

## Paul's Epistle to the Romans

<sup>1</sup>Paul,  
a bond-servant of Christ Jesus,  
**called** *as* an apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God,  
<sup>2</sup> which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,  
<sup>3</sup> concerning His Son,  
    who was born  
        of a descendant of David  
        according to the flesh,  
<sup>4</sup> who was declared the Son of God  
            with power  
                by the resurrection from the dead,  
                according to the Spirit of holiness,  
  
Jesus Christ our Lord,

Paul greets the church as a **bondservant** [*doulos*] or slave. A *doulos* was owned outright by his master and could not serve another. Paul fully understood the implications of this self-designation for the Lord had revealed to Ananias of Damascus that he would suffer much for His name's sake (Acts 1: 16). The full revelation of Paul's sufferings (cf. 2 Cor. 11: 23-28) would be experienced by Paul over a period of 32 years from 36 AD to 68 AD when he was finally, according to Christian tradition, beheaded in Rome. He had sacrificed everything for the sake of his new Master whom he had met on the road to Damascus. He was not his own but bought with a price, and what he declared of all Christians was confirmed in his own life (1 Cor. 6: 20). He belonged fully to Christ who had commissioned him with His gospel.

He was **called as an apostle**. The word **called** is *kletos*, the same word used in Rom. 8: 28 describing believers who are **predestined, called, justified, and glorified**. As all believers are effectually called by the Holy Spirit to salvation, Paul was effectually called by God to be an **apostle**, literally, a messenger who is sent on a mission. To some extent, all believers are "sent on a mission" to share the gospel, but only a few were called directly by Christ Jesus to be His apostles, a gift to the church which has ceased because of the full revelation of God in Scripture. For the same reason, the gift of prophecy has ceased with the closing of the NT canon. The gifts of preaching and evangelism remain since these gifts are the application of the revelation already provided in the Scriptures.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." <sup>9</sup> (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; (Eph. 4:7-12 NASB)

Paul will extend this list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12. Every believer is given a spiritual gift from Christ through His Spirit for the well-being of the body of Christ.

After Judas hanged himself, the remaining disciples chose Matthias by lot to take Judas' place (Acts 1: 21-26). We never hear anything more of Matthias in the NT, and this omission alone does not imply that his selection was null and void. However, it seems clear that Christ himself would later personally select Paul to replace Judas.

More specifically, Paul was **set apart for the gospel of God**. His mission for the rest of his life was not to rise among the ranks of the Jewish leadership, but to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

But the Lord said to him [*Ananias*], "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; <sup>16</sup> for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16 NASB)

The gospel is the **gospel of God** (appearing 8 times in the NT) as well as the **gospel of Christ** (8 times), and the **gospel of Jesus Christ** (1 time). Christ suffered to die for our sins and appease the wrath of God against our sins, but God the Father is the one who sent His son to appease and satisfy His own wrath. We should not suppose that the initiative to save us belongs only to the Son who took pity upon sinners who would otherwise be damned by God's wrath. Christ did not have to convince an unwilling, unloving Father to save us. Rather, the Father had pity upon His elect people, sending the Son to die for them thus satisfying His justice and wrath. **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son** (Jn. 3:16) indicates that the initiative in saving His people begins with God the Father. In the economy of redemption, the Father plans our redemption and sends the Son, the Son executes this plan by living a perfect life and dying on the cross as the perfect divine sacrifice, and the Spirit applies redemption through His inward work in our hearts. The reality, however, is not that each person of the Trinity does His individual part in isolation, but that in every stage of redemption the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working together in coordination to accomplish our redemption.

For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> But He answered them, "**My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.**" (Jn. 5:16-17 NASB)

Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.**" (Jn. 6:28-29 NASB)

"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:8 NASB)

What is true of the new creation was also true of the old creation and providence. In Genesis, God the Father spoke the word of creation and Christ executed the work of creation through the Spirit. Moreover, Christ through His Spirit governs all His creatures and all their actions.

In the beginning **God created** the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, **and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.** <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "**Let there be light**"; and there was light. (Gen. 1:1-3 NASB)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world.**<sup>3</sup> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things by the word of His power.** When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb. 1:1-3 NASB)

Christ was **promised beforehand** by the OT prophets. The Messianic promises of the OT are too many to list, but some stand out as extraordinary.

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. (Deut. 18:15 NASB)

'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.<sup>19</sup> It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. (Deut. 18:18-19 NASB)

Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,<sup>3</sup> "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.<sup>5</sup> Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying,<sup>6</sup> "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."<sup>7</sup> "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'<sup>8</sup> 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Your possession. (Ps. 2:1-8 NASB)

<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death.<sup>16</sup> For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;<sup>18</sup> They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps. 22:14-18 NASB)

<sup>1</sup>Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.<sup>3</sup> And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;<sup>4</sup> But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (Isa. 11:1-4 NASB)

He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.<sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.<sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (Isa. 53:3-5 NASB)

<sup>4</sup> **who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead** implies the enormous burden resting upon the resurrection in support of Christ's claim to be the Son of God. Without the resurrection, Christ is not who He claimed to be, and we are still in our sins. It is through the resurrection that God proved that Christ's sacrifice had been accepted and that His wrath had been turned away from those whom He had given to the Son (Jn. 6: 39). It is also now through the resurrection that we may declare

boldly that men must repent of their sins and believe in Christ, for through the resurrection, God has vindicated His authority to judge men for their sins.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**" (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

In this passage, Paul makes no attempt to prove the resurrection of Christ, yet he presents the resurrection as proof that God will judge the world at some future date. If the events on the Areopagus in Athens—the context of Acts 17—take place around 54 AD, then Paul is speaking about 20 years after the resurrection of Christ, plenty of time for such extraordinary news to have reached the ears of Athenians living 780 miles away from Jerusalem. After all, though he had never visited Rome, Paul was now writing to a congregation that had arisen by means of Rome's cosmopolitan (multicultural) influence throughout the world. People from all over the world had traveled along the Roman roads to the western world's epicenter in Rome. These travelers would have included Christians. Athens' philosophical influence was the equivalent (equal) of Rome's political and economic influence; therefore, it is doubtful that the Athenians had never heard of the resurrection of someone named "Christus". Although Paul makes no effort to prove it, he simply states the fact of the resurrection as the basis for God's judgment.

Likewise in Acts 26, Paul preaches the resurrection to Festus and King Agrippa (a Jew), appealing to Agrippa's knowledge of the prophetic witness of the OT as well as his awareness of the events which had taken place in Jerusalem almost 30 years previously.

**"For the king knows about these matters,** and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; **for this has not been done in a corner.**" <sup>27</sup> "King Agrippa, **do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.**" <sup>28</sup> Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 26:26-28 NASB)

**For this has not been done in a corner** refers to the resurrection in Jerusalem. There was no covering up the history of the disciples' claims that Christ had risen from the dead, however much the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities attempted to do so. The dead body of Jesus was never found in the tomb. Agrippa knows too much about the OT prophecies to deny how exactly they are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, but he is careful not to allow Paul to manipulate him into an admission of the truth claims of Christianity, especially not before Festus, governor of Judea.

<sup>5</sup> through whom  
we have received  
grace  
and apostleship  
to bring about *the* obedience of faith  
among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,  
<sup>6</sup> among whom you also are the called  
of Jesus Christ;

In vv. 5-6, Paul identifies his mission to the Gentiles, a mission commissioned to him through Ananias in Damascus. He was also an apostle to Israel, but in a special sense Paul believed that his primary calling was among the Gentiles.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings **and** the sons of Israel; (Acts 9:15 NASB)

(for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also **to the Gentiles**), (Gal. 2:8 NASB)

Paul had received his apostleship to bring the Gentiles to faith in Christ—to bring about *the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles* (v. 5). There was no contradiction in Paul's mind between God's sovereign activity in salvation (Rom. 9) and the responsibility of the church to preach the gospel to all nations according to the Lord's command (Rom. 10: 13-15; cf. Matt. 28: 18-20). The interplay between God's chosen goal and His chosen means to this goal will receive more detailed discussion later in chapters 9 and 10.

<sup>7</sup> to all who are beloved of God in Rome,  
called *as* saints:  
Grace to you and peace  
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Beloved of God** reminds us that God loves His people with an unchangeable, steadfast love which will not be taken away from those who believe in Him. **Grace to you and peace** is Paul's characteristic greeting (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 3; 2 Cor. 1: 2; Gal. 1: 3; Eph. 1: 2, etc.), but he does not say this as a matter of routine. In Rom. 5, the reason for our peace is found in the atoning work of Jesus Christ without which one is still an enemy of God.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this **grace** in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1-2 NASB)

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all,  
because your faith  
is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

**Throughout the whole world** obviously referred only to the civilized Greco-Roman world of which Paul was familiar, but Paul was not given to idle praise. Apparently, the influence of the Roman congregation was far beyond the limits of the metropolitan city of Rome. The church of Christ at this time was a very small community existing under perilous political contexts; yet Jesus' promise to Peter and the disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matt. 16: 18) were being progressively realized in this particular congregation. Two thousand years later, the gospel of Jesus Christ has spread over the entire globe through the life and witness of ordinary believers like you and me. It is, and will continue to be, unstoppable.

<sup>9</sup> For God,  
whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son,  
is my witness  
*as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,

- <sup>10</sup> always in my prayers making request,  
if perhaps now at last by the will of God  
I may succeed in coming to you.
- <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you  
so that  
I may impart some spiritual gift to you,  
that you may be established;
- <sup>12</sup> that is,  
that I may be encouraged together with you  
*while* among you,  
each of us by the other's faith,  
both yours and mine.
- <sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brethren,  
that often I have planned to come to you  
(and have been prevented so far)  
so that  
I may obtain some fruit among you also,  
even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Though having never met the Christians in Rome, Paul prayed for them **unceasingly**. He hopes to finally come to Rome to **impart some spiritual gift** to them. We are not told what this gift is, although Paul often performed miracles in confirmation of the truth of the gospel (Rom. 15: 18-19; 2 Cor. 12: 12). The gift would not be the gift of the Holy Spirit since the presence and knowledge of the Spirit is assumed throughout the letter (cf. Rom. 8). Judging from the content of the letter to the Romans, the **gift** was more likely the gift of teaching. Explicit in the letter is the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians as well as arrogance about one's identity as either Jew or Gentile. (It seems that preoccupation with one's identity—black or white, Luganda or Runyankore, Luo or Kukuyu, Tutsi or Hutu, male or female, is nothing new.) Paul desires to address this division and the arrogance generated by it.

The end goal of imparting a spiritual gift was that the Romans be **established**, something which Paul qualifies as being mutually **encouraged together** [*sumparakaléō*]...**by the others faith** (v. 12). The main idea of the word **encourage** [*parakaléō*] is to "call to one's aid" (*BibleWorks*) or literally, to call to one's side. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the **helper** [*parakletos*]. Paul will deal with this subject in much more detail in Romans 12 when he gives a general outline of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ and their function of being mutually encouraging and helpful to every member of the congregation. The Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation from others. It is a life lived in community with other believing members of the body of Christ who encourage one another to persevere in faith and good works.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> **and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging** [*parakaléō*] *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:23-25 NASB)

Paul does not set himself up on a pedestal, as if he didn't need anyone to encourage him. He was flesh and blood like everyone else and was often in need of being helped by the faith of others.

Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.<sup>29</sup> Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (2 Cor. 11:28-29 NASB)

The point is: we need each other—whether we know it or not.

Paul had planned to come to Rome but had been **prevented** from doing so. We may be sure that this was no flimsy excuse. He had also been hindered from venturing into Asia and Bithynia by none other than the Holy Spirit (Acts 16: 6-7). Luke does not go into detail about what happened on the second missionary journey—whether prohibitive external circumstances, inward promptings of the Spirit, or prophetic utterances (cf. Acts 21: 10-11)—but the text indicates clear providential hindrance. Shortly afterward, Paul sees the vision of **the man of Macedonia** requesting help. God was in control of the mission to the Gentiles, and Paul yielded humbly to His **will** (v. 10). God shuts some doors and opens others. Thus far, He had shut the door to Rome.

<sup>14</sup> I am under obligation  
both to Greeks  
and to barbarians,  
both to the wise  
and to the foolish.

<sup>15</sup> So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

**I am under obligation** may be translated **I am debtor** (cf. Rom. 8: 12). Paul's apostleship was no "feather in his cap", that is, nothing to brag about. If anything, it was a burden or debt under which he labored strenuously until his martyrdom in 68 AD.

The distinction between **Greeks** and **barbarians**, **wise** and **foolish** is difficult to determine. Some of the Greeks were "wise", that is, well-educated, but most were simple commoners making their living from day to day through sweat and hard labor. Many of the Romans were wealthy slave owners, but from the 1<sup>st</sup> century through the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), the vast majority of any nation or people group was poor. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul reminded them that very few of them were rich or noble.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were **not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;**<sup>27</sup> **but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,**<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,<sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God. (1 Cor. 1:26-29 NASB)

Although Paul first focused upon the Jews attending the synagogues, by the time he wrote the Romans, he had learned that God was doing a mighty work among the Gentiles; and these Gentiles were coming from every walk of life: rich but mostly poor, educated but mostly uneducated. Neither nationality or cultural development mattered to Paul (Murray, *Romans*, p. 25). Everyone was made in the image of God who showed partiality to none. Since Paul had been given much, his obligation to all was much. One thing he knew: there was no room for boasting.

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed  
of the gospel,

for it is the power of God for salvation  
**to everyone who believes,**  
to the Jew first and  
also to the Greek.

<sup>17</sup> For in it  
the righteousness of God is revealed  
**from faith to faith;**

as it is written,

**"BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."**

<sup>18</sup> **For** the wrath of God  
is revealed from heaven  
against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men  
who suppress the truth  
in unrighteousness,

<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God  
is evident

**within them;**

for God made it evident

**to them.**

<sup>20</sup> **For** since the creation of the world

His invisible attributes,

His eternal power

and divine nature,

have been clearly seen,

being understood

through what has been made,

**so that**

they are without excuse.

<sup>21</sup> **For even though they knew God,**  
they **did not honor Him as God**  
or **give thanks,**

but

they

**became futile** in their speculations,

and their foolish heart

**was darkened.**

<sup>22</sup> **PROFESSING TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS,**

<sup>23</sup> and **exchanged**

the glory of the incorruptible God

for an image in the form of corruptible man

and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

<sup>24</sup> **THEREFORE**

*God gave them over*

in the lusts of their hearts to impurity,

so that

their bodies would be dishonored among them.

<sup>25</sup> For they **exchanged**



the truth of God  
for a lie,  
and **worshiped and served**  
the creature  
rather than the Creator,  
who is blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> **FOR THIS REASON**

*God gave them over*

to degrading passions;  
for their women **exchanged**  
the natural function [*i.e., the true, natural function which God created*]  
for that which is unnatural,

<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also

the men **abandoned**

the natural function of the woman  
and burned in their desire toward one another,  
men with men **committing**  
indecent acts  
and **receiving** in their own persons  
the due penalty of their error.

<sup>28</sup> **AND JUST AS THEY DID NOT SEE FIT TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD ANY LONGER,**

*God gave them over*

to a depraved mind,  
to do those things which are not proper,

<sup>29</sup> **being filled with**

all unrighteousness,  
wickedness,  
greed,  
evil;  
full of envy,  
murder,  
strife,  
deceit,  
malice;  
*they are gossips,*  
<sup>30</sup> *slanderers,*  
haters of God,  
insolent,  
arrogant,  
boastful,  
inventors of evil,

disobedient to parents,  
<sup>31</sup>without understanding,  
untrustworthy,  
unloving,  
unmerciful;

<sup>32</sup>**and although they know the ordinance of God,**  
that those who practice such things are worthy of death,  
they not only do the same,  
but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

### Romans 1: 16-17: The Theme of Romans

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed  
of the gospel,  
for it is the power of God for salvation  
**to everyone who believes,**  
to the Jew first and  
also to the Greek.

<sup>17</sup>For in it  
the righteousness of God is revealed  
**from faith to faith;**  
as it is written,  
**"BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."**

This is the theme to the entire letter, and several questions emerge. **First**, why does Paul say that he is **not ashamed of the gospel**? Quite simply because it is a gospel that arouses derision and scorn both from Jew and Gentile. This is more apparent in 1 Corinthians.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18 NASB)

For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:22-24 NASB)

We will return to this question later.

Second, what does **the righteousness of God**, or **God's righteousness**, mean? Two primary definitions have been favored: (1) the righteousness of God is the saving activity of God on behalf of his people, (2) the righteousness of God is the special status of those who have been placed in right relationship with God. Douglas Moo believes that one need not choose one definition to the exclusion of the other. Both God's **activity** and the believer's **status** are intertwined in the meaning of the word.

Bringing together the aspects of activity and status, we can define it as the *act by which God brings people into right relationship with himself* (Moo, *Romans*, p. 74, emphasis his).

A third question pertains to the phrase, **from faith to faith**, by which Paul may be emphasizing the point that **from** the beginning of salvation history **to** the present, righteousness has ever and always been by faith and nothing but faith. It is a righteousness based upon faith or, to put it another way, a “‘faith righteousness’ as truly as it is a ‘God-righteousness’”. (John Murray)

Paul’s immediate quotation of Hab. 2: 4 underscores the historical basis for this emphasis. **To faith** may indicate that every believer in the time of Paul’s writing and up until the present is the recipient of this righteousness regardless of race or culture. The righteous man shall live by faith **now** just as he has **always** lived from OT times, the way of salvation attested by the OT prophetic witness.

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being **witnessed by the Law and the Prophets**, (Rom. 3:21 NASB)

We note from the text in Rom. 1: 17 that this righteousness of God **is revealed**, underscoring the fact that it is not something that man can discover through his own intellect or research into the mysteries of physical or general creation or philosophy. From 1 Cor. 1: 21, we learn that God never intended for man to discover the way of salvation through his own independent observation or philosophical speculation, but rather through the “foolish” preaching of the gospel.

God **revealed** this truth progressively through his prophets with the final revelation of the gospel occurring in the incarnation, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of His son.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Heb. 1:1-2 NASB)

While the righteousness of God for salvation is **good news** to the repentant sinner, it is also news which must be **believed** and obeyed. The resistant Jews did not **subject themselves** [*hupotasso*: place under, obey] in submission to this means of righteousness. The gospel is an invitation from God to be in right relationship to Him by believing in His Son’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. Refusing such an invitation is a serious offense.

For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and **to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. (2 Thess. 1:6-8 NASB)

For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:3-4 NASB)

## **Romans 1: 18-32: The Unbelief of the Gentiles**

Perhaps no other passage in Scripture better summarizes the culpability (blame) of unbelievers, particularly unbelievers who have not had access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> **For** the wrath of God  
is **revealed from heaven**  
against all ungodliness  
and unrighteousness of men  
who suppress the truth  
in unrighteousness,

<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God  
is evident  
**within them;**  
for God made it evident  
**to them.**

<sup>20</sup> **For** since the creation of the world  
His invisible attributes,  
His eternal power  
and divine nature,  
have been clearly seen,  
being understood  
through what has been made,  
**so that**  
they are without excuse.

What unbelievers have now, and what they have had since the beginning of the world, is access to the truth about God revealed in His creation, including the creation of those who bear His image. We call this general revelation in contrast to special revelation which is given to OT prophets, NT apostles and prophets, the revelation that is now collected in the 66 books of the Bible.

In this passage Paul says that the **visible creation** reveals the **invisible attributes** of God's being. The psalms make essentially the same claim, that the invisible being of God is inescapably seen in what He has made.

The **heavens are telling of the glory of God**; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Ps. 19:1 NASB)

The **heavens declare His righteousness**, And all the peoples have seen His glory. <sup>7</sup> Let all those be **ashamed** who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols... (Ps. 97:6-7 NASB)

Note the phrase, "And all the **peoples** have seen His glory." The psalmist is speaking exhaustively of all the inhabitants of the earth. The word, **peoples**, is the same word used in many other OT texts to indicate non-Israelite people.

"You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the **peoples** who surround you, (Deut. 6:14 NASB)

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the **peoples** who are on the face of the earth. (Deut. 7:6 NASB)

We will look at the following headings:

**I. What is the content of general revelation and how do men respond to it?**

**II. How effective is general revelation in revealing the nature of God to unbelievers?**

**III. Applications of the Text**

**I. What is the content of general revelation and how do men respond to it?**

According to verse 20, general revelation consists in **what has been made**. God created a material world, the world of matter and energy—sun, moon, stars, clouds, rain, sunsets, oceans, rivers, mountains, animals, trees and flowers—last and most importantly, the crown of creation, male and female who are made in God’s image.

In addition to this, **material** creation generates the **non-material** concepts or ideas about the One who created these things, what Paul calls God’s **invisible attributes**. Both the visible creation and the concepts deduced from visible creation make up the content of general revelation given not only to the elect, but to **all men**.

Paul names only two of these **attributes** in v. 20, but it appears that these two are only summations of God’s attributes revealed in what he has made—namely, “His **eternal power** and **divine nature**.” God is eternal, without beginning or end, and His power is eternal power. By definition, God must be eternal; otherwise, there exists some other being or power *previous* to God which then must be recognized as God. The **eternal power** of God must also be omnipotent power capable of caring for all creation. A god who is limited in power, by definition, cannot be God. His divine nature would include his **wisdom** and **providential care** of his creation, among other things. The psalmist says,

He sends forth springs in the valleys; They flow between the mountains;<sup>11</sup> They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. (Ps. 104:10-11 NASB)

He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works.<sup>14</sup> He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth... (Ps. 104:13-14 NASB)

The young lions roar after their prey And seek their food from God. (Ps. 104:21 NASB)

O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions. (Ps. 104:24 NASB)

They all wait for You To give them their food in due season. (Ps. 104:27 NASB)

Man can reason from the providential care of creation that God is also **good** and that he **loves** his creation, something which Jesus mentions in the Sermon on the Mount.

"But I say to you, **love** your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> **so that** you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt. 5:44-45 NASB)

Being a sinner, man often disputes the goodness of God because of his circumstances, but if Scripture is allowed to correct our understanding of general revelation and providence, we learn that despite ours and others' circumstances, God is good. Nevertheless, his goodness cannot be disputed even if the sinner has no access to Scripture's correction. Men are **obligated** to acknowledge God's goodness from general revelation alone; and when they fail to give thanks for it, they are judged. When Paul speaks of the invisible attributes of God, he must be including many which are not specifically named.

In v. 20, Paul says that the **invisible** attributes of God **have been clearly seen (discerned)** in creation. Therefore, being made in God's image, men are capable of reasoning from the visual images of creation and providence to the invisible concepts and ideas about the nature of God. In his address to the Lystrans, Paul assumes this capability.

<sup>14</sup> and yet He did not leave Himself **without witness**, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:17 NASB)

To serve as a **witness**, something or someone must be intelligible, clear, and unambiguous (capable of interpretation). The witness of God's goodness to the Lystrans **should** have been understood because it **could** be understood.

Last, but not least, the general revelation of God to all men includes God's invisible attributes of **holiness** and **wrath**. Paul has already alerted us to the revealed **wrath** of God in v. 18 which is manifested toward those who **suppress** the truth about God in unrighteousness. The verb **suppress** [*katecho*] has the idea of "holding back" or restraining.

And you know what **restrains** [*katecho*] him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now **restrains** [*katecho*] *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. (2 Thess. 2:6-7 NASB)

When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to **keep** [*katecho*] Him from going away from them. (Lk. 4:42 NASB)

Men do not wish to retain the knowledge of God in creation because this knowledge obligates them to worship God and honor Him with obedience and thanks. The same kind of **suppression** occurs toward the spoken word of God—special revelation. For example, after the flood, God repeated the creation mandate to Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. One of Ham's sons was Cush who became the father of Nimrod whose kingdom was Babel in the land of Shinar.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. (Gen. 9:1 NASB)

<sup>6</sup>The sons of Ham *were* Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Cush *were* Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah *were* Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup> Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." <sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. (Gen. 10:6-10 NASB)

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.<sup>2</sup> It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.<sup>3</sup> They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.<sup>4</sup> They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:1-4 NASB)

The genealogy and separation of the nations in chapter 10 reflects the division of languages which takes place in chapter 11. The important point to consider is that this division of languages and nations occurs a mere 100 years after the flood. Yet, there is open defiance of God's mandate to multiple and fill the earth with inhabitants. Men "hold back" the truth of God. In this case, the truth was not general revelation but special revelation—the word of God to Noah and his sons. But since mankind would not listen to special revelation or general revelation, God gives him over to futility, philosophical and religious speculation, and immorality of every kind.

And in v. 21, the **hearts** of those who **knew God** but did not **honor** Him as God or give Him **thanks were darkened**. The verb is passive. They did not darken their own hearts. Their hearts were darkened. Paul uses another passive verb in distinguishing elect Israel from non-elect Israel.

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest **were hardened**; (Rom. 11:7 NASB)

From the context of vv. 24-32, it would appear that this **wrath** is manifested against sinners in two ways: **Temporal judgments** and the **consciousness of eternal judgment** for violating God's law.

In vv. 24-31, Paul uses the common literary method of **parallelism** in which he repeats many of the same vices using different words with similar meanings, piling up term upon term, making no attempt to be exhaustive in his list, but **impressing upon the reader's consciousness the gravity and extent** of man's guilt. Man is thoroughly and hopelessly guilty.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.<sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them over to **degrading passions**; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.<sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,<sup>29</sup> being filled with all **unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,**<sup>30</sup> **slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,**<sup>31</sup> **without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful**; (Rom. 1:24-31 NASB)

(1) First of all, in this life God judicially **delivers** the sinner over to the degrading consequences of his own apostasy and idolatry. The fundamental sin is not sexual immorality or any of these other sins on Paul's vice list in vv. 24-31. The fundamental sin underlying all other sin is idolatry which gives birth to every other sin.

Paul uses the expression **gave them over** three times for emphasis.

(a) V. 24. He **gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. Impurity** is a general term meaning uncleanness, commonly indicating sexual uncleanness of any kind. The phrase **lust of their hearts** indicates that those who are **given over** were already immersed in the sin to which they are delivered. God never compels people to sin nor does he tempt people to sin (James 1: 13), but He does hand them over to the escalating bondage of their own lusts and deceit.

(b) V. 26. He **gave them over** to the degradation of unnatural sexual passions which resulted in individuals receiving “in their own persons the due penalty of their **error**”. The **error** in v. 27 is the error of suppressing the truth, dishonoring God, refusing to worship Him and failing to give him thanks. God punishes this error by handing them over, in this particular case, to the practice of homosexuality. It is the **homosexuality** itself—or elsewhere in the vice list illicit heterosexuality—which is the **due penalty**, not AIDS or any other sexually transmitted diseases. However, many people engaged in such sins do not get these diseases, and other innocent people, including spouses and children, do.

[Note well that homosexuality is a **degrading passion**, despite what western cultures (including the US) are trying to prove. Moreover, although heterosexual promiscuity between two unmarried people is still a sin, it is still not as serious a sin as homosexuality and adultery. How do we know this? Because the penalties in the OT were not the same. For homosexuality and adultery, the penalty was death; but for sex between two consenting persons, the man must pay the woman’s father a dowry even if the father refuses to give her to him in marriage (Ex. 22: 16-17). Thus, illicit sex could be very expensive to the male who wishes simply to have a one-night fling. Homosexuality and adultery, on the other hand, were destructive to the social fabric of Hebrew society and must be punished with the full severity of the law—although a ransom could still be paid, life for life, essentially transferring a man’s wealth to the injured party.]

In his epistles, Paul mentions sexual sins more than any other, possibly due to his cultural context, but most likely because sexual sin is against one’s own body which, in the case of the Christian, is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6). So then, God hands over the sexually immoral person to ever more sexual immorality and the emptiness and dissatisfaction which inevitably results from more sex, whether it be homosexual, illicit heterosexual, or bisexual sex.

(c) V. 28. He **gave them over** to a **depraved mind**. He did this because “**they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.**” Once more, the temporal judgment is the consequence of apostasy. “God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.”

<sup>29</sup> **being filled with**  
all unrighteousness,  
wickedness,  
greed,  
evil;  
full of envy,



murder,  
strife,  
deceit,  
malice;  
*they are gossips,*  
<sup>30</sup> slanderers,  
haters of God,  
insolent,  
arrogant,  
boastful,  
inventors of evil,  
disobedient to parents,  
<sup>31</sup> without understanding,  
untrustworthy,  
unloving,  
unmerciful;

Notice also that the **depraved mind** does not manifest itself **only** in the degradation of **wickedness** and **evil**, words which might be interpreted as sexual immorality. Rather, the depraved mind is exhibited in behavior that many modern evangelicals are **tempted to white-wash** as “respectable sins”: **greed, envy, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, arrogance, pride, disobedience to parents, untrustworthiness, being unloving and unmerciful**. We are reminded of Col. 3: 5 in which Paul mentions four words normally associated with sexual immorality; and then something we didn’t expect.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to **immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire**, and **greed**, which amounts to **idolatry**. (Col. 3:5 NASB)

**Greed**. The market place must be tempered with Christian virtue—generosity and a willingness to help others succeed. Otherwise, it becomes a jungle of deceit and theft where people devour one another. People in poor countries will use the excuse that there is no work, so they must steal and lie to make a living. But if God commanded us to work six days a week and rest on the seventh, then there must be work to do. He expects us to find something to do to feed ourselves and others; otherwise, His command is meaningless and absurd. But God does not give absurd commands. The sin of **greed** breeds jealousy, hatred, even murder. Greed, envy, and dissatisfaction (failure to give thanks) is also the source of all sexual immorality. Men and women are greedy for human flesh which doesn’t belong to them.

At the end of any of Paul’s **gave them over[s]**, he could have substituted any of the other sins which he catalogs in this vice list: greed, envy, slander, etc. In every case, God delivers the sinner over to whatever he is already doing. God hands over the greedy man to more greed. Since he is not satisfied with God, he will never be satisfied with anything. He must have more. God hands over the argumentative man to more strife. The Nabal’s of this world can’t get along with anybody.

The **deceiver** can't tell the truth even when the truth is more convenient. He gives the adulterer over to more adultery, but he or she will never be satisfied in any of these relationships. God's retributive justice is always at work in the universe. Men will be repaid in like kind.

So, first of all, the **wrath of God** is manifested **temporally** by delivering sinners over to the escalating consequences of their own idolatry illustrated, but not exhausted, in Paul's vice list.

(2) Secondly, the **wrath of God** is manifested in man's consciousness of eternal punishment for violating His moral law.

<sup>32</sup> **and although they know the ordinance of God,**  
that those who practice such things are worthy of death,  
they not only do the same,  
but also give hearty approval  
to those who practice them.

The word for **ordinance** in v. 32 is [*dikaioma*], also translated **judgment** or **righteous decree**. It is the same word used in Romans 8: 4.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> so that the **requirement** [*dikaioma*] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4 NASB)

In other words, all men **know** something of God's righteous decree or moral requirements. He also knows the judicial punishment of death for violating these requirements. His knowledge of these requirements is by no means exhaustive, and it is certainly distorted; but it is **real**. This is more clearly explained in Romans 2.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,<sup>15</sup> in that **they show the work of the Law written in their hearts**, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately **accusing or else defending them**, (Rom. 2:14-15 NASB)

We may then ask, what is the source of this knowledge of God's moral requirements and the penalty for violating them? It is not from the Law of Moses since the pagan Gentiles Paul is referring to do not have the Law of Moses. The source is from within themselves, this intuitive sense of right and wrong present in the mind and heart of every rational creature.

Every civilization on earth, however primitive, possesses a moral code, a sense of right and wrong derived from the witness of creation inherent in the image of God. This moral code is twisted and suppressed by man's sinfulness; but it cannot be obliterated, no matter how much men may try. It finds its ultimate source in God's holiness manifested however faintly or strongly in man's conscience.

One would think that man's moral sensibility and his awareness of the eternal consequences of sin would moderate his sin, and it is true that men and women are not as bad as they could be. There

is God's common grace to sinners restraining their sin and cultivating many good qualities. Some unbelievers are very nice people outwardly, nicer than a lot of believers I know. Many are faithful husbands, wives, fathers and mothers. After all, the work of the Law is written on their hearts, and this work is demonstrated in varying degrees among men.

However, the moderating influence of common grace is not Paul's burden in this passage. His burden is to demonstrate the downward spiral of sin and its consequences leading to eternal death; and he does so to emphasize man's desperate need of the gospel, the power of God unto salvation. We have no evidence from Scripture that the knowledge of God mediated (made known) through general revelation has any positive effect in moving men toward a saving knowledge of God. In fact, this passage is the most detailed passage in the NT dealing with general revelation, and it is entirely pessimistic and unhopeful. Paul presents no expectation that man's knowledge of creation will produce a positive effect. Something far more compelling than general revelation is needed which is explicated through chapter 11. The development of man's religion is downward, not upward.

Instead of reforming himself, man not only continues in sin but "gives **hearty approval** or **encouragement** to others who practice the same sins." As Murray says,

To put it bluntly, we are not only bent on damning ourselves but we congratulate others in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in damnation.

John Murray also makes three inferences from this verse:

- (1) The most degraded of men...are not destitute of the knowledge of God and of his righteous judgments...Conscience asserts itself.
- (2) This knowledge does not of itself prevent these same persons from indulging the sins which they know merit the judgment of God and issue in death.
- (3) The knowledge of God's righteous judgment does not create any hatred of sin nor does it foster any disposition to repent of it.

## II. How effective is general revelation in revealing the nature of God?

Multiple verses in this section imply that this revelation is **effective**. It is **effective** in accomplishing God's purpose of **revealing his eternal and divine nature to men**. Returning to v. 19,

<sup>19</sup>because that which is **known** about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Then in verse 20, Paul says that the invisible attributes of God are **clearly seen**. They are **understood** through natural revelation. Moreover, as we have seen, they also **know** the **ordinance** or **righteous requirements** of God's law because the work of the law is written on their hearts; and they **know** that all who violate those requirements are **worthy of death**. According to this passage alone, unbelievers know a great deal about God. John Frame says,

The unbeliever...ought to believe in God without any...argument at all, simply on the basis of God's revelation in creation (Rom. 1: 18-21...). If our task is simply to put the unbeliever into

a position where he ought to believe, then we are best advised to do nothing, for he is in that position already (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 63, emphasis mine).

In his study guide to the WCF, G. I. Williamson comments on Chapter One: Of the Holy Scriptures, which says,

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation...(WCF, 1, emphasis mine).

It has long been the habit among Christians (even of Reformed persuasion) to speak of the insufficiency of natural revelation, as if there were something defective in the revelation it makes of God. This may be seen in the traditional use of the theistic proofs.

(1) From the world as a great effect we may argue the possibility of a great cause.

(2) From the apparent order and design in the world we may argue the possibility of a designing intelligence.

(3) From the apparent rule of the world by moral law we may argue the possibility of a moral lawgiver.

After these, and similar arguments, were developed and brought together, it was hoped that unbelievers might be convinced that (a) “a god” probably exists; and that (b) if he does exist, he might possibly be the God of the Bible. Only when the possibility of the existence of “God” was thus “proved” was it expected that the unbeliever would admit further evidence that might confirm that God really does exist. Observe that in this scheme the creature fixes the terms under which God must present his credentials. Facts are not allowed to say, “The true God is,” but only, “A god may possibly exist.”

What is wrong with such an approach? Simply this: every fact (and the sum total of all facts) *proves* the existence of the God of the Bible...

All men know God, the true God, the only God. They do not merely have the capacity for knowing him; they actually do know him, and cannot possibly evade knowing him (G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, pp. 2, 3; emphasis mine).

Of course, Williamson is not saying that men have a knowledge of God that results in salvation, but that they know a great deal about the true God, just as Paul says they do in Romans 1.

But the inefficiency or insufficiency of natural revelation in bringing men to a saving knowledge of God does not rest in the revelation itself, but in man’s distortion and misinterpretation of creation, namely, his active suppressing of the obvious facts about God in creation. The problem is not that general revelation is not **clear**, but rather that it is too clear, for it reveals the wrath of God against man’s ingratitude and idolatry. There is nothing **deficient** about general revelation itself. Yet, because of the noetic effects of sin (effects upon the mind), creation is incorrectly interpreted or distorted to fit man’s agenda of disobedience. Consequently, general revelation is not **sufficient** to bring men to saving faith in Christ.

[For an example, consider the theory of evolution. Since this theory cannot be tested in a laboratory, it can never be elevated to the level of scientific law. Nevertheless, evolution is treated as a law by most of the scientific community. We may ask why? Perhaps the reason is that evolution eliminates the need for a Creator, and many people like the idea of a causeless universe which has no Creator who holds them accountable for their actions. To use another example, there

is abundant evidence for a world-wide flood: Epic stories of a flood exist in the ancient literature of many civilizations; geological formations; discoveries of marine animals on the tops of mountains; etc. The evidence is clear, but unbelievers will suppress this truth in unrighteousness. Men do not wish to hear of any evidence of God’s judgment against sin.]

The effectiveness of material creation in providing the knowledge of God becomes even clearer when Paul says that the revelation of creation is effective in rendering men **without excuse** (*anapologetos*; literally, “without apology” or without a defense). This is just to say that unbelievers have no defense for their unbelief.

For what, primarily, are they **without excuse**? For responding to this general revelation with **irreverence, idolatry** and its consequent **immorality** rather than with **honor**, genuine **worship** and **thanksgiving**.

<sup>21</sup> For even though they **knew** God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

<sup>22</sup> Professing to be **wise**, they became fools,

<sup>23</sup> and **exchanged the glory** of the incorruptible God **for an image** in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

<sup>25</sup> For they **exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and **worshiped and served the creature** rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

In vv. 23 and 25, idolatry is described by Paul in terms of two parallel **exchanges** or **substitutions**.

First, sinful men and women “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an **image** in the form of **corruptible** man”.

Secondly, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

Men’s history abounds with the worship of **images**: idols carved and chiseled from wood and stone, idols in “the **form of corruptible man** and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures”. Paul has in view graven images of creatures, including humans, as objects of worship, something forbidden in the second commandment. These creatures are **corruptible**, perishable. On the other hand, God’s **glory**, represented in the diversity of his attributes, is **incorruptible**, imperishable, immutable, eternal—attributes that Paul says that men “know”.

<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His **invisible attributes**, His **eternal power** and **divine nature**, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, **so that** they are without excuse.

We have already seen from the OT texts that these attributes include his **providence** in caring for his creatures, suggesting the attribute of **love**. They also include his **holiness and wrath** because men **know** the righteous decree of God against those who violate his law, so that they intuit the wrath of God against their disobedience. They **deny** this knowledge, but they cannot **dodge** it any more than they can dodge a sandstorm.

The second **exchange** in v. 25 is parallel to the first but expressed in a different way. They “**exchanged the truth** of God for a lie.” What is the **truth**? From the context, it is the truth about who God is. Here, he does not say that men worship the **form** of these creatures, but that he **worshipped and served the creature** itself: including human beings, animals and birds, the sun, moon, anything created. Worshipping the manufactured idol is the same as worshipping the thing represented by the idol.

The verbs are translated with the **past** tense: **exchanged, worshipped, served**, and so on; but we cannot limit these exchanges to the **past** as if they were **substitutions** that are no longer taking place. Man is not finished with his idolatry. Notice the **present tense verbs** of vv. 18 and 19: the wrath of God **is revealed**; and that which **is known** of God **is evident**. These exchanges have been going on “since the creation of the world”, and they continued in Paul’s day up to this day until the very end of the age with the “earth-dwellers” of Revelation worshipping the **beast**.

However, **false worship is not limited to established religions**. It obviously includes pornography, sexual fantasies, and all other forms of sexual immorality. But Paul doesn’t stop there, either. He includes **greed and envy** leading to **murder, strife, slander, deceit and hatred**. It would include the worship of one’s own reputation and status in the community. By nature, all men and women are narcissists starving to death while worshipping their own reflection in a mirror.

[In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a hunter from Thespieae in Boeotia who was known for his beauty. According to Tzetzes, he rejected all romantic advances, eventually falling in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, staring at it until he died of starvation. But, as John Piper has said, “In heaven there are no mirrors.”]

This is why the worship of celebrities is such an important aspect of our western **national cult religion**: Movie stars, musicians, athletes, super-successful businessmen are images of what common people aspire to be. In Africa, people worship the wealthy or politicians who are both wealthy and powerful. But these images are most often in blatant **contradiction** to the image of Christ into whose image believers are being conformed day by day.

Idolatry is fundamentally the **exchange** of the true God for any **substitute** of our imaginations. Husbands may worship their wives or wives their husbands. Parents often worship their children and want their children to be successful replicas of themselves or other successful people. People worship material things and the green paper currency that represent material things. They worship power and influence, because power gives them the illusion of being their own gods. God’s covenant people often fall into these same sins. As Calvin has said, “Our hearts are idol-factories.”

