passion based on knowledge." And Eugene H. Petersen in *The Message* paraphrases it: "I readily admit that the Jews are impressively energetic regarding God—but they are doing it exactly backwards." God wants our heart and our head to be well balanced in our approach to the Gospel. Zeal without intelligence is as barren as intelligence without zeal. We do not have to understand everything in order to be saved, but faith, on the other hand, is not a leap in the dark either.

The Jewish problem, as we saw earlier, was actually not lack of knowledge but a lack of surrender which would have given them insight. They wanted to serve God on their own terms, not on His. In their approach to the law they concentrated on the moral law and, although they observed the rituals of the ceremonial law scrupulously, they failed to understand that the very fact that a ceremonial law with its sacrifices existed testified against them as sinners. If they had been able to obey the moral law without flaw, a ceremonial law would have been redundant.

1. Acts 22:17-21

“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” The Greek word for “end” is *telos*, which according to *The Pulpit Commentary* can mean “termination, fulfillment, aim, or purpose.” In a way all three meanings can be applied to Paul’s statement. It, obviously, does not mean that the moral law has been abolished, that idolatry, adultery, lying, stealing, murder, and covetousness would no longer be condemnable offenses. As a matter of fact, all of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament with the exception of the Sabbath law. The first and foremost meaning, therefore, is that Jesus Christ, in the sacrifice of His body on the cross, fulfilled the whole ceremonial law. Animal sacrifices are no longer needed for the atonement of man’s sin. As such, Christ’s sacrifice terminated the Old Testament law. The Greek word *telos* is the root word in Jesus’ cry on the cross *tetelestai*, “it is finished.”

Jesus Christ is also the fulfillment of the law in the sense that God considers us to be in total obedience to the moral law as we are “in Christ.” In Him we are sinless because we are covered by His righteousness. The indwelling Holy Spirit will kindle the love of God in our hearts that makes obedience to God’s will the most natural thing for us. As John writes in his first epistle: “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.”¹

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary observes: (1.) Christ is the end of the ceremonial law; he is the period of it, because he is the perfection of it. When the substance comes, the shadow is gone. The sacrifices, and offerings, and purifications appointed under the Old Testament, prefigured Christ, and pointed at him; and their inability to take away sin discovered the necessity of a sacrifice that should, by being once offered, take away sin. (2.) Christ is the end of the moral law in that he did what the law could not do (Rom 8:3), and secured the great end of it. The end of the law was to bring men to perfect obedience, and so to obtain justification. This is now become impossible, by reason of the power of sin and the corruption of nature; but Christ is the end of the law. The law is not destroyed, nor the intention of the lawgiver frustrated, but full satisfaction being made by the death of Christ for our breach of the law, the end is attained, and we are put in another way of justification. Christ is thus the end of the law for righteousness, that is, for justification; but it is only to every one that believeth. Upon our believing, that is, our humble consent to the terms of the gospel, we become interested in Christ’s satisfaction, and so are justified through the redemption that is in Jesus.”

Paul gives two quotations from Moses to illustrate the difference between righteousness by the law and righteousness by faith. The first is from Leviticus, where God says: “Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.”² The second is in Moses’ own words from Deuteronomy: “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”³

It seems that, if Moses made two statements, one about righteousness by the law and the other about righteousness by faith, that mutually excluded one another, he must have contradicted himself. *The Pulpit Commentary* reflects on this: “This quotation is intended to express, in the words of Moses himself, the principle of Law, viz. the requirement of entire observance of it, such as the apostle elsewhere contends is impossible (cf. ... Galatians 3:10-12). It may be objected that Moses himself, in the original passage, does not seem to be setting forth any such impossible requirement. He says, in the name of the Lord, ‘Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which, if a man do, he shall live in them;’ implying, it would seem, that a man might so keep them as to live in them; else were the injunction delusive. In the quotation

1. I John 5:3,4
2. Lev. 18:5
3. Deut. 30:11-14

also of the same text in Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21 and ... Nehemiah 9:29, only such a requirement as might have been fulfilled appears to be understood. But St. Paul (as appears from the context, and from ... Galatians 3:12, where the text is similarly cited) refers to it as expressing the strict principle of law, as above defined. It, then, the text, in its original connection, seems to fall short of the sense put upon it, we may understand the apostle to quote it as a wellknown one, sufficiently suggestive, if taken, as he intends it to be, in connection with others, such as ... Deuteronomy 27:26, cited with it in ... Galatians 3:10, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them.' It is his way to refer to familiar texts, or such as most readily occur to him, as suggestive of Old Testament ideas which he expects his readers to be acquainted with."

One of the problems in Paul's quotations and comments in these verses is the conciseness. Evidently, as the observation of *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests, Paul supposes his readers to be sufficiently familiar with the quoted passages to be able to fill in the blanks. Keeping the law in its totality means keeping both the moral law, which evoked conviction of sin, and the ceremonial law which provided the sinner with the means of atonement. In his running comments on Moses' words in Deuteronomy, Paul emphasizes the part the ceremonial law played in the justification of the sinner, the point being that all the animal sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is obvious that Moses did not have Christ's incarnation and resurrection in mind when he spoke these words. Paul's comments give to Moses' words a depth that Moses himself could not have dreamed of. But in the light of biblical truth taken as a whole, Paul's additions cannot be called illogical. After all, Moses' suggestion that one would ascend to heaven or descend into Hades point out the impossibility of man procuring his own salvation. Moses did not use the word "Hades" but "beyond the sea," which, for someone being in the heart of the desert, presented a similar impossibility.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Paul's interpolations in Moses' words: "The apostle's purpose in varying from the original is obvious from his interposed comments, and from the application that follows. It seems to be as though he had said, 'See how, with a slight alteration, the passage in Deuteronomy becomes an exact description of our Christian doctrine.' The most marked alteration is the substitution of 'into the deep' for 'beyond the sea.'"

Behind the words of Moses that Paul quoted is the thought that obedience to the law is a matter of love, and love is a matter of the will. This is obvious from what follows the quoted words in Deuteronomy. Moses continued his address to the people with: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."¹ Israel's problem in the desert, and throughout the Old Testament, was that the Word of God had not changed their hearts. They had chosen not to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength. Such a change of heart could not be achieved by the sacrifice of animals; it would take the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul's conclusion of Moses statement "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it"² is: "that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming." The fact that Paul does not quote the last part "so you may obey it" does not imply that faith would not be a matter of obedience. As a matter of fact obedience is proof of faith. Paul must have taken it for granted that his readers took this as self-evident.

The obedience is contained in Paul's following words about public confession and belief of the heart. We must not understand the words "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe

1. Deut. 30:15,16,19^b,20

2. Deut 30:14

in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” to mean that a mere saying those words would bring about salvation. They are the evidence of salvation, not the means of it.

We agree with *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* that “The confession of the mouth, of course, comes, in point of time, after the belief of the heart.” What surprises us as modern evangelical Christians is more that Paul does not mention in this context the death of our Lord as payment for our sins, but rather His resurrection from the dead as the basis of salvation. Paul’s words hardly fit into our methods of contemporary evangelism. We tend to emphasize forgiveness of sin and the invitation to the Lord to come into our heart. Here again, Paul speaks from the assumption that his readers understand the fundamental truths, which, therefore, need not to be repeated.

When Paul uses the words “confess with your mouth” he probably referred to the confession a person would make at the time of his baptism. And since baptism in itself expressed identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus, a declaration about forgiveness of sin by means of Jesus’ atonement on the cross would in fact be redundant. The ceremony already expressed that. What matters is the declaration of Christ’s lordship over the life of the individual.

Paul’s choice of words makes us realize how far we can stray from the Biblical principles of evangelizing. In using such terms as “accepting Christ as personal Savior,” we unwittingly put more emphasis on our person than on the Lord. Salvation expresses itself ultimately in the lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives. There is a tendency to assume that the important matter is our salvation. We never say this in so many words, but, as I heard it expressed once, we act as if we mean that, if we want to obey God, that is commendable, but it is not necessary for salvation. Salvation means that Jesus is Lord in me, and what makes it possible to obey is the fact that God raised Him from the dead. It would profit the church greatly if we would go back to these basics in our methods of evangelism.

We must not lose sight of the context of Paul’s remarks in this chapter. What brought him to this point was the fact that the Jews had the means of salvation revealed to them and did not use them in the proper way. They did not acquire God’s righteousness because they were trying to establish their own. Faith in God did not play any part in their search for salvation.

The words “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” are a quotation from Isaiah: “So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed’ ”¹ Paul had already quoted the same words at the end of the previous chapter. In Isaiah’s text the Hebrew word, translated “dismayed” is *chuwsh*, which means “to hurry,” or “to be eager with excitement.” We find the same word in the last encounter between David and Jonathan. According to a prearranged token, Jonathan shot arrows which his helper was supposed to pick up. When Jonathan shouted to the boy: “Hurry! *Go quickly!* Don’t stop!” David knew that he must flee from Saul’s court because his life was in danger. TLB paraphrases Isaiah’s text: “He who believes need never run away again.” The apparent difference in meaning between being put to shame and hurrying or running away is due to the fact that Paul used the text of the Septuagint. The common ground between the two expressions is the confidence of security. He who is sure of his salvation will not feel the need to run from embarrassment.

Paul had already emphasized the fact that in God does not make any difference between persons and races in the matter of salvation. In an earlier chapter, he had stated: “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”² The way of salvation is the same for all members of the human race. In Jesus’ own words: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”³ All it takes for us is to ask.

1. Isa. 28:16

2. See Rom. 3:22,24.

3. John 14:6

Paul's last quotation in this section is from the Book of Joel. Joel's words "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" are in the context of a prophecy about Pentecost. We read: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."¹

Paul's formula for salvation sounds almost too simplistic; as if all it takes is to call upon the Name of the Lord. It seems too good to be true. This simplicity does in no way reduce the value or the complexity of salvation itself. It does not make salvation an easy or a cheap matter. There is no such thing as "cheap grace." The pearl the merchant found in Jesus' parable was not cheap. "He ... sold everything he had and bought it."² What makes it so easy for us is that God paid for it. It may be easy for us to flip a light switch, but that does not mean that electricity is easily understood.

On the other hand, it is not always that easy for us to call upon the Name of the Lord. It implies the admission that we cannot help ourselves, that we are bankrupt and lost. It means saying: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."³ The prodigal son had to be reduced to the level of the pigs before he was able to say this.

Verses 14 and 15 are usually quoted in connection with evangelism and missionary outreach. In the context of Romans, however, they apply, first of all to Israel and not to the Gentiles. Bible scholars have wrestled with the line of Paul's logic, or the apparent lack of it, in these and the following verses. It seems as if Paul addresses the Jewish need for salvation but then allows his mind to roam to the Gentiles also. Some of this broadening of the scope may be accounted for by the words of the apostle in verse 12, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him." There is no lack of logic in the sequence of the questions in verses 14 and 15, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

In looking at these words and asking to whom they apply, we may object that the people of Israel had had amply opportunity to hear and believe. The Lord Jesus Himself had covered the whole country preaching the message of the Kingdom and confirming it with signs and miracles. The apostles had been sent out in teams of two to assure that no corner of the nation remained unreached. But the seed of the Word of God had fallen mostly on rocky ground and produced little or no fruit.

In the arrangement of the questions, the matter of faith in the proclamation is the key factor. The whole chain breaks when the message is not believed. And belief hinges on the authority of the one who proclaims. So the ultimate question is whether Jesus was really the One sent by the Father, or whether He was merely the carpenter from Nazareth, turned itinerant evangelist. Jesus appealed to the miracles He performed as proof of His calling. He told the Jews: "I did tell you [that I am the Messiah], but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me." And: "Even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."⁴

The logical implication of unbelief in Jesus' mission as the Messiah is that those who proclaim the message in His Name will not be believed either.

Paul manages to link this whole argument about Israel's unbelief to Israel's own history. The quotation from Isaiah in verse 15 is taken from the context of Israel's return from captivity. Prophesying about Cyrus' proclamation which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem,⁵ Isaiah exclaimed: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good

-
1. Joel 2:28,29
 2. Matt. 13:46
 3. Luke 15:21
 4. John 10:25,38
 5. See Ezra 1:1-4.

tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”¹ Paul condenses Isaiah’s words by leaving out “on the mountains,” which reduces Isaiah’s beautiful word picture to its most rudimentary meaning. Although some of the poetry is thus lost, the meaning remains clear. After years of captivity there is the proclamation of pardon; the sentence is remitted, the doors of the prison are opened. It is the message that makes the mountains look beautiful and the messenger the most welcome person imaginable.

The reason for this emphasis on Israel’s unbelief will become clearer when we arrive at Paul’s warning to the Gentile believers in Christ in the following chapter.

C. Israel Rejects the Prophets 10:16-21

16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

It has been objected that Paul’s cryptic way of quoting Old Testament passages to prove his point makes his logic hard to follow. We must bear in mind, however, that Paul addressed an audience that, obviously, knew what he meant in a language they understood. We are approaching a text that suffers from translation and a culture that is not our own. Paul’s readers were familiar with the verses he quoted and with the context in which they were found. They knew what the apostle was talking about.

There is in the Greek text in verses 16 and 17 a play-on-words that is lost in the translation. The verbs “accepted” and “hearing” have the same root in Greek. *Hupakouo*, rendered in the NIV “accepted,” in the KJV “obeyed,” means “to hear and obey.” The root is *akoe*, which is simply rendered “hearing” in the next verse. It stands for “the act of hearing.”

Israel’s response to the coming of the Messiah and to the message He preached and embodied was unbelief, or hearing without obeying. This is obvious from the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified in Jerusalem. The Jews did not consider Jesus’ authority to be genuinely derived from God. In human society disobeying direct orders from those who are in authority can have fatal consequence. In the army, for instance, disobedience to a command is considered to be desertion. In rejecting Jesus Christ, Israel rejected in fact God’s plan of salvation. The basis of their disobedience was their failure to comprehend what God was doing. As Paul states in First Corinthians: “None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”²

Isaiah, in his prophecy about Christ’s suffering, referred to Israel’s preconceived idea about what the Messiah was supposed to be like and what He ought to do. Paul quotes the opening words of the chapter that foretells Jesus’ rejection: “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”³

1. Isa. 52:7
 2. I Cor. 2:8
 3. Isa. 53:1

Nobody in Israel understood the purpose of Jesus' suffering and death, although the whole Old Testament testified to it. The two men who walked to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection voiced the general feeling of all the disciples when they said: "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place."¹ They all thought they had been wrong. We read Jesus' answer in Luke's Gospel: "He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."² It was not until "He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"³ that the light began to dawn.

Paul may have had these words from Luke's Gospel in mind when he wrote that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. Actually, Luke had probably not yet written his Gospel yet at that time; so we may assume that the words were originally Paul's words. Unless the Spirit of Christ opens our minds, we will not understand the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies.

One of the best examples of Paul's cryptic style is the quotation from Psalm 19. In quoting the verse "Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world," Paul refers to the whole Psalm, including the part that begins with, "The law of the LORD is perfect." Unless we understand this, we would assume that Paul had taken those words out of context. The part Paul quoted refers to God's glory in nature, which is the part of God's revelation that does not reveal the way of salvation. But God's perfect law certainly does. The moral law reveals man's sinful condition and his need for salvation and the ceremonial law provides the means of atonement as a shadow of the reality of Christ's death on the cross.

The same can be said about the following quotation from Moses' farewell speech in Deuteronomy. The whole text of the section from which Paul quoted reads: "The LORD saw this and rejected them because he was angered by his sons and daughters. 'I will hide my face from them,' he said, 'and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding. For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains.'"⁴

This chapter concludes with two quotations from Isaiah, Chapter Sixty-Five. Isaiah's text reads literally: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.' All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations."⁵ The way Paul deviates from the original text seems to be inconsequential. In the first verse he switches the two sentences without changing the meaning. In the second verse he adds to word "disobedient to Isaiah's text, which means no change in meaning either. Isaiah's condemnation of Israel was based on their practice of idolatry. God stretched His hands out to them but they turned to idols instead. The Jews in Paul's day had sworn off idolatry, but that did not mean that their hearts had turned to God. Their rebellion had simply taken on a different guise. Although the Jews who returned from Babylonian exile no longer practiced idolatry, they had not forsaken the principle of idolatry, which is manipulation of spiritual power for their own benefit. It was this principle that made Jesus decide to use parables in His teaching. In doing so, our Lord stretched out

-
1. Luke 24:19-21
 2. See Luke 24:25-27.
 3. Luke 24:45
 4. Deut. 32:19-22
 5. Isa. 65:1,2

His hands to a nation that did not want to hear. Upon the disciples' question, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" Jesus answered: "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'"¹ This was followed by another quote from Isaiah, the same Paul used in his conversations with the Jews who came to hear him in Rome.²

Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the Gospel message is a complicated matter. It means in fact a rejection of the law and the prophets, of the Word of God itself. In the long history of Israel's salvation, beginning with the Exodus, it seems that God tried to deliver a people that did not want to be delivered. Israel in the desert, on its way to the Promised Land, proclaimed that they would rather have stayed in Egypt. They were reluctant to possess the land that was given to them. With the exception of a few kings whose hearts were right with God, the majority of them lost themselves in idolatry which led them to captivity and near total annihilation. The irony of their history is that those nations they despised but whose gods they adopted, found God's righteousness, but they did not.

III. Israel's Future. The Restoration by God Chapter 11 A. Israel's Rejection is Not Total 11:1-10

1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-how he appealed to God against Israel:

3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?

4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,

8 as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."

9 And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

The previous chapter ended with a description of Israel as "a disobedient and obstinate people." This prompts the question: "Did God reject his people?" The implied answer is "No!"

Evidently, in the approximately thirty years since Pentecost, when Luke reported the phenomenal growth of the early church in Jerusalem,³ the severe persecution had taken its toll and the number of Jewish Christians had dwindled to a trickle. When Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Rome, Israel as a whole had rejected the Gospel message. In the two previous chapters, Paul expressed his deep grief about this state of affairs.

Now Paul puts this in a biblical perspective and he concludes that there is a historical pattern of apostasy in Israel and also of God's remedy for it. Every time a period of spiritual draught occurred, God

1. Matt. 13:10-13

2. See Matt. 13:11-15; Acts 28:25-27.

3. See Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7.

kept a hand full of seed for the next harvest. He did that in the days of Elijah, as well as in Paul's day. Even today, although most Jews still do not accept Jesus as their Messiah, there is a nucleus of Messianic Jews to prove that God has not rejected Israel as a whole.

The fact that Paul identified himself with the Gentile Christians, as he wrote to the church in Corinth,¹ does not mean that he denied his Jewish roots. To the church in Rome he reveals himself as a one-hundred-percent Jew, in order to prove that God had not rejected the people of Israel. He may have been instrumental in the persecution that decimated the Jewish church, but now he belonged to those who had "not bowed the knee to Baal." The reference to Elijah's dialogue with God suggests that Paul was not alone in this category.

The apostasy of Israel's in Elijah's time was probably the worst in all of Israel's history. The Northern Kingdom never fully recovered from it and went down into oblivion in the Assyrian captivity from which no one returned. Paul may have identified himself with Elijah in his despondency about the spiritual condition of his countrymen. But he also shared in the comfort of God's answer to the Old Testament prophet.

Paul calls the Jews who accepted the Gospel message "the elect." As far as the others is concerned, they fall into the same category as Pharaoh in Egypt, whose heart God hardened after he had hardened his heart himself. We must not read verse 8, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day" to mean that they were prevented from responding to the Gospel by an act of God. As in the case of Pharaoh, God merely confirmed a consisting condition.

The question remains whether apostate Israel can still be considered God's chosen people, or whether only Messianic Jews fall into that category. The answer to this is pertinent in our time, since most Israelis who presently live in the land of Israel are either Judaist or atheist. Some Christians blindly accept all present-day Israel does as legitimate because they are still considered God's chosen people, regardless of the morality of their acts.

On the other hand, some Christians maintain that the church has replaced Israel of old as God's chosen ones and that Israel has irrevocably lost its privileged status with God. This chapter of Romans seems to contradict the extreme of both views.

The thought might occur that Israel's apostasy means that God failed to reach His goal with the people He had chosen to be the vehicles of His revelation on earth. Paul undercuts that thought by proving that this apostasy was foretold in the Old Testament.

It is difficult to confirm Paul's claim that the words "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day" are part of Old Testament prophecy. Most commentators refer to two verses in Deuteronomy and Isaiah that generally express that thought. In Deuteronomy we read: "But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear."² And Isaiah prophesied: "Be stunned and amazed, blind yourselves and be sightless; be drunk, but not from wine, stagger, but not from beer. The LORD has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers)."³

Verses 9 and 10 are obviously an almost literal quotation from Psalm Sixty-nine.⁴ In all this Paul returns to the thought he already expressed in the previous chapter: "Since [Israel] did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."⁵

1. See I Cor. 9:19-23.

2. Deut. 29:4

3. Isa.29:9,10

4. See Ps. 69:22,23.

5. See Rom. 10:3.

B. Israel's Rejection Is Not Final 11:11-32

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry

14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

16 If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,

18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in."

20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,

29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience,

31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

In the phrase "Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?" Paul uses two different Greek words, *ptaio*, rendered here "stumble" and *pipto*, which literally means, "to fall," to which the NIV adds "beyond recovery." The NIV undoubtedly reinforces correctly the meaning of Paul's words. But *pipto* can be used for any kind of falling down, revocable or irrevocable. We find *pipto* in the verse: "Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house."¹ But also in: "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they

1. Luke 8:41

were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?”¹ Whatever the differences in meaning, in Paul’s thought it obviously means a fall from which recovery is possible.

The incentive God wants to use for Israel’s recovery is their jealousy. Paul mentioned this already in the previous chapter in the quotation of Moses’ words: “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”²

About two thousand years have passed since Paul made this statement and it certainly behooves us to ask if Christianity as it has impacted the pagan world has given Israel any reason to be jealous. If one thinks of anti Semitism as it has flourished off and on over the centuries, the pogroms and holocaust, the answer is obviously “no.” As Gentile Christians, we must take our obligation for reconciliation with the Jewish members of the human race very seriously. Anti Semitism and persecution are contrary to the Gospel, but they have been carried out in the name of Christianity and as such we share in the blame. It ought to be our passion, as it was Paul’s, to live a life as followers of Jesus Christ that makes Jesus’ kinsmen jealous. Otherwise, we will have failed to be the custodians of God’s revelation on earth, just as much as the Jews have failed in being a kingdom of priests.

We must not conclude from Paul’s words that salvation has come to the Gentiles because of Israel’s disobedience that Israel’s disobedience was the only means the Gospel could have reached the rest of the world. The natural way would have been that the Jews had carried the Good News to the ends of the earth after having received the Messiah themselves. That is what God had wanted them to do. Their refusal did not annul or even frustrate God’s strategy. Whether we obey or disobey does not affect the Almighty, but it does affect us. The Jews have suffered and are still suffering for their disobedience, but the realization of God’s plan continues. We may even conclude from Paul’s words that Israel’s refusal has sped up the process. As with Pharaoh’s refusal to let God’s people go, God was not the loser. Paul’s conclusion, therefore, is quite justified that, if Israel’s negation already means such blessing, their acceptance of God’s will must result in a cornucopia of spiritual fruit.

Why does Paul, all of a sudden, single out the Gentiles in verse 13? He had been speaking to the church in Rome in general, which must have consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. Speaking of himself, he states that, as a Messianic Jew, he wanted to make the Judaists jealous. For other Messianic Jews it would be natural to follow Paul’s example. To the Gentiles he says: “Follow my example, since I am an apostle to the Gentiles.” Paul’s passion was to arouse both sections of the church to consciously enter into this ministry of arousal.

He calls conversion of some Gentiles “the reconciliation of the world,” referring to the effect of Jesus’ atoning death. A mass conversion of the Jews is compared to Jesus’ resurrection. This resurrection corresponds with the bringing of the whole creation into the glorious freedom of the children of God, of which he spoke in an earlier chapter.³

In his transition from one subject to the next, the apostle uses two illustrations: the sacrifice of the first fruit of the harvest and the relationship of the root of a tree to the branches. It seems that Paul mixes his metaphors in doing so, but the two are linked together by the word “holy.” The Greek word *hagios* carries the meaning of holy in the sense of being morally pure as well as of consecrated to God. Only God is “holy” in the true sense of the word and that which belongs to God is called “holy” as indicating that it is set apart for the Lord.

The lump of dough as part of the whole batch refers to the Feast of First Fruits, in which a sacrifice of the first fruit of the harvest had to be presented to the Lord before the people could eat of it. We read in Numbers: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat the food of the land, present a portion as an offering to the LORD. Present a cake from the first of your ground meal and present it as an offering from the threshing floor.

1. Luke 13:4

2. Rom. 10:19

3. See Rom. 8:21.

Throughout the generations to come you are to give this offering to the LORD from the first of your ground meal.’¹

Barnes' Notes observes: “By this illustration Paul doubtless means to say that the Jewish nation, as a people, were set apart to the service of God, and were so regarded by him. Some have supposed that by the first-fruit here the apostle intends to refer to the early converts, made to the Christian faith in the first preaching of the gospel. But it is more probable that he refers to the patriarchs, the pious people of old, as the first-fruits of the Jewish nation; see Rom 11:28. By their piety the nation was, in a manner, sanctified, or set apart to the service of God; implying that yet the great mass of them would be reclaimed and saved.” James calls all New Testament believers “firstfruits,” but it could be objected that his epistle is addressed “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”²

Supposing that the lump of dough and the olive tree illustrate the same truth, the part of the dough that was sacrificed as first fruit corresponds to the roots of the tree. Paul speaks of Israel as the braches of the tree and of the Gentile Christians as branches that are grafted into the tree. We conclude from this that the tree cannot be identical to Israel; it must represent something else of which Israel and Gentiles were a part. We assume, therefore, that the tree must be seen as God’s revelation in this world, of which Israel was the original guardian and of which Gentile Christians became a part. The tree may also be symbolic for God’s Covenant.

In the illustration of the tree, the application is widened to the Gentiles who are grafted upon a tree of which they were originally not a part. F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* writes: “The reference to the root and the branches leads Paul on to develop his parable of the olive-tree—a parable which has often been quoted against him as showing that he was a typical town-dweller, unfamiliar with the most ordinary phenomena of the countryside. For a gardener does not graft a slip from a wild fruit-tree on to a cultivated fruit-tree; it is a shoot or ‘scion’ from a cultivated tree that must be grafted on to a stock of the same or an allied species. Sir William Ramsay does, indeed quote Theobald Fisher as saying that it was customary in Palestine sixty years ago ‘to reinvigorate an Olive-tree which is ceasing to bear fruit, by grafting it with a shoot of the Wild-Olive, so that the sap of the tree ennobles this wild shoot and the tree now again begins to bear fruit.’ That a similar process was familiar in Roman times is evident from Paul’s contemporary Columella, according to whom, when an olive-tree produces badly, a slip of a wild-olive is grafted on to it, and this gives new vigor to the tree.”³

It appears that the olive tree also was considered a national symbol of the nation of Israel. Jeremiah said: “The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form.”⁴ The olive branch has been a symbol of peace, corresponding to the Hebrew “Shalom,” ever since the days immediately following the flood. We read in Genesis: “When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.”⁵ Olive oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and God’s two witnesses, mentioned in Zechariah and Revelation, are called “the two anointed ones,” or “the two olive trees.”⁶

The whole point of Paul’s illustration is a warning to the new believers from the Gentiles against pride about their newly acquired position as beneficiaries of the covenant God made with Abraham. It is true that their conversion revived the tree to the point where it began to bear fruit again, but branches do not produce fruit by themselves. It is the root of the tree that is the vital link in fruit bearing. Paul wanted the

1. Num. 15:17-21

2. See James 1:1,18.

3. *The Tyndale Commentary* provides footnotes with references to the source of the quotations, which we omit.

4. Jer. 11:16

5. Gen. 8:11

6. See Zech. 4:11,12; Rev. 11:3,4.

testimony of the new believers to incite jealousy in the heart of the Jews. Pride and arrogance would have the opposite effect upon them. We can say that, up to the present, pride and arrogance on the part of Christians has played an important part in the unwillingness of Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah.

The essence of faith is acceptance of God's grace, which leaves us all without any reason for boasting. If grace means pardon of sin, one must be a sinner to begin with in order to receive that pardon. What then do we have to be proud of? The danger of boasting is that the focus of our faith will shift and we slip into the same condition of unbelief which caused the rejection of the Jews. The only fruit we can bear as Christians is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we cease to be productive, what reason would God have to keep us within His covenant? Our (eternal) security is just as much a matter of faith as is our salvation. And faith that does not bear fruit cannot be called faith, according to the apostle James.