“But,” Paul says in effect, “**It’s all a big, fat lie.**”

Both western and African cultures are obsessed with sex. But they don’t even compare with Paul’s first-century, Greco-Roman culture. Can you imagine your pastor on Sunday morning warning members of the church to stop consorting with prostitutes without once citing Scripture? But Paul does this with the Corinthians and Thessalonians: (1 Cor. 6) “Don’t unite the body of Christ with a prostitute.” (1 Thess. 4) “This is the will of God, that you abstain from sexual immorality.” As

direct addresses to these congregations, it's not the same thing as a preacher reading it out of the Bible. Paul addresses these issues because they were occurring among professing believers.

Both verses 23 and 25 help answer the question: **How effective is general revelation in communicating the knowledge of God?** The exchanges indicate that general revelation is very effective for this purpose. In fact, it is an infallible witness to the person and nature of God and his moral requirements for mankind. You cannot exchange one thing for the other if you don't have something to exchange. Sinful men exchange the eternal glory of God for the corruptible and temporary pleasures of this world because they have the knowledge of this glory in their possession for the exchange.

Men trade **eternal glory** for **dust and ashes**—things and people that perish. And it is **not true** that they don't know what they have and make the exchange based on **ignorance**. Throughout the passage Paul says that men **know**. They **know God**. They know who he is and what he is like. They can **clearly see** and **understand** his **invisible attributes**, rendering them “without an apology” or defense.

They possess the **truth** of God and trade it for a **lie**. It is a non-coercive exchange.

General revelation is **infallibly effective** in communicating the truth about God to men who have never heard the gospel. It is the **unwritten word of God** to all men in contrast to **special** revelation, the **written word of God** to specific men (Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*).

It is this passage that leads many, including me, to the conclusion that the terms, **honest atheist** or **honest agnostic** are oxymorons—a contradiction in terms. Unbelievers **know God**; yet, as we will discuss later, they also **don't know God** at the same time.

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom **did not come to know** [*ginosko*] God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:21 NASB)

For even though they **knew** [*ginosko*] God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom. 1:21 NASB)

They know him through general revelation, but because they are sinners who **distort** and **suppress** creation's witness to God, their knowledge of God will not lead them to a saving relationship to God.

As I have said, we have **no evidence from Scripture** that the knowledge of God **mediated** through general revelation has any positive effect in moving men toward salvation. There is no optimism either **explicitly stated or anticipated** in Romans 1—and, for that matter, Romans 2 and 3—for man's positive response to creation. Something far more compelling than general revelation is needed.

### III. Applications of the Text

#### 1. We should not be ashamed of the simplicity of the gospel.

We might wonder why Paul says that he is not **ashamed** of the gospel. Why would anyone be ashamed of it? Apparently, some Roman believers were; otherwise, Paul would not have mentioned it. The historical context of this statement is made more understandable from 1 Cor. 1: 18-21. Like the Roman church, the Corinthian church lived under the pressures of Greco-Roman culture and its derision of the gospel as **foolishness**.

<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

<sup>19</sup>For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God **made foolish** the wisdom of the world?

<sup>21</sup>For since **in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God**, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor. 1:18-21 NASB)

By examining this text along with Romans 1, we conclude that although unbelievers know God, they do **not** know him at the same time. They know who he is and something of his nature and being. They know that they are subject to his judgment because of their sin. But their knowledge of these things will not lead them to an understanding of how they can be in a right relationship with God, to know him sufficiently and efficiently in order to be saved. General revelation does not reveal God's plan of salvation. It is revealed only through the word of God preached.

In verse 21, Paul says that man's **wisdom** did not lead him to a saving knowledge of God. Creation efficiently and sufficiently revealed the nature of God. Man's conscience—also part of this creation—revealed the holiness of God and man's guilt and future punishment for violating His law. But man's sin rendered him incapable of coming to the **proper conclusion**:

(1) that he must worship and serve exclusively the true God made known in creation

(2) that he must be grateful to God

(3) that he must repent of his violations of God's law revealed in his conscience and throw himself at God's mercy for forgiveness and grace.

Romans 1 shows that men have not, and will never, come to **this conclusion** through unaided human reasoning. Paul suggests no reason for optimism in the entire passage.

The history of religion is not e-volution to a higher, more accurate consciousness of the true God, but de-volution, a downward spiral leading to the distortion of what man knows about God, to debauchery and death. And the evidence in Romans or elsewhere in the NT doesn't seem to lead to any other conclusion. Writing to Gentiles in the church of Ephesus, Paul says,

*remember* that you were at that time [*i.e. when you were dead in sin*] separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**. (Eph. 2:12 NASB)

Three conditions are mentioned in this passage rendering the Gentiles beyond the reach of salvation:



- (1) They were **separate from Christ**
- (2) **Excluded from the commonwealth of Israel**
- (3) **Strangers to the covenants of promise**

Lacking any of these forms of special revelation, the Gentiles had **no hope** and were **without God in the world**, and their condition remains hopeless today without the gospel. It is simply untrue that men can find God at any time and everywhere in the world. He should be able to do so, but he can't do so. His sinful heart causes him to **suppress the truth in unrighteousness** (v. 18).

Despite the exegetical evidence, Clark Pinnock, a supposedly evangelical theologian makes this comment in his book, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (1992):

Because of cosmic or general revelation, anyone can find God anywhere at any time, because he has made himself and his revelation accessible to them. This is why we find a degree of truth and goodness in other religions (p. 104).

Faith is what pleases God. The fact that different kinds of believers are accepted by God proves that the issue for God is **not the content of theology** but the **reality** of faith” (p. 105).

“What God really cares about is faith and not theology, trust and not orthodoxy (p. 112).”

Christian inclusivism teaches that although the atoning work of Christ is essential for the salvation of every human being without exception, it is not necessary for a person to consciously know about Jesus or his atoning work. So, although not pluralism, inclusivism at its very root *is* pluralism because one may be following another God and be saved through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. In other words, one can be saved through Christ without consciously knowing Christ or believing in him. The atoning work of Christ is applied to him irrespective of explicit faith in Jesus Christ. This would include sincere Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, animists, or any other religion that men may devise. We are back to Romans 1.

When Jews and Muslims, for example, praise God as the Creator of the world, it is obvious that they are referring to the same Being. There are not two almighty creators of heaven and earth, but only one. We may assume that they are intending to worship the one Creator God that we also serve (Pinnock, p. 96, emphasis mine).

...how can one fail to appreciate the noble aspects of the Buddha, whose ethical direction, compassion, and concern for others is so moving that it appears God is at work in his life?... how does one come away after encountering Buddhism and deny that it is in touch with God in its way? (Pinnock, p. 100, emphasis mine)

Pinnock seems to omit the historical fact that Buddha abandoned his wife and small child (never to return) to search for meaning in life. So much for his “compassion and concern for others.”

Faith is what pleases God. The fact that different kinds of believers are accepted by God proves that the issue for God is not the content of theology but the reality of faith (Pinnock, p. 105, emphasis mine).

This is but one of many examples of begging the question found in Pinnock's book. Not once does he give a sound exegesis of any Scriptural passage where God accepts "different kinds of believers".

Inclusivism has also been espoused by C. S. Lewis in *The Last Battle* and by Billy Graham in a 1998 interview with Robert Schuller. I am willing to give Graham and Lewis the benefit of the doubt. Schuller, on the other hand, has scarcely been right about anything.

In his book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior* (1994), Ronald Nash says that based on his observation of evangelical leaders and Christian college and seminary professors, the percentage of Christian inclusivists may be higher than 50%. He also estimates that 30% of evangelicals nation-wide would have inclusivist leanings.

However, in 1 Corinthians 1 Paul indicates that it was never God's intention in the first place that man would come to the proper conclusion without the aid of **special** revelation.

**In the wisdom of God** has been interpreted to mean "in the midst of the manifestation of God in creation". That is, man was surrounded by God's wisdom which was displayed in the wonders of creation, including man himself. Despite this display of wisdom, men did not read it correctly and did not come to know God. This is the interpretation of Charles Hodge, Calvin, Meyer, and others. Albert Barnes in his *Notes* acknowledges this as the most common interpretation, but rejects it in favor of another one, as does Gordon Fee.

**"In the wisdom of God"** may also be interpreted as God's **ordination** or **plan**. God never intended that men's observation of creation through unaided human reasoning would result in salvation. If human observation and reasoning had reached that destination, it would have produced the very thing the gospel was **designed** to destroy, the pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency of man. So then, **to prevent any opportunity for boasting**, God ordained a means of righteousness which eliminated this possibility. This, of course, begs the question of the necessity of the atoning work of Christ. Was there any other method of saving us at God's disposal? The answer would require a lengthy discussion, but the short answer is NO. There simply was no other way for God to be both just and the justifier of sinners. Christ's testimony is very clear on this point. "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (Lk. 24:26-27 NASB)

Paul asserts that it was within the province of God's own wisdom that he so arranged things. He does not explain how so here, but the reason seems clear. A God discovered by human wisdom will be both a projection of human fallenness and a source of human pride, and this constitutes the worship of the creature, not the Creator. The gods of the "wise" are seldom gracious to the undeserving, and they tend to make considerable demands on the ability of people to understand them; hence they become gods only for the elite and "deserving" (Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 72-73, emphasis mine).

This interpretation is consistent with the context of Paul's argument throughout 1 Cor. 1: 18-31 in which he develops the **antithesis** (contradiction) between the **wisdom** of man and the **foolishness**

of the gospel. If men had had their way, they would have devised an entirely different method of salvation based upon one of two things. For the Jews, God's favor would be earned through keeping the law. For the Greeks (as well as for eastern mystics like Gautama Buddha) ultimate reality, purpose, and meaning would have been understood through philosophical speculation. Paul was well-acquainted with the failure of his own people who had missed the righteousness of God by manufacturing a righteousness based on law-keeping. He was equally familiar with all the philosophical schools of Athens from Plato's idealism, Aristotle's empiricism, and Zeno's stoicism. All the philosophers and philosophical schools had failed in pointing men to God, leading Paul to say,

**Where is the wise man?** Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?<sup>21</sup> For since in **the wisdom of God** the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through **the foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe.<sup>22</sup> For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and **the wisdom of God**.<sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;<sup>27</sup> but **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise**, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,<sup>29</sup> **so that no man may boast before God.** (1 Cor. 1:20-29 NASB)

So, for four thousand years from Adam to Christ (I am a six-day creationist), God conducted a test of man's reasoning to see if it would come to a positive end—namely, a saving knowledge of God (cf. Barnes' comment below). The result of this test was never in doubt; yet, God proved experimentally that men would consistently fail to put 2 and 2 together to make 4. Even the Old Covenant administration with Israel was a foreordained, purposeful, methodological "failure" in bringing men to God but a success in proving that even in the best of revelatory circumstances amidst the miracles of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Israel still would not, and could not, believe in Him or keep His law because of inherent sin (see Hebrews 8 as well as Paul's statement of the law's failure in Romans 8: 3, "For what the law **could not do, weak** as it was through the flesh, God *did*.") Thus, a new administration of grace was necessary which consisted solely of the proclamation of a "**foolish**" message, first through the NT prophets and apostles, and now through the missionary outreach of the church, the only chosen mediums revealed in the Bible. If the Judaistic method of attempting to be right with God through law-keeping (the favored method of most, if not all, other world religions) failed to bring the Jews to salvation, then upon what basis do we claim that any other system of knowledge will be acceptable?

Likewise, even Plato and Aristotle—quite possibly the greatest philosophical minds of human history—failed to bring mankind to an understanding of meaning, purpose, and the underlying justification for human morality and virtue. The history of western philosophy is the history of dead-ends, failures, and self-contradictions. Barnes comments:

(1.) It was desirable that the powers of man should be *fully tried* before the new plan was introduced, in order to show that it was not dependent on human wisdom, that it was not originated by man, and that there was really need of such an interposition. (2.) Because *sufficient time* had been furnished to make the experiment. **An opportunity had been given for four thousand years, and still it had**

**failed.** (3.) Because the experiment had been made in the most favourable circumstances. The human faculties had had time to ripen and expand; one generation had had an opportunity of profiting by the observation of its predecessor; and the most mighty minds had been brought to bear on the subject. If the sages of the east [*e.g. Buddha in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Confucius in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC*], and the profound philosophers of the west [*e.g. Plato and Aristotle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC*], had not been able to come to the true knowledge of God, it was in vain to hope that more profound minds could be brought to bear on it, or that more careful investigation would be bestowed on it. The experiment had been fairly made and the result was before the world (*Barnes Notes, 1 Corinthians*, p. 17).

This is a profound statement, and it is a partial explanation of why God waited four thousand years from Adam to become incarnate in human flesh. It was to provide tangible, historical proof that men in their frail wisdom could not find their way to God even if given ample time, although they **should** have been able to do so and were **culpable** for failing. In His sovereign initiative, God the Spirit must hold them by the hand like little children and lead them to His Son, precisely why Jesus said that unless one becomes like a child, he would not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mk. 10: 15). To recalcitrant Jews, Jesus insisted that unless the Father sovereignly draws men to the Son, they **will not** come to him.

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.<sup>21</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."<sup>22</sup> "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the day of judgment* than for you."<sup>23</sup> "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day."<sup>24</sup> "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom *in the day of judgment*, than for you."<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, **that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.**"<sup>26</sup> "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. (Matt. 11:20-26 NASB)

Indeed, God has hidden the "things" pertaining to the kingdom of God from those who are "wise and intelligent" in their own eyes but has revealed them to "infants" (Matt. 11: 25). The Jews in Bethsaida and Chorazin beheld the miracles of Jesus and would not believe, and modern man beholds the wonders of the created world and will not believe.

**Stephen Hawking** was an English theoretical physicist, cosmologist (studied the origins of the universe), and author who was director of research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at the University of Cambridge at the time of his death. In his book, *Brief Answers to Big Questions*, published after his death, he said, "There is no god." He was also the author of the book, *The Theory of Everything*, which looked at all the major theories in the history of science and an exploration into a theory which would explain "everything", including the origin of the universe. Hawking died in 2018, finding to his dismay and sorrow that he had missed, not merely the **theory** of everything, but the **explicit answer** to everything in the universe found in the Bible. God hid himself from Hawking, and continues to do so from millions of brilliant, educated people while simultaneously revealing himself to African farmers, merchants, boda drivers, mothers and children who have little if any formal education. Even so, Father, for it seems good in your sight.

While Hawking searched for wisdom, the Jews in Jesus' day were looking for miraculous signs (1

Cor. 1: 22). Immediately after Jesus fed the 5000 with a few loaves of bread and a few fish, they approached him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

So they said to Him, "**What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You?** What work do You perform?"<sup>31</sup> "**Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness;** as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" (Jn. 6: 30-31)

"What do you do for a sign that we may see, and believe in you?"! Apparently, turning five loaves and two fish into enough food to feed five thousand **men**, not counting the **women and children**, was not sufficient evidence to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They required a sign **out of heaven**, like the giving of manna from heaven during the days of Moses. They wanted someone who would upstage Moses.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven."<sup>33</sup> "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."<sup>34</sup> Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."<sup>36</sup> "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."<sup>37</sup> "**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**"<sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."<sup>39</sup> "**This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.**"<sup>40</sup> "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."<sup>41</sup> Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."<sup>42</sup> They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves."<sup>44</sup> "**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.**" (Jn. 6:32-44 NASB)

It takes more than signs and wonders to bring sinners to Jesus Christ. The greatest miracle of all is the regenerated heart.

Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.**" (Jn. 6:28-29 NASB)

We should not be ashamed of our simple gospel; for in this "weak", "foolish" gospel, the wisdom and strength of God are demonstrated to be superior to man's reasoning. In the gospel God has joined together the educated and the uneducated, the brilliant and the mentally weak, the parent and the child (Matt. 19: 14). He has also brought together the rich, the poor, and all those in-between. And because of this, we should not allow our carnal desires for comfort, class status, and reputation for learning or wealth cause us to create churches which are mere replicas of the world. We should care nothing if the world regards us as poor and foolish, for apart from regeneration Christ will **always** appear this way to the world. Indeed, it was God's **intent** in the first place that man would not discover the way to Him through superior intellect and ethical performance. He has chosen the insignificant of this world to shame those who are wise in their own eyes.

Had God consulted us for wisdom we could have given him a more workable plan, something that would attract the sign-seeker and the lover of wisdom. As it is, in his own wisdom he left us out of the

consultation...Not from the world's "beautiful people," but from the lower classes, the "nobodies," God chose those who for the most part would make up his new people. Thus they themselves evidence the foolishness of God that confounds the wise...By bringing "good news to the poor" through his Son, God has forever aligned himself with the disenfranchised; at the same time he has played out before our eyes his own overthrow of the world's false standards. Every middle-class or upper-class domestication of the gospel is therefore a betrayal of that gospel (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 77, 78, 82; emphasis mine).

I have emphasized Fee's words, "for the most part", to point out that God has not left out the rich, educated, and members of the elite classes. However, Paul clearly indicates that among the Corinthians, and most likely in all the churches, "not many" fit into those categories.

But how often the church is tempted to craft a gospel message and an alien institution that goes with it which is domesticated by our love for personal peace, affluence, status, and in a word, self-worship. How much we desire a god made in our own image.

## **2. Just as general revelation reveals the existence and attributes of God, Scripture reveals the gospel, the way of salvation.**

We have explored the clarity of general revelation to reveal the existence and attributes of God, but is the Bible clear enough to reveal God's way of salvation? John Frame addresses this question.

...there is a legitimate distinction to be drawn within Scripture between what a person is required to *know* for salvation and what he is not. Nobody, would claim, for example, that a person will go to hell if he does not understand the difference between guilt offerings and trespass offerings in Leviticus. These are certainly "matters of salvation," but they are not matters that one must know in order to be saved...I would say that everything in Scripture is a "matter of salvation," that is, significantly related to salvation. But a person can be saved even if he does not know or understand some things in the Bible. **The clarity of Scripture pertains to those fundamentals that constitute a credible profession of Christ...**

Does Scripture itself warrant this doctrine of the clarity of God's written Word?

I will consider this question in terms of the lordship attributes. First, in relation to God's *control*: God is fully in control of his communications to human beings. When he intends to communicate with a human being, he is always able to do it successfully. But another name for successful communication is *clarity*. An unclear word is one that does not succeed, that fails to accomplish its purpose. But we know that God's word always accomplishes its purpose (Isa. 55: 10-11). Therefore, his word is always clear.

Why, then, do people fail to understand God's word? The ultimate answer is that God did not intend for them to understand. Note again God's commission to Isaiah, in 6: 9-10. God's word in Isaiah's mouth, oddly enough, brings dullness and a lack of understanding, not complete understanding. Jesus quotes this saying in Matthew 13: 14-15 to explain why he speaks in parables. Note also verses 10-13...

Jesus says here that he intentionally speaks in parables, which enlighten the disciples as to the mysteries of the kingdom, but hide those mysteries from those outside the circle. His words are clear to one group, unclear to another. They have exactly the power he intends them to have. He intends to communicate

to one group, so to them his word must be clear. To the other group, he does not intend to fully communicate; so to them the word is not clear.

The clarity of the Word, therefore, is selective. It is for some, not all. It is for those with whom God intends to fully communicate (John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pp. 204-205).

Thus, the sovereign purpose of God in not allowing men to know him savingly from observing **general revelation** also works with respect to **special revelation**. Just as the knowledge of God in general revelation is clear, the gospel is clear in special revelation, the word of God. But just as man suppresses the truth of God from creation in unrighteousness, he also suppresses the truth of God in Scripture in unrighteousness. But even this suppression of the truth is part of God's sovereign plan to hide the truth from some while revealing it to others. We will discuss this more in detail in Romans 9.

### 3. Our point of contact with unbelievers is the knowledge of God we share in common.

When speaking with unbelievers, the Christian is not placed in the predicament of proving to the unbeliever that God **probably** exists, followed by convincing proofs of his existence which are then exposed to the unbeliever's autonomous reasoning for either acceptance or rejection.

The unbeliever...ought to believe in God without any...argument at all, **simply on the basis of God's revelation in creation** (Rom. 1: 18-21...). If our task is simply to put the unbeliever into a position where he **ought** to believe, then we are best advised **to do nothing**, for he is in that position **already** (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 63).

If we needed a persuasive argument for the existence of God, is it not strange that God never gave us one within the pages of Scripture? Instead of an argument, we have declarations: that the heavens are declaring the glory of God (Ps. 19: 1), that only fools say that there is no God (Ps. 14: 1; 53: 1), and that men already know that God exists, know what he is like, and know that they are under his judgment for violation of his law (Rom. 1). It is not an argument for God that the unbeliever needs, but a reminder of what he already knows and suppresses in his unrighteousness.

However, this does not imply that the use of evidence is illegitimate, as if our argument is a small closed circle, "God exists because God exists" or "God exists because the Scriptures say that He exists." This would be unscriptural since Paul's argument in Romans 1 is that there is **clear evidence** for the existence and attributes of God exhibited in natural revelation. The problem is not lack of clear evidence; it is unbelief and suppression of God-given evidence. As Van Til would put it, every fact of the universe cries out for the existence of God, for there is no intelligibility in any fact which cannot be related to all other facts and eventually back to the God who created them. In other words, if God does not exist, then people, places, things, and events are random collisions of molecules which have come together by chance rather than by design. In such a chance world, we cannot talk about meaning, purpose, love, truth, good, evil, justice or injustice, since such things cannot really exist in a chance world made only of matter. Trillions of molecules bouncing around in the universe cannot produce these non-material things.

While **materialism** (everything is made of matter) may be the predominant philosophical opinion among unbelievers, including most scientists, there is not a single one of them who can practically

live by this “faith”. All of them believe in some kind of **morality** and some kind of **human dignity**. They will step on a cockroach but risk their lives pulling a small child out of a burning building; although, according to their materialistic philosophy, both children and cockroaches are products of chance and, therefore, without significance. They will also bury their loved ones when they die, but not cockroaches. Many will be faithful husbands and loving fathers. Most of them believe in some form of **love, kindness, and purpose**. However, none but believers can philosophically **account** for such beliefs. Love, kindness, human dignity, morality, and meaning are not material things which can be observed in a laboratory under a microscope or in outer space with a telescope; yet, in order to entertain any ultimate purpose for life, they must believe by faith (i.e. without visible evidence) that such things exist. (I will excuse, for the moment, the Muslim belief in Allah who presumably spoke through Mohammed. Then the argument is not about the existence of God but who he is and which “holy book” is really God’s infallible communication with men—a lengthy discussion. In short, I would summarize the argument by saying that the Bible will stand up against any other so-called communication from God.)

Unbelievers also believe in **cause and effect** which cannot be accounted for on the basis of a random collision of molecules. Scientific laws are mental constructs, not material things which may be observed. (Has anyone ever seen a scientific law?) Although we may observe men walking down the stairs a thousand times, we may not reason from **empiricism (observable events) alone** that it would be safer the next time to take the stairs rather than jump out of a third story window. Logical inference is non-material (not made of matter) and unobservable; a future event is also unobservable and not subject to empiricism.

Dodging the existence and attributes of God, as well as the logical inferences from an intricately designed universe, is like dodging a sandstorm. You can try to escape the direct path of a sandstorm, or deny that it exists, but it will catch up with you and smother you in its reality. Based on the inescapable reality of God, we may challenge unbelievers with the logical consequences of their insistence that there is no god or that if a god exists, he is not the God of the Bible; for the God of the Bible who has spoken to us in his Son is the only proper destination of any evangelism.

## Romans 2

<sup>1</sup>Therefore

**you have no excuse,**  
everyone of you  
who passes judgment,  
for in that which you  
judge another,  
you condemn yourself;  
for you  
who judge  
**practice the same things.**

<sup>2</sup>And we know

that the judgment of God  
rightly falls upon those  
**who practice such things.**



<sup>3</sup> But **do you suppose this, O man,**  
    when you pass judgment on those  
        **who practice such things**  
    and do the same yourself,  
    that you will escape the judgment of God?

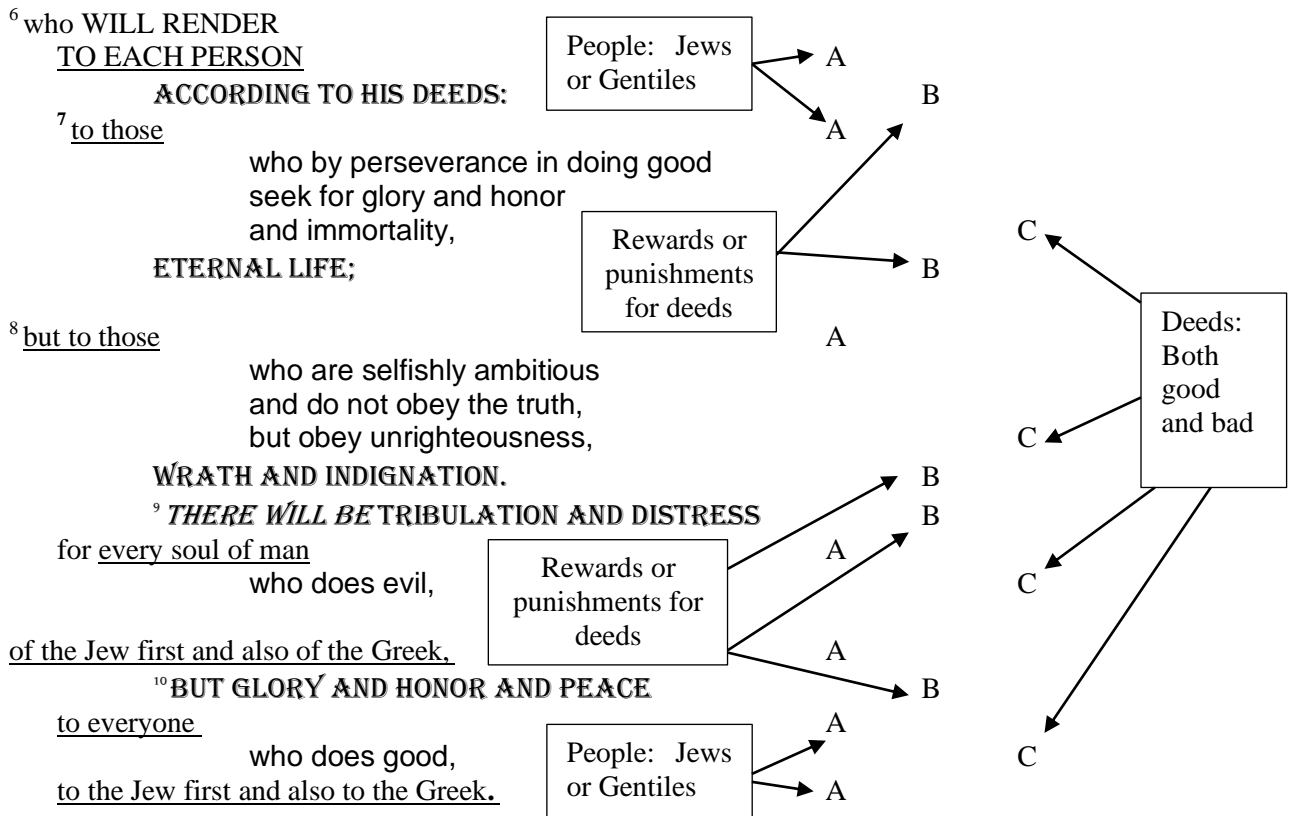
<sup>4</sup> Or **do you think lightly**  
    of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience,  
not knowing  
    that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Paul now addresses the hypocrisy of the Jewish membership in the church of Rome who are passing judgment upon the ungodly behavior of the Gentiles (described in Romans 1) while they themselves are guilty of the some of the same behavior. The **therefore** of v. 1 is difficult to understand in light of the literary context alone. “What is it there for?” That is, what has Paul said previously that would call forth his accusation of hypocrisy? All we can figure is that Paul knew something about church life at Rome to know that something was dead wrong. It appears that Jewish members were flaunting their Jewishness in the face of the Gentile membership so as to jeopardize the fundamental equality of both Jew and Gentile under the gospel. Although the priority of the Jew in receiving the gospel is clearly established in v. 16, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” this priority was not a permanent arrangement. The permanent arrangement had been established in Paul’s letter to the Galatians in which he obliterated any distinctions between Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free. Everyone was on the same level ground at the cross.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:27-29 NASB)

Moreover, as he clearly shows in the rest of the chapter, being a Jew by birth and being in possession of the Law was not the essence of genuine Jewry (v. 29). Rather, it was the fruit of obedience from the root of faith and love that really mattered. Those who judged others for sins which they themselves committed were merely passing judgment upon themselves, much as the Israelites of old had done, and were eventually spewed out of the land of promise and taken into exile. Even as OT Israel, the chosen people, had not escaped God’s judgment, the Jews in the Roman church would likewise not escape His judgment (v. 3). God had been patient and kind to those members involved in error—as He was undoubtedly to the Israelites—but His kindness was designed to lead them to repentance and renunciation of their sin, not as a license to continue in sin. Here in chapter 2, we get the first hint of Paul’s argument denouncing the antinomian tendency of some members who believed that justification by faith was a license to sin (chap. 6).

<sup>5</sup> But because  
    of your stubbornness  
    and unrepentant heart  
you are storing up wrath for yourself  
    in the **day of wrath**  
    and **revelation**  
        **of the righteous judgment of God,**



<sup>11</sup> For there is no partiality with God.

As we read this, we must keep in mind that Paul is writing to the church consisting of wheat and tares—the saved and the lost. The true church of Christ consists of those who are chosen out of the world and regenerated by the Spirit. They are justified and progressively sanctified, being continually conformed to the image of Christ and renewed to the true image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Col. 3: 10; Eph. 4: 24). They will one day hear the call of Christ and the trumpet and will be raised from the dead and united with their Savior (1 Thess. 4). This is what theologians call the “invisible church”—invisible to us but not to God. On the other hand, there is the visible church consisting of true believers as well as those who have outwardly responded to the gospel but inwardly remain unconverted. Jesus warned us that there would be various kinds of soil upon which the gospel seed would be sowed, but only one kind of soil would be prepared to receive the seed and produce abundant fruit. The other soils would produce temporary fruit which would eventually be choked out by temptations or scorched by persecution (Matt. 13).

Therefore, Paul, in the same genre as the author of Hebrews, offers **stern warnings** to those who imagine themselves as true believers while living in disobedience.

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, **so that we do not drift away from it.** <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, <sup>3</sup> **how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?** After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (Heb. 2:1-3 NASB)

Evidently, the gospel of pure grace and justification by faith had been misinterpreted by some in the church of Rome to mean that good works were irrelevant to the Christian life. But Paul makes it clear that one's deeds reflect who he really is, a child of God or an imposter. Moreover, deeds, not profession, would be the basis of the final judgment. While salvation was by grace alone through faith (Romans 4-5), judgment was according to one's **works**, consistent with the teachings of Christ.

"**Many** will say to Me on that day, '**Lord, Lord**, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, **YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS**.'<sup>24</sup> "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine **and acts on them**, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>25</sup> "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.<sup>26</sup> "Everyone who hears these words of Mine **and does not act on them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.<sup>27</sup> "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell-- and great was its fall." (Matt. 7:22-27 NASB)

**Many** will profess the name of Jesus on **that day**, namely, the day of judgment; but the criterion of judgment is not what they have done in terms of personal ministry, but whether they have submitted their lives to the moral law of God expounded by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Likewise, the one who **hears** Jesus' words must also **act** upon those words. Hearing is not equivalent to believing; only acting upon those words is the proof of genuine belief.

In the Bible, **wrath** (v. 5) is associated with God's judicial (legal) punishment of professing believers and unbelievers alike who live in disobedience.

The **princes of Judah** have become like those who move a boundary; On them I will pour out My wrath like water. (Hos. 5:10 NASB)

"But **the children** rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, *if* a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness. (Ezek. 20:21 NASB)

"O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *have become* a reproach to all those around us. (Dan. 9:16 NASB)

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,<sup>8</sup> DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,<sup>9</sup> WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.<sup>10</sup> "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';<sup>11</sup> AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"<sup>12</sup> Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (Heb. 3:7-12 NASB)

"I will also cut off the cities of your land And tear down all your fortifications.<sup>12</sup> "I will cut off sorceries from your hand, And you will have fortune-tellers no more.<sup>13</sup> "I will cut off your carved images And

your *sacred* pillars from among you, So that you will no longer bow down To the work of your hands.  
<sup>14</sup> "I will root out your Asherim from among you And destroy your cities. <sup>15</sup> "And **I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath** On the nations which have not obeyed." (Mic. 5:11-15 NASB)

"I will pour out My wrath on Sin, The stronghold of **Egypt**; I will also cut off the hordes of Thebes. <sup>16</sup>  
"I will set a fire in **Egypt**; Sin will writhe in anguish, Thebes will be breached And Memphis *will have*  
distresses daily. (Ezek. 30:15-16 NASB)

A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on **His adversaries**, And He reserves wrath for **His enemies**. (Nah. 1:2 NASB)

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for **because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience**. (Eph. 5:5-6 NASB)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is **because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience**, <sup>7</sup> and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. (Col. 3:5-7 NASB)

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup> and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and **from the wrath of the Lamb**"; <sup>17</sup> for **the great day of their wrath has come**, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17 NASB)

You get the idea. However, genuine believers are not ultimately destined for wrath, but for blessing.

For God **has not destined us for wrath**, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Thess. 5:9 NASB)

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him**. (Rom. 5:9 NASB)

For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, **who rescues us from the wrath to come**. (1 Thess. 1:9-10 NASB)

**Storing up wrath** (v. 5) is coordinate with v. 6, **who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS**. God is a just judge who takes every unforgiven sin into account. Those who continue in an unrepentant state (v. 5, **because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart**) are adding fuel to the fire of their own judgment in **the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**. Paul could be quoting from Ps. 59: 18; 62: 12, or Jer. 25: 14.

And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord, For You recompense a man according to his work. (Ps. 62:12)

'(For many nations and great kings will make slaves of them, even them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.)'" (Jer. 25:14 NASB)

Jesus quotes from the OT in Matthew,

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

It is simply not true that God's punishment in hell will be the same for everyone. It would be unjust for a thief to get the same punishment as a murderer, and it would be unjust to put a man to death for accidentally killing someone. Offenders did not get the same punishment under Mosaic Law.

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. (Exod. 22:1 NASB)

"For every breach of trust, *whether it is* for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, *or* for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. (Exod. 22:9 NASB)

"If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. (Num. 35:30 NASB)

"Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously—<sup>5</sup> as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live; (Deut. 19:4-5 NASB)

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> "But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. <sup>14</sup> "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from My altar, that he may die. (Exod. 21:12-14 NASB)

As God repaid offenders **according to their deeds** in the OT, so in **the day of wrath** He will repay according to their deeds. Jesus said that it would be more tolerable for Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon on the day of judgment than for Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum.

"Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you." (Matt. 11:22-24 NASB)

Likewise, it will be more tolerable (or less intolerable) on the day of judgment for Muslims in Saudi Arabia and Buddhists in China who have not heard the gospel than for Africans and Americans who have rejected it. This is the **inviolable law of sowing and reaping**.

"And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive **many lashes**,<sup>48</sup> but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but **few**. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Lk. 12:47-48 NASB)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. <sup>8</sup>For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Gal. 6:7-8 NASB)

On the other hand, **according to his deeds** may also have a positive meaning:

<sup>7</sup> **to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.**

In Ephesians 6,

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup>not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. <sup>7</sup>With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, <sup>8</sup>**knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.** (Eph. 6:5-8 NASB)

Believers will be rewarded according to their good deeds. It is equally erroneous to believe that God will reward every believer in the same way in heaven. Some believers have sacrificed their lives for the gospel, but others have been more preoccupied with earthly pursuits. Think of the labors of the apostle Paul, Hudson Taylor in China, Adonirah Judson in Burma (modern day Myanmar), William Carey in India, and the thousands of nameless missionaries and pastors who have died for their faith in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and China. Compare these to Christians who live relatively comfortable, affluent lives in the US. We should not minimize their faith as if it doesn't count. God loves them and will save them, but He will not reward them as much as others who have truly sacrificed themselves for the gospel, including African pastors who labor with little or no pay from their congregations. God will also reward African Christians who give their tithe to help pastors and the poor within their own congregations, and He will withhold reward from those who have not been generous to others.

As unbelievers **store up wrath**, believers **store up treasures in heaven.**

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup>for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19-21 NASB)

While only **eternal life** is mentioned as the reward in Rom. 2: 7, Jesus mentions something besides eternal life. For how does one store up **more** eternal life? Eternal life is eternal. You can't store up more eternity. But you can store up more heavenly treasures for eternity, and Jesus encourages us to do so. He is giving believers an incentive to place **less** importance upon this life and the treasures of this life and more importance upon eternal life and heavenly treasures. The prosperity gospel reverses this emphasis. It encourages us to seek earthly treasures.

Throughout this section, Paul makes it clear that the critterion of reward or condemnation is the same for **each person** (v. 6), referring to Jew and Gentile. **The criterion is works.** Considering that the primary burden of the letter is the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith and not the

works of the law, Paul's argument may appear self-contradictory. But while the criterion of **judgment and reward** is works, the criterion of salvation is **faith**. We must allow the distinction between what a man **earns** and what he **receives** as a gift. Christians earn rewards in heaven, but they do not earn regeneration, justification, and sanctification which are gifts of grace leading to those rewards. However, even with the distribution of earned rewards, we must understand that rewards are grounded in God's grace. Apart from grace, the Christian could produce no good works.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing**. (Jn. 15:5 NASB)

Likewise, unbelievers earn the **wages of sin** which is death, and they earn the exact measure of judgment which is appropriate to their guilt. We must also allow Paul to develop his thought gradually throughout the letter. He does not begin a formal explication of salvation by grace through faith until chapter 3.

We have already seen what Jesus says about the retributive justice of God in Matt. 16: 27, but this verse is not exceptional in the NT.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'<sup>35</sup> **For** I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;<sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' ...

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;'<sup>42</sup> **for** I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;<sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' (Matt. 25:34-36, 41-43 NASB)

The **for** in each of these passages is an "explanatory for" clarifying the King's distribution of reward or punishment. The sheep do good deeds while the goats neglect good deeds—sins of omission which carry the same punishment as sins of commission.

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,<sup>29</sup> and will come forth; **those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment**. (Jn. 5:28-29 NASB)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his **deeds** in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men,<sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. (Eph. 6:7-8 NASB)

Both Jesus and Paul are simply describing the **character-consequence sequence** of those who have either been saved by grace with the resultant good deeds or the character-consequence

sequence of those whose hearts have remained unrepentant, resulting in bad deeds or neglect of good deeds. A person **is** as he **does**.

Moreover, the priority of either reward or condemnation is given to the Jew who was the **first** to receive God’s special favor in ancient days and the **first** to receive the gospel in the first century. However, this priority of reception provides no advantage to the Jew on the day of judgment, but rather, greater responsibility and culpability. This leads to the anticipated assumption on the part of Paul’s audience that there is no advantage to the Jew whatever, something Paul denies at the beginning of chapter 3. For now, he continues to strengthen his argument that both Jew and Gentile are evaluated on the same basis: obedience or disobedience to the law, NOT on the basis of possessing the Law or not possessing it.

<sup>12</sup>For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

**For** offers further explanation of the impartiality of God (v. 11), who will render to **each person**—Jew and Greek—according to his deeds. The impartiality with respect to person does not rule out the recognition of the relative difference between Jew and Greek in salvation history. While the Jew was in possession of the special revelation of the Law of Moses, the Greek was not. Thus, while God will extend no special excuse to the Greek who does not have the Law, His judgment of his sin will nevertheless take his “law-less” status into consideration (cf. Murray, p. 70).