What Paul is saying in verses 22-24 is that God can hardly wait to graft the original branches back into the tree. That would constitute a lesser miracle than the one that brought the Gentiles into the covenant. The essence of Paul's warning is not to arouse doubt into the heart of the believer, whether Jew or Gentile, regarding the validity of his salvation, but to emphasize that the evidence of faith is in the fruit it bears. If faith in Jesus Christ does not result in the transformation of character and in a spreading of the blessing, it may be considered non-existent. As Paul will state in a later chapter in this epistle: "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone."¹

The Greek word *musterion*, rendered "mystery" does not have the same meaning in the Bible as in our use of it in everyday speech. It is not something inexplicable, but something that was hidden in the past and that has been revealed in the present. Jesus used the word in connection with the parables He told. When the disciples asked Jesus: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" He replied, "The knowledge of the *secrets* of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."²

The mystery Paul speaks about is not really found in any Old Testament Scripture, although the apostle quotes from the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah to prove his point. The truths Paul states must have been given to him in a direct and personal revelation by the Lord. They may have been part of the revelation he mentions in Galatians, where we read: "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."³

The content of the mystery is the future restoration of Israel as God's chosen nation after they repent from their sins. Paul merely hints to the Old Testament prophecies and outlines them with: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." These words are a digest of two of Isaiah's prophecies on one of Jeremiah. In Isaiah we read: " 'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD. 'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' says the LORD. 'My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,' says the LORD."⁴ And: "By this, then, will Jacob's guilt be atoned for, and this will be the full fruitage of the removal of his sin: When he makes all the altar stones to be like chalk stones crushed to pieces, no Asherah poles or incense altars will be left standing."⁵ And Jeremiah prophesied: " 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother,

-
1. Rom. 14:7
 2. Matt. 13:10,11
 3. Gal. 1:11,12
 4. Isa. 59:20-21
 5. Isa. 27:9

saying, ‘ ‘Know the LORD,’ ‘ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ ”¹

There is actually more of this mystery contained in Zechariah’s prophecy, which Paul does not quote: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan

by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.”² John repeats this prophecy in Revelation but he makes it universal by applying it to all the peoples of the earth. We read: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”³ John’s quotation also points to the time of Christ’s return as the moment at which this mass conversion will take place.

Another “mystery” upon which the apostle does not elaborate is the meaning of the words “until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” That statement is particularly baffling when we consider that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”⁴

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states that this would refer: “not the general conversion of the world to Christ, as many take it; for this would seem to contradict the latter part of this chapter, and throw the national recovery of Israel too far into the future; besides, in Rom 11:15 the apostle seems to speak of the receiving of Israel, not as following, but as contributing largely to bring about the general conversion of the world: clearly it means, ‘until the Gentiles have had their full time of the visible Church all to themselves, while the Jews are out, which the Jews had until the Gentiles were brought in.’ ”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary, referring to the literal meaning of the Greek words “The nations of the Gentiles shall be filled with them,” comments: “The apostle, therefore, seems to give this sense of the mystery—that the Jews will continue in a state of blindness until such time as a multitude of nations, or Gentiles, shall be converted to the Christian faith; and the Jews, hearing of this, shall be excited, by a spirit of emulation, to examine and acknowledge the validity of the proofs of Christianity, and embrace the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should not restrict the meaning of these words too much, by imagining,

1. That the fullness must necessarily mean all the nations of the universe, and all the individuals of those nations: probably, no more than a general spread of Christianity over many nations which are now under the influence of Pagan or Mohammedan superstition may be what is intended.
2. We must not suppose that the ‘coming in’ here mentioned necessarily means, what most religious persons understand by conversion, a thorough change of the whole heart and the whole life: the acknowledgment of the divine mission of our Lord, and a cordial embracing of the Christian religion, will sufficiently fulfill the apostle’s words. If we wait for the conversion of the Jews until such a time as every Gentile and Mohammedan soul shall be, in this special sense, converted to God, then we shall wait forever.” *Adam Clarke’s* interpretation would raise the question, if Paul’s words do not mean what they seem to mean, what do they mean?

In verses 28-32 Paul concludes his thoughts by reducing them to a principle that governs God’s dealing with the human race in general. The friction between Christians, whether Messianic Jews or Gentile converts, and Judaist Jews does not mean that God has revoked His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and

1. Jer. 31:33,34
 2. Zech. 12:10-14
 3. Rev. 1:7
 4. See I Tim. 2:4; II Peter 3:9.

Jacob. The principle is that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” The death of the patriarchs did not annul the covenant. Jesus implied this when He said to the people of His time: “Have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”¹

The principle reveals that disobedience is behind the hardening of the human heart. When all of humanity had turned away from God’s revelation, as in the days of Abraham in Mesopotamia, God chose him to reveal Himself to that patriarch in order to build a nation among whom He could dwell and make Himself known. When they became disobedient to the light they had received, God brought another man into the world, Jesus Christ, through whom He built another people that would represent Him in the world. Both the hardening of heart, however difficult this may be for us to understand, and the revelation of God’s truth about Himself, are called acts of mercy. Withholding light from people’s soul has been called “a conspiracy of mercy.” It produces a reduction of human responsibility and guilt by means of a diminishing of accountability. As Jesus explained to His disciples: “This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’”² If this application of God’s justice is difficult for us to understand, we realize that it is because of our limited understanding of who God is. The Judge of all the earth is the most merciful person imaginable. If this were not so, none of us would have any hope for the future.

C. Israel’s Restoration: The Occasion for Glorifying God 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

The Greek of Paul’s doxology is more beautiful than any English translation can express. “O depth of riches...” Instead of being puzzled by the mystery of the dispensations by means of which God deals with mankind throughout the ages of history, the apostle is overwhelmed by the greatness of God’s glory. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states beautifully: “God leaves no prints nor footsteps behind him, does not make a path to shine after him; but his paths of providence are new every morning. He does not go the same way so often as to make a track of it.”

Our partial understanding of God’s acts in human history sometimes leads to the wrong conclusion that there would have been a better way for God to deal with man’s problems. Part of our difficulty is that we cannot see the whole history of mankind as it is played out against the background of the eternal controversy between God and Satan. This lack of understanding led Job to question God’s ways in his life. When Job finally met God face to face, he exclaimed: “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”³ We cannot understand what Satan’s challenge to God’s sovereignty means in connection with human affairs and why God answers him the way He does. As in a game of chess, the grandmaster seems to sacrifice his most precious pieces, ending up winning the game, so God plays with Satan a game that he has already lost.

God may not have given us the ability to understand His wisdom, but He has not withheld from us the gift of marvel. We can understand enough of the mystery to see the greatness and the beauty of it. We know that God created everything for His own glory. It is stated in the Book of Psalms: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”⁴ And the choir of heavenly beings in

1. Matt. 22:31,32

2. Matt. 13:13

3. Job 42:3

Revelation sings: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”¹

Particularly the creation of man exhibits the glory of God. We read in Isaiah that God says: “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth--everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”² When man fell into sin, it must have seemed as if the purpose of his creation for God’s glory was defeated. But in summing up the result of His work of salvation, Jesus said in His prayer: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”³ As it turned out during Israel’s exodus from Egypt, the very opposition of Pharaoh served the purpose of God’s glory. We read that God said to Moses and the people: “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.”⁴ As the first “Question” and “Answer” of *The Westminster Larger Catechism* reads: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”

The conclusion of it all is that, not only creation in all its aspects, but even the fall and the way God redeems His fallen creation promotes God’s glory. Therefore, the Psalmist testified: “All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD.”⁵

In extolling God’s glory, Paul focuses particularly on God’s wisdom and knowledge. Man’s acknowledgment of God’s wisdom, in a way, proves his own wisdom. One needs wisdom in order to recognize superior wisdom. Isaiah’s concluded wisely: “Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor?”⁶ Even the fact that we have the ability to glorify God is proof of our own worth and glory as human beings. We cannot give glory to God if we do not have any to give! But the glory we give to God is the glory He has given to us.

God is the source, the means, and the purpose of all. Without Him we would have no meaning. If we glorify Him, we benefit ourselves. If we do not give Him the glory, we contribute to His glory anyway, as we saw from the example of Pharaoh.

“For from him and through him and to him are all things.” God is the source of all; He is the means by which all exists, and the purpose of all existence. To state that behind all that exists there is “intelligent design,” as some scientists do, is a step forward from the theory of evolution, but it is a gross understatement of the facts. The Living Bible paraphrases it fittingly: “For everything comes from God alone. Everything lives by his power, and everything is for his glory. To him be glory evermore.”

Part Three: The Application of the Righteousness of God (12:1-16:27)

- I. Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Duties 12:1-13:14
 A. Responsibilities Toward God 12:1-2

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

-
4. Ps. 19:1
 1. Rev. 4:11
 2. Isa. 43:6,7
 3. John 17:4
 4. Ex. 14:4
 5. Ps. 138:4,5 (NKJV)
 6. Isa. 40:13

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In his *Preface to Romans*, Luther states about this chapter: "In chapter 12, St. Paul teaches the true liturgy and makes all Christians priests, so that they may offer, not money or cattle, as priests do in the Law, but their own bodies, by putting their desires to death. Next he describes the outward conduction of Christians whose lives are governed by the Spirit; he tells how they teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live and act toward friend, foe and everyone. These are the works that a Christians does, for, as I have said, faith is not idle."

The Greek text of these first two verses is richer than most English version render. Paul calls upon our reason. The words "I urge you," of as the KJV reads: "I beseech you," can also be rendered "I appeal to you."

The important word in the sentence that opens this last section of the Book of Romans is "therefore." Although it is not the first word in the Greek text, it is the one that connects the following with what precedes. It is the reaction to the doxology that concluded the last section. It is as if Paul asks us what we do with what we read.

Actually, Paul presents us with only one option, which is to put ourselves on God's altar as Abraham did with Isaac, as Christ did not the cross.

Our abandonment to God is in response to God's mercy. The Greek word rendered "mercy" is *oiktirmos*, which is, variously, rendered, "mercy," or "compassion." The English word "compassion" is the word of choice in this context, since in its literal meaning of "suffering together" it expresses exactly what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He has taken our suffering upon Himself to pay for us the ransom for our freedom from sin and death.

The presentation of our bodies to God as a sacrifice is expressed in different ways in the Old Testament in the various sacrifices. The Book of Leviticus specifies five different kinds of sacrifices: the Burnt Offering or Holocaust, the Grain Offering, the Peace Offering, the Sin Offering, and the Trespass Offering. In all of these, the person who brought the offering identified himself with the animal or the produce being offered. In laying his hands on the head of the animal to be killed, he confessed that what happened to the animal, in principle happened to him.

The sacrifice of the body Paul envisions here may be seen as a combination of the grain offering and the peace offering. The grain offering was bloodless; it was the response of the creature to His Creator, without any reference to sin. The person who brought the grain offering professed that God had a claim upon his body because He made it. The Peace Offering, or Fellowship Offering was based upon the sacrifices that made atonement for sins committed and for the sinful nature. The Trespass Offering and the Sin Offering provided the basis for the restoration of fellowship with God. Paul expresses this elsewhere in this epistle: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹ The Book of Leviticus distinguishes two parts in the peace offering: the Thank Offering and the Votive Offering, or the offering for the making of a vow.²

Understanding these meaningful Old Testament rituals will be of help in understanding Paul's plea for us to react to God's mercy to us in an appropriate way. Putting our bodies on God's altar means putting them to death as far is our right to self-determination. In Galatians, Paul calls this being crucified with Christ. We read: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."³

1. See Rom. 5:1.

2. See Lev. 7:11-21.

3. Gal. 2: 20

Paul wants us to identify with the Hebrew slave, who when freedom is offered to him after his seven-year-term of service says: “I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free.” This declaration was then confirmed in the piercing of the man’s ear.¹

The NIV states that this sacrifice of our body is a “spiritual act of worship.” The Greek word rendered “spiritual” is *logikos*, from which the word “logical” is derived. The KJV renders it “reasonable.” It is as if the apostle asks us what else a logically minded person can do in response to the demonstration of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.

In stating his appeal the way he does, Paul, at the same time, defines that worship ought to be the sacrifice of ourselves to God. Worship does not merely consist in an emotional utterance of words of praise; it is the putting our bodies at God’s service in perfect obedience as a slave to his master.

Paul applies the principle of worship through sacrifice in a very practical way by stating: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” J. B. Phillips catches the sense of these words beautifully with his paraphrase: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.” We are all in danger of passively adjusting to our surrounding. Peer pressure has a tremendous impact upon all of us, regardless of age. The only antidote is allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in our hearts. The world does not ask for our permission to bombard us with its slogans and advertisements. Unless we actively resist we will be swept away by it. But the Holy Spirit does not take advantage of our passivity. We have to actively open the door for Him and sign an act of consent before He will begin to minister renewal to us. Writing to Titus, Paul states: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”² We cannot renew ourselves any more than we can pull ourselves up by our hair.

God is interested in our thinking. He is the God of logic and He wants us not only to draw the logical conclusion of His mercy to us by putting ourselves on His altar, but He also wants us to continue thinking logically. Putting ourselves on His altar may seem suicidal, but as soon as we do it we experience that there is a lifting of the fog from our mind. We only realize to what degree sin has clouded our mind when we surrender our thoughts to God. No one is immune to the infiltration of demonic influences in his thinking. That is the reason Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”³ Without the cleansing of our thought life, obedience to God’s will is impossible. We will not even know God’s will without the surrender of our mind to the Holy Spirit. God does not demand blind obedience; He wants our full and wholehearted cooperation. Paul uses the Greek word *dokimazo*, which means, “to test,” with the implication of approving. This does not mean that we have the option of trying out the will of God in order to see whether we like it or not and, consequently, obey it or not. God will only reveal His will to us if we determine beforehand that we will obey. “Test and approve” does not make it judges of God’s will but explorers for the purpose of putting it into action. We start on the basis of the conclusion that whatever we find out about God’s will, it will be “good, pleasing, and perfect.”

B. Responsibilities Toward Society 12:3-21

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

-
1. See Ex.21:2-6.
 2. Titus 3:5
 3. II Cor. 10:4,5

- 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*
- 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*
- 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;*
- 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*
- 9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*
- 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*
- 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*
- 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*
- 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*
- 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*
- 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*
- 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*
- 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*
- 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*
- 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*
- 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*
- 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

This section is packed to the brim with sound advice which shows how good a judge of human nature the apostle Paul must have been. This reminds us of the advice the nineteenth century revivalist, Charles Finney, gave to preachers, to know the Bible, know human nature, and know how to apply one to the other.

In defining our responsibilities toward society, the apostle begins by pointing us to our responsibility toward the church, the body of Christ. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul works out in greater detail his thoughts about the meaning of belonging to a body of believers.¹ As members of the body of Christ, we have value and importance beyond our own understanding. In order to understand the gifts God has given to us, we have to discern which place we occupy. Once we know where we belong, doing what we ought to do follows naturally. The eye knows it has to see and the ear that it has to hear.

Confusion only occurs when we try to change places. The exercise of gifts begins with acceptance of the place to which God has appointed us. Our sinful human nature often makes us strive for places of prominence, where the exercise of our gifts will catch the public eye and makes us the recipients of human approval and praise. It is to combat this sinful tendency that Paul advises: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." "The measure of faith," in this context, refers to the place in the body of Christ to which God has allocated us when we surrendered to the Holy Spirit.

The body of Christ is not the place where believers are called upon to flaunt their ego. Accepting our place by considering ourselves as being crucified with Christ, may propel us to prominence, but if that happens it will be God's doing, not ours. Insight into the source of our gifts, that is knowing that our talents are what God has entrusted to us in His grace and that they are not the product of our own creation or ingenuity, will help us in becoming effective members of the body instead of cancerous cells that develop according to their own design. As *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "Pride is a sin that is bred in the bone of all of us, and we have therefore each of us need to be cautioned and armed against it." And

1. See I Cor. 12 and 14.

Barnes' Notes states about the subject: "If all people held their talents as the gift of God; if all would find and occupy in society the place for which God designed them, it would prevent no small part of the uneasiness, the restlessness, the ambition, and misery of the world."

The image of the church being the body of Christ was one of Paul's favorite topics. He used it several times in his epistles to admonish and encourage the believers of the churches he had planted. Besides the mention in this chapter, we find it several times in First Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians:

- "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."¹

- "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."²

- "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."³

- "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."⁴

- "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."⁵

- "There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called."⁶

- "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."⁷

- "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."⁸

- "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."⁹

-
1. I Cor. 10:16,17
 2. I Cor. 11:27
 3. I Cor. 12:12-27
 4. Eph. 1:22,23
 5. Eph. 3:6
 6. Eph. 4:4
 7. Eph. 4:11,12
 8. Eph. 4:16

- “After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-for we are members of his body.”¹

- “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”²

- “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”³

- “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.”⁴

- “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”⁵

Paul only mentions a few of the gifts that ensure the normal functioning of the body of Christ: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, generosity, leadership, and mercy. The list is, obviously, not exhaustive.

Paul’s words: “If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith” may sound like an easy statement, a brief glance at the opinions of different commentators indicates that conclusions on the subject are not drawn easily. Interpretations differ on the meaning of the word “prophecy” as well as of “in proportion to his faith.” The Greek word rendered “proportion” is *analogia*, from which the word “analogy” is derived. Some commentators, therefore, render Paul’s words “in analogy to his faith.” Others object that this does not fit the context.

In trying to determine Paul’s intent in the use of the words “in proportion to his faith,” we must start out with the basis upon which Paul places the exercise of all the gifts he mentions here, namely the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Without this sacrifice none of the gifts with which the Holy Spirit endows us will bear any fruit. But we cannot say, of course, that we ought to exercise our gifts according to the measure of our surrender to God. That would imply that a partial surrender would be sufficient. The fact of surrender implies that we put our trust in God for the exercise of our gifts instead of in our own ability.

One angle of approach is to see the measure of our faith as a unit of comparison with others, either with our fellowmen, or with God. Paul touches upon this kind of comparison in Second Corinthians, where we read: “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you.”⁶ The implication in that case would be that the exercise of our faith would be for the purpose of God’s approval instead of the approval of our fellowmen. The ultimate standard of judgment is the character of God. The realization that we will be measured with the yardstick of God’s glory is enough to reduce us all to size. No one who understands this will think of himself higher than he ought to.

The best approach seems to be to use connect Paul’s statement to Jesus’ *Parable of the Talents*, where we read: “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each

9. Eph. 5:23

1. Eph. 5:29,30

2. Col. 1:18

3. Col. 1:24

4. Col. 2:18,19

5. Col. 3:15

6. II Cor. 10:12,13

according to his ability.”¹ The proportion of our faith is the ability God has given to us, which is expressed in the number of talents we have received. In spite of what it sounds like, the proportion of faith does not limit our exercise, it stretches it. After all, faith means that we keep on reaching beyond our limitations. Paul expresses this elsewhere by saying: “And who is equal to such a task?”² And he provides the answer to his question by saying: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”³ After all, the point of the parable is that God praises those who double God’s investment in their lives.

“Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what’s a heaven for?”⁴

The subject becomes even more complicated when we take a closer look at the concept of prophecy itself. Most Bible scholars define prophecy as the divine gift that allows a person to predict the future. We object to this that although most prophecy is concerned with future events, some prophecy pertains to the past and some to the present. For instance, when Elisha’s servant Gehazi decided to take advantage of Naaman’s healing and secretly followed the general’s chariots to ask for payment, Elisha called him and said: “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you?”⁵ And Paul puts prophecy in the present by writing to the Corinthians: “But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”⁶

The general consensus is that a prophet proclaims the Word of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Whether this is always done spontaneously and extemporaneously is not clear. In the context of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, prophecy is merely defined as words that strengthen, encourage and comfort. We read: “Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”⁷ Some, though not all, regular preaching would fall into this category. As a matter of fact, it would be hard to imagine that in the church in Corinth several people would stand up and predict the future at the spur of the moment. Some prophecy may be defined as presenting well-prepared and rehearsed material based on the written and inspired Word of God. The fact Paul makes a distinction between prophecy and revelation, and that the latter has priority over the former, suggests that prophecy in the New Testament may sometimes refer to preaching. We read in First Corinthians: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.”

The fact that in the days of Samuel and Elisha schools of prophets existed proves that prophecy in the Old Testament was a subject to be studied. It did, obviously, not always come by direct inspiration. Maybe, what Paul states here about prophecy means: “If you can preach, preach!”

The meaning of the other gifts, serving, teaching, encouraging, generosity, leadership, and mercy does not offer any particular problem. The Greek word translated “serving” or “ministering” is *diakonia*, from which the word “deacon” is derived. In the practice of the early church as well as of the modern one it means providing for the needs of the underprivileged. “Leadership” is the translation of the Greek word *proistemi*, which literally “to stand before,” “to preside over,” or “to practice.” It may refer to the gift of

-
1. See Matt. 25:15-30.
 2. II Cor. 2:16
 3. II Cor. 3:5
 4. Robert Browning, quoted by Oswald Chamber in *My Utmost for His Highest*.
 5. II Kings 5:26
 6. I Cor. 14:24,25
 7. I Cor. 14:3

administration. The lines that divide serving, generosity and mercy are rather fine. The difference may be more in intensity than in substance.

The same can be said about the exhortation in verses 9 and 10. Love for one another, love for what is good, and brotherly love cover the same ground and only differ from each other in degree.

The verse “Honor one another above yourselves” is interesting. The Greek reads literally “in honor one another preferring in business.” The Greek word for “honor” is *proegeomai*, which means “to show respect,” or “to lead the way for others.” *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests the reading “taking the lead of each other in honor.”

The NIV’s reading of verses 11-13, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” almost amounts to a paraphrase. The Greek is more choppy: “In the diligence not slothful; in the spirit fervent; the Lord serving, in the hope rejoicing; in the tribulation enduring; in the prayer persevering; to the necessities of the saints communicating; the hospitality pursuing.”

We can say that, as in verses 3-8 the apostle outlines the functioning of the body of Christ in the exercise of the gifts of the different members that compose it, in verses 9-13 he deals with the mode, the “how to” of the gifts. As in First Corinthians, Paul demonstrates that the exercise of any gift without love amounts to futility. Love is the lifeblood of the body of Christ. In First Corinthians Paul gives an inventory of the gifts in Chapter Twelve and in Chapter Fourteen he explains the logistics of the gifts. But the pivot is found in Chapter Thirteen, the famous chapter of love. Love determines the body temperature of the church. And Christ likes the members of His body to be hot. Jesus reproached the church in Laodicea: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-neither hot nor cold-I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Paul states that Christians should keep their spiritual fervor, be fervent. The Greek word used is *zeo*, which means, “to be hot or to boil.” When D. L. Moody was once asked if a Christian was allowed to smoke, he answered: “No, he must burn!” We must be on fire for the Lord.

Verses 12 focuses on the future with “Be joyful in hope” and on the present with “patient in affliction” and “faithful in prayer.” When writing to Titus, Paul defines “hope” as the return of Jesus Christ. We read: “We wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”¹ It is this hope in the future, the certainty of Christ’s return that ought to lift our spirit and give us joy. Hope qualifies the present as an unsatisfactory condition. We must never be satisfied with the condition of imperfection in which we live at present. Even if our physical and emotional state is more than just bearable we must not settle in it as if it were permanent. We are on the road to glory and our present joy draws its strength from the future.

The Greek word for “affliction” is *thlipsis*, which means pressure in any kind of form. It is derived from a word that means “crowd.” God wants us to be patient under pressure. He will provide enough of the green pastures and quiet waters of Psalm Twenty-three to see us through.

Prayer is our lifeline. To become irregular in prayer leads to disaster. If prayer becomes as natural as breathing, we will travel well on our way to glory. “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”²

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” lifts generosity out of the realm of professionalism. We must all become deacons of the church whether we are elected to the post or not. Our homes should be open to all. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”³ Not many of us entertain angels in our home. If we keep on trying, maybe one day it will happen!

1. Titus 2:13
2. Prov. 4:18
3. Heb. 13:2

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” is a direct quotation from Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount*. We read in Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus said: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹ Paul’s quotation is proof of the fact that at least part of the Gospels must have existed in writing during his lifetime. Jesus practiced what He preached. “When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”² Stephen practiced Jesus’ command when he was martyred. We read that his last prayer was for his enemies: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”³

Barnes’ Notes correctly observes: “This is one of the most severe and difficult duties of the Christian religion; and it is a duty which nothing else but religion will enable people to perform.” Our natural tendency is to repay people with equal coin for the harm they do to us. Only the Holy Spirit can make us change our mind.

Persecution points to hostility of the world around us. Paul’s recommendations in verses 15-17 pertain to those with whom we fellowship in Christ, although rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn may give us entrance into the lives of unbelievers also. It is often easier for us to feel sympathy in loss than empathy in gain. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* correctly observes: “To feel genuine joy for another’s success is a mark of true spiritual maturity.” About sharing in people’s grief, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “Labor for a compassionate or sympathizing mind. Let your heart feel for the distressed; enter into their sorrows, and bear a part of their burdens. It is a fact, attested by universal experience, that by sympathy a man may receive into his own affectionate feelings a measure of the distress of his friend, and that his friend does find himself relieved in the same proportion as the other has entered into his griefs. ‘But how do you account for this?’ I do not account for it at all; it depends upon certain laws of nature, the principles of which have not been as yet duly developed.”

Living in harmony with fellow believers can only be achieved if we maintain the vision of the body of Christ, which Paul referred to earlier in this chapter. As people whose sins have been forgiven, we are under obligation to love as we ourselves have been loved. Being a Christian lays upon us the ministry of reconciliation, not only of sinners with God but of forgiven sinners with one another. David expressed this vision in his Song of Ascents:

“How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron’s beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.”⁴

-
1. Matt. 5:44-48
 2. Luke 23:33,34
 3. Acts 7:60
 4. Ps. 133:1-3

Paul hands us the key to this harmony in the remainder of verse 16, “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” In a footnote, the NIV gives an alternate reading for “be willing to associate with people of low position,” “Or willing to do menial work.” People in the United States of America distinguish themselves more favorably at this point than in other parts of the world. As a European, I can testify that members of the more affluent classes tend to look down upon those who do menial work. In some parts of Asia office workers let one or more of their fingernails grow long in order to disqualify themselves from using their hands for anything else than pushing pens. Willingness to do low-grade work may not make us better Christians, but it can enhance our testimony. When our Lord lived on earth He was “homeless.” “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”¹ Few people are ready to willingly give up that much for the Lord. We ought not to look down or separate ourselves from those who have been brought down that low against their will.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil” fits in the same category as our reaction to those who persecute us. The advice probably pertains to threats that are less life threatening than persecution. This counsel also relates to Jesus’ command in the *Sermon on the Mount*. “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”² It is often more difficult to demonstrate the spirit of Christ in the lesser things of life than in the bigger ones. Repaying evil with evil always immediately brings us into the camp of the enemy.

A literal translation of the Greek, rendered “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody” is “providing right things before all men.” The Living Bible paraphrases this: “Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through.” In writing this, Paul must have thought of the text in Proverbs “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.”³ There is a limit to what we can do right in the eyes of all men. There are instances in which the approval of man opposes God’s approval. Paul referred to this himself when he wrote to the Galatians: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”⁴ This advice is not a recommendation to be a people pleaser.

Paul obviously recognized that it is not always possible to live at peace with everyone. But it takes two to fight and conflicts among believers always consist of one “old man” fighting another.

There was a time in Israel’s history when the immediate relative of a murder victim, the *go’el haddam*, was under obligation to avenge a murder. We read: “The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.”⁵ According to *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “At the root of the enactments of the Mosaic penal code lies the principle of strict but righteous retribution, the purpose being to eradicate evil and produce reverence for the righteous God. This principle, however, was not first introduced by the law of Moses. It is much older and is found especially in the form of blood revenge among many ancient peoples. It appears almost everywhere where the state has not yet been formed or is still in the first stages of development, and consequently satisfaction for personal injury falls to private revenge.” In most parts of the world the need for private persons to take justice in their own hands has disappeared as central governments were formed and justice became the responsibility of the state.