Those **who have sinned without the Law** (namely, the Law of Moses) will nevertheless **perish without the Law**, that is, without any exposure to the written Law of Moses. Paul does not mean to say that the Gentiles had had no exposure to the moral law of God whatsoever, only that the written Law of Moses delivered through special revelation had not been given to them and that they had not lived under the Mosaic Covenant, which, he maintains in chapter 3, was an **advantage...great in every way**. But this did not excuse the Greek from God’s judgment. As Paul has thoroughly explained in chapter 1, the Gentiles well understood the moral attributes (**ordinances**) of God—though not in the same detail as the Israelites—but suppressed this truth in unrighteousness. They also understood that those who violated the ordinances of God were **worthy of death**. Therefore, they would **perish**. As he often does, Paul speaks in Hebrew parallelism

<sup>12</sup> For <u>all who have sinned</u>	A	
<b>without the Law</b>		B
will also <u>perish</u>	A	
<b>without the Law,</b>		B
and <u>all who have sinned</u>	A	
<b>under the Law</b>		B
will be <u>judged</u>	A	
<b>by the Law;</b>		B

Later, Paul says that **sin is not imputed when there is no law**. Nevertheless, **death reigned from Adam until Moses** (5: 13), thus proving that God’s law was present in some form or another to implicate man in sin. This form is soon to be identified as **the work of the Law written in their hearts** (2: 15). Here, in v. 12, it is clear that there are those who **sinned** without living **under** the institution and implementation of the Mosaic Law or covenant. They sinned without having



possession or awareness of the Mosaic Law. Moreover, they will **perish** eternally without having or being **under** the Mosaic administration, proving the reality of the **imputation of sin** before the Mosaic Law as well as the imputation of sin upon those who will never live under it. Being without the Law does not excuse men from judgment; it merely mitigates (lessens) their judgment. Contrarily, those who sinned **under the Law** (the Jews) **will be judged** under the administration of that Law with greater culpability.

<sup>13</sup> for

<i>it is not</i> <b>the hearers of the Law</b>	A	
<i>who are just before God,</i>		B
but <b>the doers of the Law</b>	A	
<u>will be justified.</u>		B

<sup>14</sup> For

when Gentiles who do not have the Law		C	
<b>do instinctively the things of the Law,</b>			D
these, not having the Law,		C	
<b>are a law to themselves,</b>			D

<sup>15</sup> in that

<b>they</b>		C	
<b>show the work of the Law written in their hearts,</b>			D
their conscience		C	
<b>bearing witness</b>			D
and their thoughts		C	
<b>alternately accusing or else defending them,</b>			D

<sup>16</sup> on the day when,

according to my gospel,  
 God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Verse 13 supports Paul's previous insistence that mere possession of the Law of Moses was no advantage to the Jew. Hearing the Law read in the synagogue is not equivalent to doing the Law. Only **doers of the Law will be justified**. The statement is true as it stands, supported by Jesus' own response to the rich ruler.

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; **but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.**" <sup>18</sup> Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; <sup>19</sup> HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Matt. 19:16-21 NASB)

But we are not to suppose that either Jesus or Paul is presenting **works of the law** as a practical method of being justified or inheriting the kingdom of God. The nation of Israel had already proven that it could not be done. While it is theoretically true that a person could be right with God by being a **doer of the Law**, it is never presented in the OT or NT as a practical possibility.

Theoretically, if I strapped bird-like wings to my arms and flapped them hard enough and fast enough, I would be able to fly; but given my genetic make-up as a man rather than a bird, I would never be capable of flying. Likewise, given our sinful constitution, saving ourselves through perfect obedience is not an option. It would be the equivalent of flying like a bird.

So why does Paul even mention it? Only because the Jews had come to believe that there was something inherently commendable in **possessing the Law and hearing it read**; perhaps the same kind of merit some Christians imagine when they attend church and listen to sermons. Somehow, God is satisfied if they listen to them whether or not they practice what they hear. Sorry. Hearing the truth without doing it does not succeed in obtaining right standing before God.

Continuing with this argument, Paul says that Jews are not the only people with moral consciousness, a sense of right and wrong. Therefore, they are not anything special in this regard. Even Gentiles who do not have the Law often **do instinctively the things of the Law**, that is, they “do **by nature** the things of the Law”. Unbelievers are often honest in the market place, good to their wives, husbands, and children. Many are hard-working, industrious, and cooperative—sometimes more than believers. We should expect such behavior even from those who have never been exposed to the Bible because they are made in the image of God—just as we would expect all birds to fly because of their constitution as birds. Flying is what birds do. Exhibiting some limited measure of goodness and morality is what humans do because they are God’s image-bearers; they are not animals. **The work of the Law is written in their hearts**. Paul is careful not to attribute the same thing to unbelievers that is attributed to elect Christians and Jews who have the law written on our hearts according to the promise of the New Covenant.

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "**I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer. 31:33 NASB)

"FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: **I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS**. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (Heb. 8:10 NASB)

The intent of this promise is that the **believer**, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, will have the disposition, will, and desire to keep God’s law as it is etched into his conscious being. Paul says that we are being renewed day by day to true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Our greatest motive will be to love and please God by keeping His law as it applies to every action. Our chief goal will be God’s glory and the advancement of his kingdom on earth. Our attitude toward the law is that of the psalmist who says, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Ps. 119:97 NASB)

The unbeliever cannot have the law written on his heart in this sense. On the other hand, he often demonstrates **the work of the law** in his heart through outward subscription or submission to its demands—e.g., marital fidelity and honesty in the marketplace. As the law was inscribed on tables of stone in the Mosaic economy restraining sin and producing external obedience, the work of the law is impressed upon the heart of the unbeliever producing some external obedience.

This statement is not a contradiction of what Paul has said about mankind in chapter 1. Men are totally depraved (chapter 3) in that every faculty of their being is affected by sin, including their minds, but they are not as bad as they could possibly be. Moreover, not all men are equally bad. Some are **worse** than others, and some are **much worse** than others depending upon the measure and operation of God's common grace within them. Thus, in Romans 1, Paul is not describing every single individual as being the same. If it were not for the retraining influence of the **work of the law** on their hearts, life on earth would be unbearable.

In v. 15, the **conscience** of the unbeliever **bears witness** to this work of the law in that he is constantly excusing or accusing his own behavior as good or bad. Every human being in every culture in every period of human history has some sense of right and wrong. And this sensibility is not because he has been exposed to the written law of God in the Scriptures. It is because of his **nature** [*phusis*] as a human being . People all over the world feel either guilt or self-satisfaction from their actions. Animals do not. The reason people feel guilty is because they have violated deep convictions about what is good or bad. When Christ returns (v. 16), there will be no need for man's self-judgment. Christ himself will expose all his sins.

<sup>17</sup> But if **YOU**

    bear the name "Jew "  
    and rely upon the Law  
    and boast in God,  
    <sup>18</sup> and know *His* will  
    and approve the things that are essential,  
        being instructed out of the Law,  
    <sup>19</sup> and are confident that you yourself  
        are a guide to the blind,  
        a light to those who are in darkness,  
        <sup>20</sup> a corrector of the foolish,  
        a teacher of the immature,  
            having in the Law  
                the embodiment of knowledge  
                and of the truth,

<sup>21</sup> **YOU**, therefore,

who teach another,  
        **do you** not teach yourself?

**YOU**

who preach that one shall not steal,  
        **do you** steal?

<sup>22</sup> **YOU**

who say that one should not commit adultery,  
        **do you** commit adultery?

**YOU**

who abhor idols,  
        **do you** rob temples?

<sup>23</sup> **YOU**

who boast in the Law,  
    through your breaking the Law,  
        **do you** dishonor God?

<sup>24</sup> For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED  
AMONG THE GENTILES  
BECAUSE OF YOU,"

just as it is written.

That Paul has directed his accusation primarily against **Jewish** hypocrites becomes evident in v. 17 where **Jew** is explicitly mentioned. The Jewish nation, and now apparently a large Jewish segment of the Roman church, had **boasted** in their rich heritage. Being recipients of the Mosaic Law, they considered themselves capable of tutoring the Gentiles in living a good life; but while possessing the theory of righteous living, they fell short of the practice, including adultery, theft, and the literal robbing of pagan temples (Murray, p. 84; cf. Acts 19: 37).

Paul doesn't attempt to be exhaustive in his vice-list. Undoubtedly, these were just a few of the infractions of the Law by professing Christian Jews in Rome. In keeping with the failures of OT Israel and the Jews during Christ's ministry, professing Jewish Christians in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century were now providing pagan Gentiles similar occasion to blaspheme the name of God. God's reputation suffers from the reputation of His children. It is doubtful that Paul was accusing the whole Jewish community of wide-spread and systemic violation of the law of God in these particular sins. More likely, a little leaven was leavening the whole lump of bread. The incestuous man in Corinth was not representative of the whole Corinthian church; nevertheless, his behavior obviously had a negative spiritual impact on the whole congregation as well as detracting from the glory of Christ within the broader community of Corinth.

The problem in Corinth, and perhaps in Rome, was that the obedient Christian community had done nothing about the sin prevailing in the church.

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.<sup>2</sup> You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. (1 Cor. 5:1-2 NASB)

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?<sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (1 Cor. 5:6-7 NASB)

We can only speculate since Paul does not mention church discipline, or the lack of it, in his Roman letter. It very well could be the case that the sins of adultery and theft were rampant in the church at Rome; and certainly, the whole tenor of the chapter seems to indicate this possibility. If so, there is nothing new under the sun. The 21<sup>st</sup> century church does the same through serial adultery (multiple marriages based on non-biblical reasons), sexual immorality (including pornography and homosexuality among professing Christians), questionable business and legal practices in which legal loopholes and manipulation are used to confiscate property, preoccupation with "personal peace and affluence" (Francis Schaeffer's assessment of 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture). The name of our God is ridiculed among unbelievers who scarcely see the difference between Christian and non-Christian **behavior** or Christian and non-Christian **values**. Small wonder that the church has not made more progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. But in the meantime, God is still building His kingdom—sometimes in spite of us.

<sup>25</sup> For indeed

<u>circumcision</u> is of value	A	
<b>if YOU practice the Law;</b>		B
<b>but if YOU are a transgressor of the Law,</b>		B
your <u>circumcision</u> has become <u>uncircumcision</u> .	A	
<sup>26</sup> <b>So if the UNCIRCUMCISED M&amp;N keeps</b>		
<b>the requirements of the Law,</b>		B
will not <u>his uncircumcision</u> be regarded as <u>circumcision</u> ?	A	
<sup>27</sup> <b>And HE WHO IS PHYSICALLY UNCIRCUMCISED,</b>		
<b>if he keeps the Law,</b>		B
will he not judge YOU	A	
<b>who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision</b>		
<b>are a transgressor of the Law?</b>		B

**Religious rituals** prescribed by God always had value; otherwise, God would never have commanded them in the first place. They are tangible, sensory signs of our belonging to God as His covenant people. However, when those rituals—circumcision and the Passover, now replaced by baptism and the Lord’s Supper—take on an inherent efficacy (worth) all their own apart from the reality of what they represent, they lose their intended value. Circumcision’s purpose was to remind God’s people that they were set apart from the pagan world. It was a sign of the removal of sinful flesh through the regenerating power of the God’s Spirit (Ezek. 37: 14). Like circumcision, baptism now symbolizes the removal of sin’s pollution.

<sup>11</sup>and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup>having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

<sup>13</sup>When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (Col. 2:11-13 NASB)

Thus, Moses exhorts Israel to do something he knew they were not capable of doing, to circumcise their hearts, followed by Jeremiah roughly 850 years later.

"So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. (Deut. 10:16 NASB)

"Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." (Jer. 4:4 NASB)

Therefore, since circumcision represents the removal of sinful behavior, the uncircumcised man who is obedient to the law actually possesses the circumcision of heart to which external circumcision pointed (v. 26). And if such a man is keeping the law, will he not have more occasion to judge the circumcised but disobedient Jew rather than the other way around (v. 27)?

In the explanation which follows in vv. 27-28 preceded by **For**, Paul will clarify what he means in vv. 25-27. He is not teaching that uncircumcised Gentiles were actually capable of keeping the law; but that, theoretically, if they *were* capable, then their uncircumcised status as law-keepers would be superior to the circumcised status of disobedient Jews. Throughout the chapter—arguably one of the most difficult in the NT—Paul has been eroding the presumption of Jewish

superiority for having the Law and circumcision. Paul maintains that without obedience, they provide no advantage.

The application of this principle for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that Christian pedigree and external rituals are valuable only to the extent that they represent the actual condition of those who possess them. Take baptism, for example. Baptism is a symbol of one's union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6). It is valuable to the one who possesses the reality of this union but not to the one who merely went through the outward ritual of baptism. Moreover, millions who grow up in the church are confident that they are secure because they are the fourth, fifth, sixth (?) generation of children who have "always" been Christians. Yet, their behavior does not support their claim. While it's wonderful to be part of a fifth generation church-going family, membership in the church and baptism does not secure one's place in heaven.

<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**,  
nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

<sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew who is one **inwardly**;  
and circumcision is that which is of the heart,  
by the **Spirit**,  
not by the **letter**;  
and his praise is not from men.  
but from God.

Several important points emerge in these two verses.

1. The genuine Jew both in Paul's day and in ancient Israel was never produced by circumcision of the flesh but by circumcision of the heart. The internal requirement of heart regeneration was no different in the Old Covenant as it is in the New Covenant. Later in Chapter 11, Paul will speak of the true Israel as "the remnant according to God's gracious choice." While God elected the nation, He did not elect every individual Jew within the nation. In the same way, we cannot produce Christians through baptism. Baptism is merely the external sign of death to sin and resurrection to life. It is not the reality. Why then, do we baptize? Because God wanted us to have a tangible sign of our union with Christ. We still need symbols.

2. As there was a visible and invisible church in the Old Covenant—an Israel according to the Spirit within the Israel according to the flesh—there is still in the New Covenant an invisible church of true believers within the visible church consisting of believers and unbelievers.

3. Genuine circumcision in the OT was by the Holy Spirit, not by human effort. Although physical circumcision was commanded in the Law (**by the letter**), circumcision of the heart could not be accomplished with physical hands but only **by the Spirit**.

4. Consequently, boasting in the religious ritual of circumcision done with human hands is eliminated and, along with it, the **praise** one receives because of external compliance with the law.

We are reminded of other Pauline statements to the same effect.

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the **false circumcision**;<sup>3</sup> for we are **the true circumcision**, who worship **in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh**,<sup>4</sup> although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:<sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;<sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.<sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, **those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ**.<sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,<sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (Phil. 3:2-9 NASB)

For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised **so that they may boast in your flesh**.<sup>14</sup> But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.<sup>15</sup> **For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.** (Gal. 6:13-15 NASB)

### Romans 3

<sup>1</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

<sup>2</sup>Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

From the preceding discussion in chapter 2, the reader might conclude that since there is no advantage in being a Jew in the final judgment, then there were no advantages to the Jews period. Moreover, since genuine circumcision is spiritual circumcision of the heart then there is likewise no advantage to physical circumcision. Paul flatly denies these conclusions in v. 2 without any elaboration. He saves his elaboration for chapter 9—11. Here, he merely says that their advantage is **Great in every respect** followed by the first and greatest advantage: **they were entrusted with the oracles of God**. In other words, the first and greatest of all the advantages to the Jews was the fact that He gave them His word. We should not limit **oracles** to the prophetic pronouncements of the prophets but to everything God had revealed to Israel by way of **special** revelation. Moses himself had highlighted this very advantage long ago.

"Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:8 NASB)

Later in chapter 9, Paul will also mention other advantages: “the **adoption as sons**, and **the glory and the covenants** and the giving of the Law and **the temple service and the promises**,<sup>5</sup> whose are **the fathers**, and **from whom is the Christ** according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:4-5 NASB) It is possible that he intended to extend his list of advantages from v. 1, but his thought was interrupted with a series of objections which needed urgent rebuttal beginning in v. 3. Nevertheless, had he only intended the **first** advantage, the word (**oracles**) of God, it would have been sufficient to silence those who minimized God’s favor to the Jews in past times. What other nation, indeed, had God given His written word? Did he give it to the most powerful civilizations on earth: Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Incan, Aztec, et al all of whom made tiny, insignificant Israel pale in comparison? No, he gave it to a shepherd people despised in the eyes of the world.

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> **"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,** <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:6-8 NASB)

The question of the advantage of circumcision also brings up the question of other religious rituals in the church, baptism and the Lord's supper (cf. Murray, p. 92). If circumcision and observance of the Passover (not mentioned in the text) did not save the Jews from God's judgment, and if baptism and the Lord's supper **do not save** from God's judgment, then why practice them? The answer is simple: Because the Lord commanded them. As Paul will argue subsequently, the faithlessness of the Jew in believing and obeying what circumcision symbolized does not negate the importance of the sensible sign in pointing him to the necessity of repentance and regeneration.

Likewise, the Christian is blessed with two sensible, tangible signs which point him to the necessity of continuing repentance, faith, and fellowship with God. Through his baptism, he knows that there is continuing need for dying to sin and living to righteousness and that he is no longer the old man he once was but the new man in Christ who has the spiritual resources to say no to sin. If he is not continuing to resist sin, baptism reminds him that he may not be the new man he claims to be. The Lord's supper reminds him that he is in fellowship with God and invited to his table, but at the same time it reminds him that if he is living in sin, he is not welcome at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11) and may very well be a false believer.

<sup>3</sup> **What then?**

If some did not believe,

their unbelief  
will not nullify  
the faithfulness of God,  
will it?

A

B

C

<sup>4</sup> May it never be!

D

Rather, let God be found true,  
though every man *be found* a liar,  
as it is written,  
"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED  
IN YOUR WORDS,  
AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

E

<sup>5</sup> But if our unrighteousness  
demonstrates the righteousness of God,

**what shall we say?**

The God who inflicts wrath  
is not unrighteous, is He?  
(I am speaking in human terms.)

A

B

C

<sup>6</sup> May it never be!

D

For otherwise, how will God judge the world?

E

<sup>7</sup> But if through my lie



the truth of God abounded to His glory. B  
 why am I also still being judged  
 as a sinner? C

<sup>8</sup> **And why not say**  
**(as we are slanderously reported**  
**and as some claim that we say),** A  
 "Let us do evil  
 that good may come " C  
 Their condemnation is just. D

This is another very difficult section in Romans. In these verses, Paul argues against the objection that the unbelief and faithlessness of the Jewish people effectively negate (**nullify**) God's faithfulness (vv. 3-4). Second, it is objected that if **our unrighteousness** (specifically, the unrighteousness of the Jew) **demonstrates the righteousness of God**, then God would be unrighteous if he punished the very behavior which sets his righteousness in bold contrast with man's unrighteousness. To put it a different way, why should God punish their sin if their sin displayed the glory of His holiness (vv. 5-7).

The objections are not unrelated to what Paul has just said in v. 2. The first and greatest benefit of the Jews is that they were entrusted with God's word, a word that included all of God's **promises of blessing** to Israel. And since Israel didn't believe, these blessings appear to have fallen to the ground, thus nullifying God's promises and, and therefore, His faithfulness. The objection and the rebuttal are stated more clearly in Romans 9 and 11.

**But it is not as though the word of God has failed.** For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; <sup>7</sup> nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." <sup>8</sup> That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Rom. 9:6-8 NASB)

I say then, **God has not rejected His people, has He?** May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup> God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*, how he pleads with God against Israel? <sup>3</sup> "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." <sup>4</sup> But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." <sup>5</sup> In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. (Rom. 11:1-5 NASB)

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. In Chapter 2, in answer to the first objection, Paul simply says, "God is never unfaithful. He is always reliable in what he says." But what, exactly, did He say? What did He say to the Jews? Did He say that they would always be the recipients of unending and unconditional blessings, or did He say that they would be blessed if they remained true to the covenant stipulations and cursed if they didn't? It is absolutely true that God is faithful; but He is faithful to **all** His promises, promises of curse as well as blessing. This is abundantly clear in the history of Israel in which God poured out blessing upon blessing when they were faithful to believe His word and keep His commandments but also was faithful in cursing Israel when they abandoned His covenant law. He had warned them ahead of time of this double promise in the reenactment of

the giving of the law in which the blessings were spoken upon Mount Gerizim and the curses from Mount Ebal (Deut. 27-28).

Thus, when Paul answers the anticipated question about whether Israel's faithlessness nullifies God's faithfulness, namely, the promise of blessing, Paul says, "May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" followed by **the supporting testimony of Scripture**, Ps. 51, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED." But how does David's testimony support Paul's rebuttal?

As the transcription of Ps. 51 shows, the psalm is David's response to Nathan's rebuke after his sin of adultery and murder. In the encounter with Nathan (2 Sam. 12), he had been informed of God's multiple curse against him: the child by Bathsheba will die, "the sword shall never depart from your house": Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar and is subsequently murdered by Absalom. Absalom flees and is never reunited to David except deceptively to steal the kingdom away from David. Absalom rebels and rapes David's concubines in broad daylight (also specifically prophesied). He is subsequently murdered by Joab. Adonijah conspires to take the crown away from Solomon and is subsequently executed by his own brother. Not all these curses had occurred by the time Ps. 51 was written, but at least one had, the death of his first child by Bathsheba, prophesied by Nathan. Although David **had been found a liar**, God had remained **faithful** to His promise of curse. For David was not above the Law of God but under it and rightly subjected to its stipulations and conditions.

Paul summarizes the second objection in v. 8 when he repeats an actual quotation of his opponents in Rome who accuse him of teaching antinomianism, "Let us do evil that good may come." The objection has the same substance as that in Rom. 6: 1 and is very similarly stated, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" His answer to both questions is the same, **May it never be!** Here in chapter 3, the specific objection raised is that God would be **unrighteous** (v. 5) to **inflict wrath** on those whose **unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God**. Man's wickedness provides God an opportunity to display his **righteousness** by highlighting His perfection against the backdrop of man's sin, much like the beauty of the stars is highlighted against the blackened sky. Paul dismisses this absurd notion with **I am speaking in human terms** followed by his characteristic unequivocal negation, **May it never be!** or in some translations, "God forbid!"

**For** (v. 6b) introduces the reason for the dismissal of this objection: **how will God judge the world?** In other words, if God is unrighteous or unjust in judging men for doing something (namely, sinning) which highlights the glory of His righteousness, then this would make it impossible for Him to judge the world, for His judgment would render Him unrighteous.

Verse 7 is a repetition of the objection of v. 5 (Moo, p. 193). **My lie** does not refer to a specific lie but to the universality of man's character as **liar** in v. 4. Verses 5a and 7 are parallel thoughts.

<sup>5</sup> But if our **unrighteousness**  
demonstrates the righteousness of God,  
what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?

<sup>7</sup> But if through my **lie**  
the truth of God abounded to His glory,  
why am I also still being judged as a sinner?

This is followed by the summary conclusion of the objection in v.8, in their own words, “**Let us do evil that good may come**” and Paul’s summary judgment, **Their condemnation is just.**

What follows is a section of Scripture detailing what theologians label as “total depravity”. Most of the verses are from the Psalms with one from Isaiah (Ps.14: 1-3; 53: 1-3; 5: 9; 140: 3; 10: 7; Isa. 59: 7; Ps. 36: 1).

<sup>9</sup> **What then?**

Are we better than they?

Not at all; for we have already charged  
that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

<sup>10</sup> as it is written,

**"THERE IS NONE**

**RIGHTEOUS,**

NOT EVEN ONE;

<sup>11</sup> **THERE IS NONE**

**WHO UNDERSTANDS,**

**THERE IS NONE**

**WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;**

<sup>12</sup> **ALL**

**HAVE TURNED ASIDE,**

**TOGETHER**

**THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;**

**THERE IS NONE**

**WHO DOES GOOD,**

THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

<sup>13</sup> "THEIR THROAT

IS AN OPEN GRAVE,

WITH THEIR TONGUES

THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"

"THE POISON OF ASPES

IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";

<sup>14</sup> "WHOSE MOUTH

IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";

<sup>15</sup> "THEIR FEET

ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

<sup>16</sup> DESTRUCTION AND MISERY

ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

<sup>17</sup> AND THE PATH OF PEACE

THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."

<sup>18</sup> "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD

BEFORE THEIR EYES."

Consistent with his purpose so far, Paul applies this description to both Jews and Gentiles. **We** (we Jews) are not better than **they** (the Greeks or Gentiles). **All are under sin.** With such a hopeless description, Paul is laying the groundwork for his doctrine of justification by faith alone in chapters

4 and 5 and the sovereign grace of God which underlies it. Man is universally, fundamentally, hopelessly, and irrevocably flawed. He must be recreated.

Contrary to the opinion of most westerners, men are not basically good: THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE. The notion that all men are looking for God and finding Him in their own way on their own terms—per Clark Pinnock—is flatly denied in this passage as confirmation of Paul’s teaching in Romans 1. The direction of man’s religious aspirations is not evolution from less truth to more truth but devolution from the truth of God seen in creation to false religion and blatant denial of what God has revealed about Himself. Men simply don’t want to know this God: THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD, that is, for the true God. He has already revealed Himself in creation but to no avail. Men suppress this truth in unrighteousness. And because they don’t want to know him, God gives them over to their own stupid speculations and sinful behavior. They are incapable of doing good in the ultimate sense of the word: THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. This is confirmed in Rom. 8: 17 when Paul says, **because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.** To please God, one must keep His law out of love for God and man and for the purpose of glorifying the one and only God. This, unregenerate man cannot do.

Verses 13-17 continue the description with emphasis on specific sins: lying and deception often leading to murder (**poison of asps**), blasphemy and the intent to murder and harm others. Man’s life is full of chaos and hatred (the opposite of **peace**), destruction, harm because **there is no fear of God before their eyes.**

Small wonder then that if man is to be saved, he must be saved by grace.

<sup>19</sup> Now we know

that **whatever the Law says, it speaks**  
to those who are under the Law,  
so that

every mouth may be closed  
and all the world may become accountable to God;

<sup>20</sup> because

by the works of the Law  
no flesh will be justified in His sight;  
for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

**Whatever the Law says** refers to the quotations from the Psalms and Isaiah in vv. 10-18. The **Law** in these verses refer not to the Law of Moses but to the whole OT. Jesus uses the term in the same way,

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 7:12 NASB)

"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. (Matt. 11:13 NASB)

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. (Matt. 5:17 NASB)

In the last quotation, Jesus says that He did not come to abolish the OT or the prophetic witness of the OT, but to fulfill the promises and predictions of the OT.

Scholars are divided in the identification of **those who are under the Law** (3: 19). On the one hand, Paul has just made multiple quotations from the Jewish OT; therefore, he could be referring only to Jews (Moo, Morris). Support for this interpretation is that **under the Law** is usually a designation for the Jewish people who were under the law of Moses. The terminology is different in v. 19 which says **those who are in [en] the Law** not **under [hupo] the Law**, but I'm not sure if we can determine the meaning from this single word.

The context of verse 9 may be more significant in solving the problem.

What then? Are we [*i.e. we Jews*] better than they [*i.e. the Gentiles*]? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; (Rom. 3:9 NASB)

This is followed by **as it is written** and a list of quotations describing men under sin, as if to say, "All the OT descriptions of man's depravity were meant to apply universally, not just to Jews." The natural conclusion from the context is that **both Jews and Greeks are all under sin** and that both are described from the OT quotations. The matter seems to be cinched by the conclusion of man's universal accountability in v. 19, **so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God**. This is universal language. Every argument (**every mouth**) pretending to excuse anyone from condemnation, Jew or Gentile, from is shut.

In v. 20, the phrase **because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight** supports Paul's conclusion in v. 19 that all men are accountable to the judgment of God. They cannot be justified (declared right with God) on the basis of works because the performance of **works** sufficient for justification is lacking. This clear negation eliminates any interpretation that the **doers of Law will be justified** (2: 13) was a practical possibility. (It is merely theoretical except for the perfect Son of God who actually earned our salvation by fully keeping the terms of the Mosaic Covenant.) The denial of **works of the law** as a means of justification is found twice in Romans and three times in Galatians (in one sentence), making this doctrine one of the clearest in the NT.

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith **apart from works of the Law**. (Rom. 3:28 NASB)

<sup>16</sup>nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and **not by the works of the Law**; since by **the works of the Law no flesh will be justified**. (Gal. 2:16 NASB)

The Law will not justify; it will not declare a man to be guiltless or in a right standing with God. What it **will** do is define sin. It will tell us what is required of us to be pleasing to God.

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." (Rom. 7:7 NASB)

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the Law  
**the righteousness of God has been manifested,**

being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,  
<sup>22</sup> even **the righteousness of God**  
through faith in Jesus Christ  
for all those who believe;  
for there is no distinction;

In verse 21, Paul returns to the theme of God's **righteousness** introduced in 1: 16-17. God's righteousness is both the (1) **activity** of God in bringing men into a right relationship with Himself as well as (2) the resultant standing or position of the sinner in this restored relationship. It is both the activity of God and the result of His activity.

**...through the Law comes the knowledge of sin, but now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested.**

While the Law brings to us the knowledge of our sin without putting us in a right standing with God, the gospel "makes clear" (**manifest; phanerōō**) how this relationship may be restored. The **now** of v. 21 does not imply that the way to God had never been known. The writer of Hebrews says that the **good news** had been preached to the OT Israelites, using a form of the same word used in Romans 1: 16

For indeed we have had **good news preached** [*uaggelizō*] to us, **just as they also**; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Heb. 4:2 NASB)

For I am not ashamed of the **gospel** [*uaggelion*], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16 NASB)

However, the **but now** refers the manner in which this righteousness of God was presently being revealed, namely, through the incarnation and sacrificial death of Christ (Murray, pp. 108-109). This method of revealing God's righteousness was unique to this particular time in salvation history never before matched by the **witness of the Law and the prophets**. While the OT witness to the gospel was clear enough to be perceived and believed, leaving those who heard it either justified or without excuse, the NT manifestation of this righteousness of God is something new.

But how was the righteousness of God **witnessed by the Law and the prophets? The Law and the prophets** represent the entire OT revealing the progressive unfolding of redemptive history. All the types and shadows of the OT pointed to Christ: the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22; the story of Joseph being sold for silver, yet saving the twelve tribes of Israel; the exodus from Egypt; the OT sacrifices; the Passover; the prophetic witness found in prophecies like Isa. 53.

He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. <sup>4</sup> Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (Isa. 53:3-5 NASB)

This witness of the law and the prophets prompted Christ to say to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus,

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!<sup>26</sup> "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them **the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** (Lk. 24:25-27 NASB)

The word **Law** is used in two different senses in v. 21. The witness of the Law refers to the witness of the OT whereas in the phrase **apart from the Law**, the word means apart from the **Law of Moses**.

But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for **apart from the Law** sin is dead.<sup>9</sup> I was once alive **apart from the Law**; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; (Rom. 7:8-9 NASB)

**The commandment** in these verses definitely refers to the Law of Moses which commands and demands. Murray comments on Paul's fluid use of the word "law" in his epistles.

We have here an instructive example of the ease with which the apostle can turn from one denotation [meaning] of the word "law" to another. The righteousness that is unreservedly without law in one sense of the word "law" is, nevertheless, witnessed to and therefore proclaimed by the law in another sense of that term. Law in one sense pronounces the opposite of justification, the law in another sense preaches justification. (*Romans*, p. 110).

The words **apart from** are one word in Greek meaning "separate from". Thus, **apart from [separate from] the Law [of Moses]**, the activity of God in bringing us into a right relationship to Himself has been clearly revealed through the gospel.

In v. 22, **righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ** corresponds to **through the Law comes the knowledge of sin** (v. 20). In both verses **through** is *dia* (by means of, or through the instrumentality of). Just as we come to know our sin **through** the instrumentality of the law, right standing with God comes **through** the instrumentality of faith in Jesus Christ. The proper function of these two things are distinct, prompting Paul elsewhere to say, "However, **the Law is not of faith**; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." (Gal. 3:12 NASB) Here we see that there is a definite content to the gospel. It is not faith in faith or faith in whatever god, or religion we might be inclined to choose. Only faith in Jesus Christ will suffice, prompting the clarion call for missionaries in chapter 10.

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation.<sup>2</sup> For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.<sup>3</sup> For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. (Rom. 10:1-3 NASB)

**For all those who believe; for there is no distinction** points once more to Paul's argument that when it comes to salvation, there is only one way for both Jews and Greeks. **All those who believe** in this gospel will be saved, regardless of nationality, **for there is no distinction** between Jew and Greek in terms of the means of **righteousness**. It is by faith in Christ for both.

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Verse 23 indicates that there is also no distinction between Jew and Greek in terms of need. As **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, then men of every nationality and people group need the righteousness which comes on the basis of faith. **Fall short of the glory of God** means that men have failed to reflect the wonder and splendor of God's perfection as His image-bearer. God made man in his image to reflect his glory in the material world of creation. Because of the fall he has failed to do this, but has reflected, instead, a marred image of corruptible man. It is a serious offense to deny God his right to be glorified.

<sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Read together, vv. 22 and 24 make perfect sense without v. 23, leading me to believe that v. 23 may be a parenthetical statement.

<sup>22</sup>even *the righteousness [dikaiosune]* of God **through faith** in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction

(<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,)

<sup>24</sup>**being justified [dikaioo]** as a gift by His grace **through the redemption** which is in Christ Jesus

Looking at the Greek words for **righteousness** and **being justified**, we see that **being justified** is the activity of God in declaring us righteous. **Through faith** is the instrumental means of receiving this righteousness, not as wages earned, but as **a gift by His grace**. **Through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus** is the instrumental means of God's activity in making us righteous. **Redemption** is presented in the Bible as a purchase price or ransom price.

"If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold. <sup>26</sup>Or in case a man has no kinsman, but so recovers his means as to find sufficient for its **redemption**, <sup>27</sup>then he shall calculate the years since its sale and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and so return to his property. (Lev. 25:25-27 NASB)

"And what one nation in the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem for Himself *as* a people, to make You a name by great and terrible things, in driving out nations from before Your people, whom You **redeemed** out of Egypt? (1 Chr. 17:21 NASB)

In Him we have redemption **through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7 NASB)

For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. <sup>23</sup>You were **bought with a price**; do not become slaves of men. (1 Cor. 7:22-23 NASB)

**Bought** is *agorazo*, to purchase in a marketplace. The blood of Christ is the purchase price for our redemption from the slave market of sin.

<sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly  
as a **propitiation** in His blood  
through faith.



This was to demonstrate

**His righteousness,**

because in the forbearance of God

He passed over the sins previously committed;

<sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, I say,

of **His righteousness**

at the present time,

so that

He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

While redemption implies our liberation from bondage, **propitiation** has reference to our release from God's wrath (Murray, p. 116). God's wrath is the divine response to man's disobedience, rebellion, and moral pollution. It is a concept wholly alien to the modern conception of God as love who remains indifferent to man's sin while responding deferentially to his needs and wants. God's anger was manifested in the flood and the total destruction of the world's population at the time. It is manifest in the brokenness of humanity (Rom. 1), war, famine, disease (Covid 19), storms, earthquakes, and everything men would preferably term "natural disasters" having no purpose. The temporal manifestations of His wrath are given as a measure of His grace and as warnings to repent. God restrains His anger and does not punish mankind to the full measure of His sins but is patient and forbearing.

The Passover meal in Exodus was a propitiatory sacrifice in which the blood of the lamb was applied to the doors of Israelite houses so that the angel of death—the agent of God's wrath—would pass over the houses of the Israelites. The blood would avert or turn away the wrath of God who would look with **satisfaction** on the sacrificial blood. "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9: 22b).

It should be noted that Christ is not presented in 3: 25 as the One who **initiates** propitiation but is Himself the propitiatory sacrifice. While the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons with different roles to play in the drama of redemption, they work together in coordination to accomplish it. Christ is not depicted in Scripture as the one who must pacify an angry Father who longs to pour out his wrath upon a disobedient humanity. ("I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Ezek. 33: 11). Rather, God the Father **sends** the Son and **displays** Him **publicly** as a propitiation (satisfaction) in His blood.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and **sent His Son to be** the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:10 NASB)

How would the bloody, violent display of Christ on the cross **demonstrate** God's **righteousness** if righteousness is defined as the activity of God in putting man in a right relationship with Himself? Thus far in salvation history, God had **passed over the sins previously committed** (v. 25). This phrase has been pressed into service to prove the doctrine of universalism in that God did not punish the sins of mankind before the cross. But this is a dangerous misinterpretation of the phrase. Paul is speaking with respect to the sins of God's people under the Old Covenant (Haldane, *Romans*, p. 151). That is, before the sacrifice of Christ, He had not punished the sins of His people to the full extent of His justice but had allowed lesser propitiatory sacrifices in the form of animals to turn away His wrath for the time being. The sacrificial system had been provided for the Israelites as a temporary means of averting the wrath of God until such a time when the perfect

sacrifice of Christ would serve the purpose of His justice for all time. **At the present time**, God displayed Christ, God in the flesh, as the propitiation of His wrath and as a **demonstration** that He was **just** in forgiving man's sins. Sin had to be dealt with, and He punished it to the full extent of His wrath. But at the same time, He demonstrated His **righteous activity** in putting sinners in a right relationship with Himself. That is, He was not only **just** by punishing sin, but also **justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus** as his substitute. He was also a God of mercy.

As sinners with limited understanding, we have little capability of understanding the problems related to God's justice and mercy. It was a complex problem, one God chose not to solve in the wink of an eye but over the space of 4000 years from Adam to Christ.

<sup>27</sup> Where then is boasting?

It is excluded.

By what kind of law? Of works?

No, but by a law of faith.

<sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith  
apart from works of the Law.

<sup>29</sup> Or is God *the God* of Jews only?

Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also?

Yes, of Gentiles also,

<sup>30</sup> since indeed God who will justify  
the circumcised by faith  
and the uncircumcised through faith

is one.

<sup>31</sup> Do we then nullify the Law  
through faith?

May it never be!

On the contrary,

we establish the Law.

Such a demonstration of God's righteousness excludes boasting. By what **law** is boasting excluded? Here, again, Paul uses another nuance of the meaning of law as "principle." On the principle of works, boasting would not be excluded because men would be made right with God on the basis of performance. But if the "principle" in operation is one of **faith**, boasting is eliminated; righteousness is then based on believing in the performance of someone else whose sacrifice turned away the wrath of God.

Again in v. 28, Paul repeats the good news **that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law**. Not only a **Jewish man**, but **any** man, Jew or Gentile. There is only one God who created the world of men, Jew and Gentile, and this one God devised only one means of justification for all men.

Given the fact that all are justified by faith **apart from works of Law** (v. 28), one may conclude that **we then nullify the Law through faith**. Paul denies this with his characteristic negation, **May it never be!** Far from nullifying the law through our faith, we **establish the Law** by affording it the proper function—to inform us of sin. He does not carry this idea into Romans 4, but he will pick it up again in chapters 6, 7, and 8.

## Romans 4

In Romans 2—3, the one means of justification has been established—not by works of law, but by faith. In Romans 4 Paul presents the historical verification of justification by faith in the life of Abraham, father of the Jewish nation but also father of all who believe. Thus Abraham unites both Jewish and Gentile believers.

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham,  
our forefather according to the flesh,  
has found?

<sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works,  
he has something to boast about,  
but not before God.

<sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say?  
"ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD,  
AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

<sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works,  
his wage is not credited as a favor,  
but as what is due.

<sup>5</sup>But to the one  
who does not work,  
but believes in Him  
who justifies the ungodly,  
his faith is credited as righteousness,

Had Abraham been justified by obedience to the law of God (**works**), then he would have had grounds for boasting. However, the phrase, **but not before God**, shows that this was not the case at all in the life of Abraham. **Abraham believed God**, that is, he believed what God said to him, that he would have a son from his own body and that his offspring would eventually number as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15). In the NASB, the word **it** refers to Abraham's belief. His belief in God's promise was **credited to Him as righteousness**. It is clear from Paul's analogy in vv. 4-5 that **work** and **faith** are two separate grounds for righteousness which may not be combined (Rom. 11: 6). Upon the basis of works, salvation is bestowed as a **wage** which is earned; but upon the basis of **faith**, salvation is granted as an undeserved **favor** or gift. Abraham is described as one **who does not work** but one who **believes**. Paul will return to Abraham later, but now uses David as another illustration of faith-righteousness in opposition to works-righteousness.

<sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks  
of the blessing on the man  
to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup>"BLESSED ARE THOSE  
WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS  
HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,  
AND WHOSE SINS  
HAVE BEEN COVERED.

<sup>8</sup>"BLESSED IS THE MAN  
WHOSE SIN  
THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

Paul is quoting from Ps. 32 which is David's recollection of God's chastisement during and after his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the deceitful coverup, and Uriah's murder.

When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.<sup>4</sup> For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. Selah.<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. (Ps. 32:3-5 NASB)

Using this quotation, Paul effectively illustrates the grace of God extended to David, the adulterer/liar/murderer, who was far from deserving God's favor through works, but rather, was earning the **wages** of His wrath and condemnation. Nevertheless, David repented of his sin and received God's forgiveness by faith knowing that there would be nothing he could do to atone for his own sin. The sequence in David's life was sin-confession-forgiveness—the same sequence we find in 1 Jn. 1: 9—not sin-works-forgiveness. Moreover, by David's example, Paul demonstrates that salvation by faith apart from works was not discontinued with the implementation of the Mosaic Covenant. While living under the Mosaic Covenant—and deserving its curse for adultery and murder—David resorted to the promise motif of the Abrahamic covenant by believing in God's mercy toward faithless sinners.