-
1. Matt. 8:20
 2. Matt. 5:39-42
 3. Prov. 3:3,4
 4. Gal. 1:10
 5. Num. 35:19

The inherent problem of justice being applied by private persons is that there is often a lack of objectivity. The first bigamist, Lamech, who lived shortly after the fall, bragged to his two wives: “I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”¹ Private vengeance has led to family feuds and tribal wars that could easily have been avoided had there been a good working central system of justice. Even in Moses’ day, God argued against the need for settling of all grudges. We read: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”² Jesus called this “the second commandment.” In His answer to some Pharisees, He said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”³

Paul’s words, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” are a direct quote from the Book of Deuteronomy.⁴ The prophet Nahum announced: “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.”⁵

Paul’s words “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head” are a direct quotation from the Book of Proverbs.⁶ The context of the quotation serves as its interpretation. A literal heaping of burning coals on someone’s head would constitute an act of extreme cruelty. The act might give relief to pent-up feelings of hatred for the one who does the heaping, but for the person who is the recipient of the heat it means intense suffering. Bible scholars have argued this point for centuries since it seems that the image of burning coals does not represent the act of kindness of giving food and drink to those who ought to be starved and parched. In spite of the inconsistency of the parable, the lesson is clear that God wants us to conquer our enemies by making them our friends. God wants us to reflect His dealing with us in the way we treat those who oppose and hate us. In Jesus’ words: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁷

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” wraps up everything the apostle has stated in this chapter and it forms the bridge to the next chapter, which deals with our responsibilities toward the government. “Do not be overcome” is the imperative passive form of the verb, “overcome” is the active form. The Greek verb is *nikao*, which is derived from *nike*, “victory.” It means, “to subdue. The idea of the use of the passive mood is that, unless we do something, evil will get the victory over us. It also suggests that we have it in our power to resist. Being conceived and born in a world in which evil reigns supremely does not mean that evil is irresistible to us. Jesus states emphatically: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”⁸ It is the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross that enables us to resist the evil in the world and in ourselves, not only by doing good, but by being good.

C. Responsibilities Toward Government 13:1-7

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

-
1. Gen. 4:23,24
 2. Lev. 19:18
 3. Matt. 22:37-40
 4. Deut. 32:35
 5. Nah. 1:2,3
 6. See Prov. 25:21,22.
 7. Matt. 5:48
 8. John 16:33

2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

As a Jew, Paul knew the history of his own people. At the time of their birth as a nation, during the exodus from Egyptian slavery, they became a theocracy and remained so for several centuries until the days of Samuel. The Book of Judges testifies to the fact that a theocracy is not a workable premise for people who are born with a sinful nature. The message of Judges is summed up in the words: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."¹ Even during the centuries in which Israel was a monarchy, only a few kings realized that they ruled as king by the grace of God. When Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, Israel had been subjected to Roman rule for over a century already. Actually, the Jews never regained their independence after their return from Babylonian Captivity.

The principle of government is linked to man's fall in sin. Governments are meant to curb crime in society and to provide a workable infrastructure for everyday life. Without sin there is no crime to curb. Government, therefore, is God's provision for man's need as a sinner.

Paul's words on the topic of a Christian's responsibility toward a secular government apply, first of all, to the time in which they were written. It is important to observe that Paul wrote these words to people who lived in Rome, at the center of the Roman Empire, the place where Caesar lived. The Caesar at the time Paul wrote his epistle was Nero (A. D. 37-68). We cannot apply everything Paul wrote to the modern-day democracy in which we live. But there are certain principles that are relevant to any type of government in any century. The first principle is that of submission to the government in power, whether we voted it in or not.

The Greek word, rendered "submit" is *hupotasso*, which means "to be subordinate," or "to obey." The same word is found in the verses: "Then [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with [His parents] and was obedient to them."² "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets."³ And "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."⁴ The word, obviously, does not always mean unquestioning obedience. The apostles, for instance, considered themselves subject to the Jewish authorities of their day, but when Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching the Gospel, they replied: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."

C. E. B. Cranfield in *Romans, A Shorter Commentary*, states: "Paul has in mind, of course, an authoritarian state, in which the Christian's 'subjection' to the authorities is limited to respecting them, obeying them so far as such obedience does not conflict with God's laws, and seriously and responsibly disobeying them when it does, paying them direct and indirect taxes willingly, since no government can function without resources, and—a very important element which is not mentioned here but may be supplied from 1 Timothy 2—praying persistently for them."

1. Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25
2. Luke 2:51
3. I Cor. 14:32
4. Eph. 5:21

Paul's main concern was the testimony of the Gospel. Many of Paul's admonitions about the behavior of Christians in a heathen society are given with that in mind. Non-Christians tend to reduce all they see under the same denominator. Christianity in Paul's day was considered to be a Jewish sect. According to *The Pulpit Commentary* a group of Jews in Rome had begun an insurrection, shortly before Paul wrote this epistle, which prompted the Emperor Claudius to expel all Jews from Rome.¹ Christians in Rome were under suspicion.

In stating: "There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" the apostle equates obedience to the government with obedience to God. Christians who disobey government regulations disobey God. Civil disobedience can only be justified if the law of the state clearly contradicts the law of the Lord.

The fact that Paul makes no exceptions for governments that are evil, such as Nero's reign obviously was, may be difficult to accept for some of us. It puts stringent restrictions on Christians in the realm of political activism.

Supposedly, Nero's persecution of Christians had not yet begun when Paul wrote this. Whether the apostle would have changed his mind if he had written at a later date can only be a matter of speculation. If we believe in the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit, we must assume that the date of writing would not have made no difference.

Paul mentions two areas in which secular government limits personal freedom, one is morality and the other taxation. The topic of moral behavior is further developed in the following verses; payment of taxes is only mentioned here.

There may be more of a touch of humor in the words "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing" than most translations let on. Paul seems to emphasize the fact that the eyes of the government are particularly on the matter of tax paying. The Greek text reads literally, "they are upon this very thing attending continually."

Jesus' words "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"² must have been in Paul's mind when he wrote this admonition.

D. Responsibilities Toward Neighbors 13:8-14

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The admonition "Let no debt remain outstanding" forms the bridge between our relationship to the government as taxpayers and our obligations as Christians toward our fellowmen. Being in debt means using

1. Cf. Acts 18:2.

2. Matt. 22:21

someone else's money to satisfy our own needs. The Bible issues several warnings regarding indebtedness both as a creditor or a debtor. We read in Deuteronomy: "Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin."¹ And the Book of Proverbs warns: "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow'--when you now have it with you."² Shakespeare wisely advised: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."³

Going in debt in whatever way demonstrates a lack of faith in God's power to provide. Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* states: "We are made partakers of the Divine nature through the promises; then we have to 'manipulate' the Divine nature in our human nature by habits, and the first habit to form is the habit of realizing the provision God has made. 'Oh, I can't afford it,' we say--one of the worst lies is tucked up in that natural domain, and so it is spiritually, and yet we talk as if our Heavenly Father had cut us off without a shilling!" It has been said: "A Christian can always afford to pay his bills." Added to this, people who live on credit have difficulty tithing.

Having said this, the apostle turns to the only debt a Christian is allowed to have, the debt of neighborly love. When Jesus was asked to sum up the Ten Commandments, He said: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."⁴ These words not only summarize the Ten Commandments, they give the message of the whole Bible in a nutshell. That is what God's revelation and human life are all about.

Love is the antidote to sexual immorality, murder, theft, and covetousness. Incidentally, these verses dispel the myth that adultery can express of a loving relationship.

The last verses of this chapter are a wake-up call in the deepest sense of the word. When Paul states, "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed," he speaks of the consummation of our salvation, not about the assurance of eternal life we receive when we first put our trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. The darkness of the night is the spiritual darkness in which our world is steeped and the dawn is the Second Coming of our Lord.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary entitles this section of verses 11-14, "The Christian directory." *The Commentary* states: "We are here taught a lesson of sobriety and godliness in ourselves. Our main care must be to look to ourselves. Four things we are here taught, as a Christian's directory for his day's work: when to awake, how to dress ourselves, how to walk, and what provision to make."

Undoubtedly, Paul lived in the expectation of Christ's immanent return. Several of his exhortations indicate that he hoped it would occur while he was still alive. Two millennia later, we tend to believe that since Paul was wrong in this expectation we are under no obligation to expect the Second Coming today or tomorrow. Jesus emphatically warns us: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."⁵

Paul's words "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here," obviously have a spiritual connotation. These verses are said to be the means of conversion to Christianity of Augustine.

The thought of the night and dawn as image of a moral condition is found several times in the Old Testament. Isaiah uses it as a picture of hope and judgment over Edom. We read: "Someone calls to me from

-
1. Deut. 24:14,15
 2. Prov. 3:27,28
 3. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
 4. Matt. 22:37-40
 5. Matt. 24:42,44

Seir, ‘Watchman, what is left of the night? Watchman, what is left of the night?’ The watchman replies, ‘Morning is coming, but also the night. If you would ask, then ask; and come back yet again.’¹ And the Psalmist expresses his longing for fellowship with God in the words: “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.”²

Paul does not issue a call for physical insomnia; he refers to the spiritual condition that dulls the senses and loses the vision of reality. Our ability to eventually adept to every situation has the drawback of blunting our vigilance. Satan, as well as our own carnal nature, take advantage of this condition to blur moral issues. As we become less aware of God’s presence and give lesser priority the Word of God in our daily life, sinful habits take on new life. Jesus used the same image as Paul, saying: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”³

But Paul’s statement: “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” clearly speaks about the expectation of Christ’s return as a stimulus for holy living, not merely of fellowship with God on a daily basis. John reflects this thought in his First Epistle: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”⁴ The slackening off of the expectation of the Second Coming has taken the edge of this alertness for many Christians. But even if we do not live in the hope of the Parousia, the realization that our life on earth could end any minute, without previous notice, and that we will be called to give account whether in heaven or on earth, gives the need for keeping our lives clean the same urgency.

Over against “the deeds of darkness” Paul places “the armor of light.” This suggests that the darkness in these verses represents enemy territory and that as God’s children we are considered trespassers. Satan attacks us with temptations such as orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension and jealousy. The apostle arranged the list in their order of severity, beginning with the worst. There is a considerable distance between jealousy and orgies. But one leads to the other. It all starts by letting down our guards and allow our expectations of the Lord return to slip. Clothing ourselves with Jesus Christ is the answer. That sounds like a cover-up, which in fact it is. As long as we are on earth, our own sinful nature will tend to be jealous and move toward orgies. Clothing ourselves with the redemption and righteousness of Jesus will begin the healing process and it is the best and only defense we have against an enemy who knows how to manipulate us in the dark.

II. Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Liberties 14:1-15:13
A. Principles of Christian Liberty 14:1-22

1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

2 one man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

1. Isa. 21:11,12

2. Ps. 130:6

3. John 3:19-21

4. I John 3:2,3

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5 one man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.

8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

11 It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." "

12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

Most of what Paul discusses in this chapter is related to the fact that Christianity was born from Judaism. For many Christians the issues Paul mentions are no longer relevant, but the principles still are. For most Jewish Christians it was difficult to understand which parts of the Mosaic Law had lost their relevance and which were still valid. Even among the apostles, many issues were not clear. It was understood that the death of Christ was the fulfillment of most of the ceremonial law and that the requirement to sacrifice an animal in order to obtain forgiveness had become obsolete. But even Peter struggled with the question of eating the meat of certain animal that the Mosaic Law had declared unclean. When he received a vision in which he was ordered to killed and eat animals that were not kosher, he answered: "Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."¹ And when the first Council of Jerusalem adopted a motion which was sent to the churches of mostly Gentile believers, they advised them to "abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood."² Sexual immorality in that context pertained primarily to participating in pagan temple rites.

1. See Acts 10:9-16.

2. Acts 15:20,21

We see that there was a period of growing awareness in the early church as to the meaning of the Old Testament ceremonies. Peter and John, evidently, participated in the temple prayers in Jerusalem at which animal sacrifices were brought. We read: “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.”¹ Even Paul himself participated in some temple rites at Jerusalem that involved purification according to the Old Testament law for the Nazarite vow.² As a matter of fact, Paul demonstrated considerable inconsistency in the following of the principles he set for his own life and that of others. He argued vehemently against circumcision and yet he personally circumcised Timothy.³ He proclaimed that “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes,”⁴ yet he submitted to the law himself. The only conclusion we can draw from all of this is that, in Paul’s mind the only important issue was motivation.

To the Galatians, he wrote in the strongest possible terms: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”⁵ This freedom can demonstrate itself in choosing to take the yoke of Christ for the sake of others.

In Rome, as in all other centers of the Roman Empire, the main source of meat was the heathen temple. This meant that the animals had been sacrificed to an idol. This made some Christians decide to become vegetarians. Interestingly, Paul qualifies those people as having a weak faith. We tend to consider those who categorically reject all the world has to offer as being the strong Christians. Paul seems to say that spiritual strength shows itself in discernment not in wholesale rejection. I heard one dear brother argue once against all classical music, saying that some composers had led immoral lives and that one could not know how much of that was expressed in their compositions.

The issue of eating meat that is sacrificed to idols is no longer relevant in our day, but the principle of discernment still is. We could make a long list of supposed Christian taboos that dominate the daily life of sincere believers in Christ, but in doing so we might leave out some that would offend one person and not the other. The solution Paul offers is abstaining from judgment. In this epistle Paul’s objection is against passing judgment on others, in other epistles he argues against submitting to being judged. In Colossians, for instance, he states: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”⁶

“Passing judgment on disputable matters” is the NIV’s translation of the Greek text that reads literally “doubtful disputations.” *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “The plain meaning of this is, do not admit him to your society for the purpose of debating the matter in an angry and harsh manner; of repelling him by denunciation; and thus, ‘by the natural reaction of such a course,’ confirming him in his doubts. Or, ‘do not deal with him in such a manner as shall have a tendency to increase his scruples about meats, days, etc.’... The ‘leading’ idea here—which all Christians should remember—is, that a harsh and angry denunciation of a man in relation to things not morally wrong, but where he may have honest scruples, will only tend to confirm him more and more in his doubts. To denounce and abuse him will be to confirm him.

-
1. Acts 3:1
 2. See Acts 21:20-26.
 3. See Acts 16:1-3.
 4. Rom. 10:4
 5. Gal. 5:1-6
 6. Col. 2:16,17

To receive him affectionately, to admit him to fellowship with us, to talk freely and kindly with him, to do him good, will have a far greater tendency to overcome his scruples. In questions which now occur about modes of 'dress,' about 'measures' and means of promoting revivals, and about rites and ceremonies, this is by far the wisest course, if we wish to overcome the scruples of a brother, and to induce him to think as we do. Greek, 'Unto doubts or fluctuations of opinions or reasonings.' Various senses have been given to the words, but the above probably expresses the true meaning."

In the light of what Paul wrote in a previous chapter about believers being part of the body of Christ, it is interesting to observe that in this chapter he calls them "someone else's servant." This statement not only takes the wind out of the sails of criticism but it also undermines the modern tendency to "evaluate" one another. This application of practices that govern the world of business ought not to be applied across the board to the members of the body of Christ. Although in the body of Christ the foot depends on the eye, it does not mean that one is accountable to the other. Accountability of each member is to the head, which is Christ. This seems to contradict what Paul wrote to the Galatians about helping those who seem to fall behind. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."¹ This issue there is sin, not the "disputable matters" that are the topic of this chapter. The line between the two may be a fine one and the Holy Spirit's guidance is needed to distinguish between the two.

From the matter of food Paul proceeds to the observance of certain days. We assume that the reference is particularly to the Sabbath. Some commentators want to include most or all of the Jewish festivals that were prescribed in the Old Testament. But since most of those, if not all, are particularly related to the birth of the Jewish nation and to their experiences during the desert crossing, they cannot have had any significance to the Gentiles who became Christians. From the Book of Acts we get the impression that the early church soon began to put greater emphasis on the first day of the week, to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, than on the seventh day, which was the Sabbath.

There is little or no biblical basis for the tendency that developed in the church over the centuries to apply the stringent regulations that governed the Sabbath to the Sunday. Apart for the principle that the human body needs time off and that a six-day workweek followed by a day of rest is a healthy one, keeping the Sabbath on Sunday does not seem to be a biblical requirement for believers in Christ.

Putting all the related issues together, Paul states "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Although this appears to contradict the other thought expressed, namely that our preference and opinions are our private possessions, the gist of Paul's thought is clear. The common ground of our human relationships is the relationship we have with Christ. What binds us together as members of the same body is that we are all connected to the head. Even in "disputable matters" it is not our private opinions or preferences that count but our relationship with Jesus Christ. Even our private opinions must be surrendered to His authority.

It is Paul's mention of our death that gives such depth to this statement. The way we look at death will determine how we handle life. If we keep in mind that our life on earth covers only a limited period of our existence and that we will spend the bulk of it in eternity, we learn how to judge our days and minutes in the light of eternity. Many of our opinions and inclinations will crumble when we hold them up to the light of Christ. However paradoxical this may sound, it is the limitations that Christ's judgment puts on us that constitutes our Christian liberty.

Barnes' Notes observes: "The connection of this declaration with the argument is this: Since we belong to another in every state, and are bound to do his will, we have no right to assume the prerogative of sitting in judgment on another. 'We' are subjects, and are bound to do the will of Christ. All other Christians are subjects in like manner, and are answerable, not to us, but directly to the Lord Jesus, and should have the same liberty of conscience that we have."

1. Gal. 6:1

It seems that the mention of Christ's death and resurrection goes beyond that what needs to be proven in this context. The words only make sense if we see them in connection with everything Paul is saying in this chapter. We all know that the primary value of Christ's death and resurrection lies in our salvation from sin. He died for our sins and rose for our justification. Here Paul emphasized the fact that Christ's death and resurrection qualify Him to be the judge of all mankind. Jesus Himself testified to this when He said: "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."¹ And speaking to the philosophers in Athens, Paul said: "For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."²

The words "You, then, why do you judge your brother?" must have reminded Paul's readers of what he wrote in Chapter Two about the Jews in general: "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"³ As in the first instance, passing judgment on a brother (or sister) often is done for the ulterior motive of covering up one's own shortcomings.

This does not mean that there are no situations in which judgment is not appropriate. All discipline is based on judgment. A parent has the right and obligation to discipline a child, a teacher a pupil, etc. As members of the body of Christ, we have the obligation to warn and admonish one another in cases of blatant sin. Otherwise Jesus' prescription for church discipline could never be applied.⁴

The words in Verse Eleven are a free quotation from Isaiah, where we read: "By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear."⁵ *Barnes' Notes* comments here: "The passage originally did not refer particularly to the day of judgment, but expressed the truth that all believers should acknowledge his dominion. It is as applicable, however, to the judgment, as to any other act of homage which his people will render." In the way in which Paul inserts this quotation he diverts the attention from the servant to the Master. If we realize who God is, we will leave the evaluation of our brothers and sisters to Him instead of wanting to do that work for Him. Instead of criticizing, we have to obligation to clear the way for our fellowmen so that we do not make them stumble on the road of fellowship with God.

Before going into any further explanation as to the way we can be an obstacle to others, Paul states his private opinion that no food is unclean in itself. Actually, the thought originated with Jesus who, speaking about ceremonial cleanness, said to His disciples: "'Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean'.)"⁶ Jesus' statement was rather revolutionary if we see it against the background of the elaborate Old Testament ceremonies of cleansing that were required. When Paul, therefore, makes allowance for a difference of opinion about food it is because of the ingrained Judaist concepts of what was clean and what was not. It must have been very difficult for Jewish believers to come to grips with the impact the Gospel was making upon their whole belief system.

-
1. John 5:22
 2. Acts 17:31
 3. Rom. 2:1-4
 4. See Matt 18:15-17.
 5. Isa. 45:23
 6. Mark 7:18,19

There is a fundamental difference between those points that constitute the foundational truth of the Gospel and those that are peripheral. Paul violently opposed those who undermined the basics, such as the Judaist who tried to substitute God's grace by human efforts. But on matters of eating and drinking, observing or not observing certain days, his love for his neighbor made him go the second mile and more. Offending Christians who were steeped in Judaism was a very sensitive issue in Paul's day. This may no longer be the case today, but the principle that our attitude toward others must be governed by loving concern about the salvation of their souls is still valid.

All this is included in the fact that we will have to give account to God. We will be judged on the way we have treated our fellowmen. If Jesus comes to us in the form of someone who has scruples about food or holidays, we must treat him as we would treat our Lord. These words will apply to us: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."¹ The essentials of the kingdom are expressed in the words "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

"Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil" lays the burden of proof upon us. The Greek reads literally: "Let not then your good be blasphemed." *Barnes' Notes* observes: "Christians have more things in which they 'agree' than in which they differ. The points in which they are agreed are of infinite importance; the points on which they differ are commonly some minor matters in which they may 'agree to differ,' and still cherish love for all who bear the image of Christ." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: "It is highly important that a believer provide the correct standard for his conscience, and that he help his fellow believers to have this standard too. He must shun anything that prevents a fellow believer from getting a correct standard and anything that separates a fellow believer from fellowship with Christ."

Paul equates the Kingdom of God with the Gospel era, yet it is not exclusively limited to that epoch. The time in which Israel was a theocracy was also "the Kingdom of God," and the reign of Christ on earth during the Millennium will also be, as will be the consummation of time when God will be all in all. The Kingdom of God is the place where God is king, whether this is in the heart of the individual or in the church. The elements that define God's rule are "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Wherever the Holy Spirit can demonstrate these factors, there God rules. It is "when brothers live together in unity" that "the LORD bestows his blessing."²

The last two verses of this chapter contain some marvelous truths. Everything Paul says here pertains to the peripherals not to the essentials. There are some things that God reveals to us that we cannot keep to ourselves. About those things Jesus says: "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."³ But about the non-essentials, Paul states: "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God." Our spiritual liberty is a matter of privacy. We are under no obligation to convert people to our lifestyle or to our preferences. We must bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, not into what we believe about Him. If our conscience bothers us when we eat certain foods, we must pay attention to our conscience. We must not do anything for which we cannot invoke God's blessing. When Paul says: "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God," he speaks about the assurance of faith, not the object of faith.

B. Practices of Christian Liberty 15:1-13

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

1. Matt. 25:40

2. See Ps. 133:1,3.

3. Matt. 10:27

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs

9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bible scholars differ in opinion about the last two chapters of this epistle. The fact that there are ancient copies of Romans that omit the chapters 15 and 16 caused some to believe that the original manuscript ended with chapter 14 and the doxology of chapter 16, and that these last two chapters were added later, either by Paul's own hand or someone else's. The debate is as old as early church history and there is nothing we can add to it in our day. Since these chapters are included in the canon of Scripture, we do better to study them and consider them to be part of the original.

Paul, obviously, continues here the topic he broached in the previous chapter, but he enlarges it by applying the principle that must govern our behavior to a broader field of application.

The apostle identifies himself with "the strong," that is with those who believe they can legally eat and drink everything that was not allowed by the Old Testament Law, or that was connected to the rituals in the pagan temples. This means that there were strong and weak believers in both categories, that is among Messianic Jews as well as converted Gentiles.

As in all the gray areas of moral decisions, we must ask ourselves: "What would Jesus do?" Paul would later write to the Philippians: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."¹ In every instance, Jesus went farther than any of us could ever go. He, not only, bore the failings of the weak in the sense that He accepted them, He literally took all our weaknesses upon Himself on the cross and carried them away. In support of his statement, Paul quotes from Psalm Sixty-nine, which contains several prophecies about Christ's sufferings. The whole verse that mentions the insults reads: "For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me."² Another prophecy about the crucifixion is found in Verse 21 of that Psalm: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."³ We may conclude that if Jesus took our failures upon Himself in such an extreme manner, the least we can do with other people's weaknesses is to endure them. To the Galatians, Paul wrote: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."⁴ The Greek word, rendered "carry" is *bastazo*, which means, "to endure."

The Matthew Henry's Commentary makes the following rather lengthy and profound observations about "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning":

-
1. Phil. 2:5
 2. Ps. 69:9
 3. Ps. 69:21
 4. Gal. 6:2

“[1.] That which is written of Christ, concerning his self-denial and sufferings, is written for our learning; he hath left us an example. If Christ denied himself, surely we should deny ourselves, from a principle of ingenuousness and of gratitude, and especially of conformity to his image. The example of Christ, in what he did and said, is recorded for our imitation.

[2.] That which is written in the scriptures of the Old Testament in the general is written for our learning. What David had said in his own person Paul had just now applied to Christ. Now lest this should look like a straining of the scripture, he gives us this excellent rule in general, that all the scriptures of the Old Testament (much more those of the New) were written for our learning, and are not to be looked upon as of private interpretation. What happened to the Old Testament saint happened to them for ensample; and the scriptures of the Old Testament have many fulfillings. The scriptures are left for a standing rule to us: they are written, that they might remain for our use and benefit. First, for our learning. There are many things to be learned out of the scriptures; and that is the best learning which is drawn from these fountains. Those are the most learned that are most mighty in the scriptures.

We must therefore labor, not only to understand the literal meaning of the scripture, but to learn out of it that which will do us good; and we have need of help therefore not only to roll away the stone, but to draw out the water, for in many places the well is deep. Practical observations are more necessary than critical expositions. Secondly, That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. That hope which hath eternal life for its object is here proposed as the end of scripture-learning. The scripture was written that we might know what to hope for from God, and upon what grounds, and in what way. This should recommend the scripture to us that it is a special friend to Christian hope. Now the way of attaining this hope is through patience and comfort of the scripture. Patience and comfort suppose trouble and sorrow; such is the lot of the saints in this world; and, were it not so, we should have no occasion for patience and comfort. But both these befriend that hope which is the life of our souls. Patience works experience, and experience hope, which maketh not ashamed, Rom 5:3-5. The more patience we exercise under troubles the more hopefully we may look through our troubles; nothing more destructive to hope than impatience. And the comfort of the scriptures, that comfort which springs from the word of God (that is the surest and sweetest comfort) is likewise a great stay to hope, as it is an earnest in hand of the good hoped for. The Spirit, as a comforter, is the earnest of our inheritance.”

From the Scriptures that provide endurance Paul proceeds to “the God who gives endurance.” Paul used the Greek word *hupomone*, which the NIV renders “endurance.” The translation “patience” may be preferable in this context, as in the NKJV, which reads: “that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort...” The Greek word rendered “encouragement” in the NIV is *paraklesis*, which is the noun of which the title of the Holy Spirit, *parakletos*, is derived.

We gather from the context of this chapter that “a spirit of unity” does not necessarily consist of uniformity of understanding of truth, but of an acceptance of one another in things that are peripheral. Those who eat and drink non-kosher foods can be one with vegetarians and abstainers in glorifying God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Verses 7-13 in particular, as in the whole Epistle, Paul addresses a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. The Book of Acts testifies to the fact that the Jews in general were unwilling to share the Gospel with the rest of the world. The reaction of the crowd to Paul’s testimony exemplified best what their attitude toward the Gentiles was. At his arrest in Jerusalem for, supposedly, defiling the temple Paul told the crowd: “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ” We read: “The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, ‘Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!’ ”¹ This is indicative of the difficulties Paul had to content with in trying to plant churches in which both Jews and Gentiles would fuse together as one body in Jesus Christ.

1. See Acts 22:21,22.

It seems that Paul addressed particularly the Gentile part of the congregation in Rome with the words: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” Yet, when Jesus went around Israel as an itinerant preacher, He refused to include non-Jews in His ministry. When He sent out the disciples, He said specifically: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”¹ And to a Canaanite woman, He said: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”² It is true that Jesus did answer the woman’s request and He also healed the slave of the Roman centurion.³

Paul explains the meaning of Jesus’ concentration upon the Jews by placing it against the message of the Old Testament as a whole. He points out that God’s promise to the Patriarchs included a blessing for the Gentiles. When God called Abraham, He said: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”⁴

The Greek text reads literally: “Now Christ was a minister of the circumcision to the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers and that Gentiles for mercy might glorify God.”

To the Samaritan woman, Jesus explained: “we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”⁵ But in saying this, Jesus did not exclude this woman from salvation. Jesus concentrated upon the Jewish nation because they were the people God had chosen for His revelation. That fact gave them first choice.

Paul took this as a principle for his ministry to the Gentiles. In the opening statement of this epistle he says: “the gospel... is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”⁶ In order to prove God’s intent to include the Gentiles in His plan of salvation, Paul draws from the Psalms of David and from a prophecy by Isaiah. Paul’s quotations are taken from the Septuagint, which explains the slight differences between the Old Testament text and the quotations in this epistle. The first quotation is from Psalm Eighteen: “Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; I will sing praises to your name.”⁷ The second is from Psalm One hundred seventeen: “Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.”⁸ The greatest variation is found in the quotation from Isaiah. Isaiah’s text reads: “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.”⁹ Paul quotes it: “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.”