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him. (Ps. 32:10 NASB)

Continuing with Abraham, Paul then reminds his readers that Abraham's faith in God's promises was credited to him as righteousness **before** he received circumcision. He was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him after God had appeared to him in a dream (Gen. 15). He was 99 years old when he was circumcised. A considerable length of time passed between the declaration of his righteousness by faith and his circumcision. The timing had important implications for Jewish Christians in the first century who were still confused about the relationship between salvation and circumcision. Many converts from the sect of the Pharisees were insisting that circumcision was necessary for salvation (Acts 15: 1). The controversy required a council of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to determine the status of Gentiles in the church and what was required of them.

Their conclusion was that Gentile Christians did not have to become proselyte Jews in order to become Christians. Galatians, I believe, was written by Paul **before** the council of Jerusalem as a comprehensive refutation of works-righteousness independently formulated apart from consultation with other apostles (cf. Gal. 2). His independence on the Gentile question is part of his proof of apostleship received directly from Christ apart from any formal connection with Peter, James, and John. We find a taste of this previous refutation here in Romans 4 (compare Gal. 3).

As one who was justified by faith before circumcision, Abraham becomes the paradigm (model) for all believers—both those who have been circumcised and those who haven't.

<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then  
on the circumcised,  
or on the uncircumcised also?

For we say,  
"FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

<sup>10</sup> How then was it credited?

While he was circumcised,  
or uncircumcised?

Not while circumcised,  
but while uncircumcised;

<sup>11</sup> and he received the sign of circumcision,

a seal of the righteousness of the faith  
which he had while uncircumcised,

so that he might be **the father**

**of all who believe without being circumcised,**

that righteousness might be credited to them,

<sup>12</sup> and **the father**

**of circumcision**

to those who not only

are of the circumcision,

but who also

follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham  
which he had while uncircumcised.

Paul is careful not to prejudice the reader either in the favor of circumcision or against it. As far as being right with God was concerned, it was neither an asset nor a liability, neither a contribution to justification nor a barrier to it (Murray, *Romans*, pp. 138-139). Abraham was the father of all uncircumcised believers as well as all those who were circumcised who walked in his faith-steps. The defining factor was faith, not circumcision.

<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants

that he would be heir of the world

was not through the Law,

but through the righteousness of faith.

<sup>14</sup> For

if those who are of the Law are heirs,

faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

The explanatory **for** at the beginning of v. 13 alerts us to Paul's continuing focus on Abraham's faith apart from works. This purpose might be better appreciated through familiarity with Jewish 1<sup>st</sup> century teaching highlighting Abraham's obedience, not his faith. In this distorted Jewish understanding of Abraham's significance in salvation history, "his righteousness and mediation of the promise were linked to his obedience, it even being argued that he had obeyed the law perfectly before it had been given" (Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p. 256).

Abraham received the **promise** before the giving of the Law of Moses 430 years later, but **Law** in v. 13 could mean the moral law of God in general which had been made known to man from the very beginning of creation. Cain had violated God's law concerning sacrifices and then murdered his brother. After he was banished from Eden, he was convinced that capital punishment would be invoked by anyone in the general population or specifically from the avenger of blood (Gen. 4: 14; cf. Num. 35: 25, 27; Deut. 19: 6, 12), indicating that murder had always been a capital offense. Abraham himself was told to live blamelessly before God (Gen. 17: 1). It was not as though

Abraham was lawless. Walking blamelessly before God meant that he should walk according to His law.

Yet, Paul is adamant in repeating his initial thesis that law-keeping was not the basis for Abraham receiving the promise (Gen. 15). Had it been so, then the principle of works-righteousness would have **nullified the promise**. How so? Because the promise was founded upon **God's performance and not Abraham's**. The writer of Hebrews refers to God's oath to Abraham after his willingness to sacrifice Isaac.

... "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,<sup>17</sup> indeed **I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore**; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. (Gen. 22:16-17 NASB)

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,<sup>14</sup> saying, "**I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.**"<sup>15</sup> And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.<sup>16</sup> For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute.<sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,<sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. (Heb. 6:13-18 NASB)

Upon the surface, it appears that this promise of blessing and descendants is secured through Abraham's obedience—"**because you have done this thing...**"—but an examination of Genesis 15 indicates that the promise of both descendants and land had been secured many years (perhaps almost 40 years) previous to the Isaac event (Gen. 22) through God's unilateral oath/promise to Abraham. A unilateral covenant obligates only one party, not two; in this case, God obligated himself only in the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."<sup>2</sup> Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."<sup>4</sup> Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> And He took him outside and said, "**Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.**" And He said to him, "**So shall your descendants be.**"<sup>6</sup> **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**<sup>7</sup> And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it."<sup>8</sup> He said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?"<sup>9</sup> So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." (Gen. 15:1-9 NASB)

Immediately after the promise of Gen. 15:5 is made, Abraham requests some tangible confirmation of the promise, "**how may I know that I will possess it?**" followed by the enactment of an ancient suzerainty treaty with God as a smoking oven and flaming torch walking between the pieces of slain animals taking upon Himself the curses of a broken covenant if he fails to accomplish all that He had promised Abraham (15: 9-21). The promise of Gen. 15 is identical to that of Genesis 22. Occurring before the sacrifice of Isaac, it is foundational to Abraham's faith. On the basis of God's oath against Himself enacted in the treaty, Abraham knew that even if he put Isaac to death, God

would raise him from the dead to fulfill His promise of descendants and land and to be true to His oath. Dead sons don't father children; therefore, Isaac must live.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; <sup>18</sup> it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." <sup>19</sup> He considered that **God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.** (Heb. 11:17-19 NASB)

Therefore, it was Abraham's faith, not his works, that are primarily in view in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. The story is a continuation of Gen. 15: 6, **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.**

<sup>15</sup> for the Law brings about  
    wrath,  
but where there is no law,  
    there also is no violation.

<sup>16</sup> **For this reason**  
    *it is* by faith,  
**in order that**  
    *it may be* in accordance with grace,  
**so that**  
    the promise will be guaranteed  
    to all the descendants,  
        not only to those who are of the Law,  
        but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham,  
        who is the father of us all,

In verses 15-25, Paul continues his argument that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. He also continues the thesis that this method of justification was not exclusively for Abraham, but for all who walk in the faith steps of Abraham, Jew and Gentile, right down to the present day. Justification by faith was necessary because the other method of justification, keeping the law, results only in God's **wrath** (cf. Eph. 2: 3; Rom. 1: 18). The Law brings about wrath because it simply stipulates what is required and what penalty will be applied if the conditions are unmet, but offers nothing to the sinner in terms of compliance, ability, motive, or forgiveness, etc. The Law kills, but the Spirit gives life. This is why Paul later says,

For what the Law **could not do**, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (Rom. 8:3 NASB)

The weakness in the Law is not inherent (within). The Law reflects the holiness and purity of God. It is **holy, righteous, and good** (Rom. 7: 12). Its weakness is **through the flesh**, that is, our flesh as fallen human beings.

**Where there is no law, there also is no violation** may be another reference to the **increase of transgression** after the written law of God was promulgated (published) at Sinai.

The Law came in **so that the transgression would increase**; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (Rom. 5:20 NASB)

How did the publication of the law at Sinai **increase** sin? It did so by making the express will of God known to the sinner who now sinned against a clearly written command. It is the same idea found in 5: 13-14.

for until the Law sin was in the world, but **sin is not imputed when there is no law**.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned **in the likeness of the offense of Adam**, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Rom. 5:13-14 NASB)

Sinning **in the likeness** of Adam's offense is sinning against the published will of God. God told Adam not to eat of the fruit. Sinning against the moral will of God revealed in nature also incurs God's wrath, as we see clearly in Rom. 1. **Death reigned from Adam until Moses**; therefore, sin must have been **imputed** and God's wrath against sin poured out during that period—demonstrated in death's reign. But sinning against God's published or written will is worse. The disobedient slave who didn't know his master's command will be punished less severely than the one who knew it.

"And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,<sup>48</sup> but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Lk. 12:47-48 NASB)

Jesus is speaking primarily to His covenant people who are now rejecting his word. Even as the OT Israelites were **more** culpable (more guilty and blamable) than the Gentiles because they had received the Law of Moses and the Gentiles didn't, those in Jesus' day were even more culpable than the OT Israelites because they rejected the incarnate word who could be seen with human eyes and heard with human ears. The greater the light rejected, the greater the guilt and punishment.

Therefore, what Paul may be saying in v. 15 is this: Far from being the means of obtaining the promise, the Law actually produced the opposite effect through the sins of disobedience; it brought about more **wrath** from an offended God. The Jews in Paul's day who were looking to law obedience as the means of being right with God failed to reckon with their history. Their ancestors did not obtain the promise through keeping the Law—their actions produced only wrath—but Abraham obtained it simply by believing what God had said. Law is not the pathway to the promise; **faith is**. This was no fault of the Law whose pathway should have led to blessing and life but the fault of sinners whose disobedience incurred wrath, not blessing.

At this point in the argument, Paul has not addressed the antinomianism ("easy believism") of those who thought that justification by faith issued them a license to keep sinning. He addresses this problem in Romans 6. The present issue is: how is a person justified?

**For this reason** in v. 16 refers to Paul's statement in v. 15 that the Law resulted not in the procurement (obtaining) of the promise but brought down the wrath of God. Therefore, he says, since Law was not the pathway to promise, this pathway must be **by faith...in accordance with grace**. Moreover, this method of salvation opens the way to everyone, even those who have never heard of Moses nor lived under the administration of Mosaic Law. In other words, had the promise been according to Law rather than by grace through faith, then everyone, including Gentiles, would



have had to become Jews to be saved. As it is, all of Abraham’s true **descendants** will be included in the promise, those who have no association with Moses and also those who are **of the law**, i.e. Jews who lived under the law’s administration.

This is not the first time Paul has explicitly identified believing Gentiles as the **descendants** of Abraham along with believing Jews (cf. Rom. 2:28-29 NASB). Moreover, the promise is **guaranteed** to all who receive it by faith because it is based on the reliability of God’s oath against Himself (Gen. 15). This is far from the uncertainty and precariousness of the Israelite nation whose continuing presence in the land was contingent on their obedience to the Law.

Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "**All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!**"<sup>8</sup> So Moses took the blood and **sprinkled it on the people**, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exod. 24:7-8 NASB)

Notice that the blood of the covenant is sprinkled **on the people** (probably the tribal leaders as representatives), but the blood of the covenant in Gen. 15 is not sprinkled upon Abraham, who is asleep during the covenant ceremony. It is applied symbolically to God. Also notice that at Sinai the people call down upon themselves the curse of the covenant if they fail to keep it. The covenant ceremony in Exodus takes the form of a typical, bilateral treaty between two parties rather than a unilateral treaty made by one party. Continuing presence in the land was contingent on their obedience to the Law, an obedience they could not produce because they did not believe.

This brings us back to the obedience of Abraham in Gen. 22. His obedience did not produce his faith; his faith produced his obedience. Moreover, his continuing obedience was the product of continuing faith. There is one sense in which we may say that his obedience to the truth was **guaranteed** because his faith was **guaranteed**, even as Jesus said to Peter,

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;<sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail... (Lk. 22:31-32a NASB)

Peter failed, but his **faith** did not ultimately and finally fail. In the same way, the promise is guaranteed to all Abraham’s true descendants, Jew and Gentile, who believe—and keep on believing—what God has said. The Law alone will not and cannot produce the kind of faith that will not fail.

<sup>17</sup>(as it is written,

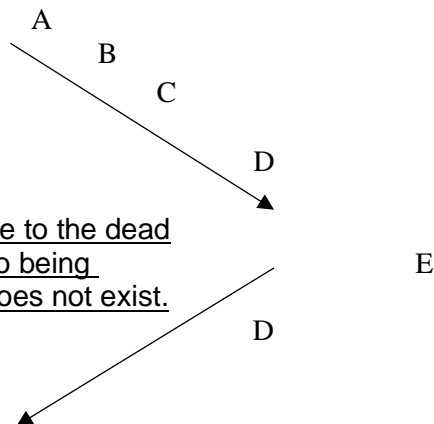
"A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS  
HAVE I MADE YOU")

in the presence of Him  
whom he believed,

Center of **chiastic  
structure**  
emphasizing  
God's sovereignty

even God,  
who gives life to the dead  
and calls into being  
that which does not exist.

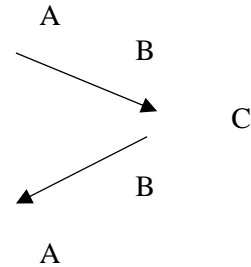
<sup>18</sup>In hope against hope  
he believed,



so that he might become  
 A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS  
 according to that which had been spoken,     A  
 "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

C  
B

<sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in faith  
 he contemplated his own body,  
     now **as good as dead**  
     since he was about a hundred years old,  
     and the **deadness** of Sarah's womb;  
<sup>20</sup> yet, with respect to the promise of God,  
he did not waver in unbelief  
but grew strong in faith,  
 giving glory to God,  
<sup>21</sup> and being fully assured  
 that what God had promised,  
 He was able also to perform.



Center of **chiastic**  
**structure**  
 emphasizing  
human weakness

<sup>22</sup> Therefore  
 IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

<sup>23</sup> Now not for his sake only was it written  
     that it was credited to him,  
<sup>24</sup> **but for our sake also,**  
     to whom it will be credited,  
     as those **who believe in Him**  
     **who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**  
     <sup>25</sup> *He* who was delivered over  
         **because** of our transgressions,  
     and was raised  
         **because** of our justification.

This section is further confirmation of Abraham's faith as the prototype of **every** believer's faith, Jew or Gentile. According to God's promise, Abraham became the father of **many nations**, not just the one Jewish nation.

"No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. (Gen. 17:5 NASB)

This promise is fulfilled spiritually in the coming of the Gentile nations to faith in Christ. It is mentioned by Paul in this connection as a parenthetical comment as if to say, "By the way, the inclusion of the Gentiles is implied even in Abraham's name and is explicitly mentioned in God's promise to Abraham." In other words, this was always God's plan. Ending the parenthesis, Paul describes Abraham's faith as consisting in the conviction that God **gives life to the dead** and **calls into being that which does not exist**. The first phrase could refer to Abraham's firm belief that even if Isaac were put to death as a sacrifice, God could raise him from the dead (cf. Heb. 11: 17-19); but most likely it refers to the deadness of Abraham's and Sarah's bodies for the purpose of generating physical offspring. The second phrase likely refers to the promise of Isaac from Sarah's womb. That both phrases refer to this supernatural birth is supported by the context of vv. 19-21.

From the chiasmic structure of the text (shown above) we note the most important structural element (E) **God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist** in the center of the chiasm. (The word *even* does not appear in the Greek text, as the NASB indicates by placing the word in italics). **Have...made you** is perfect indicative. According to Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*,

The force of the perfect tense is simply that it describes an event that, completed in the past (we are speaking of the perfect indicative here), has results existing in the present time (i.e., in relation to the time of the speaker). Or, as Zerwick puts it, the perfect tense is used for “indicating not the past action as such but the present ‘state of affairs’ resulting from the past action.” (cited from *BibleWorks* 10).

Therefore, God's sovereign action in the past of declaring Abraham the father of many nations—long before this becomes reality—produces during Paul's day and ours the present result of Abraham actually being the father of many nations. It is clear from the structure that **he believed** is subordinate to the object of this belief, **God**. Yet, the structure also reveals Abraham's cooperation in believing what God said, "**he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."**

Other translations are as follows:

NKJ Romans 4:18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be."

KJV Romans 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

ESV Romans 4:18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

ASV Romans 4:18 Who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be.

he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

These translations indicate that the sovereign activity of God in proclaiming and making Abraham a father of many nations did not rule out the necessity of faith in believing what God had said. Apart from faith—the necessary means—Abraham would not have become the father of many nations—the sovereign end or goal.

Other references in Genesis support the necessity of Abraham's faith in receiving the benefits of the decreed promise.

..."By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,<sup>17</sup> indeed I will greatly bless you, and **I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens** and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess

the gate of their enemies.<sup>18</sup> "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, **because you have obeyed My voice.**" (Gen. 22:16-18 NASB)

"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.<sup>4</sup> **I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven,** and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;<sup>5</sup> **because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.**" (Gen. 26:3-5 NASB)

These verses and others denote an element of conditionality in the Abrahamic promise, a conditionality which is absent from the Genesis narrative up until this time (Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 116). Especially in the suzerainty treaty of Gen. 15, Abraham's vision of God himself walking between the pieces of slain animals eloquently demonstrates the sovereign, unilateral (one-sided) nature of the Abrahamic Covenant as being a promise whose fulfillment God will guarantee Himself apart from Abraham's performance, but not apart from the faith which God supplies.

So then, what are we to make of this apparent discrepancy between God's guarantee of the promise and the conditionality of the promise based on Abraham's faith? God ordains not simply the end or goal but the necessary means to obtaining that goal; and normally, the means include human responsiveness. He will give Abraham faith, and then employ that faith to give birth to a nation. He will raise Christ from the dead, and then employ Christ's disciples to spread the gospel far and wide until the earth is full of the knowledge of the true God. His kingdom will come, but He will employ the church to pray that the kingdom will come (Matt. 6: 10).

This does not imply that God is dependent upon His creatures. He is not, anymore than a human father is dependent upon his small children to help him pick up debris from the lawn. He could do it himself, but the father chooses to employ his children in a purposeful task. If someone fails to respond to God's sovereign commands, He will raise up someone else who will (Lk. 3: 8). It simply means that God usually does not accomplish His decrees (goals) by direct actions of supernatural power. The parting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, the plagues of Egypt, fire from heaven at Mt. Carmel, Daniel's three friends delivered from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, Daniel's escape from the lions, other miraculous interventions in OT history, and, of course, the resurrection of Christ, stick out in our minds because they are unusual and rare occurrences of supernatural intervention in human affairs. However, God has only seldom used miracles in any period of salvation history—that is, in terms of how we normally define the word, "miracle" as something which has no logical explanation.

Broadly speaking, everything happening in the natural world is miraculous, including the birth of every child. God upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1: 3), including every molecule of the human body (Ps. 139). Without His continual intervention, the whole universe would implode on itself and cease to exist. But these are aspects of His normal providential care of creation. There has been only one virgin birth in the history of the world, the birth of Christ. And I would not recommend anyone stepping into a burning brick kiln or jumping off a tall building to test God's providential care—Jesus didn't (Matt. 4: 4-7). Like it or not, God will accomplish His will by using humans.

Verses 22-24 present Abraham's faith as the prototype of every believer's faith. Abraham had no empirical proof of God's promise—he and Sarah were old. Empirically, it didn't make any sense that a man his age and a wife of Sarah's age could have children. However, given God's previous promises and his performance record thus far, faith was the most rational response Abraham could give. Had not God protected him and Sarah multiple times from powerful kings (Pharaoh, Gen. 12; the five kings who took Lot, Gen. 14; etc.)? It would be irrational not to trust God's word despite any material evidence to the contrary—a decision Christians face every day living 4000 years since Abraham. John Calvin comments on this dilemma.

Let us also remember, that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham. All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God. He promises immortality; we are surrounded with mortality and corruption; he declares that he counts us just; we are covered in sins; He testifies that he is propitious [favorable] and kind to us; outward judgments threaten his wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.

When we read God's word, look carefully at man's condition, take note of our own total inability to live up to our own conscience, etc., we find that trusting God's word is the most rational choice we can make. Only from the Scriptures can we make any sense out of this world and find an anchor for our hope that there is something beyond us and beyond this world.

Now faith is the **assurance** of *things* hoped for, the **conviction of things not seen**. (Heb. 11:1 NASB)

The Christian faith is not a leap in the dark. Although we don't yet see the things we hope for, we have the **assurance** from the Holy Spirit speaking to us from the Scriptures, and that these things are true—even as Abraham was assured that God's promise was true despite the deadness of his and Sarah's bodies. Abraham's **hope against hope** (v. 18) reminds us of Paul's **hope** for the restoration of all things in Romans 8.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

<sup>24</sup>For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:23-25)

Once more from Hebrews.

But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. <sup>17</sup>By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; (Heb. 11:16-17 NASB)

In Moo's words,

The emphasis in v. 18 falls on the paradoxical description of Abraham's faith as "against hope, on the basis of hope." No better explanation of the phrase can be found than Chrysostom's: "It was against

man's hope, in hope which is of God." As Paul will explain in v. 19, Abraham had every reason, from a human point of view, to give up the attempt to produce a child through Sarah. His faith flew in the face of that hope which is founded on the evidence of reason and common sense—"hope" as we often use the word ("I hope to win the lottery"). Yet his faith was firmly based on the hope that springs from the promise of God. We note here that Abraham's faith is not described as a "leap into the dark," a completely baseless, almost irrational "decision"—as Christian faith is pictured by some "existentialist" theologians—but as a "leap" from the evidence of his senses into the security of God's word and promise (Moo, pp. 282-283).

There is a sense in which the believer living today is in the same boat with Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Abel, Joseph, and all the other heroes of the faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. As they died without receiving the full measure of God's promises, so we, too, will die without experiencing everything God has promised for His people. As they lived in **hope**, so do we, but this hope will not be disappointed.

Thus, Paul says, **not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also**. If we believe God's word by faith, the same righteousness that was credited to Abraham's account will also be credited to our account. It works exactly the same way.

Moreover, we must note the content of this faith which is credited as righteousness. It is not faith in faith nor faith in anything or anyone we consider worth believing. Rather, we must believe in a God who is able—as Abraham believed—to raise the dead. We must believe **in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead**, reflecting Paul's further emphasis on the resurrection in chapter 10.

But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, **the word of faith** which we are preaching,<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and **believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead**, you will be saved; (Rom. 10:8-9 NASB)

The gospel consists of essential truth which must be believed in order for a person to be saved.

Christ was **delivered over because of our transgressions** and He **was raised because of our justification**. There is a causal connection between **transgressions** and **delivered over** (Christ's death) and another causal connection between **justification** and **was raised** (Christ's resurrection). The first connection may be more obvious than the second. The penal sacrifice of Christ was necessary to make atonement for our transgressions. But in the same causal sense, it was necessary for Christ to be raised in order for our **justification** to take effect. Had Christ not been raised from the dead, it would have proved that his atoning sacrifice had not been accepted and was null and void; and if not accepted, then we would still be in our sins, unforgiven and unjustified.

...and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. (1 Cor. 15:14 NASB)

...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (1 Cor. 15:17 NASB)

We may ask why such essentials of content are necessary, but we should just as well ask why God could not secure our salvation by any other method other than by Jesus, God in the flesh, going to the cross for our salvation. Could God not have designed another way? The answer is no. There was no other way; otherwise, God would have certainly chosen another way less costly to Himself. The sacrifice of Christ was the costliest price God could have conceived to purchase salvation for rebellious sinners. Any other price would have been paltry by comparison and insufficient to the purpose of redeeming sinners who had been made in God's image. The essential nature and justice of God required it.

Going further, we may ask why it was necessary and is presently necessary for Christians to preach in hostile countries—particularly countries where the Muslim faith is the religion of the land—exposing themselves and others to persecution and possible death. Could there be another way, perhaps allowing people to follow their own understanding of God to the best of their ability until they attain to the saving knowledge of God? Again, the answer is no. Paul has already explored this question in Romans 1. The natural direction of man's religious consciousness is not upward evolution—building on one fundamental truth after another—but devolution—destroying one fundamental truth after another with a long series of denials, thus suppressing the truth in unbelief.

Just as the foundation of our faith lies in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, there will be no other way to reach the nations other than by this message and the same kind of commitment, the sacrifice of one's life and livelihood (\$) to publish the message of the gospel. The necessity of suffering is the **message**, but also the **method** of the gospel.

## Romans 5

Therefore,

**having been justified** [*dikaioo*]

by faith,

**we have** [*present indicative: keep on having*]

peace

with God

through our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>2</sup> through whom also

**we have obtained**

our introduction

by faith

into this grace

in which

**we stand;**

**and we exult**

in hope

of the glory of God.

<sup>3</sup> And not only this,

**but we also exult**

**in our tribulations,  
knowing that**

tribulation

brings about

perseverance;

<sup>4</sup> and **perseverance,**

*[brings about]*

proven character;

and **proven character,**

*[brings about]*

hope;

<sup>5</sup> and **hope**

does not disappoint,

because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts

through the **HOLY SPIRIT** who was given to us.

<sup>6</sup> For **while we were still helpless,**

at the right time

*Christ died*

for the ungodly.

<sup>7</sup> For one will hardly die

for a righteous man;

though perhaps

for the good man

someone would dare even to die.

<sup>8</sup> **But God** demonstrates His own love toward us,

in that **while we were yet sinners,**

*Christ died* for us.

<sup>9</sup> Much more then,

**having now been justified**

*by His blood,*

**we shall be saved**

from the wrath of God

through Him.

<sup>10</sup> For if **while we were enemies**

**we were reconciled**

to God

through the death of His Son,

much more,

**having been reconciled,**

**we shall be saved**

by His life.



**Having been justified** [*dikaioo*] picks up where Paul leaves off in Romans 4: 25.

*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification [*dikaiosis*]. (Rom. 4:25 NASB)

Note that the root of **justified** is also the same as **righteousness** found in Rom. 1: 17; 3:5, and 3: 21-26. The meaning of justification is to be declared righteous. Righteousness is both the activity of God in making someone right in His eyes as well as the status given to the person who is made righteous.

**By faith** indicates the instrumental means by which one is made righteous. Abraham's faith is the model or paradigm for every believer. He is not made right with God through **works of the Law** but through the instrumental means of **faith**. Paul does not say "by faith plus works". He has already dealt thoroughly with the issue of law-keeping as the instrumental means of justification, and he has said very decisively that Abraham and all believers are made righteous by faith apart from works.

But to the one who **does not work**, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,<sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness **apart from works**: (Rom. 4:5-6 NASB)

He has not yet dealt with the issue of works as the verification (proof) of one's union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. This will come in Romans 6, and he will prove decisively that union with Christ guarantees the activity of walking with Christ in newness of life—in other words, union with Christ guarantees our progressive sanctification. There is no justification without the consequent (resulting) sanctification. But this is not Paul's burden in Romans 5. It is his burden in Romans 6 as well as the apostle James' burden in James 2 to argue that only faith accompanied by works is genuine faith.

By virtue of being justified **by faith**, Christians (**we**) **have peace with God**. By contrast, anyone seeking to be justified by works cannot have peace with God because he never knows how many works he must do to achieve a righteous status with God. He may have left something out that he should have done (sins of omission), or he may have forgotten other sins of commission that he should not have done. He will go through life all the way to the end not knowing whether he is in favor with God or out of favor. But in Christ, we can have peace with God because God does not look upon our works as the measure of His favor but upon the works of Christ—His perfect active obedience in keeping the law and His perfect passive obedience in dying on the cross. On the basis of Christ's work alone, the believer can know that God loves him in spite of his daily failures to live in perfect compliance with His law.

It should be noted that this is not the peace of complacency. The true believer is not complacent or at ease in his lack of perfection. He does not take the position of the antinomians addressed in Romans 6 who say, "It does not matter how much I sin, because God's grace will take care of it. There is no need to be concerned for my sin or to strive hard to eliminate sin in my life." This is false peace that so many professing Christians have, not knowing that they have never been justified. Paul spends a considerable length of time in Romans 8 with the mortification of sin—

putting sin to death in the members of our body so that it does not have control over us. The Christian makes no peace with his remaining sin. The peace of which Paul speaks is the peace of knowing that we are righteous before God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**, i.e. through His perfect and completed work, regardless of the degree of our personal success in putting sin to death.

Moreover, it is also **through our Lord Jesus Christ** (through **whom also**) that **we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace**. “Introduction” implies initiation, in this case initiation into the grace of justification which leads inexorably (inevitably) to the grace of sanctification and glorification. The grace of justification is only the **introduction** (*prosagōge*) to the many different aspects of grace given to the believer through Jesus Christ. Our blessings do not end with justification; they only begin with justification. Paul does not elaborate here what these many blessings are, but does so more in chapter 8. They include sanctification (8: 1-13), adoption (8: 14-17a), and glorification (8: 17b-25), intercession (8: 26-27), and security (8: 28-39). He only alludes to one of these in v. 2: glorification (**in hope of the glory of God**).

Alternatively, the word (*prosagōge*) could mean “access” (ESV, NIV, KJV, NKJV), in which case Paul means that Christ has provided us the “way forward” into God’s grace.

Jesus said to him, “I am **the way**, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (Jn. 14:6 NASB)

for through Him we both have our **access** (*prosagōge*) in one Spirit to the Father. (Eph. 2:18 NASB)

in whom we have boldness and confident **access** (*prosagōge*) through faith in Him. (Eph. 3:12 NASB)

<sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:15-16 NASB)

**In which we stand** refers to **this grace**. **Stand** is *histemi*, also used in the following verses:

Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you **stand** [*histemi*] by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; (Rom. 11:20 NASB)

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will **stand** [*histemi*], for the Lord is able to make him **stand** [*histemi*]. (Rom. 14:4 NASB)

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you **stand** [*histemi*], (1 Cor. 15:1 NASB)

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:11 NASB)

The idea behind **stand** is to make a firm commitment to what we believe. We are not unstable in our faith, but unswerving and unrelenting in our belief that Jesus is our Savior and Lord, and that by grace we have been brought into a favorable relationship to God which will not falter or fail. Standing is the opposite of falling. It involves strength instead of weakness. The verb **stand** is in the perfect tense implying that our firm commitment is the present result of a past action, the action of justification which was accomplished by God the Father through Christ. Genuine faith produces

steadfastness which, though tested, will not be ultimately shaken. False conversions, on the other hand, will not **stand** the test of time and tribulation, the subject of the verse 3.

**And we exult in hope of the glory of God** is also the result of our **introduction** into the grace of justification. **Exult** [*kauchaomai*] can also be translated **boast**. The word is used three times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, and 11) and is translated **boast** in other Pauline passages. Boasting in human strength or achievement is evil, but boasting in God's work of redemption is an act of worship.

but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,<sup>29</sup> so that no man may **boast** [*kauchaomai*] before God. (1 Cor. 1:27-29 NASB)

But may it never be that I would **boast** [*kauchaomai*], except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14 NASB)

Paul boasts in the **hope of the glory** [*doxa*] **of God**. What is this glory? Most likely, Paul is alluding to the future glory of God's people at the consummation (completion) of the kingdom of God when God restores all creation in Christ. He will elaborate on this glory more in chapter 8.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory** [*doxa*] that is to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the **glory** [*doxa*] of the children of God. (Rom. 8:18-21 NASB)

The **glory that is to be revealed to us** is the glory of a restored creation: the new heavens and earth as well as the restored human body and the fully transformed (sanctified) image of man (Col. 3: 10; Eph. 4: 24) which Paul describes here as **the revealing of the sons of God**. But such things constitute the not yet of the kingdom of God, the things which we are sure about but which we do not yet see. In the scriptures, **hope** is not wishful thinking, e.g. "I hope it will rain, but I don't really expect it to rain." Rather, our hope in the glory of God refers to a sure expectation of the revealing of His glory at the consummation of His kingdom. We are certain that God will accomplish all of his good pleasure both now and in the future, but we cannot yet see with physical eyes the realization of this hope. Thus, Paul says,

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.<sup>24</sup> For in **hope** we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who **hopes** for what he *already* sees?<sup>25</sup> But if we **hope** for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom. 8:23-25 NASB)

Thus, we hope for what we cannot yet see; otherwise, it is not hope, but empirically (visually) verifiable fact. In Corinthians, Paul says that "we **walk** (live) by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5: 7), meaning that we live out our lives as Christians not on the basis of what we can see and prove empirically but on the basis of what we believe by faith to be true. We believe that Christ has died and risen from the dead and sits at the right hand of God, and that one day He will return in glory and complete the salvation which he has begun on the cross. Our hope is not wishful thinking but a firm commitment to the testimony of the apostles and others who saw Jesus after the resurrection.

It is also based upon our commitment to the authority of the Scriptures as the true record of the apostolic witness (see my “Doctrine of Scripture”). When Christ returns, we will then see what we have hoped for, rendering it no longer a hope but a realization.

<sup>3</sup> And not only this,

but **we also exult**

**knowing that** in our tribulations,

tribulation

brings about

perseverance;

<sup>4</sup> and **perseverance,**

*[brings about]*

proven character;

and **proven character,**

*[brings about]*

hope;

<sup>5</sup> and **hope**

does not disappoint,

because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts

through the **HOLY SPIRIT** who was given to us.

Paul also **exults** (boasts) in **tribulations** because through tribulations we grow in Christian maturity. Paul presents tribulation as the beginning of a cascade (waterfall) of Christian blessings including **perseverance, proven character** and **hope**. **Perseverance** is the ability to overcome obstacles, the ability to continue believing in Christ and serving Him even when we are confronted by many difficulties, even ridicule and persecution. Jesus never promised believers an easy life—just the opposite.

"Then they will deliver you to **tribulation**, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (Matt. 24:9 NASB)

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have **tribulation**, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33 NASB)

We may **exult** in **tribulations** because tribulation brings us closer in conformity to the image of Christ who learned obedience through the things He suffered (Heb. 5: 8). This present life is a proving ground for the next, a brief “boot camp” for eternity. Apart from tribulation and testing, Christians would be lazy and presumptuous in their faith, like athletes who never exercise—a contradiction in terms. What athlete never exercises his muscles? If he fails to do so, he ceases to be an athlete. Likewise, the Christian who does not “exercise” his faith in overcoming temptation and tribulation is not a true Christian. Jesus says that only those who endure to the end of tribulation will be saved.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. <sup>10</sup> "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. <sup>12</sup> "Because lawlessness is increased, most

people's love will grow cold.<sup>13</sup> "But **the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.** (Matt. 24:9-13 NASB)

Jesus is not saying that true believers will be lost, thus contradicting His own promise to His sheep.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;<sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and **no one** will snatch them out of My hand.<sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. (Jn. 10:27-29 NASB)

**No one**, not false teachers or even the devil himself, is able to **snatch** Jesus' sheep from his hands. Yet, the true sheep continue hearing His voice and continue following Him throughout this life into eternity. Both **hear** and **follow** are present indicative verbs indicating continuous action. The sheep keep on hearing and keep on following. They never stop. The sheep are secure, but they are not secure apart from continuing faith which produces continuing obedience. (This is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in Reformed theology.)

The flip side of the coin is God's preservation of the saints. Later in his epistle, Paul declares,

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will **tribulation**, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Rom. 8:35 NASB)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38-39 NASB)

**Nor any other created thing** includes all hostile people, demons, and even Satan, all of whom are created by God. Nothing can separate true believers from the love of God. And when did God begin to love us?

<sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. **In love**<sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1:4-5 NASB)

The **foundation** is the first thing built for a building. **Before the foundation of the world** means before the creation of the world. Christians are **loved** and **predestined...to adoption** before God created the world; thus, it would be unreasonable to believe that although God loved us before the world began, He might change his mind and not love us for something we might do in the future. God is not a man that He would change his mind (1 Sam. 15: 29). Preservation is the flip side of perseverance. We persevere in our faith only because God preserves us.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be **preserved** complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 5:23 NASB)

*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who **began** a good work in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASB)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; <sup>32</sup> **but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail**; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Lk. 22:31-32 NASB)

**Perseverance** produces **proven character** [*dokime*]. The same word is used in the following Pauline verses:

For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the **test** [*dokime*], whether you are obedient in all things. (2 Cor. 2:9 NASB)

But you know of his **proven worth** [*dokime*], that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father. (Phil. 2:22 NASB)

Steadfast godliness can only be proven through testing. We don't like testing, but this is just the way God works. Abraham was tested when God told him to sacrifice Isaac, and his willingness to do what God said without questioning God's wisdom or ability to raise Isaac from the dead **proved** his faith. Timothy was tested during his missionary labors with Paul while others failed the test.

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> **For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.** (Phil. 2:19-21 NASB)

We all know people who have failed to prove themselves in ministry. And Paul is not speaking of the ability to teach or preach. There are no absolute guidelines in Scripture by which we may judge one's speaking ability, and we have no audio tapes of apostolic sermons. (We should thank God for that!) The Scriptures speak of the content of preaching which must be true to the Bible (2 Tim. 4: 2); and if this element is missing, no amount of powerful rhetoric and emotional energy in the pulpit will make up for its absence. But further, no amount of Biblical content will make up for lack of **proven character**. Some of the most gifted preachers in the world have failed to demonstrate steadfast, godly character. The most recent example I can think of is that of Ravi Zacharias who was proved guilty of abusing women in massage parlors in the US and abroad. There was also one accusation of rape. He told one or more of his victims that they were his "reward" for faithfully serving God. Zacharias died in 2020, and there is no record of his repentance. No one in his ministry organization knew of his indiscretions until many of his victims began coming forward. Gifted, yes. Very gifted as a speaker and brilliant as a scholar. Proven character, no. Where is he now? We don't know, but we may hope that he repented without confessing his sin to someone else. Short of repentance, he is in hell.

Two of the students I have known for years and worked with in Uganda and Rwanda have "proven" themselves to be thieves and liars. One was a very gifted preacher. Giftedness is no substitute for **proven character** that stands the test of time. Ask yourself this question: Do I seek my own selfish interests (sex, money, power, or reputation) or do I seek the interests of Christ Jesus? Am I building my own private kingdom or am I helping to promote the kingdom of Christ?

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matt. 7:22-23 NASB)

**Proven character** produces **hope**. Why is this true? Simply because the hope of salvation cannot be present in the heart of a person while he is consistently failing the test. If anyone falls into sexual immorality, theft, deceit, or any number of sins without genuine repentance, will the Holy Spirit fill his heart with the **hope** of salvation? Will the individual say to himself, “All is well with my soul”? Or, rather, will the Holy Spirit fill his heart with conviction and dread and allow him to be overcome with doubts about the genuineness of his conversion? Let King David answer that question:

When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.<sup>4</sup> For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. Selah. (Ps. 32:3-4 NASB)

Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. (Ps. 51:11 NASB)

I once believed that a true believer could never make the statement of Ps. 51: 1 since God would never take the Holy Spirit from the true believer. True enough; once the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he will always be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. David did not live in the light of NT theology. But a believer living in sin like David should reconsider whether he was ever indwelt by the Holy Spirit; otherwise, would he be living in sin?

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (1 Jn. 1:6 NASB)

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (1 Jn. 3:10 NASB)

This dread of God’s judgment is given to the believer as a safeguard against presumptuousness (Matt. 7: 22-23 above), continuing sin, and actual judgment. The true believer will then repent (as David did) and run to Christ for mercy and forgiveness. He will not attempt to hide his sin from others (**kept silent**; Ps. 32: 3). Everything said so far is confirmed in Paul’s subsequent statement:

<sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been **poured out** [*ekchunno*] within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The ESV translates 5: 5 as **And hope does not put us to shame**. This is a better translation presenting the idea that the believer should never be ashamed of his faith. Paul has already said that he was **not ashamed of the gospel** because only in this gospel has the righteous activity of God in making sinners right with Himself been revealed. It is not revealed any other way, not even in the created order. Objectively, the reason for our hope is the crucifixion of Christ on the cross followed by His actual and physical resurrection testified by many followers (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 6). The Christian **hope** is not some leap of faith into the dark with no reason or evidence behind it. It is not faith in faith or wishful thinking. Our hope is rooted in “2000 years of Christ’s power” (the title of N.R. Needham’s three book series on church history) inaugurated in his birth, ministry, death, and the power of his resurrection and ascension. It is not only unlikely, but impossible that the church would have survived the onslaught of the Roman Empire as well as the continuing persecution of the 20 centuries afterward apart from a firm belief in the reality of Christ’s resurrection. This is the objective side of v. 5.

Subjectively, the **love of God** is testified to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The **love of God** here is not our love for God but His love for us. It is subjective in that it is something felt by the individual subject experiencing these feelings. We feel God's love for us through the ministry of the Spirit. Paul says essentially the same thing when he says to Titus,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing **by the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup> **whom He poured out** [*ekcheo*] upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (Tit. 3:5-6 NASB)

He speaks about this ministry more thoroughly in Romans 8.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> **The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit** that we are children of God, (Rom. 8:15-16 NASB)

Thus, we have two verifying proofs of the **hope** within us. First, we have the external proof of **perseverance** and **proven character** that stands the tests of **tribulation**. These may be observed by ourselves as well as others who observe the way we live. Thus, we can see the importance of accountability to others. Second, we have the internal proof of the love of God which is lavishly **poured out upon us** through the testimony of the Spirit who says to our hearts, "You are a child of God, and I love you!" Both of these proofs work together, and we need not presume that we will experience the latter without the former. At the same time, it is the love of God for us which will never let us go beyond His reach. We may fail as David and Peter failed, but in the end the true believer's faith will not fail because of the intercession of Christ and His Spirit, the subject of Romans 8: 26. How is it possible for the true believer to fall away from the faith when Christ and the Holy Spirit are both making intercession for Him? The whole idea of the believer losing his salvation makes no sense biblically, but neither does it make any sense to believe that we may choose to live as we please, the subject of Romans 6.