In Isaiah’s text, the verb “rally” is the translation of the Hebrew word *darash*, which literally means, “to seek,” or “to pursue.” The idea of “hope” is not expressed in it. In the Hebrew mind, the word may have expressed more than we would credit it with. The best illustration may be in what the Scriptures say about the character of Ezra: “For Ezra had prepared his heart *to seek* the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”¹⁰ The idea of hope must have stood out for Paul, since it brings him to the prayer that concludes this section: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Seen in connection

-
1. Matt. 10:5,6
 2. Matt. 15:26
 3. See Matt. 8:5-13.
 4. Gen. 12:2,3
 5. John 4:22
 6. Rom. 1:16
 7. Ps. 18:49
 8. Ps. 117:1
 9. Isa. 11:10
 10. Ezra 7:10 (KJV)

with the statement in the eighth chapter, hope refers to the resurrection of the body. We read there: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”¹ In the practical sense, it means that our hope for the future, that is the certainty of what God will do in the consummation of His plan of salvation, gives us the incentive to live our everyday life for the purpose of glorifying Him. Elsewhere, Paul formulates this: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”²

III Conclusion 15:14-16:26
 A. Paul’s Purposes for Writing 15:14-21

14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

15 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me

16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-

19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.

21 Rather, as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”

This paragraph could lead to the conclusion that the church of Rome consisted exclusively of Gentile believers. But that conclusion might be too hasty to hold up to scrutiny. Paul, undoubtedly, addresses the Gentile part of the church in these verses, but that does not mean that no Jews were present. His explanation how the Lord appointed him to be a minister to the Gentiles would help the Jews to overcome their innate Jewish prejudice against anybody not Jewish in the church.

Stating his belief that the Christians in Rome “are full of goodness,” Paul does not contradict what he said about himself earlier in this epistle. We read: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” The Greek word for “goodness” is “*agathosune*,” which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As we read: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”³ *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “Instead of *agathosunees*... goodness, some MSS. of good repute have *agapees*... love. In this connection both words seem to mean nearly the same thing.”

When Paul states that he has written “quite boldly on some points,” we must not take this as an apology. Although Paul was not the spiritual father of the church in Rome (he had not yet been there), he had the apostolic authority to admonish. And since he had received the specific calling to be an apostle of the Gentiles, this authority reached the church of Rome also. Having emphasized the potential failures of the

1. Rom. 8:23-25
2. I Cor. 15:58
3. Gal. 5:22,23

Christians in Rome, due to the human frailty that all flesh is heir to, he now depicts them as a sacrifice to God that is acceptable because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Grammatically, the words “that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” could be taken to mean that the offerings the Gentiles brought were acceptable to God. The Greek text reads literally “the offerings of the Gentiles,” which could be interpreted as meaning the sacrifices they brought, or that they were those sacrifices themselves. Paul based his wording upon a prophecy of Isaiah, which reads: “‘I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations--to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD--on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,’ says the LORD. ‘They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels.’”¹

In the matter of conversion and salvation, we tend to look more at what that means for us as human beings, than at what it means for God. Paul is more concerned about the glory of God in the fact that people are saved than about salvation of individuals. He considers salvation to be a byproduct, not a goal. The purpose of our salvation is that God be glorified in the fact that we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, as a spiritual act of worship.² In the same way, Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross was an act of worship to the Father before it was a sacrifice of atonement. This is expressed in the burnt offering or Holocaust as we find it described in the Book of Leviticus.³

Paul sees himself in the carrying out of his apostolic duties as an Old Testament priest who brings a burnt offering to God. The libation that accompanies that sacrifice is the Holy Spirit who perfects the sacrifice and makes it fully acceptable. The apostle John saw this same principle symbolized in connection with the prayers of the saints as they (that is their prayers) mount to heaven. We read: “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.”⁴

The way Paul expresses his pride is interesting. “Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God” seems to contradict what he states elsewhere about glorying. The Greek word used is *kauchesis*, which can mean, “to boast,” either in a good or a bad sense. Earlier, we read: “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.”⁵ The subject in both instances is different. In the latter, boasting pertains to trying to pay for our own salvation instead of accepting the grace of God. In the former, it is because of God’s grace that the apostle realizes that God has made him what he could never have become by himself, and allowed him to do things that were beyond his own power.

Boasting, like humility, is always a fragile matter; it evaporates when you touch it. The only reason Paul mentions it here is because he intends to visit the church in Rome and he wants them to be prepared to receive a blessing. That is why he writes in vs. 19: “I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.” In his first epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle stated the same principle: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest

-
1. Isa. 66:19,20
 2. See Rom. 12:1.
 3. See Lev. 1:3-17; 6:8-13.
 4. Rev. 8:3,4
 5. Rom. 3:27

on men's wisdom, but on God's power."¹ If we have identified ourselves with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection and if we have turned over to Him to control of our life, we may, in humble appreciation, boast in what God does in and through us in blessing other people. Denying that God uses us is not a sign of humility; it can be a form of well-disguised pride.

The NIV has polished rather nicely the awkward construction of the Greek text, which reads: "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things Christ has not wrought by me." "I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me," conveys the idea quite clearly.

We note the emphasis Paul puts on obedience in the context of personal salvation. I remember an evangelist once saying that, although we never verbalize it that way, we give the impression that obedience to God is nice and commendable once we are saved, but it is not indispensable. Paul clearly states that obedience is a vital part of our salvation. The whole purpose of his ministry had been to lead "the Gentiles to obey God." He accomplished this by what he said and did, which means by preaching and by practicing what he preached.

God confirmed his message, in accordance with His promise, "by the power of signs and miracles." Before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."² The Book of Acts confirms that God performed miracles through Paul, while he was on his missionary journeys. We read: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them."³ That testimony by a medical authority like Luke sounds quite convincing. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "It is noteworthy how St. Paul alludes incidentally in his letters to such "signs and wonders" having accompanied his ministry, as to something familiar and acknowledged, so as to suggest the idea of their having been more frequent than we might gather from the Acts of the Apostles. Had the alleged "signs and wonders" been unreal, we might have expected them to be made more of in the subsequent narrative of an admirer than in contemporary letters."

But miracles tend to have little effect upon the human soul without the work of the Holy Spirit. If the power of the Spirit had been absent, none of Paul's efforts would have booked any results. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and gives us the assurance that Jesus' work of atonement is applied to our lives.

In outlining the scope of his ministry, the apostle sets the boundaries at Jerusalem in the east and Illyricum in the west. It is obvious that the church in Jerusalem was not the fruit of Paul's ministry. There is no record in the Book of Acts either that he went as far as Illyricum, which would correspond to modern-day Bosnia. Since the Book of Acts does not pretend to give us a complete picture of Paul's activities, it is quite possible that he did travel as far west as Illyricum. It is clear, however, that Paul could not have meant that he took personal responsibility for all the churches between Jerusalem and Bosnia.

About this vast area, Paul states: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation." This cannot mean that Paul only preached where no one else had ever preached. The statement would exclude Damascus, where he probably preached his first sermon, since there was an existing church in that city when Paul came there. Actually, the reason for his travel to Damascus was to destroy the church that existed. Paul's preaching in Jerusalem, which supposedly he did, also contradicts the statement. We can only conclude that, as Paul made a sweeping motion to indicate the extent of the area in which he had traveled, he also made a sweeping statement about a principle that he applied generally, but not consistently. This is clear from the fact that the

-
1. I Cor. 2:2-5
 2. Mark 16:17,18
 3. Acts 19:11,12

apostle planned to visit Rome and share “the full measure of the blessing of Christ” with that church. We must also remember that Paul’s purpose in visiting Rome was to travel to Spain, not to plant or build up the church in Rome. Anything he would do in Rome was incidental and subjected to the greater plan. The main point is that Paul did not want to take any credit for the work in places where others had done the groundwork.

About his preaching, the apostle states that he “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” The Greek word used is *pleroo*, which means “to make replete,” or “to complete.” The thought is that he did not leave out anything. To the elders of the church in Ephesus Paul said: “Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”¹ Some theologians of liberal persuasion have suggested that Paul was responsible for most of the New Testament theology, as if he invented the divinity of Christ and attributed to the crucifixion a significance it does not have in the Gospels. Paul states here emphatically that what he preached was what God wanted him to preach; nothing was the fruit of Paul’s own creativity.

In order to back up his claim to guidance in this matter, Paul quotes from Isaiah. Isaiah’s Hebrew text reads: “So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.”² Paul’s quotation reads: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.” The Hebrew word in Isaiah, rendered “sprinkle” is *nazah*, which is mainly used in the context of expiation. We find it in the text: “And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments.”³ The NIV states in a footnote of Paul’s text, that the Septuagint reads: “so will many nations marvel at him.”

B. Paul’s Plans for Traveling 15:22-33

22 *This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.*

23 *But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you,*

24 *I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

25 *Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.*

26 *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.*

27 *They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.*

28 *So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.*

29 *I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.*

30 *I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.*

31 *Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,*

32 *so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.*

33 *The God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

1. Acts 20:26,27

2. Isa. 52:21

3. Ex. 29:21

Actually, it was this principle of not wanting to build on someone else's work that had prevented Paul from going to Rome. As we saw in the introduction, Luke reports that Paul expressed the desire to visit Rome after he left Ephesus and set out to travel back to Jerusalem. We read: "After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'"¹ Since Paul wrote this epistle in Corinth, during his second missionary journey, we know that his plans had already been conceived before the time Luke reports.

We do not know how much Paul was aware of the fact that he would go to Rome as a prisoner. As he approached Jerusalem, he was warned by prophetic messages that imprisonment awaited him.² It was not until he stood before Felix and said: "I appeal to Caesar!"³ that the door finally opened and God made the Empire pay for the journey.

Paul's primary goal in visiting Rome was to use the church there as a springboard to go to Spain, which was considered the Far West of the Roman Empire. Whether the apostle was ever able to realize his plan is not known. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Clement of Rome speaks of the apostle as having reached 'the extreme limit of the West.'"

The apostle, probably, wanted to kill more than one bird with one stone. Using the church in Rome as a base from which to be sent out would stimulate that church in giving and in the nurture of a vision that would promote spiritual and numerical growth as nothing else could. And Spain needed the Gospel.

The fact that, in connection with this, Paul mentions the offering of the churches in Macedonia and Achaia reinforces the idea that he was looking for ways to stimulate the church in Rome by giving them a project to work on. At the same time he planted another seed that would have the potential to grow into a healthy tree. The Macedonian offering for Jerusalem was not only a demonstration of generosity; it was also an obligation. The Gentile churches owed a debt to the mother church in Jerusalem. "For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings." In the same way the church in Rome had the obligation to share their blessings, both spiritual and material, with the pagan world to the west of them.

"The full measure of the blessing of Christ," the apostle intended to bring with him when he arrived in Rome, was not only a spiritual uplift, but also an invigorating vision for a lost world. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."⁴

Going to Jerusalem, Paul had a premonition of the reception that would await him. He was, of course, quite aware of the general sentiment among the Judaists against Gentiles in general. But he was also unsure about the reception among believers of the tokens of Gentile generosity. That was why he asked the Christian in Rome to pray for him. The Greek word, rendered "struggle" is *sunagonizomai*, from which the word "agony" is derived. It means literally "agonize with me in prayer." *Barnes' Notes* explains: "The word 'strive' denotes intense 'agony' or effort, such as was used by the wrestlers in the Greek games; and then the 'agony,' or strong effort, which a man makes in prayer, who is earnestly desirous to be heard. The use of the word here denotes Paul's earnest desire that they should make an 'intense' effort in their prayers that he might be delivered."

Paul's intuition turned out to be correct. The mob in Jerusalem tried to lynch him. A group of Jews planned to assassinate him. His prayers and those of the church in Rome did not spare him these frightening experiences but they assured the outcome. They allowed him to testify before two governors and a king and they opened the way for him to travel to Rome.

The reception by the church in Jerusalem was warm. Luke describes: "When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all

-
1. Acts 19:21
 2. See Acts 21:10,11.
 3. Acts 25:11
 4. Prov. 29:18 – KJV

the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God.”¹ His actual arrival in Rome was less of an uplifting experience. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “When Paul did reach Rome, he came as a prisoner, with no outward grounds of joy. He could not find refreshing with the Romans, since he was not free to go to them, although they were free to come to him. God’s will overruled some of the details of this request, but the request itself was granted.” The Greek word, rendered “with you be refreshed” is *sunanapauomai*, which has the meaning of “finding rest in company with one another.” The rest Paul received in Rome, first under house arrest, and later in a prison cell, cannot have been what the apostle had in mind when he wrote these words. Yet, the time Paul spent in prison was, in a way, the most productive part of his life. The Prison Epistles he wrote have done more in the building of God’s church on earth than all the years of toil and travel. God did overrule Paul’s prayer to the point where his loss became our gain.

The benediction that closes this chapter: “The God of peace be with you all. Amen” actually forms the conclusion of the epistle. Chapter Sixteen can be considered a postscript. Earlier in this chapter, Paul called God “the God of hope”²; here He is called “the God of peace.” The greeting is the equivalent of the Hebrew “Shalom.”

C. Paul’s Praise and Greetings 16:1-27

- 1 *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.*
- 2 *I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.*
- 3 *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.*
- 4 *They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*
- 5 *Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*
- 6 *Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.*
- 7 *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*
- 8 *Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.*
- 9 *Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.*
- 10 *Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.*
- 11 *Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.*
- 12 *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.*
- 13 *Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.*
- 14 *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them.*
- 15 *Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.*
- 16 *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.*
- 17 *I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.*
- 18 *For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.*
- 19 *Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.*
- 20 *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.*

1. Acts 21:17-20

2. Rom. 15:13

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.

22 I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.

Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,

26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-

27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Chapter Fifteen forms the actual end of the epistle; Chapter Sixteen can be considered a postscript. Most of this chapter (verses 3-16) consists of greetings to people who were resident in Rome at the time of Paul's writing but whom Paul knew before, either through meetings during his missionary journeys or because they were related to him. Some he had met in prison.