<sup>6</sup>For **while we were still helpless,**  
at the right time

*Christ died*

for the ungodly.

<sup>7</sup>For one will hardly die

for a righteous man;

though perhaps

for the good man

someone would dare even to die.

<sup>8</sup>But **God** demonstrates His own love toward us,

in that **while we were yet sinners,**

*Christ died* for us.

**While we were still helpless** describes the state of the sinner before conversion. Paul is reemphasizing the theme that salvation is not something we **earn** through self-effort, but



something we **receive** by faith. **Helpless** sinners can do nothing. This is the definition of helpless. If we were capable sinners, there would be something we could do to save ourselves—the miscalculation of the rich ruler. “Teacher, what good thing shall **I** do that **I** may obtain eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16 NASB) No, we are helpless, and there is nothing we can do but receive the gift offered. We will learn also from Romans that even the act of receiving the gift of salvation is itself a gift. Repentance and faith are not something we bring to the table to offer God. They are themselves part of the grace bestowed upon us. In Ephesians 2, we learn the meaning of **helpless**.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.<sup>3</sup> Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Eph. 2:1-5 NASB)

A person cannot become more **helpless** than **dead**. When a man is dead, he can’t do anything. He can’t see, hear, walk, or talk. He is unresponsive. The analogy is that spiritually dead men are as spiritually unresponsive as physically dead men are physically unresponsive. Spiritually dead men do not respond to the gospel. They may hear it with physical ears, but they do not understand it. They may read the Bible with physical eyes, but the message is hidden from them. They are the walking, talking dead.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and **he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

Where, then, does this leave the sinner? **Helpless**. Notice that **while we were still helpless** parallels **while we were yet sinners** in v. 8. **Sinners** are **helpless**. This verse alone should dispense with any false hopes of one saving himself through superior performance. Jesus used the Law to persuade the rich ruler that he was helpless, but there is no evidence that he took the hint. He still thought he could pull it off. Somehow, he could do the **good thing** to obtain eternal life.

To buttress his point, Paul says, **at the right time Christ died for the ungodly**. What was **the right time**? Christ died only once, so **the right time** must have been the first century AD. The reason for God’s delay has already been discussed. God gave sinners four thousand years from Adam to Christ to come to a saving knowledge of God by observing the wonders of His creation, including man himself, the greatest wonder of all. But man in his wisdom had failed to interpret this creation correctly. Instead, he had worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator. As indicated above, worshipping the creature includes worshipping man and his achievements—money, sex, and power. You don’t have to bow down to a wooden idol to be an idolater. Man’s heart is an idol factory (Calvin), constantly manufacturing idols to love and worship more than God.

Christ did not die for good people, but **for the ungodly**. Good people don’t think they need God, nor do they need a Savior. From this we learn that God saw nothing about us or in us that was worth saving. But we were worth saving simply because God loved us. We had no special qualities to merit His attention or to constrain His choice of us—the subject of Romans 9. Jacob was not loved and chosen because he was good, but Esau bad. They were both bad, and God chose Jacob

before he had done anything good or bad. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. If I may put it bluntly, had God been anyone other than God, He would have vomited when He looked at us. But He didn't vomit. He loved us in Christ before He created the world, and He saw us in the light of what He would make of us by His sovereign grace, not in the light of what we were—**ungodly**—or what we would make of ourselves.

Verse 7 is one of the most difficult verses in Romans. One possible interpretation is that Paul distinguishes between the **righteous man** and the **good man**. The **righteous** man is one who is just and who commands the respect and admiration of many, but is not likely to win sufficient respect for anyone to be willing to trade their life for his—**hardly**. The **good** man may be someone who is dearly loved by the person willing to lay down his life for him—**perhaps** an admirer of some very generous and kind man loved by the whole community (cf. Moo, p. 308). I suspect that many people may have been willing to lay down their lives for the apostle Paul or Hudson Taylor, famous missionary to China.

Murray denies the distinction between the two terms, saying that it is not likely that either a righteous or good man would be the object of such ultimate sacrifice (p. 168). I prefer the first interpretation since there does seem to be some distinction made between the two by using the terms **hardly** and **perhaps**. Even so, not many would be willing to die even for the good man.

The most important distinction being made is that Christ didn't die for any **righteous** or **good** people. Instead, He died for **sinners**, whom Paul previously called **the ungodly**. This is the amazing thing about the love of God, that He would send Christ to die for the undeserving. Consider the people we often meet in the cities of Africa and America. Unknown to us, some are thieves (including thieves who work in banks and corporations), murderers, adulterers, drunks, wife-abusers, child-molesters, all around bad people. Would we be willing to die for such people? **Hardly**. With much hesitation, we would **scarcely** die for good and righteous people, much less for sinful people. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** (Rom. 5:8 NASB)

<sup>9</sup> Much more than,  
**having now been justified**  
*by His blood,*  
**we shall be saved**  
*from the wrath of God*  
*through Him.*

<sup>10</sup> For if **while we were enemies**  
**we were reconciled**  
**to God**  
*through the death of His Son,*  
much more,  
**having been reconciled,**  
**we shall be saved**  
*by His life.*

**Much more then** refers to the following benefit of being saved from God's wrath. We are **justified** [*dikaioō*] **by His blood**, but even more than this, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him** (v. 9). The verb **justified** means to be declared righteous. Again, the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is both the activity of God in bringing us into a right relationship to Himself as well as the status we enjoy of being righteous in His sight. Justification is salvation considered from the perspective of God's justice. Since we are declared **righteous**, then by definition, we are not guilty. Thus, we are saved **for a relationship with God**.

But **much more** than this, **we shall be saved from the wrath** (the prepositional phrase, *of God* is not in the original Greek text but clearly implied). This is salvation from the perspective of God's anger. While we are saved in the present **for** a relationship with God now, **we shall be saved** (future tense) **from** the eschatological wrath of God in the future judgment. Justification implies the present possession of salvation, but Paul speaks of salvation in stages. We **are** saved now by virtue of our justification, but we also **shall be saved in the future** on this same basis from the eschatological wrath of God. We may also say that we are **being saved** through the intercession of Christ and the Holy Spirit on behalf of all believers.

Since God is holy and just, He cannot let sin go unpunished. For believers, that punishment was laid upon Christ who was the propitiation or satisfaction of God's wrath. For unbelievers, the wrath of God is a future certainty.

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for **because of these things** the wrath of God **comes** upon the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 5:5-6 NASB)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.<sup>6</sup> For it is **because of these things** that the wrath of God **will come** upon the sons of disobedience, (Col. 3:5-6 NASB)

**While we were enemies** (v. 10) is parallel to **while we were yet sinners** (v. 8) and **while we were still helpless** (v. 6). Most people don't think of themselves as sinners; still fewer think of themselves as enemies of God. They rather think of themselves as neutral, neither for Him or against Him. But Jesus said that there is no neutrality.

"He who is not **with** Me is **against** Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (Matt. 12:30 NASB)

However, it is more likely that v. 10 refers rather to God's enmity against sinners and not the enmity of sinners against God. It is primarily God who considered us as enemies than we who considered God as an enemy (Murray, p. 172). This interpretation fits well with the context of God's wrath in v. 9. God is angry. He created man to worship and serve Him; but man rebelled, refusing to worship God but worshipping everything God had made instead. God therefore, considers unbelieving man as an enemy—and such were we at one time, enemies of God who had to be reconciled to Him. The sin which kept us apart had to be removed by the blood sacrifice of Christ.

**Through** [*dia*] **the death of His Son**, we who were enemies of God have been **reconciled** to God. The barrier between us has now been broken down, and a new relationship has been created. **Through** [*dia*] may be translated **because** or **on account of** or **by means of**. It is on account of the death of Christ that we are reconciled to God. Again, this reconciliation is accomplished with complete cooperation and coordination between the Father and the Son and is applied through the ministry of the Spirit, the three persons who are all named in this passage (see also John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*). This is what theologians call perichoresis. While the Father is working for our redemption, the Son and the Spirit are also at work simultaneously.

But He answered them, "My Father is **working** until now, and I Myself **am working**." (Jn. 5:17 NASB)

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him [*i.e. God the Father*] who sent Me **and to accomplish His work**. (Jn. 4:34 NASB)

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is **the work of God** [*i.e. God the Father*], that you believe in Him [*i.e. Christ*] **whom He** [*i.e. God the Father*] **has sent**." (Jn. 6:29 NASB)

"I [*i.e. Christ*] glorified You on the earth, having accomplished **the work which You have given Me to do**. (Jn. 17:4 NASB)

for it is God [*i.e. God the Spirit*] who is **at work in you**, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13 NASB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen<sup>2</sup> according to **the foreknowledge of God the Father**, by the **sanctifying work of the Spirit**, to obey **Jesus Christ** and be **sprinkled with His blood**: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Pet. 1:1-2 NASB)

From gotquestions.org, we read:

Perichoresis is seen in Jesus' prayer in [John 17:1](#), "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." We compare this with [John 16:14](#), in which Jesus says that the Holy Spirit "will glorify me." So, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son. The loving relationships within the Trinity result in the Persons of the Godhead giving glory to one another.

Perichoresis is the fellowship of three co-equal Persons perfectly embraced in love and harmony and expressing an intimacy that no one can humanly comprehend. The Father sends the Son ([John 3:16](#)), and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and was sent by the Son ([John 15:26](#))—another example of perichoresis, with the result that God's people are blessed.

Perichoresis is the Greek term (not found in the Bible), and circumincession is the Latin equivalent meaning essentially the same thing. The main point I'm making is that our reconciliation with the Father is not something accomplished by Christ alone against the inherent wishes of the Father. This could not be said more eloquently than the way Paul said it in 2 Corinthians.

Now all *these* things are from **God**, who reconciled us to Himself through **Christ** and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,<sup>19</sup> namely, that **God was in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself, not

counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19 NASB)

**God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself** because Christ is also God working parallel to and in coordination with God. The Holy Spirit applies this reconciliation because the Spirit is God regenerating human hearts to receive this reconciliation. For Muslims or anyone else to say that the Bible does not teach the Trinity is a denial of the obvious. Although the word “trinity” is not used in the Bible, the concept is clearly evident. Muslims recognize only a truncated (abbreviated) Bible because they do not recognize the complete NT. They acknowledge Jesus as a prophet inferior to Mohammed, but not Jesus as God. They believe the NT was somehow corrupted by the church in spite of the more than five thousand existing copies of the NT which teach the same thing.

A second **much more** is added in v. 10. In addition to being reconciled to God, we **shall be saved by His [i.e. Christ's] life**. Paul does not elaborate on how the life of Christ will save us, but this phrase could refer to the resurrection of Christ as the guarantee of our own future resurrection.

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> **But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;** <sup>14</sup> **and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.** <sup>15</sup> Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; <sup>17</sup> **and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.** <sup>18</sup> **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.** <sup>19</sup> **If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.** <sup>20</sup> But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.** (1 Cor. 15:12-22 NASB)

Thus, for Paul, the life that Christ presently possesses at the right hand of God the Father was the guarantee that there was, indeed, a future physical, resurrected life for believers. He calls Christ **the firstborn from the dead** in Col. 1: 18.

Alternatively, **will shall be saved by His life** could refer to the coming of Christ for the church at the end of the age. Revelation 19: 11-21 tells us that Christ will return with fire coming out of His eyes and with a sword coming out of His mouth to strike down the nations. He will also throw the beast and the false prophet, the enemies of the church, into the lake of fire. In other words, the continuing life of Christ is necessary for our salvation in the future. Only He will be able to ultimately destroy His and our enemies. Though the church continues to engage in spiritual warfare with the world, the church alone will not be able to overcome all the forces of evil arrayed against it. If the two witnesses of Rev. 11 represent the church—and I believe they do (cf. my notes on Revelation)—then the church will be overcome by the beast from the abyss and will be put to death, symbolizing widespread persecution of the church (cf. Dan. 7). But in Rev. 19, Christ appears to rescue His chosen people.

Until both Christians still living and those dead at the time of Christ's second coming are united with Christ in the clouds (1 Thess. 4), the invisible church consisting of the redeemed will never be safe from the onslaughts of Satan and his accomplices, unbelievers—many of whom are very powerful politically and economically, including many who are leaders of the false church

symbolized by the false prophet. **We shall be saved by His life** when He comes to destroy His enemies and rescue His people. All the glory will belong to Christ. (The millennial position I have just espoused is debatable. There are multiple positions on the question of the “millennium” and how history will play out. On one thing we can all agree. Christ will have the victory.)

<sup>11</sup> And not only this,  
but **we also exult**  
in God

through our Lord Jesus Christ,

through whom

**we have now received**  
the reconciliation.

This is now the fourth time Paul has used the a fortiori argument—from the lesser to the greater (cf. vv. 3, 9, 10—**not only this, much more, much more then**). He has previously **boasted** in **hope**, in **tribulation**, and now he is **boasting** again, not in himself but **in God**. Of course, God is the fundamental cause of Paul’s hope and his confidence that tribulation will result in the benefits of perseverance, proven character, and more hope. **We exult in God through [or, because of, or on account of] our Lord Jesus Christ**. It is because or through the work of Christ in atoning for our sins that **we have now received the reconciliation**.

The tense of **have received** is aorist indicative active. In this particular context, we are justified in interpreting the action of the verb as once-for-all. Looking ahead to Romans 6, Paul informs us that we **died** to sin, **were baptized**, and our old self (man) **was crucified**. All of these verbs are aorist, and the context of the passage indicates a once-for-all action of the verb in the past.

For the death that He died [*aorist tense*], He died to sin **once for all** [*Greek adverb modifying “died”*]; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (Rom. 6:10 NASB)

**Christ died to sin once for all**, meaning that He does not die again and again. The Roman Catholic mass is seriously in error on this point, as if the wine and the bread actually become the body and blood of Christ when consecrated by the priest who then offers them for sacrifice. For this reason, the wine has been commonly reserved only for the priest in behalf of the common Roman Catholic member who may clumsily spill the actual blood of Christ in the act of drinking. Christ never repeated His death on the cross because His once-for-all death was sufficient. It was the death of all deaths.

Thus, the aorist tense of **have received the reconciliation** means that we are not waiting to be reconciled with God. We already are reconciled. We already **have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** which Paul speaks about at the first of the chapter. We are not waiting to have peace with God. We already have it because Christ himself is our peace. This peace may be interrupted by sinful actions, but not destroyed. It will be restored, sooner or later, through repentance and faith. But if we are depending on our own performance and works-righteousness to accomplish reconciliation and peace, then we will never have it; or, if we once believe we have it, then we will inevitably lose it through poor performance. Someone who is operating from the

system of works-righteousness will never have peace with God or the assurance of salvation, and for good reason. It all depends on him, not Christ.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as  
through **one man** A  
    sin entered into the world, B  
    and death [*entered the world—implied*] B  
through **sin,** A

and so  
    death spread to all men, B  
    because all sinned— B

**Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin.** Paul is speaking of an historical event, not some metaphorical mythology from the book of Genesis. The efforts of liberal scholarship to remove the concept of innate sin inherited from Adam as well as all miraculous events from the Bible is concentrated on Genesis. If Genesis 1-11 can be mythologized, then the explanation for man's dire predicament and his responsibility before God is effectually removed. We are left with a god who is too small either to create the world in six days or to destroy it in a flood—and too small to destroy it in the future. We have also removed the most effective warning of God's future judgment, the warning that Jesus uses above all other catastrophes in world history to prepare His people for the future wrath of God.

"For the coming of the Son of Man will be **just like the days of Noah.**"<sup>38</sup> "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; **so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** (Matt. 24:37-39 NASB)

Treating the text with its original historical intent, we note that Adam was **one man**, not a civilization of men evolved from brute animals. He was made in the image of God and was therefore given intelligence and free agency to obey or disobey. He chose the latter and through Adam's act of rebellion sin entered the world. God gives us no other explanation for why man is so utterly ruined and why he suffers so much. Other biblical proofs of the historicity of Adam are as follows:

the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. (Lk. 3:38 NASB) [In this passage, Luke treats Adam like anyone else in the line of Christ who is both a father and a son.]

*It was* also about these men *that* Enoch, *in* the seventh *generation* from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, (Jude 1:14 NASB)

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:22 NASB)

So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45 NASB)

For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.<sup>14</sup> *And it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim. 2:13-14 NASB)

Therefore, if we mythologize Genesis 3 and the fall of man, we must discard any credibility to the epistle of Jude, 1 Corinthians, or 1 Timothy, all of which speak of Genesis 3 as historical reality. But our exegetical and theological problems would not end there.

While sin entered the world through the act of **one man**, Adam, **death** entered the world through Adam's sin. ...**for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die**. This is how believers explain the existence of death. How do non-believers explain the existence of death? Naturalists explain it as the normal process of aging but fail to explain why aging is normal. Is aging normal? That is a metaphysical question—a question that lies beyond the material, physical world, and therefore, beyond the ability of scientists to answer. They may describe aging scientifically, but cannot provide the answer for its existence. Naturalists also fail to explain man's preoccupation with death or our preoccupation with ourselves—our human self-consciousness—when no other animal species has such self-awareness. Why does mankind continue his search for immortality. He seems determined to live forever although he can't explain the meaning of life.

Nothing else but the Bible explains man's preoccupation with self, death, meaning, love, good and evil, and many other fascinating metaphysical (beyond the material world) realities which everyone, including empirical scientists, must acknowledge but cannot explain from their own world-view (cf. my course on "Christian World-View".) Aging and death exist because God always keeps His promises, and His promises include both blessing and curse. If we are created by God, then He owns us; and if He owns us, then we are obligated to serve Him. But He also created us to love Him, and when we don't love Him, He is offended even more. And this explains man's ongoing wretchedness, ruin, and misery.

**And so death spread to all men, because all sinned.** What kind of death spread to all men? One view is that the **death** of which Paul speaks does not take into account the spiritual, eternal aspect of death that is considered in other Pauline passages (Murray, p. 182).

For the wages of sin is **death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23 NASB)

and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in **death** for me; (Rom. 7:10 NASB)

For the mind set on the flesh is **death**, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (Rom. 8:6 NASB)

Rather, the death that spread to all men is the death promised Adam in Gen. 2: 17 and 3: 19, namely, physical death.

but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:17 NASB)

By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19 NASB)

Hodge interprets death more comprehensively as both physical and spiritual death.



In order to the proper understanding of the apostle's argument, it should be borne in mind that the term *death* stands for penal evil; not for this or that particular form of it, but for any and every evil judicially inflicted for the support of law. Paul's reasoning does not rest upon the mere fact that all men, even infants, are subject to natural death...The great fact in the apostle's mind was that God regards and treats all men, from the first moment of their existence, as out of fellowship with himself, as having forfeited his favour...Innate depravity being universal may account for the universality of natural death; but *thanatos* [death] includes much more than natural death. What is to account for spiritual death? Why are men born dead in sin? This is the very thing to be accounted for...Paul's argument is that they were so born on account of Adam's sin (*Romans*, pp. 156, 159, emphasis his).

In Adam, all men died both physically and spiritually, explaining why all people become actual sinners if they live long enough and if they are given sufficient mental capability to consciously rebel against God. This leaves us with the question of infants and the mentally incompetent. Everyone is born spiritually dead on the basis of Adam's sin, but Rom. 5 says nothing concerning eternal punishment on the basis of Adam's sin, only **death**. Solidarity with Adam does not determine the fact of eternal punishment. A lengthy quote from R.A. Webb is very helpful in this regard.

Penal suffering, to be strictly penalty, must be recognized as such in the consciousness of the sufferer, else it would be to him unmeaning and causeless pain. The element of awareness is an essential ingredient in rational punishment.

An infant, being a sentient creature, is capable of suffering; but being an unconscious creature, with faculties too immature to understand and appreciate the reason for suffering, it is incapable of being punished, strictly and truly speaking. Its only guilt is Adamic and federal; guilt, therefore, of which it is not aware, and of which it can become conscious only by growing to the years of maturity, and expressing its sinfulness in its own voluntary and conscious acts of transgression.

If it were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor—it could not tell itself—why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma [mystery], the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication.

Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there. If another should inform the child of the crime for which it was suffering the pangs of hell, it might believe on testimony and accept the truth by faith in the informer, but it would still be destitute of any fact on its consciousness or conscience, of any deed in its own history, upon which it could rest an experimental conviction of its ill-desert and damnation. It would be experimentally, blankly ignorant.

For suffering to be truly penal there are two necessary conditions: (1) there must be a reason satisfying the conscience of him [in this case, God] who inflicts it, and (2) there must be a reason certifying guilt to the conscience of him [the infant] who experiences the suffering.

Adamic guilt—original sin—is a reason which satisfies the divine conscience, because he perceives it; and because of it, he passes a sentence of condemnation, and therefore judges the unborn posterity of Adam to be damnable. That is a righteous condemnation; but Adamic sin, not being in the consciousness of the infant, the *execution* of the divine judgment prior to the child's maturity, would leave the child's mind unacquainted with the reason for its assignation [appointment] to hell-torments, and without the power to appreciate the cause therefor; and then the divine being would know, that the child does not know, why it has been so terribly afflicted, and that it suffers in conscious ignorance of its offence; and that would leave his [God's] justice unsatisfied, and defeat the very purpose of the divine being in sending any person to hell.

Let it be understood that God does not send any human being to woe just for the sake of suffering, but in order to inflict *penalty*, and vindicate law and justice....

To execute the death-penalty upon the unconscious infant would be, for God to defeat the only motive he has for sending any human being to an endless hell. Hence the child which, on account its federal guilt is punishable *de jure* [by right or legal establishment], is not, as such punishable *de facto* [in actual fact]. The sentence of condemnation for original sin was just; but the *execution* of that sentence, expediency demands, shall be delayed until the child, through actual sinning can be made aware....

*...Providence must delay the death of the reprobate infant until he comes to maturity, and translates his original sin into conscious actual sin, so there may be a basis, not simply in law and truth, but in consciousness and conscience and experience for penalty.*

Consequently a reprobate infant cannot die in infancy: such a result would defeat the ends of justice. Consequently and conversely, all infants dying in infancy are elect, redeemed, regenerated and glorified. (R. A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, pp. 288-291, italicized emphasis his, underlined emphasis and words in brackets mine)

Webb's analysis would also apply to anyone who is too mentally incompetent to understand the difference between right and wrong or the existence of God. The wrath of God in Romans 1 could not be appropriately applied to those who have no capability of comprehending the nature of God or His moral precepts.

In another place (pp. 39-40), Webb rejects the position that infants of Christian parents are saved on the basis of their being "brought" for baptism (cf. Matt. 19: 13-15)—associating this position with the errors sacramentarianism and baptismal regeneration.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the Bible, men are always judged on the basis of their deeds (e.g. Matt. 16: 27; Rom. 2: 5-8). The pollution of Adamic sin is the evidence and reason that men are born sinners and liable to damnation, but not the evidence and reason committing them to actual judgment.

Considering the fact that infants die, **because all sinned** can only mean that in Adam's sin, **all men** sinned; and because all men sinned, all men die. The question arises: How did they sin? Did each person sin individually, or did they sin representatively in Adam? It is not the case that death spread to all men because all men sin individually. The case of infants and the mentally incompetent immediately disposes of this theory.

Adam was designated as the federal head of the human race, and he acted as our representative before God. This explains why infants die who have not sinned in the **likeness** of Adam—i.e. they have not sinned against the express and clearly communicated will of God (see explanation below). Though innocent of any conscious, voluntary sin against God or their parents, they still die. **Because all sinned** explains their physical mortality and spiritual depravity and that of every human being, the **death** of which Paul speaks in v. 12. Death spread to all men, infants included, because all sinned in Adam, not because all sinned individually. If infants were not included in Adam's federal headship, they would not die. **The wages of sin is death**, but infants and the mentally incompetent have not earned such wages individually. They succumb to death because they are descendants of Adam, **As in Adam, all die** (1 Cor. 15: 22).

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading, see my *Synoptic Gospels* on Matthew 19: 13-15 and Lk. 18: 15-17

There are many other considerations from the context leading to this conclusion (cf. Murray, *Romans*, for a complete explanation):

(1) The repetitive phrases to the effect that the **one** sin of Adam brought forth the condemnation and death of **all** men.

For if by **the transgression of the one** the many died (v. 15)

The gift is not like *that which came* through **the one who sinned**; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* **from one transgression** resulting in condemnation (v. 16)

For if by **the transgression of the one**, death reigned through the one (v. 17)

So then as **through one transgression** there resulted condemnation to all men (v. 18)

For as through the **one man's disobedience** the many were made sinners (v. 19)

(2) The analogy set forth in Romans 5. Just as sin and death entered the world through the sin of **one man, Adam**, so also the free gift of grace abounded to the many through **one man, Jesus Christ**. The correspondence between the sin of one man, Adam, and the righteousness of one man, Christ, is consistent with Paul's whole thesis that men are not justified by works but by the obedience of the **one** man, Jesus Christ.

...much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace **of the one Man, Jesus Christ**, abound to the many. (v. 15)

...much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life **through the One, Jesus Christ**. (v. 17)

...even so through **one act of righteousness** there resulted justification of life to all men. (v. 18)

...even so **through the obedience of the One** the many will be made righteous. (v. 19)

However, if the phrase, **because all sinned**, means that all sinned individually, then the argument of **justification of life** due to **one act of righteousness** does not follow. The argument would then be that since all sinned individually, all must also work individually to attain righteousness. But this is clearly not the argument Paul is making. His argument is that in the same way all men sinned in Adam, all those who believe will be made alive in Christ as their new federal head. The headship of Christ is drawn from its analogy in the federal headship of Adam.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as

through **one man**

A

sin entered into the world,

B

and death [*entered the world—implied*]

C

through **sin**,

A

and so

death spread to all men,

C

because all sinned—

B

<sup>13</sup> for until the Law

sin was in the world,

B

but sin is not imputed

B

when there is no law.

D

D

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless

death reigned from Adam until Moses,
C

even over those who had not sinned
B

in the likeness of the offense of Adam,
A

who is a type of Him who was to come.

In v. 14, **from Adam until Moses** delineates the time-frame considered within the horizon or context of Paul's argument. He is arguing in v. 12 that **all sinned** in the sin of Adam, and that **death spread to all men** because of this. To support His point, Paul first says that **sin was in the world** even before the **Law** of Moses was promulgated at Mt. Sinai, and this may be known beyond any doubt because men would not have been held accountable for their sin had there been no imputation of sin against them: **but sin is not imputed when there is no law**. That is, there would be no sin had there been no violation against the law of God. But it is clear from the **reign** of death that sin was, in fact, being imputed to men during this time-frame.

From Romans 1: 18-32, we understand that since the creation God had made Himself known from the things He made, rendering men without excuse for their unbelief, but also for their immoral behavior illustrated by the sexual degradation of homosexuality. Romans 1 clearly teaches that sin was imputed during this period, leaving us with the conclusion that the law of God was in full operation with blessing and curse. Nevertheless, the law propounded in written, published form directly from God—a law similar to the law published to Adam in verbal form directly from God—did not exist from Adam to Moses.

Adam had been banished from the garden, and his posterity had eventually divided along the lines of belief and unbelief: the line of Seth and the line of Cain (Gen. 4—5). The knowledge of God's law in oral tradition was evidently acute in the line of Seth whose descendant, Enoch, walked with God. Lamech, seventh generation from Cain, on the other hand, boasts about killing a boy. Even the death penalty for murder was in operation from Cain's banishment, evident from Cain's response, **whoever finds me will kill me**, i.e. as punishment for his crime against Abel. In Romans 2:12, we have seen that **all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law** where **without the Law** means not having in their possession the Law of Moses. It does not imply that they are without the law of God in its witness against their sin. This is clear from Rom. 2: 14-15.

For when Gentiles **who do not have the Law** do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> in that they **show the work of the Law written in their hearts**, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (Rom. 2:14-15 NASB)

Moreover, we must deduce from the OT that God's elect people, including the elect nation, had access to the special revelation of God's Law even before it was written on two tablets of stone. Note the following narratives previous to the giving of the Law in Exodus 20.

It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. <sup>14</sup> Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup> Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>"When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I

**judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.**" (Exod. 18:13-16 NASB)

The **statutes of God and His laws** were revealed to Moses before the formal law ceremony at Sinai which he used to adjudicate disputes between people. From this, and from the early chapters of Genesis, we conclude that the law of God had been revealed not only from natural creation and in men's consciences, but specially revealed to others.

These are *the records of* the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, **blameless** in his time; Noah walked with God. (Gen. 6:9 NASB) [How would Noah be **blameless** without specific revelation concerning the will of God?]

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you *alone* I have seen *to be* righteous before Me in this time.<sup>2</sup> "You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; (Gen. 7:1-2 NASB) [Noah understood the difference between clean and unclean animals before the Levitical legislation of Lev. 11.]

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **Walk before Me, and be blameless.** (Gen. 17:1 NASB)

"I will multiply your [*Isaac's*] descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;<sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws." (Gen. 26:4-5 NASB)

Even the case law concerning the theft of animals was known to Jacob roughly 350 years before the Exodus from Egypt in 1450 BC (James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant*, pp. 50-52). Defending his integrity to greedy Laban, he says,

"These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks.<sup>39</sup> "That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. (Gen. 31:38-39 NASB)

"If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep *for him*, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking,<sup>11</sup> an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept *it*, and he shall not make restitution.<sup>12</sup> "But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.<sup>13</sup> "If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces. (Exod. 22:10-13 NASB)

Although the revealed oral law of God was known both to Jacob and Laban, Laban did not allow Jacob to make use of this law, but forced him to bear the economic loss of the animal himself.

In Rom. 5: 14, **nevertheless** interrupts the false conclusion that would follow from **but sin is not imputed when there is no law.** The false conclusion would be: then there was no sin imputed against men until the Law was given at Sinai. But this conclusion flies in the face of the historical facts. The historical facts prove that there was, indeed, a law to which men were held accountable. **Death reigned from Adam until Moses** proves that sin has been imputed previously to Moses.

Men died during this time frame even though they **had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam**. What is the **likeness** of Adam's offense? His offense was a flagrant violation of the expressed will of God clearly communicated: "Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." From the time Adam was banished from the garden until the Law was made known to Israel through Moses, men died without sinning in this fashion. The godly line of Seth enjoyed the light of unwritten special revelation illustrated by Enoch who **walked with God**—an allusion to man's pre-fall fellowship with God (Gen. 3: 8-9). But even Seth's line did not have written special revelation which began with Moses. The line of Cain went astray from the beginning of his banishment, sinning against the light of nature and against the work of the law written on their hearts and against the oral tradition of law, but not against the special revelation of the written law. We have no way of knowing when this oral tradition of law was lost to Cain's line.

Therefore, Paul employs a time-frame suited to his purpose of proving that the sin of Adam was **imputed** to all men, **even** over those who did not sin **in the likeness of Adam**, that is, against the express commandment of God. They **nevertheless** died because of imputed sin, the imputed sin of Adam. Even of Seth's descendants, except Enoch, it is said, **and he died**. Of Cain's descendants without exception, it is said, **and he died**.

Therefore, **because all sinned** must refer to the imputed sin of Adam to all men, **even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam's offense**—namely, the violation of the expressed will of God. Infants and the mentally incompetent offer the most obvious examples of such people, but considering the time-frame Paul employs in his argument, it also includes those "outside the pale of special revelation" (Murray, p. 190).

In other words, when all the facts of the pre-Mosaic period are taken into account the only explanation of the *universal reign* is solidarity in the sin of Adam (Murray, p. 191, emphasis his).

Paul then says of Adam, **who is a type of Him who was to come** (v. 14). This statement is essential to the analogy he is about to make between the **one transgression** of Adam and the **one act of righteousness** (v. 18) of Jesus Christ. Adam is a type of Christ in that he was the federal head of the human race. When he sinned, we all sinned—man, woman, child, infant. We may ask, is it fair for the whole human race to be represented by one man? Three responses come to mind. First, God never asks permission for the way He orders the universe. Second, throughout the history of the human race, the principle of representation has been in operation; and no one seems to ask whether this is fair. It is just the way things are. Kings, princes, rich land lords, presidents, legislatures and parliaments representing whole nations and people groups have gone to war with other kings, nations, etc. leaving themselves either richer with the spoils of war or poorer, while leaving their people either unaffected or in bondage. Fathers represent families for good or ill.

Third, and most important to Paul's argument, he will demonstrate shortly that God has used this principle of representation for the salvation of everyone who believes. **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive** (1 Cor. 15:22). Thus, Christ becomes the new federal head for the new, redeemed humanity who are **made righteous** before God, not through acts of righteousness they have done individually, but through Christ's one act of righteousness on the cross. Thus, if we wish to argue the unfairness of representation, we must shoulder the burden of pleasing God individually on our own rather than through the representative work of Christ imputed to our account.

<sup>15</sup> But *the free gift* A'  
 is not like B'  
 THE TRANSGRESSION. C'  
 For  
 if by THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE ONE C'  
 the many died, D'  
 much more B'  
*did the grace of God and*  
*the gift by the grace of the one Man,*  
*Jesus Christ,* A'  
 abound to the many. D'

<sup>16</sup> *The gift* A'  
 is not like B'  
 THAT WHICH CAME THROUGH THE ONE  
WHO SINNED; C'  
 for  
 on the one hand B'  
 THE JUDGMENT AROSE  
 FROM ONE TRANSGRESSION C'  
resulting in condemnation, D'  
 but on the other hand B'  
*the free gift arose* A'  
 FROM MANY TRANSGRESSIONS C'  
resulting in justification. D'

<sup>17</sup> **For**  
 if by THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE ONE, C'  
death reigned through the one, D'  
 much more B'  
 those who receive D'  
*the abundance of grace*  
*and of the gift of righteousness* A'

<sup>18</sup> So then will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. D'

even so AS THROUGH ONE TRANSGRESSION C'

there resulted condemnation to all men, D'

through one act of righteousness A'

there resulted justification of life to all men. D'

<sup>19</sup> For AS THROUGH THE ONE MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE C'

even so the many were made sinners, D'

through the obedience of the One A'

the many will be made righteous. D'

<sup>20</sup> **The Law came in** E'

so that

but THE TRANSGRESSION WOULD INCREASE; C'

WHERE SIN INCREASED, C'

grace abounded all the more, A'

<sup>21</sup> so that,

even so as sin reigned in death, D'

grace would reign through righteousness D'

to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. D'

Beginning in v. 15, Paul formulates the antithesis (contrast) between the **transgression of the one** and the **free gift...and grace...of the one man, Jesus Christ**. The transgression is **not like** the free gift.

The transgression of Adam resulted in the death of **many**. He does not say, **all**; Enoch and Elijah are notable exceptions. But in 1 Cor. 15: 22, Paul says more generally, **As in Adam all die**. This **all** includes infant children. Possibly, Paul wishes to carry the contrast through to the end using similar terms (**one, all, many**) for both Adam and Christ (cf. vv. 18-19). The **one** and the **many** are both used in this passage to denote singularity and plurality. The **one** sin of Adam leads to the death of **many** while the **one** act of Christ's righteousness leads to the justification of the **many**. **Many** simply means numerous without quantification.



In no sense does Paul wish to use the terms in their exact literal significance—**all without exclusion** or **many with some exclusion** (cf. Murray, p. 192-193). **Justification of life to all men** (v. 18) cannot be made to teach **universalism** any more than **many were made sinners** can be used to exclude some people from the imputation of Adam's sin. Moreover, careful reading of the text reveals that **those who reign in life through the one** is modified by the phrase, **those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness**. The grace of receiving the gift is crucial to understanding the passage.

Adam's federal headship resulted in **death** because of disobedience. Christ's federal headship results in **grace**, the **free gift**, and **life** because of His obedience. Paul refers to Christ's obedience as the **one act of righteousness** (v. 18) in order to more clearly show the antithesis between this one act and the one act of disobedience. We know that we are not only saved by Christ's **passive** obedience on the cross but also his **active** obedience in keeping the Law of God perfectly during His sojourn on earth which included many acts of righteousness. We are saved as much by His obedience to the law as his crucifixion on the cross. Without His continual obedience during His life, His crucifixion would have been meaningless. He would have died not for **our** sins, but for His **own** sins. Yet, to keep the contrast (antithesis) simple, Paul uses the singular **one act of righteousness** as the **summary or sum total of everything Christ did for us** culminating or coming to a conclusion in His self-sacrifice.

**Is not like** sets up the contrast between the **one transgression** of Adam and the **one act of righteousness** of Christ. In the literal analysis, I have labeled this phrase with a **B'** in order to show the parallel with the phrases **much more, on the one hand, on the other hand** which show the contrast between what Adam did and what Christ did.

In v. 16: **the judgment arose from one transgression but...the free gift arose from many transgressions**. We might have expected Paul to say that the **free gift** arose from **one act of righteousness**, but this would be somewhat redundant (unnecessarily repetitive) since he clearly explains that contrast later on in the discourse. Paul is not using **many transgressions** as the **ground or basis** of the free gift but rather as the grounds for the **necessity** of the free gift. One transgression was all that was necessary to evoke the condemnation and judgment of God, but the **free gift of grace** did not take only Adam's transgression into consideration, but **many transgressions**. Therefore, the free gift was **not like** the one transgression in that it served as the **sufficient grounds** for forgiving not merely **one** transgression, but **many**. The gift of grace through Jesus Christ took **many** of man's transgressions into account when it was offered on the cross.

Just as **the many died** cannot **exclude** anyone except Enoch and Elijah—OT types of the resurrection—**justification of life to all men** cannot **include** every single human being—the heresy that all men will be saved. All men without exclusion are not justified in the sight of God; otherwise, no one would go to hell, contradicting the express teachings of Jesus and the apostles elsewhere. The Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself.

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. (Matt. 7:13 NASB)

"The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,<sup>42</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:41-42 NASB)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, (1 Cor. 6:9 NASB)

However, **all men** does include all men without distinction of every race, color, sex or social status. The text of Rom. 5, used alone without the balance of other passages restricting the scope of salvation, could be, and has been, employed to teach universalism.

Note also the parallel between **those who receive...the gift** and those who are **made righteous**. We do not make ourselves righteous. We **receive** righteousness. The voice of the verb **made** is passive; the action is done by someone or something else and received by the subject of the verb. (e.g. The man was killed by a lion. He did not kill himself. The lion killed him.) Moreover, the passive voice is also used in the phrase **were made sinners**. While it is true that all men sin individually (with the exclusions we have already noted), the universality of voluntary sin is not Paul's burden at the moment. He is continuing with his argument for the universality of all men sinning in and with Adam in his first offense. Men sin, but men do not become sinners the first time they sin. They are sinners because they sinned in Adam, and their continuance in sin and disposition to sin is evidence that they **were made sinners** in Adam.

Moreover, Paul has not mentioned the universality of man's pollution in sin, only the fact that he sinned in and with Adam; but it is clear from his quotations from the OT in Romans 3 that man's sinful acts stem from the root of his pollution, the inherited sinful nature from Adam.

The wicked are **estranged from the womb**; These who speak lies **go astray from birth**. (Ps. 58:3 NASB)

David is not limiting this estrangement to a limited category of people known as **the wicked** or **these who speak lies**. (The difficulty in understanding the Bible is the tendency to rest our theology on a few verses.) The emphasis in the verse is the beginning of man's estrangement which results from the sin of Adam. David also says,

Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity**, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Ps. 51:5 NASB)

David was the youngest son of Jesse who had three older sons; therefore, his mother (unnamed in the Bible) did not conceive David out of wedlock nor through adultery. The **iniquity** of which he speaks is the iniquity of sin's pollution. David is relating his sin of adultery back to the pollution of sin inherited from his distant father, Adam.

Again, the question arises: Is this fair? Is it fair that we are born sinners because Adam sinned? If we have a problem with this, we might also ask the question: Would we have done any differently from Adam had we been presented with the same probation? If we say, yes, then we must explain the bleak history of our sinful deeds from the moment we understood the difference between right and wrong. Indeed, would our mothers and fathers claim that we would have done things differently from Adam and Eve? Would our wives and husbands support this claim? No, we must

admit that we would have chosen to disobey in the garden even given the same positive environment and benefits as Adam and Eve.

<sup>20</sup> The Law came in

so that

*the transgression would increase;*

but

*where sin increased,*

*grace abounded all the more,*

<sup>21</sup> so that,

as **sin** reigned in death,

even so

**grace** would reign through righteousness

to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verses 20-21 are crucial to our understanding of Romans 6.

**The Law came in** refers to the promulgation (publication and giving) of the Law of Moses at Sinai at a particular time in salvation history (**For until the Law**). One of the purposes of the Mosaic Law was to provide a disciplinarian (**tutor**) to bring us to grace.

Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24 NASB)

However, this function of the Law is not under Paul's present consideration. At present, he merely wishes to introduce the surprising result of the Law's promulgation. It did not decrease the occurrence of man's sin. It actually **increased** transgression and sin. This is counter-intuitive (surprising) to what we would have expected. We would have expected Paul to say that the giving of the Law decreased sin. As men heard the Law of Moses read and explained, the effect of this Law should have been to discourage men from breaking it and thus incurring God's wrath and curse. Keeping it would have ensured his promise of blessing. But this is not what Paul says, and this is not what happened historically. In the history of Israel, the Law of Moses was continually ignored and violated, resulting in the eventual exile of Israel and the annihilation of the kingdoms of David and Solomon.

The increasing knowledge of the law of God also increases the transgressions against known law. Consideration should be given here to the type of transgression which is increased. It is a transgression **in the likeness of the offense of Adam** that Paul has in view—a transgression against the published and express commandment of God. It is this kind of transgression that has increased.

Paul will explain this phenomenon in more detail in Romans 7. "I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said,

"YOU SHALL NOT COVET." Yet, when Paul became fully aware of the implications of the tenth commandment, he confessed, "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; (v. 9).

For now, he simply states the fact that the law increases transgressions. Sin increases with the publication and knowledge of the Law of Moses (or the moral law of God explained in further depth in the NT Scriptures). Why is this? We will explore why later on. Suffice it to say at this point that with more knowledge comes greater responsibility.

To use an illustration, suppose I am driving down the road at 100 kilometers an hour when the speed limit is only 80 kilometers an hour. I am pulled over by a traffic policeman. He gives me a ticket for speeding. I try to explain that I didn't know the limit was 80 kph. He tells me that my ignorance is no excuse. This situation would correspond to the time-frame between Adam and Moses before the Law was given. Most people in the world were **ignorant** of the Law because never written and published, although they were still guilty before God because the work of the Law was written on their hearts either excusing them or accusing them. But what if the policemen pulls me over just thirty seconds after I had just read a posted speed limit sign of 80? If I am honest, I cannot plead ignorance of the law. I saw the sign, but I decided to break the limit anyway. Since I cannot plead ignorance, my **transgression** has **increased** in the estimation of the policemen. I was not only speeding, but I was speeding willfully against a known law.

This is what the written and orally published Law of God does. It **increases** the transgression of those who know what it says but choose voluntarily and willfully to ignore it. Sin is not merely one act of disobedience, but at least two. The first sin is to decide to ignore God's law. The disobedient act comes second. We are already sinning the moment we choose to ignore God. To use a biblical example, David was already sinning when he chose not to look the other way when he accidentally saw Bathsheba naked. He chose to sin again when he chose to contemplate her naked body and lust for it. He chose another sinful act when he summoned her to the castle, and another when he got her in bed, etc, etc. All of this would have been blamable even if David had been ignorant of the Law of God; adultery was considered a sin even in pagan cultures (cf. Gen. 20: 4). But he wasn't ignorant. His sin **increased** because the Law had already been given 500 years before he was king, and because he was fully aware of it.

The more puzzling phrase in v. 20 is **so that** (*hina*). This word implies purpose. One purpose for the giving of the Law was to **increase transgression**. So why did God give the Law to increase transgression? God knew the Law would not deter sin in the heart of man. It may deter external sins which are severely punished. If I face a ten-year sentence in jail for stealing \$10,000—and if I am in my right mind—I will not wish to trade a year of my life for each \$1000 I want to steal. But there is no punishment for lusting or coveting. I will not go to jail for either. I can go to hell for habitual lusting and coveting, but even this threat of punishment will not cure me of either sin. The Law increases the knowledge of sin, but also the guilt incurred for breaking a known law. For this reason, Paul says in Rom. 7: 24, **Who will set me free from the body of this death?** followed by his exultation in Rom. 7: 25, **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Followed still later by:

For **what the Law could not do**, weak as it was through the flesh, **God did**: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> **so that the**

requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4 NASB)

The Law can make sin known. It can increase the guilt of sin. The Law cannot cure sin or ensure its own compliance. But we have not answered the question: Why was it God's purpose in giving the Law to increase transgression? Akin to this question is: Why was it God's purpose for Adam to transgress His law? And why was it God's purpose to choose some vessels for mercy while choosing others for destruction (the subject of Rom. 9)? In the immediate context, Paul says, "but where sin increased, **grace abounded all the more.**" The election of Jacob, the passing over of Esau, the election of Israel, and the destruction of Pharaoh were demonstrations of God's wrath, power, and mercy.

What if God, although willing to **demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known**, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?<sup>23</sup> And *He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy*, which He prepared beforehand for glory, (Rom. 9:22-23 NASB)

So also is the abounding grace of God toward sinners against the background of multiplied transgressions. **As sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness.** For the first time in the chapter, the **reign of death** is contrasted with the **reign of grace**. In order to maximize the glory of His grace, God gave the Law to **increase** the number of transgressions which must be vanquished with grace. The increase in transgression is not to be attributed to God as its cause. The cause of transgression is man's pollution inherited from Adam. He is a sinner by birth and a sinner by choice. But with the giving of the Law, man's sin is more "in God's face" as a flagrant and knowledgeable violation of God's law. God's grace is therefore highlighted against the backdrop of transgression even as the stars are highlighted against the blackened sky.

This idea, of course, provides a platform for misinterpretation, one that Paul foresees immediately in his discourse: **What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?**

## Romans 6

**<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then?**

**Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?**

**<sup>2</sup> May it never be!**

Verses 1-2 form an  
inclusio with v. 15

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 of Romans, Paul lays out in detail the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. In 5: 20, he says, **And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.** In other words, as the revealed will of God expressed in the Law increased the realization and culpability (accountability) of sin, the grace of God increased even more in order that men's sin might be forgiven. God's grace was found to be more abundant than all of man's sinfulness. From this verse an old hymn was written, "Wonderful the grace of Jesus, greater than all our sin."

Paul knew that this statement of God's abundant grace would lead to the wrong conclusion for some of his audience. This conclusion is phrased as a question found in v. 1 of chapter 6. If, indeed, when man's sin increases, God's grace increases even more abundantly, should we then

continue sinning even more so that God's grace would increase even more? In other words, the worse our sin looks, the better God's grace looks; therefore, let's keep on sinning so that God's grace will look better and better. To this suggestion Paul says, **May it never be!** Paul's refutation of antinomianism is first mentioned in Romans 3.

And why not *say* (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just. (Rom. 3:8 NASB)

He was also accused of antinomianism by some of the Judaizers troubling the church of Asia Minor.

"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! (Gal. 2:17 NASB)

Therefore, there were those who accused Paul of teaching lawlessness. Since he is saved by grace alone, the Christian's conduct is unimportant. The argument against this kind of thinking is found in the remainder of Romans 6. The argument amounts to this: As Christians we have been united to Jesus Christ. We have been united to Christ in his death, in his burial, and finally in His resurrection. Just as sure as Christ has died, we have died with Him. Just as sure as He has been buried, we have been buried with Him. And just as sure as He was raised again from the dead, we also have been raised with Him from the dead "to walk in newness of life." The purpose of our being united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is that we can make a complete break with the life of sin we once had and can now begin to walk in a new life, the life we have with Christ.

How shall we who  
died to sin  
still live in it?

Having stated the question of v. 1, Paul answers with a resounding no. He then begins to lay out his argument against the antinomian (lawless) conclusion to the doctrine of justification by faith with a rhetorical question demanding another negative answer: **How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** The verbs are important. **Died** is aorist indicative, meaning a once-for-all definitive action in the past. The true believer died. When he died has not yet been explored in the passage. **Live** is future indicative pointing to action taking place in the future. Coupled with **still**, the future action is continuous. How can a believer who died to sin still live in sin continually in the future? The implied answer is: He cannot. Paul could stop here with the argument against antinomianism, but he continues with a lengthy discussion of the believer's union with Christ as the reason for his denial.

<sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that  
all of us who  
have been baptized  
*into Christ Jesus*  
have been baptized  
*into His death?*

**Or do you not know** suggest something of the apostle's dismay at the ignorance of the church in Rome. They should already understand what Paul is about to explain. It is now our blessing that they didn't understand, for this is the most complete explanation of the Christian's union with Christ in the NT. The doctrine of union with Christ is foundational to our understanding of justification, sanctification, and glorification. The primary subject of Romans 3—5 (especially 4—5) is justification. The primary subject of Romans 6, 7, and 8 is sanctification.

Perhaps we can appreciate from the sheer volume of information concerning sanctification that sanctification is just as important to Paul as justification. It should also be equally important to the Christian, but often isn't. Why did God save us in the first place? Did He save us so that we can live godless, immoral lives like the rest of society? The question itself supplies its own answer. God chose the Israelites to be a holy people who reflected His character, and He chose us for the same purpose. After Israel's failure, He sent the new Israel, Jesus Christ, who would create a new people consisting of both Jew and Gentile who would serve as His new holy nation, a kingdom of priests consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. (1 Pet. 2:9-11 NASB)

Failure to reflect the holiness of God misses the whole purpose of salvation. But how can this sanctification take place? By hard work? By heroic self-effort to keep the Law? Romans 7 supplies the answer to that question. Our efforts to keep the law of God are ineffectual and fruitless apart from a clear understanding of what God has already accomplished for the Christian. Through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8), the **old self** has been put to death, **crucified**, and the **new self** (**new man**; Eph. 4: 24) has risen with Christ to live a new life. This is what theologians call definitive sanctification, the sanctification or “setting apart” that God has already accomplished once-and-for-all through the death of His Son. Just as we had no part to play in our justification except believing and receiving the gift (Rom. 5), we had no part to play in definitive sanctification except believing and receiving. Apart from this definitive sanctification, our progressive sanctification is impossible. Progressive sanctification is our gradual conformity into the image of Christ—i.e. his moral perfection. As John says,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, **we will be like Him**, because **we will see Him just as He is**. (1 Jn. 3:2 NASB)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says,

What is sanctification? Answer. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, (1) whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, (2) and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.(3)

(1) 2 Thess. 2:13

(2) Eph. 4:23,24

(3) Rom. 6:4,6; Rom. 8:1 (WSC 1:35 WCS)

How does this take place? We **have been baptized into Christ Jesus**, including baptism **into His death**. The verb is aorist passive. From the context of v. 10 (the **once-for-all** death of Christ) and Paul's argument as a whole, the action of being baptized into Christ and into His death is presented in the aorist tense as a once-for-all act in the past (cf. Murray on Rom. 6). How, then, were we baptized into the death of someone who died 2000 years ago? The question reveals that the baptism of which Paul is speaking is a spiritual baptism, not a water baptism. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we were baptized into Christ's death. The verb is passive, indicating that we did not perform the action of baptizing, nor did the priest or pastor. The Holy Spirit alone can baptize us into Christ Jesus. Yet, Paul uses water baptism as the symbol by which spiritual baptism may be fully understood. We **have been buried with Him through baptism into death**.

<sup>4</sup>Therefore

we

**have been buried**

*with Him*

through baptism  
into death,

At this point, I will not open a can of worms about the proper method of baptism. Personally, I accept both sprinkling and submersion as proper modes of baptism and confess that submersion seems to fit the spiritual picture better than sprinkling. We **died**, and we **have been buried**. (And it is very difficult to bury someone under a few drops of water.) More importantly, the very picture of being buried indicates the finality of our death. You don't bury someone who is still alive! Paul goes on to say in v. 5 that this burial is not an actual burial. Our burial with Christ in baptism is **in the likeness** [*homoioima*] **of His death** even as our resurrection in v. 5 is **in the likeness** [*homoioima is implied*] **of His resurrection**. This gives us a clue to the meaning of what kind of resurrection Paul is speaking of in v. 5. In this passage, our resurrection, even as our death, is of a spiritual nature. We (i.e., our old selves) died spiritually and we (i.e. our new selves) are resurrected spiritually. This also gives us a clue to the certainty of the Christian's sanctification. C

Paul is not speaking of the physical resurrection in 6: 5. Our physical resurrection is also certain, grounded upon the physical resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15 for details), but this is not Paul's burden in chapter 6. The whole context of this chapter deals with the question posed at the beginning, **Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?** The physical resurrection at the end of the age has no direct bearing on the subject at hand except as an indirect encouragement to this end. The spiritual resurrection in Rom. 6 and Eph. 2 is described by John in Revelation as the **first resurrection** (Rev. 20: 5-6).

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.<sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. **This is the first**



**resurrection.** <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in **the first resurrection**; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4-6 NASB)

<sup>4</sup>so that

as **Christ**

was raised

from the dead

through the glory of the Father,

so

we too

might walk

in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup>For if

we

have become united

*with Him*

in the likeness of His death,

certainly we

shall also be *[united—implied]*

*[with Him—implied]*

in the likeness of His resurrection.

**So we too** is an indication of purpose. What was the purpose or goal of Christ being **raised from the dead**? There were, of course, many purposes in the mind of God for raising Christ from the dead. Paul is concerned here with only one: **so we too might walk** *[peripateo]* **in newness of life**.

What is **newness** of life? Just the opposite of the oldness of life we once lived. Once more, let Scripture interpret Scripture.

And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you **formerly walked** *[peripateo]* according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup> Among them we too all **formerly lived** in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph. 2:1-3 NASB)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. <sup>6</sup> For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> **and in them you also once walked** *[peripateo]*, **when you were living in them.** (Col. 3:5-7 NASB)

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness,

carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** (Gal. 5:19-21 NASB)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> **Such were some of you;** but you were washed, but **you were sanctified**, but **you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NASB)

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet walk [peripateo] in the darkness*, we lie and do not practice the truth;<sup>7</sup> but if we **walk [peripateo] in the Light** as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 Jn. 1:6-7 NASB)

To **walk [peripateo]** means to live, to walk around. We once **walked** (aorist tense—past) in darkness, but now we **walk** (present tense) in the light. The question here is: When does God purpose for us to **walk** in the light, to **live in newness of life**? Is this newness of life reserved for some future time in heaven, or does God wish for us to begin walking in the light immediately after our conversion? The question implies the answer. Not only is the Christian's physical resurrection guaranteed in the future, eschatological resurrection at the end of the age, but also his present spiritual resurrection—ongoing progressive sanctification—is guaranteed in the accomplished resurrection of Christ: **certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.** It is one of the primary reasons for Christ being raised from the dead.

But look at the verb tense: **shall be**. Does this not imply that Paul is speaking of the physical resurrection in the future? It is admitted that the verb tense can be problematic for the interpretation offered above; but once more, we must look at the context. What is Paul talking about? He is answering the question posed by antinomians who believe that we can continue living in sin since grace increases in proportion to our sin (v. 1). His argument consists in the fact that **If we have become united with Him [Christ] in the likeness of His death, [then—implied] certainly we shall also be [united with Him—implied] in the likeness of His resurrection.** The verb **have become** in v. 5a is perfect indicative. “The force of the perfect [indicative] tense is simply that it describes an event that, completed in the past has results existing in the present time...the continuance of completed action” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, cited from *BibleWorks 10*).

Thus, Paul says to his audience, you have been united with Christ in the past with the present result that you remain united with Him. But just how are we united with Him, only in His death, or also presently in His resurrection? The question pertains to the future **shall be**. Does this imply that our unity with Christ in His resurrection must be delayed until the general resurrection at the end of the age? The text of the verb allows this interpretation, but the force of Paul's argument constrains us to interpret our union with Christ to include present unity in His resurrected life.

There is a little word at the beginning of v. 5 which compels us to this conclusion: **For**. The word is explanatory. Verse 5 explains verse 4. The words...**so we too might walk in newness of life** in v. 4 are parallel to **we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection** in v. 5. With v. 5, we know that the Christian is also presently united with Christ in His resurrection. The analogy of scripture will support this interpretation.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together [aorist] with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and **raised [aorist] us up with Him**, and **seated [aorist] us with Him** in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 2:4-6 NASB)

None of these verbs are future; they are all aorist indicating that the action of the verb has already happened. The Christian is **made alive...with Christ, raised...up with Him** and **seated with Him in the heavenly places** as if he is already in heaven. Since we know that we are not physically in heaven, Paul must be speaking of the spiritual resurrection of the believer, much like that of Rom. 6: 5.

<sup>6</sup> knowing this,

that <b>our old self</b>	A	
<u>was crucified</u>		B
<i>with Him,</i>		
in order that		C [purpose]
<b>our body of sin</b>	A	
<u>might be done away with,</u>		B [result]
so that		C [purpose]
<b>we</b>	A [the new “we”]	
<u>would no longer be slaves to sin;</u>		B [result]

<sup>7</sup> for [explanation]

<b>he who has died</b>	A
<u>is freed from sin.</u>	B [result]

Verses 6-8 support the interpretation above. **Knowing this** indicates that Paul is not finished with the thought of v. 5. He now describes in more detail the death of the Christian in terms of the death of Christ. The mode of Christ’s death was crucifixion, and the mode of our death is crucifixion. Paul is now ready to explain what he means in v. 2 by **we who died to sin**. In what manner did we die? We died by crucifixion. Once more, this crucifixion is spiritual, but the effects of it are both internal and external. It is a crucifixion that affected or brought into existence the whole life of the Christian in all its spiritual and physical complexity. Our physical life is controlled by our spiritual life. There is no dichotomy or separation between the physical and the spiritual in Paul’s theology. **For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.** (1 Cor. 6:20 NASB)

The analogy of faith in Galatians helps further explain Paul’s meaning in Romans.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Gal. 2:20 NASB)

**I have been crucified with Christ** exactly replicates what Paul is saying in Romans 6 about all believers being crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live**, replicates the idea that the old self has been put to death in crucifixion. It is no longer the old **I** who lives but the new self who lives. **But Christ lives in me** replicates the idea that **we too might walk in newness of life**, or as he says, *in the likeness of His resurrection*.

**Old self** may be translated **old man**. He is **old** in contrast to **new**. What has happened to this old man? He **was crucified**. The tense is aorist indicating that the action of **crucified** has, in fact, happened. How did this happen? It happened **with Christ**. Clearly then, the crucifixion in v. 6 is a spiritual crucifixion mystically connected to and grounded in the historical, physical crucifixion of Christ. Our crucifixion is vicarious, accomplished in another person who represented us.

It should be noted here that if the crucifixion of Christ is only a theological metaphor—something that did not actually happen—then our faith is in vain. The sacrifice of Christ was the fulfillment of all the OT sacrifices. These bloody sacrifices are not presented to us in the OT as metaphor. Thousands of animals died. Modern liberal theology shuns the idea of the actual sacrifice of Christ partly because it mocks the idea of an actual, physical resurrection. It also mocks the idea of God's judgment and the necessity of Christ's atonement.

When were **we** crucified? This question divides into the objective and the subjective. Objectively, our **old man** was crucified when Christ was crucified in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Thus, our crucifixion was based upon an objective historical event. But clearly, we were not yet born when Christ was crucified. Subjectively, our old man was crucified at another historical point in time, the complex of events surrounding our regeneration, repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. At that point in time, the Holy Spirit subjectively applied the objective crucifixion of Christ to our hearts. Our old man died, and our new man rose with Christ in newness of life. As Christians, this has already happened. We died and rose again. For elect unbelievers, this subjective dying and rising is yet to occur, but it is certain on the basis of the objective death and resurrection of Christ for all those given Him by the Father (Jn. 6: 37-39).

**In order that** indicates purpose. What was God's purpose in **our old self was crucified**? It was for the purpose of doing away with the **body of sin** (v. 6). **Body of sin** (A) is parallel to **old self** (A). It is a body controlled and conditioned by sin, a sinful body enslaved to sin. It is a body which Paul says in v. 13 whose **members** we have presented **to sin as instruments of unrighteousness**.

**Was crucified** (B) is parallel to **might be done away with** (B). Thus, the purpose of God in the crucifixion of the old man in the crucifixion of Christ was to eliminate the old self who was in bondage to sin. This former bondage is explicitly stated in the next purpose clause: **so that we would no longer be slaves to sin**. As verse 5 explains v. 4, so verse 6 explains verse 5. Being **in the likeness of Christ's resurrection** explains what Paul means by **walking in newness of life**. We are raised up with Christ to live (walk in) a new life. The crucifixion of the old man means getting rid of the old man that the Christian once was, an old man who was a **slave of sin**. This being the case, we can see that Paul reiterates his point in many ways to prove that the Christian has died to sin so that he would no longer be a slave to sin.

Verse 7, **for he who has died is freed from sin**, is a short explanation of Paul's statement of purpose in v. 6, **so that we would no longer be slaves to sin**. It is a short statement, but full of application. To paraphrase: Dead men don't sin.

When a man dies on earth, he is no longer active and living with respect to the world as he knew it. It is as if he has vanished from the face of the earth, and he now exists in a different realm, the realm of the dead. We should think of sin as a realm or sphere of existence to which the believer is now **dead** (See Murray, *Collected Writings*, p.279). He no longer operates or lives in that sphere where he lived in bondage to sin; He is **freed** (v. 7) from that sphere. No one can make a dead man sin. It is true that we still sin and that we will still die physically, but this fact does not cancel the truth that we do not live under sin's dominion and reign. The Christian may no more live under the dominion of sin than a dead man can live on the earth. If we do live under sin's dominion, we are not united to Christ in His death, and we are not Christians.

The force of Paul's analogy between the believer's death and resurrection and Christ's death and resurrection must be fully appreciated. He does not say that the **old man** is dying, but that he is **dead**. **Christ himself is not dying** but has **died** and **is never to die again** (v. 9 below). Likewise, to appreciate the analogy, we must understand the finality of our death in the death of Christ. The old man we **formerly/once were** (see passages above) no longer exists. He is dead. Crucified victims never survive; they always die.

It is no more feasible [possible] to call the believer a new man and an old man, than it is to call him a regenerate man and an unregenerate. And neither is it warranted to speak of the believer as having in him the old man and the new man. This kind of terminology is without warrant and it is but another method of doing prejudice to the doctrine which Paul was so jealous to establish when he said, 'our old man has been crucified' (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 218, emphasis mine).

The new man who now exists is the new man in Christ who lives a new life conditioned and controlled by righteousness and one whose bodily members are presented to righteousness (see below). The confusion lies in the fact that the believer, who is dead to sin as a controlling influence in his life, still sins; but sin is no longer the dominating influence it once was.

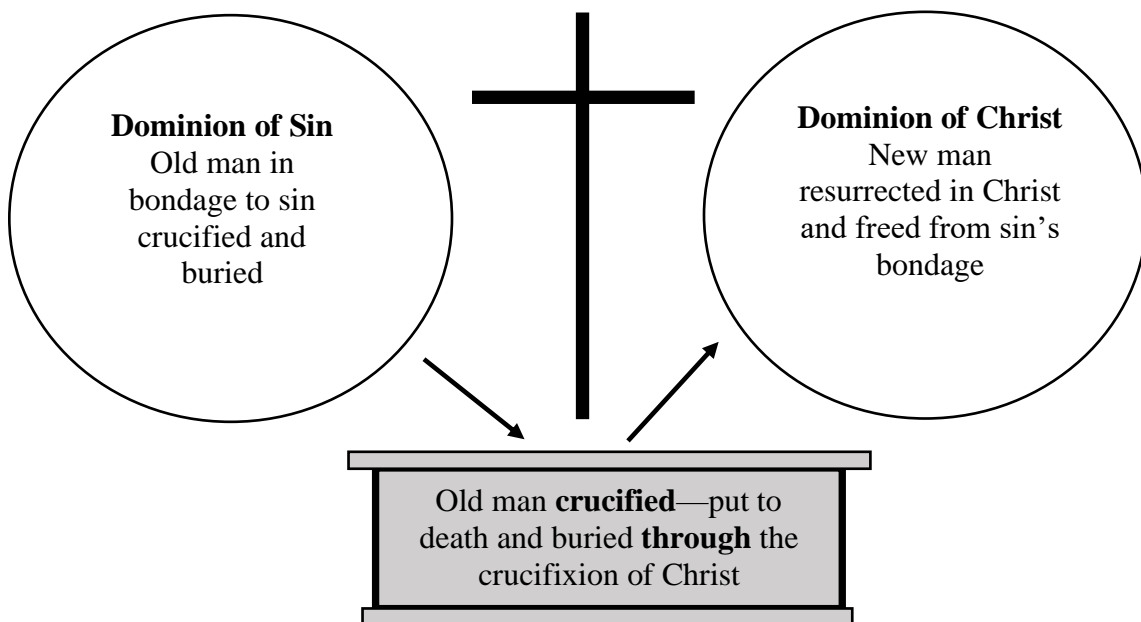
There is a total difference between **surviving sin** and **reigning sin**, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us: it is another for us to live in sin. It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital; it is another for his defeated hosts to harass the garrisons of the kingdom (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 145).

Murray acknowledges the difficulty of Rom. 6: 10. **For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.** (Rom. 6:10 NASB)

Admittedly it is difficult to determine the force of this expression. In verse 2 the same formula is used with reference to our death to sin and in verse 11 we are said "to be dead to sin". Is it possible to apply the same meaning to the death of Christ? It would appear to be arbitrary to interpret the formula as it applies to Christ in a way entirely different from the meaning in verse 2 and 11. Furthermore, there is a parallelism between verses 10 and 11, Christ's dying to sin once (vs. 10) being parallel to our being dead to sin (vs. 11), and Christ's living to God (vs.10) being parallel to our living to God in Christ Jesus (vs. 11). The parallels indicate similitude, and if Christ's dying to sin bears no

analogy to our death to sin the similitude would break down. So we shall have to proceed on the assumption that the formula as it applies to us provides the direction in which we are to seek the meaning as it applies to Christ.

As applied to believers in verse 2 and 11 the thought is that they died to the power of sin. May the same be said of Christ? It cannot be said of Christ that sin exercised its power over him in the same sense in which it ruled over us. We were the bond-slaves of sin in its defilement and power; sin did not thus rule over him. Nevertheless, Christ was identified in such a way with the sin which he vicariously bore that he dealt not only with its guilt but also with its power. Death ruled over him until he broke its power (vs. 9). So sin may be said to have ruled over him in that his humiliation state was conditioned by the sin with which he was vicariously identified. He was made sin (II Cor. 5: 21), and sin as power must be taken into account in this relationship. It was by his own dying that he destroyed the power of sin, and in his resurrection he entered upon a state that was not conditioned by sin. There is good reason to believe that it is this victory over sin as power that the apostle has in view when he says that Christ “died to sin once”. And it is because Christ triumphed over the power of sin in his death that those united to him in his death die to the power of sin and become dead to sin (vss. 2, 11) (*Romans*, pp. 224-225, emphasis mine).



<sup>9</sup> knowing that

Christ,

having been raised

from the dead,

is never to die again;

death no longer is **master** over Him.

<sup>10</sup> For

the death

that He died,

He died to sin once for all;

A

B

C

but the life

that He lives,

He lives to God.

A

B

C

The purpose of the believer's crucifixion and death is to break the power of sin in his life. To accomplish this, Christ died; and His death was the vicarious crucifixion and death of every single believer who will ever live or be conceived (infants) in this world. Moreover, His resurrection to life was the vicarious resurrection to a new life for every believer. Because He lives, we live; but we do not live the old life all over again. We live **in newness of life** characterized by the life of Christ.

But how can we say that Christ is now living in newness of life after His resurrection? Though sinless and never under the dominion of sin, Christ was nevertheless **born under the Law** (Gal. 4: 4) and **born under the power of death**. God cannot die, but Jesus, the God-man, died. He died because he voluntarily came under the **mastery** of death, the **wages of sin**. But this mastery is no longer applicable to Christ because He has already died the death of all deaths, and **having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death is no longer master over Him**. We must note that Paul does not say that "sin is no longer master over Him" because it never was. Jesus was **made** our **sin** that He might bare that sin on the cross. But He was never **made** a sinner.

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21 NASB)

Yet, Jesus was a real human being subject from His birth to potential death and all the forces of this fallen life which could have caused His death: physical trauma, sickness, starvation, murder, et al. But having been predestined to the cross in the eternal counsel of the Trinity, He avoided all forms of death until He laid down His life willingly at the appointed time. But now Jesus continues living as the God-man but never again subject to the sorrows of this life, the trauma of the cross, or separation from His Father. These things are no longer looming in the future for Jesus' life. **But the life that He lives, He lives to God**. Christ Himself has not changed. He is and always has been the sinless, eternal Son of God. But His situation has changed. The sins of the world are not presently being imputed to Him; they were imputed in the past. And He is no longer subject to the Father's wrath, either now or in the future. His work as the sinless sacrifice is **finished** (Jn. 19: 30); it is a non-repeatable event, contrary to the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation in which the bread and wine actually become Christ's body and blood when consecrated by the priest.

Analogously, the believer **lives to God**, and as Christ is no longer subject to death, the believer will one day no longer be subject to death. Even now he is not subject to the **second death**, the death of eternal judgment, because he has experienced the **first resurrection** (Rev. 20: 4-6).

<sup>11</sup> Even so

**CONSIDER YOURSELVES**

to be dead to sin,

but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

A

<sup>12</sup> Therefore

**DO NOT LET SIN REIGN**

B

in your mortal body  
 so that you obey its lusts,  
<sup>13</sup> **AND DO NOT GO ON PRESENTING** B  
 the members of your body to sin  
 as instruments of unrighteousness;

**BUT PRESENT** A  
**yourselves** to God  
 as those alive from the dead,  
 and **your members**  
 as instruments of righteousness to God.

At verse 11, Paul begins the practical imperatives (commands) which follow from the indicatives (statements of fact) in vv. 1-10. The imperatives are based upon the indicatives. That is, there is no relevance to the commands apart from the reality of the truths that Paul has stated as accomplished facts. If the believer has not **died to sin**, then there is nothing served in commanding him to **consider** himself **dead to sin**, because he isn't. Either the old man is still living, or he is dead. Analogously, there is no relevance in telling a dead man to get up and walk because he can't. He's dead. The old man cannot be both living and dead at the same time and in the same way. Again, we must appreciate the compelling force of Paul's analogy. He has never said that the old man is "dying" (present participle). He has, instead, used the aorist (**died**) signifying an act that has already happened. Moreover, in the context of Rom. 6, we may reasonably say that the force of this aorist implies a once-for-all action. Christ has died, but he will never die again. Analogously, the believer has died with Christ, and there will be no need for him to die again and again and again.

But the stated fact of the believer's death—the death of the old man—does not deliver him from responsibility. The American evangelical expression for living the Christian life—"Let go and let God..."—is not a biblical concept. Rather, we find Paul commanding us not to present our bodies to sinful practices. The believer is fully active in his struggle against sin. What must be understood, however, is that the fact of our crucifixion and death of the old man is the basis and pre-requirement for putting sin to death in practice.

It is faith of this fact that provides the basis for, and the incentive to the fulfillment of, the exhortation, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to the end that ye should obey its lusts, neither present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6: 12, 13). In this matter **the indicative [statement of fact] lies at the basis of the imperative [the command]** and our faith of fact is indispensable to the discharge of duty. The faith that sin will not have the dominion is the dynamic in bondservice to righteousness and to God so that we may have the fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life (Rom. 6: 17, 22) (Murray, *Redemption*, p. 146).

If a runner believes he has the potential to run 100 meters in less than ten seconds, he will have the incentive (motive) to train many months to achieve this goal. If, indeed, God has given him the genetic potential (analogously, **alive to God in Christ Jesus**) then the proper training (do not let sin reign; progressive sanctification) will enable him to reach this goal. But there are others who have no incentive or ability to run 100 meters in under ten seconds (analogous to **the old self**)



and their bodies keep getting fatter and weaker all the time. Think of the new man as the genetic potential of the athlete. This genetic potential is God's gift to him. But think of the training as progressive sanctification which includes our responsibility to respond to the grace of God within us.

Thus, it is only on the basis of this truth that Paul exhorts us not to let sin reign in our bodies (vv. 12-13), and it is our faith in the fact of our being dead to sin and alive to God that gives us the incentive we need to say no to sin. This may sound like double-talk. Why does Paul tell us *not to let* sin reign when sin **cannot** reign over the Christian? But we may as well ask why there are so many warnings in Scripture to professing Christians not to apostatize from the Christian faith when the profound truth is that a true Christian will never apostatize (Heb. 6: 1-9; 1 Jn 2: 18-19; 1 Cor. 10: 1-13; Phil. 1: 6). Warnings in Scripture are given for one purpose, to warn. The warnings appeal to our personal responsibility to be actively vigilant (careful) in our walk with the Lord and our fight against sin. Recall the tragic ending of Ravi Zaccharias' life. We can only speculate how many times the warnings of Scripture came to his mind but were ignored. We must rely on God's grace, but we may not presume upon it to act automatically apart from human response.

The Christian must take action when the Holy Spirit warns from Scripture. The warnings of Scripture are not hypothetical—assumed for the sake of an argument—but are real. If we deny our faith in Christ and persist in this denial, we will certainly be lost. Warnings are designed to keep this from happening, and they are a means of grace. The exhortation **do not let sin reign** (v. 12) has the same purpose; it is a means of grace. If we, on the other hand, let sin reign, that is, allow ourselves to be drawn into habitual sin from which we never repent, then we will discover that we were never really converted.

We should not conclude from this exhortation that sin can reign in the true Christian any more than we should conclude from the warnings against apostasy that the Christian can lose his salvation. This would be a denial of everything Paul had said previously about Christ dying to the rule and realm of sin and the Christian dying with him—statements of fact. The exhortation (command) is based on the indicative (statement of fact) that the Christian is dead to sin. And since we are dead to sin and alive to God, we should live this way. Notice that Paul follows the exhortations of vv. 12-13 with another powerful indicative, **For sin shall not be master over you...** (v. 14). The statement of fact is a strong incentive for the Christian to actively put sin to death in his actual experience.

To say to the slave who has not been emancipated, "Do not behave as a slave" is to mock his enslavement. But to say the same to the slave who has been set free is the necessary appeal to put into effect the privileges and rights of his liberation (Murray, *Romans*, p. 227).

The newly emancipated slave has to be continually reminded not to act as a slave but as a free man. Though free, in many ways he still thinks like a slave. When he meets his former master in the marketplace, he is very likely to fear him even as before. If his master shouts an order, he is also likely to slavishly obey. Since sin is so engrained in our thinking and acting, even those who have been believers for years have to constantly remind themselves not to act like **slaves** of sin, but those who have been **freed** from its bondage.

But our behavior must be rooted in truth, not fiction or wishful thinking. If we are still under the reign of sin, there is no use resisting sin; we are still slaves. But if sin cannot dominate us, we have the incentive to resist it. Suppose it were possible to look into the future at the final score of a football game, and suppose we foresaw that our team won the game. What would be the effect of that knowledge on the team's performance? Knowing the final score was in their favor, such knowledge would fill the team with the incentive to play their best, knowing that they could not ultimately lose. This is precisely what knowledge of the truth does for the Christian, contrary to the Roman Catholic view that eternal security breeds license and carelessness. Knowing that Satan cannot ultimately and finally defeat him, the believer has all the incentive he needs to keep on winning in his fight against sin. The battle must still be fought, and some battles will be lost; but the war is already won in Christ Jesus. On the other hand, apathy in fighting the battle against sin is a warning sign of unbelief. Why should we fight battles that don't need to be fought? Only the Christian believes in the importance of winning the fight.

To a large extent the progress of sanctification is dependent upon the increasing understanding and appropriation of the implications of that identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6: 11). And when Paul contemplates the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus and the hope of resurrection, nothing is more characteristic of his present preoccupation than to know Christ 'and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death (Phil. 3: 10) (Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 311).

The four imperatives—**consider, do not let sin reign, do not go on presenting, but present**—are found in vv. 11-13. **Consider** or **reckon** has both a negative and positive aspect. We are to **consider** ourselves dead to the realm and rule of sin. Our address has changed. We are no longer living in the dominion of sin. But we must also **consider** ourselves **alive to God**. Paul refers to the negative and positive aspect of the Christian conduct in many other letters.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.<sup>2</sup> **Set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth.<sup>3</sup> For **you have died** and **your life is hidden with Christ in God**.<sup>4</sup> When Christ, **who is our life**, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.<sup>5</sup> Therefore **consider** the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:1-5 NASB)

"I **have been crucified with Christ**; and it is **no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20 NASB)

Both of these verses are the Rom. 6 equivalent of considering ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. We must not stop short of the positive aspect—living to God. At the same time, we must remember what has happened to the old man—crucified.

**Reign** (v. 12) is [*basileuo*], to be king. We must not **let sin reign** or become **king** in our lives. If sin is king, Jesus is not king. A realm will allow only one king at a time. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, [*that is, "master"*]' Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Lk. 6:46 NASB) In other

words Jesus is asking, “Why do you contradict yourselves? You call me ‘master’, but you deny that I am your master by refusing to obey me.”

**...in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts** indicates that the Christian life encompasses the whole man, not just his heart. We are created body and soul, and what we do with our bodies affects our souls. Both are connected. (Ps. 51: 14-15). Sin within the body is personified (treated as a person) demanding obedience from the believer. But while we were enslaved to sin, we could do nothing else but **obey** this master. Now, we are able to resist sin and must obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit who reminds us that we have died to sin as king. The kingdom of sin is a different realm, and we no longer live in that realm or serve that king, but we live in a different realm and serve a different king. We must remember who we are before we yield to sin.

<sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

The physical body is viewed here as an **instrument** or tool to be used either for the service of **unrighteousness** or **righteousness**. We are confronted again with Paul’s emphasis on a comprehensive Christianity incorporating both mind and heart exerting itself in good deeds while simultaneously taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. The latter must precede the former. The thoughts of the heart must first be taken captive in order to carry out the duty of righteousness required of the body. The intent and thoughts of the heart are not sufficient for the full measure of obedience. The bodily act of righteousness must be included as the proper conclusion of the heart and mind. The hands, feet, mental abilities—the whole body—must be used for doing good to others. The hands must help the needy, not steal (Eph. 4: 28). They must protect the life and property of others, not kill. The sexual organs must be used to love one’s spouse, not for promiscuity and adultery (1 Cor. 7: 3-5 compared with 1 Cor. 6: 15-20). In short, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**. Paul gives us many practical, everyday examples of how the body is to be used to do good, not evil. One particular example stands out for daily life.

<sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your **hearts** into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. <sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. <sup>13</sup> But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. <sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (2 Thess. 3:5-15 NASB)

In 1 Cor. 9: 1-19 and 1 Tim. 5: 17-18, Paul concentrates on the obligations of the church to provide a **living** for the elders who provide spiritual instruction for the congregation—**especially those**

**who teach and preach**; but this is not the primary subject here. He is speaking of members of the church in Thessalonica who refused to work. Paul had made it his practice of refusing pay from any church, most notably the church of Corinth, so that the progress of the gospel would not be hindered. In Thessalonica, by working **night and day** Paul and others on his team had set an **example** for other members of the congregation to do the same, to work hard. The example was not for the purpose of teaching all elders to forego remuneration for their labor in the word—they could accept it or refuse it according to their own discretion—but for providing model behavior for the church, particularly for members who were requiring material assistance from other members in the church.

Paul and others who labored in the word knew that they had a **right** (2 Thess. 3: 9) to material support, but Paul foregoes this right to set an example; and he categorically condemns the **undisciplined life** of these idle members and orders them not to lead an **unruly** life. He also gives an **order** to others not to feed them, providing an effective cure for their laziness (v. 10). If the unruly members were not working, someone else must have been feeding them. Thus, Paul's order in v. 10 must apply not only to the culprits but to their facilitators. Quite the contrary, if the idle members persisted in their refusal to work, they were to be shunned (**do not associate with him**) by the rest of the members, putting them **to shame** for their lack of discipline. Contrary to the African norm of avoiding putting anyone to shame, Paul says that **shame** can be very useful, providing a needed corrective to the immoral practice of too much leisure. They should have worked hard because they loved God and the apostolic **tradition**, but if these primary motivations are lacking, congregational discipline is also in place as a backup motivation for obedience. Congregational discipline is not evil; it is a means of grace. Yet, these members were to be considered as **brothers**, not as **enemies**, so long as the evil practice ceased.

What is also interesting about this admonition to the Thessalonians is that it begins with Paul's appeal to their **hearts**. **May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ** (v. 5). Their lack of follow-through on Paul's instructions to work or to order others to work indicated a lack of heart commitment to his teaching. Their **hearts** were not right before God; therefore, their behavior was also wrong.