Some Bible scholars believe that Chapter Sixteen of the Epistle to the Romans was actually a separate letter sent to the church in Ephesus and that Phoebe was headed to Ephesus instead of to Rome. The fact that we find it at the end of the Roman Epistle could then be explained by the fact that epistles were copied and shared with other church. F. F. Bruce in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* writes: "That a separate letter to the church in Ephesus has somehow been tacked on to a letter addressed to Rome is highly improbable; in any case, 'a letter consisting almost entirely of greetings may be intelligible in the age of picture-postcards; for any earlier period it is a monstrosity.'" ¹

In his *Preface to Romans*, Luther uses this last chapter of the epistle to vent his wrath and ire against the Roman Catholic Church. We read: "The last chapter consists of greetings. But Paul also includes a salutary warning against human doctrines which are preached alongside the Gospel and which do a great deal of harm. It's as though he had clearly seen that out of Rome and through the Romans would come the deceitful, harmful Canons and Decretals along with the entire brood and swarm of human laws and commands that is now drowning the whole world and has blotted out this letter and the whole of the Scriptures, along with the Spirit and faith. Nothing remains but the idol Belly, and St. Paul depicts those people here as its servants. God deliver us from them. Amen."

The chapter opens with a recommendation for Phoebe, a deaconess from the church in Cenchrea. *The Pulpit Commentary* states here: "This Phoebe was probably the bearer of the Epistle. She appears to have had business, perhaps of a legal kind, that took her to Rome; and St. Paul took advantage of her going to send the letter by her, desiring also to enlist the aid of her fellow-Christians at Rome in furtherance of her business, whatever it might be. Her having business at Rome, and her having been 'a succourer of many,' suggests the idea of her being a lady of means." Some Commentators believe that Phoebe may have been a convert from paganism since a Jewish woman would be unlikely to bear a name borrowed from Greek mythology.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary explains: "Cenchrea was a seaport on the east side of the isthmus which joined the Morea to Greece, since the Lechaem was the seaport on the west side of the same isthmus. These were the only two havens and towns of any note, next to Corinth, that belonged to this territory. Since the Lechaem opened the road to the Ionian sea, so Cenchrea opened the road to the Aegean; and both were so advantageously situated for commerce that they were very rich. These two places are now usually denominated the Gulf of Lepanto, and the Gulf of Ingia or Egina. It was on the isthmus, between these two ports, which was about six miles wide, that the Isthmian games were celebrated; to which Paul makes such frequent allusions."

1. Quotation from Hans Lietzmann.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds to this: “This chapter refutes the idea that the apostle resented women working in the churches or among believers. His tribute to Phoebe is followed by greetings to various people and groups. Among those greeted are eight women. Paul specifically comments on how much work five of these women did (Mary, v. 6; Priscilla, a fellow worker, v. 3; Tryphena and Tryphosa, v. 12; Persis, v. 12). The mother of Rufus was so dear to Paul that he calls her his mother as well (v. 13). Only two women are mentioned without any comment—Julia and the sister of Nereus (v. 15).”

The first couple to be greeted was Priscilla and Aquila. Paul had first met them in Corinth where he worked together with them in the tent making business.¹ The name Priscilla is probably a nickname; it means: “little old woman.” Aquila means: “Eagle.” The couple had been expelled from Rome by order of Emperor Claudius, who executed an ethnic cleansing of the city, ordering all Jews to leave the capital. Aquila and Priscilla followed Paul to Ephesus, where they entertained a house church. Writing from Ephesus to Corinth, Paul wrote: “Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.”² When they returned to Rome is not known. In Rome they had opened their home again to host a group of believers. At the time of Paul’s second imprisonment and subsequent martyrdom, they had moved back to Ephesus, according to the mention of their name in a letter to Timothy.³ The mention of this couple in this chapter makes one understand why some Bible scholars tend to argue for this chapter belonging to the church in Ephesus instead of to the one in Rome. When and how Aquila and Priscilla risked their lives for the apostle is not known. “They risked their lives for me” is the translation of the Greek: “Who for my life have laid down their necks.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary notes: “Household churches are probably also to be found in Rom. 16:10-11,14-15. If this is true, then the mention of five household churches makes one realize that Christians in Rome were members of smaller groups rather than of one large assembly.”

The next one to be greeted was Epenetus, whom Paul called “the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.” In First Corinthians, the apostle wrote: “You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia.”⁴ Evidently, Epenetus was part of that family.

Nothing is known about Mary, who worked hard for, either the Christians in Rome or for Paul and his companions. Some Greek manuscripts read “for us,” others “for you.” The modern view is that “for you” is probably the correct reading.

In the words: “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was” Bible scholars have faced several questions that are difficult to answer. It cannot be determined whether “Junias,” or “Junia” is a masculine or a feminine name. If the latter is the case, she may have been Andronicus’ husband. Whether “my relatives” means that they were related to Paul personally is also unclear. The words could simply mean that they were fellow Jews. Where and when they were in prison with Paul cannot be established. Paul may have been in prison more often than is recorded in Acts. In Second Corinthians, Paul, comparing himself to other Christian workers, boasts: “[I have] been in prison more frequently.”⁵ Whether “They are outstanding among the apostles” means that they were called “apostles” or simply that they were highly regarded by the twelve, is also open for discussion. It is clear that they had known the Lord Jesus longer than Paul, which he confirms with a trace of jealousy.

Nothing further is known about Ampliatus, Urbanus, or Stachys. Whether Apelles is the same name as Apollos, mentioned in Acts, cannot be established either.

-
1. See Acts 18:1,2.
 2. I Cor. 16:19
 3. See II Tim. 4:19.
 4. I Cor. 16:15
 5. See II Cor. 11:23.

About the household of Aristobulus and Narcissus, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* notes: “It would seem, from what is said of Narcissus in the following verse, that this Aristobulus himself had not been a Christian, but that the Christians of his household simply were meant; very possibly some of his slaves.” Of Herodion, Paul says again that he is his relative, whatever that may mean.

The next three whom Paul greeted warmly are woman: Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, whom Paul praises as hard workers.

Of Rufus, Paul states that he is “chosen in the Lord.” The Greek word *eklektos* literally means: “elect,” as in the verse: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?”¹ In this context, however, it must mean: “select, favorite, or outstanding.” The fact that Paul calls Rufus’ mother, *his* mother does not, of course, make him Paul’s natural brother. The terminology refers to acts of kindness Rufus’ mother had shown to the apostle. Nothing is known about Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas. Both Hermes and Hermas are names for the Greek god, also known as Mercury. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states about Hermas: “Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen attributed to him the work called *The Shepherd*, but that is highly unlikely because *The Shepherd* was written about 150 AD. He is celebrated as a saint, in the Roman calendar, on May 9.”

Nothing is known either about Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and Olympas. Of some of those names it is not even sure whether they are masculine or feminine.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss” must be seen, rather as a suggestion than as a command. The underlying thought is one of expressing affection for one another. There is no hint of erotic feelings in this kiss Paul suggests Christians in Rome use by way of greeting one another. Forms of greeting vary greatly from one culture to another and from one country to another. Even within the same country there can be differences in expressing respect or affection. Culture in the same country even changes with the spirit of the age.

After having admonished the church to practice brotherly love by showing affection to one another, Paul issues a warning about those who ought not to be included in this kind of fellowship. The Greek text reads literally: “Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences (scandals) contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them.” The fact that Paul issues such warning would indicate that divisions and offences related to false doctrines had not yet affected the church in Rome.

We do not know how the church in Rome had come into being, whether Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost had given the main impetus, or whether the people Paul had met elsewhere and whom he greeted in this epistle had carried the Gospel to the capital of the empire. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain what the sound doctrine was that held the church together. Paul’s warning may have been primarily directed toward the Judaic teachers, who preached circumcision. But the reference to those people’s appetites, or “belly” as the Greek reads, may suggest mere carnal behavior that would undercut the spirituality of the church. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: “In speaking of them as serving, or being slaves to, their own belly, it cannot be concluded certainly that he attributed to them habits of sensuality. He may only mean that it is the gratification of the lower part of their nature that they have in view; and there may be allusion to the motive of such persons being the desire of eating and drinking at the cost of the Churches. In ‘The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles’ (alluded to under... Romans 12:6, *seq.*) the desire to live without working at the cost of the Church is set down as one of the marks of a false apostle or a false prophet.”

The sound doctrine is that what forms the backbone of this very epistle. Paul, evidently, did not only write this letter to them as a way of introduction to the church, so that they might consider him worthy of their support on his way to Spain. He wanted them to have a solid foundation to fall back on when they were being attacked on points of doctrine on which they had not been tested before.

1. Rom. 8:33

Some Bible scholars have seen in this warning another reason why this chapter must belong to the church in Ephesus. The warning has something in common with Paul's admonition to the elders of Ephesus during his farewell at the beach of Miletus. He said to them: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."¹ Others believe that the apostle's words fit the Epistle to the Romans perfectly, particularly the Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen. The reference to "their own appetites" could refer to the desire of "the strong in faith" who insisted on demonstrating that they could eat everything without considering "the weak in faith."

The words: "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you" correspond to "Your faith is being reported all over the world"² in the first chapter of this epistle, thus establishing the unity of the letter. It is doubtful that Paul would have used those words about a church with which he was personally acquainted.

The words: "I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil" correspond to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."³

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" sounds with the force of a trumpet. It is an amazing statement that reveals much about our place in the order of creation, God's plan for humanity, and the authority we have in Jesus Christ. Although this is nowhere clearly stated, I believe that one of the reasons God created Adam was to have him overcome Satan, the fallen archangel Lucifer and restore God's Kingdom in a polluted universe. When Adam and Eve joined the enemy camp, God said to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."⁴ The initial fatal blow was given to Satan when Jesus died on the cross. As participants in that victory, we are to finish the work as part of God's mandate given to us. Our victory over Satan will be as expensive and all demanding for us as it was for our Lord. John reveals for us in Revelation what it will cost. We read: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."⁵ It is always dangerous to step on snakes. The suggestion is that Satan uses people in the church who cause division.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" is more than a final benediction; it accompanies the promise of victory over evil.

Verses 21-23 contain another series of greetings, this time by those who are with Paul in Corinth to the church in Rome. Paul mentions Timothy, Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Paul first met Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father in Lystra, and he took him with him on his travels.⁶ Some Bible scholars believe that Lucius is the same person as Luke. If that is true, the addition "my relatives" at the end of the verse would not apply to Lucius, or Luke, since he was not a Jew. Jason may be the one who hosted Paul in Thessalonica, mentioned in Acts,⁷ but there were been many Jasons in the Roman Empire in Paul's day. Sosipater may be the same as Sopater, mentioned also in Acts.⁸ Paul calls the two or three last ones mentioned "my relatives," which identifies them as Jews and probably members of his immediate family.

1. Acts 20:29-31
2. Rom. 1:8
3. I Cor. 14:20
4. Gen. 3:15
5. Rev. 12:11
6. See Acts 16:1-3.
7. See Acts 17:6,7,9.
8. See Acts 20:4.

On Tertius, Paul's secretary who wrote the letter, F. F. Bruce writes in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*: "He is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Paul seems regularly to have employed amanuenses to write his letters, but this is the only one who is known to us by name. Whether he sent his greetings personally on his own initiative or at Paul's suggestion, Paul would certainly approve of his sending them. Perhaps he was a professional amanuensis, since Romans is rather more formal than most of Paul's letters; but he was evidently a Christian, since he sends his greeting 'in the Lord'. On other occasions one of the apostle's companions (such as Timothy, to judge by the frequency with which his name is added to Paul's in the superscription of letters) may have acted as amanuensis."

Some Bible scholars believe that Gaius is the same person as Titius Justus, mentioned in Acts,¹ who opened his home for Paul and later for the house church Paul planted in Corinth. The apostle John addressed his third epistle to Gaius, who may have been the same person.²

The name Erastus has been found in an archeological excavation in Corinth, inscribed on a marble piece of pavement, stating that he laid this pavement at his own expense. Whether that is the same person as mentioned in Paul's letter cannot be proven. Quartus is further unknown.

Vs. 24 is missing in the NIV and in most modern translations. Some older Bible version read "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" which seems redundant since it was already stated in Vs. 20.

Whether the doxology of Verses 25-27 belong here or at the end of Chapter 14, has been the subject of much debate among Bible scholars.

As the word doxology implies, Paul brings his epistle to an end by giving glory to God. He focuses on two points as the basis for this glory: God's power to keep and God's wisdom prepared and provides. The apostle digresses extensively between those two points.

The first thought that occurs is that there is an obvious need for believers in God to be established. God wants us to become deeply rooted in the truth of the Gospel. The Psalmist illustrates the condition of the person who prioritizes the Word of God: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."³ The power that gives us stability is God's, not ours. And the way in which this power is made available is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is through the knowledge and understanding of the facts of salvation. Those facts are that the Word became flesh; God who created the universe became a creature. He lived on earth as a sinless human being, sacrificed His body as a sin offering in our behalf and conquered death by dying in our place and rising from the grave. He did this as the embodiment of God's promises to the people of Israel and through Israel to the human race as a whole. This last point was not revealed until after Jesus had risen and ascended to heaven. Throughout the ages this had been God's mystery. The prophets had foretold it, but the fulfillment of their prophecies had not come until Jesus' work on earth and in heaven was finished and the Holy Spirit had come down from heaven, not only on Jewish believers, but on everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Messiah.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul would later write: "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."⁴ This revelation of God's wisdom is the second pillar upon which Paul places this doxology.

1. See Acts 18:7.

2. 3 John:1

3. Ps. 1:3

It is obvious that these words are particularly relevant for a church that mainly consists of converted Gentiles. The original recipients of this epistle knew the facts of salvation sufficiently to become born again believers. In this letter Paul gave them, and gives us, the implication and application of these facts of salvation that make us give glory to God. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a document that states so clearly that we were lost in sin, and how we are saved by grace, and how this brings us to a life of newness and victory. It is God's work in us through the Holy Spirit that accomplishes His goal. We may pray with the Psalmist: "The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever--do not abandon the works of your hands."¹

We conclude our study with the last words in Luther's *Preface to Romans*: "We find in this letter, then, the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know: the meaning of law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope and the cross. We learn how we are to act toward everyone, toward the virtuous and sinful, toward the strong and the weak, friend and foe, and toward ourselves. Paul bases everything firmly on Scripture and proves his points with examples from his own experience and from the Prophets, so that nothing more could be desired. Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament. Without doubt, whoever takes this letter to heart possesses the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore each and every Christian should make this letter the habitual and constant object of his study. God grant us his grace to do so. Amen."

Toccoa Falls, GA. 11/3/05

4. Eph. 3:2-6

1. Ps. 138:8