Back to Romans, Paul's emphasis on the **body** is doubtless an apologetic against the cultural Greek view of the body as evil or at the very least irrelevant to the true identity of the individual. Who am I? If I am essentially a spiritual being, it does not matter what I do with my body. I can even purchase sex. Full-blown Gnosticism had not yet entered the church, but the philosophical teaching was well-known and a threat to the apostolic insistence that the creation of man as soul and body implied the obligation to curb the impulsive sins pertaining to the body.

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet **the body is not for immorality**, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. (1 Cor. 6:13 NASB)

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and **make them members of a prostitute**? May it never be! <sup>16</sup> Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." <sup>17</sup> But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. <sup>18</sup> Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from

God, and that you are not your own?<sup>20</sup> For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:15-20 NASB)

The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.<sup>4</sup> The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.<sup>5</sup> Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Cor. 7:3-5 NASB)

The Roman church, and the church throughout the empire, needed to be taught that the body as **an instrument of righteousness** was essential in demonstrating the truth of the gospel. (God always spoke to Israel in word and deed. He said what He would do, and then He did it.) It was not simply the heart or intent that counted. The deeds of the body were the barometer by which the depth of heart commitment was measured.

The verb **present** has the connotation (meaning) of laying someone or something at the disposal of another to be used for his purposes. The **members of the body**—hands, feet, eyes, ears, mouth, sexual organs—must NOT be laid at the disposal of an old **master, sin**, who no longer had any jurisdiction or controlling power over the Christian. Rather, the body must be laid at the disposal of **God** who owns the body. All the members of the body must be used in orchestration to present a consistent picture of the gospel, otherwise the Christian religion would be viewed like so many other religions in the Roman Empire which were merely private adorations of a particular god or gods which made no demands upon external behavior. Without the body, Christianity remains invisible. The corporate body of Christ working together in consistency with the truth remains the greatest apologetic for the Christian faith.

### **Excursus: Corroborating Evidence for the Death of the Old Man**

#### **1 Corinthians 15: 21**

One objection to the doctrine of the definitive death of the **old man** is 1 Cor. 15: 21b, **I die daily**. From the context, it means that Paul faced the possibility of physical death **daily** in his missionary efforts. In v. 22 he says, If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE (1 Cor. 15:32 NASB). He was not saying that he crucified his old man daily which would be a clear contradiction of everything he taught in Romans.

#### **Colossians 3: 9-10 and Ephesians 4: 22-24**

Do not lie to one another, since you **laid aside** [*aorist participle*] the old self with its *evil* practices,<sup>10</sup> and **have put on** [*aorist participle*] the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—(Col. 3:9-10 NASB)

that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside** [*aorist infinitive*] the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,<sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,<sup>24</sup> and **put on** [*aorist infinitive*] the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:22-24 NASB)

Colossians 3: 9-10 teaches the same principle, namely, that the old man has been **laid aside** (aorist participle) and the new man has been **put on** (aorist participle). The verb tense does not indicate a gradual process of laying aside and putting on. Besides, such continual laying aside and putting on simultaneously would produce inconsistency in Paul's figure of speech. A person cannot be laying aside one garment and putting on another over and over again in a continual stream of incoherent activity hour by hour. Such a picture would be an absurdity. It may be argued that Ephesians 4: 22 implies the responsibility of the Christian to lay aside the old man. This would seem to indicate that the old man is still alive to be put aside. Exegetically, this interpretation would be possible, but the analogy of Scripture will not allow this interpretation. (See Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, for a complete explanation. I will summarize his argument below.

(1) First, Colossians and Ephesians are twin epistles and we should expect the meaning of one passage to be the same as the other. In this case, the passage in Colossians is clearer and should guide us in our interpretation of Ephesians. Paul has been accused here of equivocation and contradiction, but our approach to the differences between Colossians/Romans and Ephesians cannot proceed upon the presupposition that contradiction in the Holy Scriptures is possible. We must take the clearer teaching of Romans and Colossians to understand the less clear teaching of Ephesians.

(2) Second, the **contexts** of both passages teach a definitive break with the corruptions of the old man which cannot characterize the Christian.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the **futility of their mind**,<sup>18</sup> being **darkened in their understanding**, **excluded from the life of God** because of the **ignorance** that is in them, because of the **hardness of their heart**;<sup>19</sup> and they, having become **callous**, have given themselves over to **sensuality** for the practice of every kind of **impurity** with **greediness**. (Eph. 4:17-19 NASB)

**Gentiles** in v. 17 is Paul's designation for unbelievers, not non-Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 1; 10: 20; 1 Thess. 4: 5). According to the context of Ephesians 4, the characteristics mentioned in vv. 17-19 fit Paul's description of the **old self which is being corrupted** v. 22. We may ask: Is the Christian **excluded from the life of God**, given over to **sensuality** and given to habitual **impurity** and **greediness**? If so, then Paul contradicts what he wrote in Rom. 6: 7, **For he who has died is freed from sin**, that is, **freed from sin** as a habitual way of life, freed from sin's bondage and dominion.

(3) Third, the description of vv. 17-19 is presented by Paul as being the believer's **former** manner of life" (v.22), not his present manner of life. The former manner of life is the life of the old man who has been crucified.

that, in reference to **your former manner of life**, you lay aside the old self, which is **being corrupted** [*present participle*] in accordance with the lusts of deceit, (Eph. 4:22 NASB)

If this description fits, then such is not a **former manner of life** but a present manner of life.

(4) Fourth, **learning Christ** and **being taught** in Christ (Eph. 4: 20-21) is the condition which leads to putting off the old man and putting on the new. Therefore, putting off the old man and putting on the new are consequences which have followed from learning Christ, consequences which we would expect to have already taken place in the past described as **your former manner of life**.

(5) Fifth, the old man is **being corrupted** (present participle indicating continuing action.) The old man cannot be improved through sanctification; he only gets worse and must be killed. Since continuing corruption cannot fit the description of the believer, Paul must be talking about unbelievers who are essentially the old man. Unbelievers are not getting better; they are getting worse—further and further entrenched in their denial of Christ and the claims of God upon their lives. Although they may show signs of outward improvement, the inward man becomes more determined in his rebellion against God. The only way a man gets better is through grace, not self-effort.

Think of an old man who has died physically. Most of his possessions and dirty laundry (sin) have been cleared out of the house after burial. However, there still remain remnants of the old man's life—a pair of ragged shoes and one sock with a hole in it, a frayed, dirty shirt, a torn pair of trousers, etc. Although he is gone from the house, and although most of his old belongings have been cleared out, a few items remain. Over the next few weeks, the remainder of the old man's clothing will be removed. Likewise, the believer (the **new man** resurrected in Christ) will remove the remaining items of the old man he once was and the old life he once lived. But it will take a lot longer than a few weeks! This process will occur for the rest of his life, for there are many remaining sins of the old man which are left behind. At death, Christ will complete the process by purging whatever remains. At that point, what the believer is now in position and standing with Christ, he will also be in condition experientially and practically.

### End of Excursus

<sup>14</sup> For

sin shall not be **master** over you,  
for

you

are not under  
law  
but under  
grace.

<sup>15</sup> **What then?**

**Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?  
May it never be!**

V. 15 forms an  
inclusio with vv. 1-2

Having stated the imperatives (commands), Paul returns to the indicatives (statements of fact) which underlie and support the imperatives. The imperatives of vv. 11-12 are mere theoretical nonsense if, indeed, the believer is still the **old self**. If he is the old self, he will not be able to obey the imperatives. He is still a slave to sin. Two indicatives (statements of fact) are made: **sin shall not be master over you** and **you are not under law but under grace**.

The first statement corresponds to v. 9, **death is no longer master over Him**, namely, Christ. While **death** was at one point in time **master** over Christ, it is no longer nor will it ever be again. Sin was never master over Christ; therefore, Paul cannot make a complete parallel between the believer in bondage to sin and Christ in bondage to sin. Yet, Christ was held bondage to the **wages** or consequences of sin which Paul mentions in v. 23. Analogously, **sin shall not be** *[future tense]* **master over you**. Who is this **you**? The **you** in v. 14 is **the new self**, the new **you** who **walks in newness of life** (v. 4), who is **united with [Christ] in the likeness of His resurrection** (v. 5), who is **no longer a slave to sin** (v. 6), who is **alive to God** (v. 11).

Christ's definitive break with **death** corresponds to the believer's definitive break with **sin**. **Sin** can no more be the master over the Christian than **death** can be the master over Christ. The full force of the analogy must be preserved throughout the interpretation of Rom. 6 or else false conclusions and applications of the text will follow.

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. (Rom. 6:9 NASB)

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:14 NASB)

The second indicative, **you are not under law but under grace** has been much debated. In what sense is the Christian not under law but under grace? May we say that the Christian is not under the stipulations and demands of the moral law of God, and may we also say that the OT saint had no access to grace? If this is Paul's meaning, then he has just contradicted his strenuous denial of the antinomian suggestion in Rom. 6 to the effect, **Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?** to which he replies, **May it never be!** followed by his extensive denial of this suggestion rooted in the believer's union with Christ. Moreover, he has also contradicted his extensive illustration of justification by grace through faith in the life of Abraham (an OT believer) who did not work to be saved but simply believed.

Moreover, beginning in Rom. 12, Paul continues to elaborate on the applications of being dead to sin and alive to God which include the following summary of the law in Rom. 13.

Owe nothing to anyone **except to love one another**; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.<sup>9</sup> For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is **summed up** in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."<sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law. (Rom. 13:8-10 NASB)

It does not at all appear as if Paul is sweeping the moral requirements of the Law of God under the rug. Rather, he is strengthening his claim in Rom. 7: 12 that **the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good**. Therefore, he must mean something other than setting aside the moral law of God as obsolete and inapplicable to the Christian.

He is now introducing a topic which he explains further in Rom. 7. The topic pertains to the cessation of the Law administration or covenant at Sinai versus the ongoing administration of grace inaugurated (begun) in Christ. In the administration of Law there was still grace; otherwise, no OT



believer would have been saved. We have already seen this in earlier chapters in Romans. **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law** (Rom. 3:28). **Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness** before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:3, 10).

The analogy of Scripture in Galatians gives us a further hint as to Paul's meaning. Paul says that Christ was born **under the law**.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, **born under the Law**,<sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4-5 NASB)

All of us were once **under the Law**. This means that we were under obligation to obey it and **under** its **curse** if we failed.

For as many as are of the works of the Law are **under a curse**; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." (Gal. 3:10 NASB)

Christ, who was also born under the Law, was also born under its requirements as well as its curse if He failed to obey it. He did obey it, but voluntarily took our curse upon Himself. Not having forfeited His own life through personal sin, He was qualified to take our place under God's judgment and curse and ransom (**redeem**) us through His blood atonement, the purchase price for our redemption. The only way He could do this was through His active obedience in keeping every requirement in the Law. The administration of the Law could not be suspended or terminated without the successful completion of every stipulation—including the proper standard (the law of God), motive (love for God and others), and goal (the glory of God and the kingdom of God). Christ achieved this in His perfect life, and He became the perfect, unblemished **lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**.

But now that Christ has accomplished everything required in the law, the administration of the law has been replaced by a new administration of grace, a New Covenant promised to the OT and the NT people of God (Jer. 31; Heb. 8—11). The author of Hebrews (whoever he is, may God bless him), demonstrates repeatedly in his epistle that the New Covenant is **better** than the Old Covenant, based upon **a more excellent ministry**, a **permanent** (therefore, better) **priesthood**, a **better sacrifice**, **better promises**, having a **better hope**, a **better country**.

In fact, God himself found the former covenant, the Old Covenant, to be deficient for the final purpose of redeeming His chosen people.

**For if that first covenant had been faultless**, there would have been **no occasion** sought for a second.  
<sup>8</sup> For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; (Heb. 8:7-8 NASB)

Concentrating first on v. 7, the author admits that the first covenant, the Old Covenant, was not faultless. He does not elaborate what fault is implied until he contrasts the resources of the Old Covenant with that of the New Covenant by quoting the words of Jeremiah 31. If there had been

no **fault** or deficiency in the **first covenant**, God would have **sought no occasion** for implementing a **second** covenant. Based upon v. 7, we would have expected the author to follow up on this statement of fault-finding by saying, “**For finding fault** with the first covenant...” In v. 7, he is talking about the covenant, not about faithless Israel, with whom he has previously dealt.

Nevertheless, modern English translations render the text in v. 8 **For finding fault with them, He says...**

For finding fault **with them**, he saith (Heb. 8:8 ASV)

For he finds fault **with them** when he says: (Heb. 8:8 ESV)

But God found fault **with the people** and said: (Heb. 8:8 NIV)

Because finding fault **with them**, He says: (Heb. 8:8 NKJ)

These translations are grammatically possible and are, by far, the preferred rendering of most, if not all, modern translations of the Bible, but they do not fit the context of the chapter, nor the immediate context of v. 7. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the apostolic author has been concerned with one major topic—the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant to Moses and the Old Covenant. It is true that God **found fault** with His rebellious people, Israel; but that is not the primary focus of this particular passage or even the book of Hebrews. Scholars as far back as John Brown of the 18<sup>th</sup> century have questioned what has become the popular rendering, **For finding fault with them.** Opting for a different translation, Brown says,

The words, “finding fault,” do not appear to me to refer to God’s finding fault with the Israelites, but to His finding fault with, or declaring imperfect, the Mosaic economy; for that is the point which the Apostle is establishing. The words may, and I apprehend ought, to be rendered, “But finding fault, He says to them.” (*Hebrews*)

Among modern scholars, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes also suggests that the common rendering is not consistent with the immediate context.

The expression *he finds fault* forms a link with what has just been said in the preceding verse about the first covenant not being faultless. The basis on which, so to speak, God “faults” the Old Covenant is suggested by the definition of the New Covenant in the passage from Jeremiah that follows, namely, that the former could not supply the new heart of regeneration which the latter guarantees. The rendering, “he finds fault *with them*,” which seems to be universally approved today, is ill suited to the declaration cited from Jeremiah, which is one of promise to the people rather than of finding fault with them; and it is preferable (adopting a strongly attested variant reading in the Greek text) to translate this introductory clause: “for he finds fault...when he says *to them*”: the promise of the New Covenant clearly implies “fault-finding” with the Old Covenant. Understanding the pronoun “them” in this way as referring to those to whom the prophecy was originally addressed [namely, the audience of Jeremiah’s prophecy] rather than as referring to those with whom God finds fault, preserves the sequence of thought from the preceding verse which is plainly indicated by the logical conjunction *For*. Thus our author is saying: “If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second; for he finds fault (with that first covenant) when he says to them: “The days will come...when I will establish a New Covenant...‘not like the covenant that I made with their fathers’” (*Hebrews*, p. 298, emphasis mine).

Young's Literal translation of the Greek text also supports this interpretation.

For finding fault, He saith to them, 'Lo, days come, saith the Lord, and I will complete with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, a New Covenant, (Heb. 8:8 YLT)

Stay with me! The controversy over the proper translation hinges on the question of whether the original pronoun **them** is the genitive *autous* (**with them**) or the dative *autois* (**to them**). It does not require the skills of a Greek scholar to understand that fallible human copiers of the text could have made a slight mistake from the original autographa (the original Greek text), a mistake that was passed on to various other copies by multiple copiers. The *iota* (the *i*) of *autois* could easily have been miscopied as the *upsilon* (the *u*) of *autous*. If so, the translation **with them** would naturally be preferred instead of **to them**. Hughes makes a strong argument for the superior rendering of *autois* rather than *autous*: "The documentary evidence weighs in favor of *autois* as the authentic reading..." (*Hebrews*, p. 299, footnote).

Later in the chapter, the author of Hebrews says,

When He said, "A New Covenant," He has made the first **obsolete**. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is **ready to disappear**. (Hebrews 8:13 NASB)

Therefore, for the believer in Christ, the Old Covenant as an administration of God's plan of redemption, has become **obsolete**, outdated and replaced with something **new**. While the Old Covenant, the Law, was calculated to accomplish what was necessary for redemption at a particular point in redemptive history, it was never intended to be permanent. However, the moral constraints of God's law are permanent (cf. Matt. 5: 17-19) as long as we understand that they are to be applied in ways that are appropriate to the historical context of God's people who are living as aliens and strangers on earth rather than in a theocracy. (For example, incestuous adulterers are not to be executed by the state, but they must be excommunicated from the membership of the church. 1 Cor. 5 compared with Deut. 27: 20).

Paul concludes this section (vv. 1-15) and introduces the next section (vv. 16-23) with an *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is a repetitive statement which serves as the beginning and ending of a section of scripture. The middle between the two *inclusios* are related in content and serve to explain them. Paul has been refuting the idea that we may continue in sin so that God's grace can be seen in its most generous and glorious light. This idea is antinomianism (lawlessness) and is strongly condemned. **May it never be!**

The suggestion that the Christian can continue in sin because he is no longer under the administration of Law is also met with the same condemnation. **May it never be!** This is the second rationalization for continuing in sin offered by the antinomian. The explanation found in vv. 16-23 serves to clarify why this also is poor theology. Freedom to do as we please is not really freedom. It is bondage to sin eventually **resulting** in death.

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that

**when you present yourselves to someone**

*as slaves*

for obedience,

you are **slaves**  
of the one whom you obey,  
either of sin resulting in death,  
or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

**Do you not know** is a repetitive refrain from v. 3 just as v. 15 repeats vv. 1-2. Paul is now introducing another antinomian argument and then refuting it. **Do you not know** is a mild rebuke for culpable ignorance. The Christians in Rome should have understood by now the concepts Paul is discussing, but sin makes people stupid. (I should know, for I am often stupid.) The argument is simple enough. When we place ourselves fully and unreservedly at the disposal of someone or some **thing**, then we become the **slaves** of the one we serve. We are either slaves to **sin** or slaves to **obedience**, i.e. obedience to righteousness. There is no middle ground for a partial slave. The word for slave is *doulos* or bondslave. There were other slaves who could serve two masters, but not the bondslave.

"**No one** can serve [*douleuo*] two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve [*douleuo*] God and wealth. (Matt. 6:24 NASB)

Thus, one could either **present** himself as a **slave** [*doulos*] **to sin** or as a **slave** [*doulos*] **of righteousness**, but not both simultaneously. As believers, we have died to the old self who habitually presents himself or herself as a slave to sin and are living as the new self who presents himself as a slave of righteousness. Habitually, the believer lives righteously, not sinfully. We still sin, but this is not the characteristic self of the believer who hates sin and loves righteousness. Living sinfully is the characteristic self of the unbeliever who loves sin. However, we often forget who we are as new men and new women; and we slip back again into the bondage of sin. We must then be reminded of Paul's words here: that when we sin, we are presenting ourselves as slaves of sin.

When this happens—and if we are true believers—the Holy Spirit convicts of sin and reminds us of our union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. We repent, appeal to the cross of Christ for forgiveness, and move ahead with new resolve to live for Him. Since we are still living in this mortal, sinful body, this cycle is repetitive, so much so that we wonder if we are making any progress. Little by little, progressive sanctification takes place because we are promised that it will take place.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He **who began a good work** in you **will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASB)*

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;<sup>13</sup> **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** (Phil. 2:12-13 NASB)

Paul's confidence in the progressive sanctification of believers was grounded in his conviction that God never leaves the believer incomplete. Once God opens the believer's heart to repentance and faith—definitive sanctification, the setting apart of the believer from the world for salvation—He will also make sure that the believer is perfected in holiness of character. Definitive sanctification

takes place at conversion and it is rooted in election (Rom. 9). In justification, God declares the sinner to be holy because of his union with Christ in his crucifixion. At that moment in time, the believer is set apart for God's purpose, namely, to be part of a **holy nation, a people for his own possession** (1 Pet. 2: 9). In progressive sanctification, the believer becomes in practice what he is declared to be, holy. It would make no sense for God to begin this **good work** in the believer without bringing it to the fruition of a completed **salvation** which includes **sanctification** to holiness.

God himself **is at work** in us through the Holy Spirit to bring us into agreement with His moral law and **to work for His good pleasure** i.e. to do those things which are pleasing to Him. **Both to will and to work** refers to both the disposition of the Christian to desire God's pleasure and the active doing of His good pleasure. God did not make us robots or computer programs which work automatically with the push of a button. He made a people with free agency who desire to do his will. This is not the mechanical activity of a robot, but the wooing influence of the Spirit who gradually, but persistently, wins us over to God's way of thinking.

Notice that it is the person who **presents** himself as a slave of either obedience or sin. The presenting is an act of the will, a choice that one makes about whom he will serve, sin or righteousness. "The devil made me do it" is a false statement. It is a withdrawal from personal responsibility. A person does not have a "demon of adultery" in his life that makes him **present** himself as a slave of adultery. He chooses to commit adultery. He also does not have a demon of theft, drunkenness, or any other demon forcing him to commit sin. He commits sin because he likes sin. He acts according to his own will or disposition, a disposition that is incapable of producing a righteous life. But to be incapable is not the same thing as not being responsible. The natural (unbelieving) man is incapable of pleasing God, but he is still responsible for pleasing God.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

Paul speaks of the inability of the unbeliever more in detail in chapter 8.

For those **who are according to the flesh** set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is **hostile toward God**; for **it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so**, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot **please** God. (Rom. 8:5-8 NASB)

This is a further commentary on Rom. 6: 16. The mind, heart, and disposition of the unbeliever, **those who are in the flesh**, are such that he cannot **please** God comprehensively. He may be able to act externally according to the standard of God's law. For instance, he may be able to be faithful to his wife. But he cannot keep the seventh commandment with the proper motive (love for God) and with the proper goal (the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom of God). He may be faithful to his wife for the practical reason that he knows she will divorce him if he is unfaithful, or because he enjoys sexual relations with her and her companionship. But by themselves, these motives are purely selfish. She is useful to him to gratify his desires for sex and companionship. He cannot love her as Christ loves the church; thus, his fidelity in marriage is fundamentally flawed and self-serving.

In v. 16, slavery to sin **results** in **death** while slavery to obedience **results** in **righteousness**. Later, he says that the **outcome** of slavery to sin is **death** while the **outcome** of slavery to righteousness is **eternal life**. Paul is not presenting obedience to righteousness as the means of earning eternal life. He is merely clarifying the consequences of sin as death and that of obedience as life. This is the same character-consequence sequence that we find in the OT in the blessings and curses promised in Deut. 27-28. Obedience results in life and sin results in death. Paul points to this same sequence earlier in the epistle.

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, <sup>6</sup> who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: <sup>7</sup> to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup> *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 2:5-10 NASB)

<sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God

that though you were **slaves of sin**,  
you became obedient from the heart  
to that form of teaching to which you were committed,  
<sup>18</sup> and having been freed from sin,  
you became **slaves of righteousness**.

**But thanks be to God** expresses Paul's gratitude for the change of heart God had produced in his audience. Even as justification is the work of God's grace, sanctification is also by grace. Freedom from the penalty of sin is the focus of justification. Freedom from the dominion of sin is the focus of sanctification.

**Were** [*imperfect tense*] **slaves of sin** (v. 17) indicates a state of being in the past with continuing consequence in the present. They are no longer slaves. **You became obedient from the heart** indicates a change of the will from hostility toward God to willing compliance to and agreement with His law. Though believers are elected in Christ before the world began, they are not forced into the kingdom of God. They come willingly.

**To that form of teaching to which you were committed** shows that progressive sanctification is not an automatic process in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit uses means by which the believer is transformed into the image of Christ. Those means include prayer and fellowship with believers, but they also include proper **teaching** from the word of God in contrast to worldly thinking and conformity to the world's system.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2 NASB)

Evangelism is not the end-goal of the church's mission, but discipleship. Jesus never told his disciples to make converts to the Christian faith.

"Go therefore and make **disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> **teaching them to observe** all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:19-20 NASB)

We can obtain "decisions for Christ" all day long without making a single disciple who **endures to the end** of tribulation and persecution and one who **observes** or **obeys** what Christ commanded. If people are not taught, they will drift away from the faith, like the soil in **rocky places** and **among the thorns** (Matt. 13: 20-22). The word of God does not **bear fruit** in such people, and an easily as they "decide" to become Christians, with equal ease they "decide" not to believe the truth. Paul is writing Romans primarily to believers, but he knew that there were those in the church who were only professing the faith but not possessing it. They must be continually taught to possess and keep the faith. But he addresses the Romans on the assumption of the genuineness of their profession, and he admonishes them accordingly in order to divest them of the heretical teaching of antinomianism.

**You became obedient** [*aorist*] **from the heart** and **having been freed from sin** indicate a change which has occurred in the hearts to Paul's audience. The statements of fact are parallel to one another. Obedience from the heart is the same as being freed from sin as a way of life. The heart is no longer in bondage to sin but is now free to obey righteousness.

<sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.

For

**just as you presented your members**

as slaves

to impurity and to lawlessness,

resulting in further lawlessness,

**so now present your members**

as slaves

to righteousness,

resulting in sanctification.

In v. 19, Paul compares our former single-minded service as slaves to "Master sin" with what should be the equal single-minded service of Christians to "Master righteousness".

...Paul in this verse employs a comparison: "just as you presented...so now present." He thus makes clear that Christians should serve righteousness with all the single-minded dedication that characterized their pre-Christian service of such "idols" as self, money, lust, pleasure, and power. Would that we would pursue holiness with the zeal that so many of us pursued these other, incomparably less worthy goals! (Moo, *Romans*, p. 404).

When we hand over the members of our body to **impurity and to lawlessness** [*anomia—from which we get the word, antinomian*], there can be only one **result, further lawlessness**. The sinner cannot remain at the same level of sinfulness as if he may draw the line and prevent any further drift into sin: "This far but no more." The sinner does not get better but worse. Even King David, a believer who wrote psalms and sang songs to the Lord, did not stop with his adultery with

Bathsheba, but tried with all his might to cover it up by having Uriah and his one hundred soldiers killed at the wall.

When we **present** our **members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness**, the result is always more of the same. Sin breeds more sin. A young pastor in the Presbyterian Church of America made the decision to view pornography on the internet. This decision led to more episodes of viewing pornography followed by the solicitation of prostitutes. He was discovered, removed from his pastorate, and placed under care of the presbytery. Not responding to the disciplinary care, he moved to a city in south Alabama and somehow procured a job as a Bible teacher in a Christian school. (I don't understand how this happened.) While there, he solicited a young female student to provide sexual services for male customers in the area, taking a cut of the proceeds. He was discovered by the police and jailed. Shortly thereafter he hanged himself in jail, leaving a wife and young children. The tragedy of his life is almost unspeakable, but this is what slavery to sin produces.

On the contrary, **presenting our members as slaves to righteousness results in [progressive] sanctification**. As the slave to sin gets worse, the slave to righteousness gets better and better. He will not stand still. His sensitivities to sin will become more acute. This is the reason someone like the apostle Paul could call himself **the least of the apostles** in 55 AD (1 Cor. 15: 9), **the least of all the saints** in 60-62 AD (Eph. 3: 8), the **foremost of sinners** in 62-64 AD (1 Tim. 1: 15), and a **wretched man** in Rom. 7: 24. The warning signs leading to sin will become more pronounced the longer we heed these warnings and flee from sin.

Throughout this process, we are active and responsible, all the while God is at work in us to dispose us to His will and to do His will. Progressive sanctification, though guaranteed to the true believer, is never automatic or disassociated from his free agency to heed God's voice or to ignore it.

<sup>20</sup> **For**  
when you  
were **slaves**  
of sin,  
you  
were **free**  
in regard to righteousness.

The heart which is **free in regard to righteousness** only presumes its own freedom. It is really enslaved to sin (v. 20). In saying this, Paul admits, **I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh** (v. 19). He admits that those who are not believers have a certain kind of freedom. They are **free in regard to righteousness**. That is, they are free from any concern for what pleases God,

...deaf to God's righteous demands and incapable of responding to them even were they to hear and respect them. For Paul makes it clear that those outside Christ, to varying degrees, can recognize right and wrong (cf. Rom. 1: 18-32; 2: 14-15); but the power to do the right and turn from the wrong is not present (Moo, *Romans*, p. 406).



The work of the law is written on their hearts, but their conscience has become, in one degree or another, insensitive to their infractions of this law. They are not troubled over their sins until, and if, the Holy Spirit sovereignly moves in their hearts to create the conviction of sin. Sinners enjoy this kind of moral freedom (really bondage) in contrast to Christians who are so troubled about whether or not they are making the right choices to please God. They don't want that kind of responsibility or conscious concern about their behavior.

Such sinners at least think they are free to do as they please, not realizing that true freedom must be defined by God. An army soldier in The Democratic Republic of the Congo admitted to a journalist of his involvement in raping women in rural DRC. He said to the reporter, "When I rape, I feel free" (source unknown).

A study by US scientists has concluded that an average of 48 women and girls are raped every hour in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study, in the American Journal of Public Health, found that 400,000 females aged 15-49 were raped over a 12-month period in 2006 and 2007 (bbc.com).

What kind of twisted, corrupted conscience could claim a euphoric (joyful) sense of freedom while raping a helpless woman? One cannot be truly free unless he lives in obedience to God. Jesus Christ was truly free: but being the God-man, he was not able to sin. This was no limitation on Christ, because being the slave of sin is not capability, but inability.

By **slaves of righteousness** (v. 18) Paul means that the believer is presenting himself without reservation to be a servant of righteousness. He may no longer serve his old master, sin, because the ownership of his life has been transferred from **sin** to Christ. But Christ's slave is free.

For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's **freedman**; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. (1 Cor. 7:22 NASB)

<sup>21</sup> Therefore

WHAT BENEFIT

were you then **deriving**

from the things of which you are now ashamed?

For

THE OUTCOME

of those things

is death.

<sup>22</sup> But now

having been **freed**

from sin

and **enslaved**

to God,

you

**derive**

YOUR BENEFIT,

resulting in sanctification,

AND THE OUTCOME,

eternal life.

<sup>23</sup> For

THE WAGES  
of sin  
is death,  
BUT THE FREE GIFT  
of God  
is eternal life  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Benefit** in vv. 21 and 22 is *karpos*, **fruit**. Fruit generally has a positive meaning in Pauline literature (Rom. 1: 13; 7: 4; 1 Cor. 9: 7; Gal. 5: 22; Eph. 5: 9; Phil. 1: 11; Col. 1: 6, 10). What good fruit, Paul asks the believers at Rome, did you get from the sort of behavior (**things**) of which you are now **ashamed**? The assumed answer is: none. The genuine believer cannot point to his immoral behavior in the past with any sense of approval or satisfaction. He will not joke about having sex with multiple women or getting stone drunk on Friday nights. He will not tell stories of how he swindled others out of their money through elaborate schemes of deceit. He will not boast in his selfish pursuit of material riches by which he lavished himself with the vain glitter of this world, heedless of the need of others around him. He will not boast in his physical strength which he used to humiliate and subdue weaker men. He will only say, “God be merciful to me, the sinner.” He will admit that nothing fruitful came from his immoral behavior before he met Christ. Unbelievers often boast of their sinful exploits, but not believers. Believers will boast in the gospel and God’s grace to them in delivering them from the self-centered things they once did. The things in which they once boasted are now the very things which bring them shame when remembered.

By God’s grace, these things will gradually fade from memory. We might cite one exception: the apostle Paul who never forgot that he persecuted the church of God, and partly for this reason, he labored more than all the other apostles.

For I am the **least** of the apostles, and **not fit to be called an apostle**, because I persecuted the church of God.<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Cor. 15:9-10 NASB)

This kind of memory is useful, remembering God’s work in delivering us from evil. Otherwise, what is there about evil that should elicit boasting? The **outcome** [*telos*] of that behavior is **death**, eternal punishment. We should never boast of things which result in eternal death.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.<sup>6</sup> For it is **because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience**, (Col. 3:5-6 NASB)

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,<sup>21</sup> envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice** such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God**. (Gal. 5:19-21 NASB)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; **neither** fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, **will inherit the kingdom of God.** (1 Cor. 6:9-10 NASB)

On the other hand, good **fruit (benefit)** is produced from our “enslavement” to God by which we **present** or lay down our lives in service to others and to His kingdom. As we do this regularly from day to day asking ourselves, “What good thing can I do today in service to God’s kingdom?” we **derive our benefit** [*karpos*], namely, the **fruit of sanctification**, or as Paul puts it in elsewhere, conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8: 29). In contrast to the **outcome** of immoral behavior, eternal death, is the **outcome of sanctification, eternal life.**

But how can we say that the **outcome** or result of progressive sanctification—which includes the believer’s activity and response to grace—is eternal life? The answer is that we must see progressive sanctification as the organic **fruit** of union with Christ which includes justification. Throughout Rom. 6, Paul has been arguing that it is impossible for the true believer to continue in a life of sin due to the fact of his union with Christ in His death and resurrection. As surely as Christ died to the power of sin and death (see Murray’s comments above), the believer died to the power of sin and spiritual death—definitive sanctification, the work of God’s grace in setting the believer apart from the world to a holy life. As sure as Christ rose from the dead physically, the believer rose from the dead spiritually unto a **new life** of righteousness. The believer’s progressive sanctification is therefore grounded in the certainty of his union with Christ, including this initial definitive sanctification by the Spirit. The final **outcome** of this union is **eternal life.** So, when we consider the whole complex of events involved in our salvation, all of it is the work of God, anyway. We can claim no special work on our part in progressive sanctification which is not the **fruit** of God’s work in us.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;**<sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13 NASB)

Explaining the relationship between our participation and God’s participation Murray says of Phil. 2: 13.

God’s working in us is not suspended [interrupted] because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. All this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well-pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149, emphasis mine).

Thus, progressive sanctification is not a situation of God coming half-way and us coming half-way. Rather, God comes all the way to work in us, and we come all the way to **work out** our salvation practically through obedience; but at the end of the day all of our **presenting [our] members as slaves to righteousness**—another expression for **working out [our] salvation with fear and trembling**—is the **gift** of God’s grace. Paul makes this plain in the closing words of Rom. 6.

<sup>23</sup> For

THE WAGES  
of sin  
is death,  
BUT THE FREE GIFT  
of God  
is eternal life  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Wages** are earned, but **gifts** are not; thus, the **outcome** of **sanctification, eternal life** is the **free gift of God...in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

#### **Excursus: Roman Catholic Confusion of Justification with Sanctification**

In our treatment of Romans 6, we have seen repeatedly that our progressive sanctification (becoming more like Christ every day through the work of the Spirit) is grounded in our union with Christ in his crucifixion, death, and resurrection—the gift of God’s grace. Through a lifelong process, the Christian actually becomes the righteousness of God that he is declared to be in justification. Nevertheless, these two things, justification and progressive sanctification, are distinct from one another. Progressive sanctification flows as a guaranteed benefit from justification—guaranteed only because it is part of the total salvation which God has accomplished through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. But while justification is exclusively the activity of God, progressive sanctification (as distinguished from definitive sanctification) is a cooperative work involving God and the believer who must respond to the work of the Spirit.

The Roman Catholic Church, even to this day, confuses justification and sanctification as a single operation involving the work of Christ and the cooperation of the believer who can “increase” the justice of God to him “through good works”. Consider the following article from wayoflife.org. Take careful notice of the exact quotations of Roman Catholic documents. The underlined emphases in wayoflife.org quotations, or quotations from any other source, and in bible quotations are mine. The additional “notes” in brackets are also mine. The student is advised that my citation of information from wayoflife.org or any other organization does not imply my endorsement of all material published by that organization.

#### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE DENIED BY TRENT**

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the declarations of which are still in force, the Roman Catholic Church formally condemned the biblical doctrine of faith alone and grace alone.

Consider the following declarations of Trent:

“If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 12).

[Note: The word “anathema” is Greek for “accursed”, used by Paul in Gal. 1: 9, ironically, for those who preach a false gospel of faith plus works—the very false gospel preached by Roman Catholicism.]

“If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 24).

### **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE DENIED BY VATICAN II**

In its most formal and authoritative statements since Trent, Rome has continued to deny that salvation is by grace alone through Christ's atonement alone through faith alone without works or sacraments. Consider the following statements of the authoritative Vatican II Council of the mid-1960s, called by Pope John Paul XXIII and attended by more than 2,400 Catholic bishops—

“For it is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, 'the work of our redemption is accomplished,' and it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Introduction, para. 2).

“As often as the sacrifice of the cross by which 'Christ our Pasch is sacrificed' (1 Cor. 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out” (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter 1, 3, p. 324).

[Note: Pay attention to the present tense verb **is** in this quotation. The sacrifice of the cross **is celebrated on the altar**. Moreover, the work of our redemption **is carried out** while the eucharist is celebrated. But the Scriptures repeatedly teach that Christ's redemptive work is an accomplished fact. Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” The only thing that is not finished is the application of this accomplished work to believers by the work of the Holy Spirit, an application which is certain for His elect.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.<sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.<sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn. 6:37-39 NASB)

<sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup>He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1:4-5 NASB)

William D. Mounce observes,

“It is finished” (John 19: 30). This one word summary of Jesus’ life and death is perhaps the single most important statement in all of Scripture. The word means “to complete,” “to bring to perfection.” Jesus had fully done the work of God the Father sent him to do. Paul spends Romans 5 discussing this very fact, that our salvation is sure because Christ’s death totally defeated the effects of Adam’s sin, completely.

But the tense of the verb, the “perfect” tense, brings out even more of what Jesus was saying. The perfect describes an action that was fully completed and has consequences at the time of speaking. Jesus could have used the aorist *etelesthe* [transliteration], and simply said, “The work is done.” But there is more, there is hope for you and for me. Because Jesus fully completed his task, the ongoing effects are that you and I are offered the free gift of salvation so that we can be with him forever. Praise the Lord. *Tetelestai* [transliteration]. (*Basics of Biblical Greek*, p. 224). End of note.]

“... [Christ] also willed that the work of salvation which they preached should be set in train through the sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical [ritualistic] life revolves. Thus by Baptism men are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ. ... They receive the spirit of adoption as sons” (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Chap. 1, I, 5,6, pp. 23-24).

[Note: This is the teaching of baptismal regeneration which assumes that the person baptized is automatically regenerated through the ritual of water baptism. In contrast, Paul in Romans 6 employs water baptism as merely the symbol of our union with Christ in His death and burial, a spiritual union effected only through the Holy Spirit. Had he intended anything else, he would not have prioritized the preaching of the gospel above baptizing.

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Cor. 1:14-17 NASB)

This does not imply that Paul considered baptism unimportant. He obviously understood the importance Christ assigned to it in the Great Commission of Matt. 28: 18-20. Moreover, Paul uses water baptism as the symbol of the believer’s union with Christ in his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection in Romans 6. But ritual baptism is not the effectual cause of this union. We must remember that Romans 6 follows Romans 4 and 5 in which Paul very clearly teaches justification by faith alone apart from the works of the Law. Abraham was justified before circumcision as a paradigm for everyone whose faith—apart from his works—is credited to him

as righteousness (Rom. 4: 22-24). Ritual baptism is the sign of the New Covenant as circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant.

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Col. 2:11-12 NASB)

As the OT saint could not circumcise his heart through ritual circumcision, neither can the NT believer circumcise or cleanse his heart through ritual baptism. It is accomplished “without hands”, i.e. human hands, “through faith in the working of God.”

In Rom. 5: 10, Paul tells us that believers “were reconciled” (aorist tense, indicating something that has already happened) to God while they were “enemies”, showing that the agency of reconciliation is not the enemy—the sinner—who moves in God’s direction for reconciliation but that God moves toward the sinner to reconcile him in His Son, Jesus Christ. In 5: 18, through the “**one** transgression” of Adam came condemnation to all men while through the “**one** act of righteousness” of Christ, justification of life came to all men (i.e. all without distinction, not all without exclusion). It is through the **one** act of Christ that justification is accomplished, not through millions of individual acts of righteousness done by believers who are gradually being justified. There is simply no exegetical basis for gradual justification—no more than there is any basis for the gradual crucifixion of Christ in the Catholic mass. It was a once-for-all event accomplished in six hours the day Christ was crucified. End of note.]

“From the most ancient times in the Church good works were also offered to God for the salvation of sinners, particularly the works which human weakness finds hard. Because the sufferings of the martyrs for the faith and for God's law were thought to be very valuable, penitents used to turn to the martyrs to be helped by their merits to obtain a more speedy reconciliation from the bishops. Indeed, the prayers and good works of holy people were regarded as of such great value that it could be asserted that the penitent was washed, cleansed and redeemed with the help of the entire Christian people” (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, chap. 3, 6, pp. 78,79).

[Note: Concerning this statement, I would quote the Apostle Paul. “Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." <sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? **Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** (1 Cor. 1:12-13 NASB) Where in the Bible are we taught the saving merits of anyone except those of Jesus Christ?]

## **ROME DENIES SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE IN ITS DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION**

Rome's gospel is a confused combination of faith plus works, grace plus sacraments, Christ plus the church. It redefines grace to include works. It confuses justification with sanctification. It confuses imputation with impartation. It views justification not as a once-for-all legal declaration whereby the sinner is declared righteous before God and is granted

eternal life as the unmerited gift of God, but as a PROCESS whereby the sinner is gradually saved through participation in the sacraments. There is no eternal security in the Roman gospel because salvation allegedly depends partially upon a man's works. According to Roman Catholic theology, Christ purchased salvation and gave it to the Catholic Church to be distributed to men through its sacraments. This is not only a false gospel, it is a blasphemous usurpation of Christ's position as only Lord and Savior and Mediator. The authoritative Addis and Arnold Catholic Dictionary, with the Imprimature (ecclesiastical authorization for printing) of E. Morrough Bernard, 1950, says justification “consists, not in the mere remission of sins, but in the sanctification and renewal of the inner man by the voluntary reception of God's grace and gifts” This dictionary plainly states that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is contrary to that of the Reformation, noting that “the Council of Trent was at pains to define most clearly and explicitly the Catholic tradition on the matter, placing it in sharp opposition to the contrary tenets of the Reformers.” Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia, published in 1991, defines justification as “THE PROCESS by which a sinner is made righteous, pure and holy before God.” “Justification in the Catholic Tradition comes about by means of faith in Christ, AND in a life of good works lived in response to God's invitation to believe. ... That works are clearly required in the New Testament for union with Christ is seen in the many parables such as the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and Dives, and others” (emphasis added).

Michael Horton of Westminster Theological Seminary (California) describes the difference between the imputation of Christ and the infusion of grace in the RC tradition.

Historically Rome has always contended that the basis of Justification is the righteousness of Christ, but it's a righteousness infused into the believer rather than being imputed to him. This means that the believer must cooperate with and assent to that gracious work of God and only to the extent that Christ's righteousness inheres in the believer will God declare that person Justified.

[Note: “Inhere” in this context means that Christ's righteousness actually becomes the characteristic and quality of the sinner. Only when the sinner actually possesses this righteousness in practice will God declare him justified. For this reason, the Roman Catholic, if he believes the official doctrine of the RCC, can never have any assurance that he is justified in God's sight; he must await the final judgment. But this lack of confidence gives him little incentive to fight the fight of faith, believing that the outcome of his long struggle may not be salvation but condemnation.]

Protestants disagree pointing to the critical difference between infused righteousness and imputed righteousness. Sola Fide [faith alone] affirms that you are Justified on the basis of Christ's righteousness for us which is accomplished by Christ's own perfect act of obedience apart from us not on the basis of Christ's righteousness in us. So the good news of the Gospel is that we do not have to wait for a righteousness to be accomplished in us before God counts us as Righteous in his sight. He [God] declares us to be Just on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness. Without the imputation of righteousness the Gospel isn't Good News because we could never know if we are standing before God in a Justified therefore a saved state, we'll have to wait for some ultimate but by no means guaranteed salvation; the Gospel just isn't Good News if believers made [may?] face thousands of years in purgatory before they come at last to heaven (“The Differences between



Rome (infusion) and Geneva (imputation) in Justification”, cited from monergism.com, underlined emphasis and notes in brackets mine).

### **ROME DENIES SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE IN DOZENS OF OTHER WAYS**

Not only in most authoritative declarations and not only by its definition of justification, but in dozens of other ways Rome denies the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ's atonement, His sole mediatorship, and the doctrine of salvation through faith alone by grace alone without works.

Rome denies justification by grace alone **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION**. The New Catholic Catechism (1994) dogmatically declares: “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are 'reborn of water and the Spirit.' God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism...” (1257).

[First of all, if people are “reborn of water and the Spirit” through the sacrament of baptism, why do we see Gentiles in the NT receiving the Holy Spirit before being baptized?

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.<sup>45</sup> All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.<sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,<sup>47</sup> “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?” (Acts 10:44-47 NASB)

The Catholic Catechism’s “reborn of water and the spirit” alludes to John 3 and the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;<sup>2</sup> this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup> "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>7</sup> "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'<sup>8</sup> "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?" (Jn. 3:1-10 NASB)

Being a Pharisee, Nicodemus should have understood Jesus’ reference to Ezekiel.

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."<sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within

you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:25-27 NASB)

The quotation from Ezekiel is the word of Yahweh spoken through His prophet, Ezekiel. Thus, it is the Lord Himself who will “sprinkle clean water” on His people and make them clean, and it is the Lord who will give them a new heart. God will sovereignly save His people, cleansing them of their sins and giving them new hearts to obey Him. Jesus alludes to this passage and gives it a fresh interpretation in Jn. 3: 8. The work of the Spirit is accomplished according to His sovereign good pleasure. Notice the parallel phrases in vv. 3 and 5. Being “born again” is parallel to “born of water and the Spirit”. Being born again is something only God can accomplish. He is like the wind (*ruach*, the same Hebrew word for “spirit”) which blows wherever it wishes and upon whomever it wishes. That is, no one knows when the Spirit will work or upon whom He will work; and no one can control the Spirit any more than he can control the wind. Thus, according to Jesus’ own teaching, neither a priest, protestant pastor, nor the Roman Catholic Church can manufacture the work of God at will through ritual baptism.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Jn. 1:12-13 NASB)

Rome denies justification by grace alone **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF THE MASS**, by claiming that in the mass “the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated” and “the work of our redemption is carried out” (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

[See my notes above under **JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE DENIED BY VATICAN II**]

Rome denies justification by grace alone **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF THE SACRAMENTS**: “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. ... The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Saviour” (New Catholic Catechism, 1129).

[See my note under “Baptismal Regeneration”]

Rome denies justification by grace alone **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY**, claiming that “the doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed” (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

[Note: This is blatant denial of the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross to atone fully and finally for the sins of His people, as if what He did was not enough to satisfy the wrath of God. Just contemplate this statement! Sending His only begotten Son through the torture of beating and crucifixion was not enough to satisfy God’s justice and wrath against our sin. He required more. Our punishment in purgatory fills out what is left in Christ’s deficiency! But Jesus declares

moments before his death, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19: 30). In other words, “It is completed, fulfilled” as he says elsewhere,

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. (Jn. 4:34 NASB)

"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (Jn. 17:4 NASB)

And what was this work that Jesus accomplished?

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21 NASB)

God sent His Son into the world to accomplish the work of redemption, saving His people from their sins. He did not send Jesus to make salvation possible for His people—pending their good works in this life and self-atonement in purgatory—but to actually save them. Anything less would have been failure, and Christ never fails. End of note.]

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF CONFESSION**. “One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience” (New Catholic Catechism, 1493). “Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church” (New Catholic Catechism, 1497). “The sacrament of Penance restores and strengthens in members of the Church who have sinned the fundamental gift of ... conversion to the kingdom of Christ, which is first received in Baptism” (Vatican II, Decree on Confession for Religious).

[Note: “Absolution” or forgiveness is done by the RC priest as the representative of the one true Church, the RC Church. This is only way one may be reconciled to God—not by repentance and faith in Christ alone, but by being forgiven through the authorized priest of the RCC. Once absolved of sin by the priest, the sinner can be re-converted to the kingdom of Christ. Thus, since the Roman Catholic is lost over and over again through post-baptismal sins, he must be converted over and over again.

The RCC has formulated this doctrine from such passages as Jn. 20: 23; Matt. 16:18-19; and Matt. 18: 18.

"If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained." (Jn. 20:23 NASB)

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:18-19 NASB)

"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matt. 18:18 NASB)

In Jn. 20: 23, "have been forgiven" and "have been retained" are perfect indicatives. This means that the action of the verb has taken place in the past with the results of the action continuing into the present (see Mounce' comments on the perfect tense above). The past action indicates a judgment in heaven that has preceded the judgment on earth. Essentially the same can be said for the Matthean passages. In those verses, the underlined verbs are what Carson calls periphrastic futures. The binding and loosing in heaven have preceded the binding and loosing action on earth. In other words, heaven (God) is not ratifying a decision made on earth independent of a preceding action in heaven. The action taken on earth, to be valid, must represent obedience to the parameters of the gospel which are already established facts (cf. Gal. 1: 8-9). Peter and the apostles cannot forgive or retain sins at their own will, nor can they hinder people from entering the kingdom or permit them at their own will. To use a popular military expression, they are merely following orders.

To the extent that the preaching of the apostles—or any preaching today—represents the truth of the gospel, that preaching will have the effect of enabling men and women to enter the kingdom of heaven or will prevent them from entering on their own terms. However, if they are faithless in this task, this does not imply the absurd notion that people will be barred from heaven or admitted on the basis of a false gospel. Jon Hus was burned at the stake 100 years before Martin Luther for preaching justification by grace through faith in Christ alone; therefore, the church's action of excommunicating and executing Hus was null and void. Peter and the disciples, much less the Roman Catholic Church, cannot reinvent the gospel; it is already laid down in concrete by Christ Jesus. As Carson says, "[Peter] has no direct pipeline to heaven, still less do his decisions force heaven to comply; but he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because heaven has acted first (cf. Acts 18: 9-10). Those he ushers in or excludes have already been bound or loosed by God according to the gospel already revealed and which Peter, by confessing Jesus as the Messiah, has most clearly grasped" (D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 373, emphasis mine).

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF THE PAPACY**: "For 'God's only-begotten Son ... has won a treasure for the militant Church ... he has entrusted it to blessed Peter, the key-bearer of heaven, and to his successors who are Christ's vicars on earth, so that they may distribute it to the faithful for their salvation'" (ellipsis are in the original) (Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, Chap. 4, 7, p. 80).

[Note: We have no proof in the NT that Peter was the successor to Christ—just the opposite. "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16) simply means that Peter as the spokesman for the twelve apostles accurately conveyed the witness that Jesus was the Christ. He became the first among equals among the twelve apostles, and for a while was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, followed by James, the half-brother of Jesus (cf. Acts 12: 2; 15: 13-19; Gal. 1: 19). Notice in Acts 15: 19 that it was James' judgment, not Peter's, that circumcision would not be required of the Gentiles. Had Peter been the "vicar" of Christ, James' judgment would have been subordinate to Peter's. The whole council would have been turned over to Peter, but there is no

indication of this in the Acts account. (See also 15: 22-29 in which the decision of the council was approved, not simply by Peter, but by “the apostles and elders”.)

Writing about his experiences in Jerusalem with Peter, Paul mentions James first and Simon (Peter), second.

and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” (Gal. 2:9 NASB)

Moreover, in defending his apostleship as being given to him directly from Christ, he says that the other apostles added nothing to his message.

But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.<sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised<sup>8</sup> (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles)” (Gal. 2:6-8 NASB, emphasis mine).

Paul clearly understands his equality with Peter, James, and John in terms of the authority of his office; although, in a different context he acknowledges that he is the “least of the apostles” because he persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15: 9). Later, Paul was even forced to rebuke Peter publicly in Antioch for shunning fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.<sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.” (Gal. 2:11-12 NASB)

Thus, if Peter is the first Roman Catholic Pope, the RCC chose the wrong pope. They should have chosen Paul. Jesus, on the other hand, chose none of them as His successor but chose the eleven plus Paul to carry on His mission.

So when it was evening on that day, the first *day* of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.”<sup>20</sup> And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> So Jesus said to them again, “Peace *be* with **you**; as the Father has sent Me, I also send **you**.” (Jn. 20:19-21 NASB)

In the Greek, “you” is plural in both places in the sentence; namely, the eleven remaining disciples after Jesus’ resurrection. A reluctant and fearful Ananias in Damascus receives this order concerning Saul of Tarsus:

But the Lord said to him [*Ananias*], “Go, for he [*Paul*] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;<sup>16</sup> for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.” (Acts 9:15-16 NASB)

Moreover, if Peter had been the obvious successor to Christ, why are there others in Jerusalem taking issue with him for fraternizing with uncircumcised Gentiles, the house of Cornelius (Acts 10)?

Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.<sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,<sup>3</sup> saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:1-3 NASB)

It is obvious from the text in Acts 11 that there were some in the church who did not consider Peter to be infallible in his teaching; and, as a matter of fact, the RCC did not add the doctrine of the papal infallibility until the first Vatican Council from 1869-1870. End of note.]

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS PRIESTHOOD**: "The purpose then for which priests are consecrated by God through the ministry of the bishop is that they should be made sharers in a special way in Christ's priesthood and, by carrying out sacred functions, act as his ministers who through his Spirit continually exercises his priestly function for our benefit in the liturgy. By Baptism priests introduce men into the People of God; by the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and the Church; by the Anointing of the sick they relieve those who are ill; and especially by the celebration of Mass they offer Christ's sacrifice sacramentally" (Vatican II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, chap. 2, I, 5, p. 781).

[The teaching of the Bible is that all Christians are priests. Speaking to all those who are "chosen" (1 Pet. 1: 1), Peter says,

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Pet. 2:9 NASB)

As Israel was a priestly nation chosen to take the truth of Yahweh to other nations (e.g. Jonah), the church is Christ's new chosen people consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. The purpose of this chosen people is to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light". Quite the contrary of a priest being the only one to whom believers confess their sins, James says,

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (Jas. 5:16 NASB)

James is not making public confession before the whole church a requirement, but private confession to "one another", as few as one "righteous man" (not necessarily an elder), who will listen for the purpose of praying for "healing", namely, deliverance from the sin in question. Christians do not need any other human priest other than the divine-human priest to be absolved of their sins. Christ is sufficient for this task, and He alone can forgive sins (see discussion of Jn. 20: 23 above). However, Christians are in need of other human "priests" (namely, other believers) who will pray for them and help them live a consistently Christian life.

We learn in Ephesians that God did ordain the work of pastors, teachers, and evangelists—not priests—to explain and communicate His word to believers (Eph. 4: 11-14). The apostolic and prophetic offices, I believe, have been terminated since apostolic times because no longer needed. Apostles and prophets filled out what was lacking in Christ’s instructions to His church until the completed special revelation of God could be significantly comprehended by the church. This occurred sometime between the end of the first century to the middle, or perhaps the end, of the second century, although a few NT books were disputed until the fourth century. Michael J. Kruger, in an essay for [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org) writes,

As for the NT canon, there appears to be a core collection of scriptural books—approximately 22 out of 27—functioning as Scripture by the middle of the second century. Generally speaking, this core would have included the four gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. Books that were “disputed” tended to be the smaller books such as 2 Peter, Jude, James, and 2-3 John.

Even so, it seems Christians were using NT writings as Scripture even before the second century. The book of 2 Peter refers to Paul’s letters as “Scripture” (2 Pet. 3:16), showing that a corpus of Paul’s letters was already in circulation and regarded as on par with the OT books. Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:18 cites a saying of Jesus as Scripture: “the laborer deserves his wages.” The only known match for this saying is Luke 10:17.

In the second century, we see this usage of NT writings continue. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, appears to receive at least the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, as well as 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, and maybe some of Paul’s epistles (see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15–16). By the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr has an established fourfold Gospel collection that is read in worship alongside OT books (see his *1 Apology*, 47.3). And by the time of Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in the late second-century, we see a nearly complete NT corpus. His canon consists of about twenty-two out of twenty-seven NT books which he regards as Scripture and cites over one thousand times.

In sum, the early Christians coalesced around the NT books remarkably early. While it was not until the fourth century that the disputes over some of the peripheral books were resolved, the core of the NT canon was already in place long before (emphasis mine).

Roman Catholic tradition holds that “the church is the mother of the scriptures.” In other words, the NT canon was collected under the watchful eye of the infallible authority of the church whose authority, in turn, can be traced to the apostles. The Reformed church denies any such claim for the RCC or any church, insisting that the authority of the NT is derived in the same way as the authority of the OT, from God alone who gives witness of Himself in the Scriptures.

The question, to what does the Canon owe its position of authority, can by the Church be answered in only one way: It derives this from God. For whatever comes to us with the highest authority in matters of faith and life can only be dependent upon God himself. Authority comes, not from below, but from above (Herman Ridderbos, “The Canon of the New Testament”, p. 190, *Revelation and the Bible*, Henry, ed.).

But how did this authority “from above” practically impose itself upon the churches “below”? Most assuredly there is no scriptural or historical evidence of a voice from heaven saying to them, “Accept this book and reject that one!” The NT canon developed among the ancient churches according to the functional use made of particular books to the exclusion of others. Some books of the NT had the marks of apostolicity and authority, and others didn’t. It was not the prerogative (privilege) of church councils to draw up lists of books which were then forced upon the churches to use in their worship services (the Roman Catholic view). Rather, the churches were already making use of those books which had the accompanying witness of the Holy Spirit. The church councils, in response, compiled lists of books which had the history of use. F.F. Bruce further explains,

The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect. The first ecclesiastical councils to classify the canonical books were both held in North Africa—at Hippo Regius in 393 and at Carthage in 397—but what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable*, p. 27. Quoted from Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 4, p. 416).

It is also clear that the apostles and other NT writers recognized their own authority as the recipients of divine revelation and expected others to submit to it.

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. (1 Cor. 14:37 NASB)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:8-9 NASB)

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.<sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:11-12 NASB)

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. (1 Cor. 7:17 NASB)

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.<sup>2</sup> For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority of the Lord Jesus.* (1 Thess. 4:1-2 NASB)

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. (2 Thessalonians 3:14 NASB)

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mou*th or by letter from us. (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NASB)



Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NASB)

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup> it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13 NASB)

[End of note.]

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF MARY:** "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace" (New Catholic Catechism, 968). "... Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us gifts of eternal salvation. ... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix" (New Catholic Catechism, 969).

[Therefore, the New Catholic Catechism teaches that we need Mary, the mother of Jesus as an additional intercessor and mediator of God's grace besides that of Christ and the Holy Spirit. What the two persons of the Trinity lack in praying for us and protecting us from falling is augmented by Mary. This is yet another admission of the RCC that Christ's work is insufficient to save us. Not only do we need to atone for our remaining sins in purgatory, we need Mary to pray for us. The same title of "Helper" attributed by Christ to the Holy Spirit must be shared with Mary.

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; (Jn. 14:16 NASB)

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (Jn. 14:26 NASB)

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, (Jn. 15:26 NASB)

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (Jn. 16:7 NASB)

As for Mary being the co-mediator with Christ, we read in 1 Timothy,

For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, (1 Tim. 2:5 NASB)

Mariology (the study of Mary), as well as Mariolatry (the worship of Mary) has arisen by stages from the fifth century (see gotquestions.org for more information, from which the following information has been taken). In 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus declared Mary as “the mother of God” while also qualifying what was meant.

Not that the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of its existence from Mary, but the holy body, animated by a rational soul, which the Word of God united to himself, was born from Mary (cited from gotquestions.org).

Nevertheless, this wording revitalized the old Arian heresy that held Jesus to be a created being. To correct this wording, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD applied the term *theotokos* (God-bearer) only to Jesus’ humanity; but by then the term “God-bearer” had elevated Mary’s status to the point of veneration as it remains to this day. Interestingly, neither the earlier Nicene Creed of 321 AD or the creed of Constantinople of 381 AD use the term, *theotokos* (God-bearer). Continuing with the history of Mariology, the immaculate conception of Mary was formulated by the RCC in 1854, teaching that Mary was born sinless, free from the taint of original sin. It is admitted by the *Roman Catholic Encyclopedia of Theology* that this teaching did not appear in the Western Church until 1000 AD. Her perpetual virginity, according to the same encyclopedia, was not taught until after the 7<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Matt. 12: 46-50; Gal. 1: 19, the only time this expression is used in the NT. Had Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ, she would have been in violation of the biblical teaching concerning marriage. 1 Cor. 7: 3-5). There is a current push within Roman Catholicism to require Catholics to agree to Mary being the co-redemptrix with Christ, to Mary as the intercessor between the believer and Christ, and to Mary as the object of the believer’s prayers through which these prayers are received by Christ. Of course, Roman Catholics have been practicing these errors for many years, but the push is to formalize these teachings as requirements of one’s Roman Catholic faith.

It is one thing for a person to say that he believes the tradition of the RCC in addition to Scripture, but it is quite another for him to say that he believes RC tradition in contradiction to Scripture. In every RC tradition mentioned above, it is quite simple to employ the texts of Scripture to refute this tradition. The professing RC believer must then decide whom he chooses to believe, the tradition of his church which has been evolving for two millennia, or the NT Scriptures themselves in thousands of manuscript copies which have not changed. (See below on the Westminster tradition of Scripture.) [End of note.]

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF THE SAINTS**: “Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin” (New Catholic Catechism, 1475).

Rome denies justification by grace alone and the sole Mediatorship of Christ **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE CHURCH**: “There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. ... Christ who died for all men desires that in his

Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin” (New Catholic Catechism, 982).

[See notes on the RC “Doctrine of Confession”]

Rome denies justification by grace alone **BY ITS DOCTRINE OF INDULGENCES**: “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. ... Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead” (New Catholic Catechism, 1471).

[See notes above on “The Doctrine of Purgatory”]

## CONCLUSION

Rome has not changed its doctrinal position or its claims to be the one, true, holy, apostolic church. It is engaged, rather, in a clever ploy. It is using the ecumenical movement to bring the separated sons home to the papa (which is the meaning of the term pope), and it is succeeding brilliantly. The amazing fact is that Rome has not hidden its goal in ecumenical relations. Consider the following statement from Vatican II:

“The term 'ecumenical movement' indicates the initiatives and activities encouraged and organized, according to the various needs of the [Roman] Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity. ... The results will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, ALL CHRISTIANS WILL BE GATHERED IN A COMMON CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, INTO THE UNITY OF THE ONE AND ONLY CHURCH, which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. THE UNITY, WE BELIEVE, SUBSISTS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS SOMETHING SHE CAN NEVER LOSE” (emphasis added) (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, chap. 1, 4, p. 416).

For those who claim to be Evangelical Catholics and who claim to believe that salvation is by grace alone, I say you are deceiving yourself and others by remaining in the Roman Catholic Church which explicitly denies what you claim to believe. God's curse is upon those who preach a false gospel and Rome certainly falls under that curse. The Bible warns that those who affiliate with error become partakers with that error.

My readers do not have to take the word of wayoflife.org. or gotquestions.org. They may get on the internet themselves and check out any of the references cited in the article above. I checked some of them myself. They are word for word from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, first published in French in 1992 by the authority of Pope John Paul II; Vatican II, (1962-1965); and the Council of Trent (1545-1563), a council which the RCC has never revoked.

Here are other citations from R.C. Sproul posted on [ligonier.org](http://ligonier.org). All underlined emphases and additional notes are mine.

### **The New Theology?**

In the same era as Vatican II, there was a major split within the Roman Catholic Church between the Western and Latin wings of the church. Much of the Western wing adopted what was called the *nouvelle théologie*, "the new theology," which was much more compatible with historical Protestantism than the classical orthodox Latin Roman theology.

Incidentally, this rupture shows that the contemporary Roman Catholic communion is not as monolithic as it traditionally has been. Some see this rupture as almost as serious as the Reformation. We can find priests and even bishops who sound Protestant in their views. But it is important to remember that when we analyze the Roman Catholic Church, we are not talking about the American church, the Dutch church, the German church, or the Swiss church. We are talking about the Roman Catholic Church. The supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church is not the bishop of New York or Los Angeles. He is not the bishop of Berlin, Heidelberg, or Vienna. He is the bishop of *Rome*. He is the one who, along with church councils, defines the belief system of the Roman Catholic Church.

[Note: I have heard the disclaimer that it does not matter what the official doctrine of the RCC actually is. What really matters is what individual Catholics believe. Therefore, on this basis, what must we do to determine the predominate beliefs of Roman Catholics? Do we interview 500 North American Catholics? Five hundred African Catholics? Asian, South American? But among millions of Catholics, 500 is a small number. Maybe we should interview 500,000 Roman Catholics from around the world to determine "What Roman Catholics **really** believe." The objective reader can immediately detect the absurdity of such a proposal. It is impossible. The only way to approximate what Roman Catholics believe is to examine the official documents of their church: The Council of Trent, Vatican I and II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *The Catholic Encyclopedia of Theology*, and the popular *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*. The only way to approximate what Presbyterians believe is to examine the Westminster Confession of Faith. Sure, some Presbyterians in the PCUSA no longer believe these standards especially when it concerns the plenary inspiration of Scripture, but that's beside the point. End of note.]

The new theology made great inroads, particularly in Germany, Holland, and the United States. As a result, Roman Catholic priests in these countries began to sound like Protestants in the things they taught. They said they believed in justification by faith alone. Nevertheless, their beliefs did not reflect the church's official positions.

### **The Indisputable Fact**

The indisputable fact is that Rome made a number of strong, clear theological affirmations at the Council of Trent. Because Trent was an ecumenical council, it had all the weight of the infallibility of the church behind it. So, there is a sense in which Rome, in order to maintain

her triumphant view of the authority of the church and of tradition, cannot repeal the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent.

[Note: In other words, since the RCC claims infallibility for the Council of Trent, it cannot revoke it without renouncing the claim of infallibility for all its official documents. Otherwise, it proves the initial claim of infallibility to be mistaken. Thus, the RCC cannot satisfy many of its priests who are becoming more protestant in their beliefs because it has claimed too much for itself. The reformed church, on the other hand, has never claimed infallibility for anything other than the Scriptures. It's official doctrinal statements (e.g. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism, Heidelberg Confession and Catechism, London Confession, et al) never claim infallibility except for Scripture alone. While it is true that the reformed church (small letters) has a rich theological tradition, this very tradition renounces all claims of infallibility.

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (WCF 1:6 WCS)

Thus, the reformed church must be constantly reforming according to its current understanding of the Bible. Since many mainline reformed churches no longer hold to the teaching of the Scriptures, they, by definition, are no longer “reformed”. End of note.]

As recently as the Catechism of the Catholic Church at the end of the twentieth century, it made clear, unambiguous reaffirmations of Trent's teachings. So, those who argue that these teachings on justification are no longer relevant to the debate between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are simply ignoring what the church itself teaches. Yes, there are some Roman Catholic priests and scholars who dispute some of the teachings of their communion, but as far as the Roman hierarchy is concerned, the Council of Trent stands immutable on its teaching regarding justification. We cannot ignore what Trent said in evaluating where we stand in relation to the Roman Catholic Church and the ongoing relevance of the Reformation.

[We can be thankful for many RC scholars and priests who are now embracing Protestant theology as well as teaching it. We can also be thankful for the millions of Roman Catholics—out of a world-wide membership of 1.2 billion—who are genuine believers trusting in Christ alone through faith alone apart from their works for their salvation, just as Martin Luther did. What has been stated above in my notes or in the cited material must not be interpreted as a declaration that all Roman Catholics are lost or that all Protestants are saved. What has been stated is simply an explanation of why I believe—in agreement with virtually all reformed scholars—that the official dogma of the RCC cannot be reconciled with Scripture.

At the end of the day, we may also be thankful for Jesus' assurance:

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;<sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (Jn. 10:27-28 NASB)

Those who are Jesus' sheep will hear His voice, and that voice can be heard in none other than the pages of Scripture illumined by the Holy Spirit. End of note.]

## End of Excursus on Roman Catholicism

### Romans 7

<sup>1</sup>Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law),  
that the law has jurisdiction over a person  
as long as he lives?

<sup>2</sup>For the married woman  
is bound by law to her husband  
while he is living;  
but if her husband dies,  
she is released from the law concerning the husband.

<sup>3</sup>So then,  
if while her husband is living  
she is joined to another man,  
she shall be called an adulteress;  
but if her husband dies,  
she is free from the law,  
so that she is not an adulteress  
though she is joined to another man.

**Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law)** is a reference to the Law of Moses. Paul is again mentioning something familiar to his audience in Rome, even Gentile Christians, many of whom had been converted in the synagogue. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians would have been familiar with the Mosaic Law (Moo, *Romans*, pp. 411-412). This becomes clearer from his reference to the tenth commandment in v. 7, **You shall not covet.**

In v. 1, Paul states the principle that the Law of Moses has **jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives.** By making this simple statement, he is setting up the analogy which follows: that the believer is under the law as long as he lives, but when he dies, he is no longer under the Law's jurisdiction. Therefore, Romans 7 becomes an extended explanation of what Paul has only mentioned briefly in Rom. 6: 14, **For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

In vv. 2-3, Paul illustrates the principle stated in v. 1. A **married woman** is obligated by the Law to remain married to her husband as long as her husband is alive. In stating the case simply, Paul makes no attempt to cover all the complicated issues concerning divorce. He does this in more detail in 1 Cor. 7, but this is not his immediate purpose in presenting the illustration (see my "Doctrine of Man" in which I attempt to deal with both Paul's teaching and Christ's teaching concerning divorce). It is clear enough that **if her husband** dies, the **married woman** who was once **bound by law to her husband** is now **released from the law concerning the husband.** The Law that once had **jurisdiction** over her with respect to her husband no longer applies—she is **free** from it—and she can be **joined to another man** without becoming an **adulteress.**

<sup>4</sup>Therefore, my brethren,

you also were made to die to the Law  
through the body of Christ,  
**so that**  
you might be joined to another,  
to Him who was raised from the dead,  
**in order that**  
we might bear fruit for God.

To carry through with the principle stated in vv. 2-3, we might have expected Paul to say in the conclusion of v. 4 (**therefore**) that the Law had died. This assumes that “the details of the illustration in vv. 2-3 are parallel to the application in v. 4”. With this assumption, the Law is clearly related to the first **husband** and Christ is related to **another man** (the second husband) in v. 3 (Moo. P. 413). The **married woman** in the analogy is clearly the Christian who is **released from the law**, the first husband. She is **bound** to her first husband **while he is living**, but when the first husband dies, she is no longer bound to him and can marry another.

But Paul does not say that the Law has died. This would be mistaken since many were/are still under the Law.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who **are** under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become **accountable to God**; (Rom. 3:19 NASB)

But **if** you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Gal. 5:18 NASB)

The world is **accountable to God** because the world is **under the Law** of God to keep it as the condition of salvation—a condition none will ever meet. Those who are **led by the Spirit** are not **under the Law** in the same sense because they have died to the Law as the condition of salvation. Further, by saying that believers are **not under the law** (6: 14), Paul implies that unbelievers are under the law.

In the conclusion of 7: 4, it is not the Law that dies, but the believer who dies to the law. We can see then that the conclusion does not exactly correspond to the illustration of vv. 2-3. In the illustration, the **married woman** (analogous to the believer) cannot be made to die because she must be **joined to another man**, but in the conclusion the married woman represents the Christian who **die[s] to the Law** and is **joined to another**, namely, Christ Jesus, **to Him who was raised from the dead**.

In what sense, then, has the believer **died to the Law**? Considering Paul’s previous argument against antinomianism (lawlessness), he cannot mean that believers are no longer subject to the moral law of God. The believer cannot use the excuse that since God’s grace abounds all the more when our sin increases to justify continuing in sin (3: 20 with 6: 1); nor can he use the excuse that since he is no longer under law but under grace to continue sinning (v. 15). As Paul says later,

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled **the law**.<sup>9</sup> For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this

saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfillment of *the* law.** (Rom. 13:8-10 NASB)

Paul does not say that love discontinues the function of the law, but that it **fulfills** the law which is still applicable in the life of the Christian. **Therefore... you also were made to die to the Law** must mean something other than the discontinuation of the Law's "third use" as a guide to Christian behavior. The three uses of the law of God are as follows: (1) To reflect the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness. (2) To restrain external evil in civil society. (3) As a guide for Christian behavior, facilitating our ability to please God.

**Through the body of Christ** reveals the means by which the Christian's death to the law has been accomplished, thus connecting Rom. 7 with Rom. 6. In that chapter, Christians **have become united with Him in the likeness of His death.** Christ died because he was subjected to the penalty of the law against sin: **the wages of sin is death.** Having died with Christ, believers have also died to the penalty of the Law. As Christ died only once to sin, Christians die only once in the death of Christ, not only to sin's dominion, but to the Law's jurisdiction requiring death to sinners.

As long as law governs us there is no possibility of release from the bondage of sin. The only alternative is discharge from the law. This occurs in our union with Christ in his death, because all the virtue of Christ's death in meeting the claims of the law becomes ours and we are free from the bond-service and power of sin to which the law had consigned us (Murray, p. 243, emphasis mine).

There is more to our death to the Law and freedom from the Law than merely release from its penalty, even as Murray's quotation above suggests. Dying to the law implies dying to the governing power of the law over the believer's conscience. As Moo says,

Throughout chaps. 5-8, Paul focuses not so much on the condemnation that comes when the law is disobeyed—"the curse of the law" (Gal. 3: 13)—as on **the failure of the law to deal with the problem of sin**—"the inability of the law (cf. 8: 3a)...

It is this deliverance from the power, or "binding authority," of the law that Paul describes in this verse. In being released from the law in this sense, the believer is, naturally, freed from the condemning power of the law (Moo, pp. 415-416, emphasis mine).

Moreover, this release from the governing power over the believer's conscience is implied in the dual-purpose statement of v. 4b.

**so that**            *[purpose]*  
                         you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead,  
**in order that**   *[purpose]*  
                         we might bear fruit for God.

On the one hand, the believer who has died to the Law through the death of Christ is now joined to Christ as the **married woman** is joined to her new husband. The woman could not be joined to her new husband unless the first husband died. But since the law cannot die, Paul alters the analogy to say that we are dead to the law. We cannot be joined to Christ as our "new husband" unless we are dead to the old husband, the law.



We might ask at this point why Paul uses the marriage relationship as the foundation of the analogy of dying to the Law and being joined to Christ. More than any other analogy, he uses the marriage union to describe our corporate relationship to Christ. Here, the analogy is applied to the individual. Could it be that Paul uses this most intimate and psychologically charged union to best insinuate (suggest) either the bondage one experiences from life under the law or the freedom he experiences from life in Christ? A woman's marriage to a stern, demanding husband is not a pleasant "walk in the park". He may often seem hard and unforgiving, and she may often feel that she seldom measures up to his expectations. All the same, the stern husband takes care of her, and she does not go looking for love and security in all the wrong places. Though sometimes hard, the relationship is necessary and effective in keeping her alive. This describes Israel's relationship to the Law and our relationship to the moral law stamped upon our conscience (Rom. 2: 14-15) before conversion. We may discern from much of what Paul says elsewhere of being **under the Law** that such a life was also no "walk in the park."

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"—(Gal. 3:13 NASB)

Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24 NASB)

**Tutor** is more accurately translated **disciplinarian**, a male slave whom the father of the household assigned responsibility for making sure the underaged son did his chores and completed his educational assignments. If he didn't, the disciplinarian would take a rod to his soft underside until he did what he was told, leading the son to flee to his father for mercy. The Law did that for us. It beat our consciences black and blue until we fled to Christ for mercy and grace.

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,<sup>6</sup> who also made us adequate *as* servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life.<sup>7</sup> But if **the ministry of death**, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was,<sup>8</sup> how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?<sup>9</sup> For if **the ministry of condemnation** has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.<sup>10</sup> For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. (2 Cor. 3:5-10 NASB)

Also, from the author of Hebrews:

**For you have not come** to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,<sup>19</sup> and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.<sup>20</sup> For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."<sup>21</sup> And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."<sup>22</sup> **But you have come** to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,<sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. (Heb. 12:18-24 NASB)

At the council of Jerusalem, Peter responds to the legalism of some Pharisees.

<sup>5</sup>But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses"...

<sup>10</sup>"Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a **yoke [zugos] which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?**" (Acts 15: 5, 10)

Peter's meaning should be comprehended from Paul's analogous use of **yoke** in Gal. 5: 1-3 in which he contrasted freedom in Christ to the **yoke** of keeping the stipulations of the Old Covenant represented in circumcision, precisely the issue before the Jerusalem Council.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a **yoke [zugos] of slavery**.<sup>2</sup> Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.<sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that **he is under obligation to keep the whole Law**. (Gal. 5:1-3 NASB)

By yielding to the **yoke** of circumcision, the Judaizers also obligated themselves to keep the remainder of the Law in their quest for God's approval and blessing, something which neither the fathers of the faith nor Peter's contemporaries were able to achieve through their unsatisfactory performance. In contrast to law-keeping was simple faith in Jesus Christ and unreserved trust that His perfect obedience and sacrifice was abundantly sufficient to secure peace with God and freedom of conscience.

Calvin remarks on the differences between the Old Covenant and the new.

To sum up: the Old Testament [i.e. the Old Covenant] **struck consciences with fear and trembling, but by the benefit of the New they are released into joy**. The Old held consciences bound by the yoke of bondage; the New by its spirit of liberality emancipates them into freedom.

But suppose that our opponents object that, among the Israelites, the holy patriarchs were an exception: since they were obviously endowed with the same Spirit of faith as we, it follows that they shared the same freedom and joy. To this we reply: neither of these arose from the law. But when through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled for refuge to the gospel. It was therefore a particular fruit of the New Testament [New Covenant] that, apart from the common law of the Old Testament they were exempted from those evils. Further, we shall deny that they were so endowed with the spirit of freedom and assurance as not in some degree to experience the fear and bondage arising from the law. For, however much they enjoyed the privilege that they had received through the grace of the gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of ceremonial observances as the common people. They were compelled to observe those ceremonies punctiliously [very carefully about every detail], symbols of a tutelage [education] resembling bondage (cf. Gal.4:2-3); and the written bonds (cf.Col.2:14), whereby they confessed themselves guilty of sin, did not free them from obligation. Hence, they are rightly said, in contrast to us, to have been under the testament of bondage and fear, when we consider that common dispensation by which the Lord at that time dealt with the Israelites (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter XI, Section 9; words in brackets mine and emphasis mine).

The second part of the dual purpose in v. 4, **in order that we might bear fruit for God**, more clearly reveals the positive effect of dying to the Law and being joined to Christ. We are reminded of what Christ told His disciples.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch **cannot bear fruit of itself** unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup>"I am the vine, you are the branches; **he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit**, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:4-5 NASB)

Apart from a vital relationship to Christ, no one can **bear fruit**; and nothing short of dying to the Law in the crucifixion of Christ and being resurrected with Christ will create this relationship. This will not be accomplished through rigorous law-keeping. (Saul of Tarsus tried it this way and failed: Phil. 3.) Psychologically, we will always wonder if enough of those commandments have been kept to be loved and accepted by God. Yet, we know that God has accepted the works of Christ and loves Him as His only begotten Son. If we are in Christ, God can love us as He loves His Son. In Christ Jesus, we have peace with God. Hodge comments,

We are not under a legal dispensation, requiring personal conformity to the law, and entire freedom from sin, past and present, as the condition of our acceptance; but we are under a gracious dispensation, according to which God dispenses pardon freely, and accepts the sinner as a sinner, for Christ's sake, without works or merit of his own. Whoever is under the law in the sense just explained, is not only under condemnation, but he is of necessity under a legal or slavish spirit [see Gal. 4: 24]. What he does, he does as a slave, to escape punishment. But he who is under grace, who is gratuitously [without merit] accepted of God, and restored to his favour, is under a filial [relationship of a son] spirit. The principle of obedience in him is love, and not fear. Here, as everywhere else in the Bible, it is assumed that the favour of God is our life. We must be reconciled to him before we can be holy; we must feel that he loves us before we can love him...The only hope therefore of sinners, is in freedom from the law, freedom from its condemnation, freedom from the obligation to fulfill it as the condition of acceptance, and freedom from its spirit (Hodge, *Romans*, p.205; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

The **fruit** of which Paul speaks can be none other than the fruit of obedience which includes the **fruit of the Spirit**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. **Against such things**, Paul says, **there is no law** (Gal. 5: 22-23).

<sup>5</sup> For while we were in the flesh,  
the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law,  
were at work in the members of our body  
to bear fruit for death.

In the context of Rom. 7-8, **in the flesh** is the opposite of being **joined** to Christ. In chapter 8, it is antithetical (opposite) to being **in the Spirit** (8: 9). It is the same as being an unbeliever. For the unbeliever, the **Law** has the effect of eliciting **sinful passions** which do their **work in the members of our body**. Far from arousing the conscience of the unbeliever to repent and change his course of action, the Law actually stimulates within the sinful heart the desire to violate the very things forbidden. This is contrary to the redeemed heart which **joyfully concur[s] with the law of God in the inner man** (v. 22). **...to bear fruit for death** is also opposed to **that we might bear fruit for God**.

<sup>6</sup> But now

we have been released from the Law,  
having died to that by which we were bound,  
so that  
we serve in newness of the Spirit  
and not in oldness of the letter.

Paul continues the analogous relationship he began in v. 2. As the married woman whose husband has died is **released from the law concerning the husband**, Christians **have been released from the Law** through the death of Christ. **Having died to that by which we were bound** is parallel to **bound by law to her husband** in v. 2.

The result of **having died** is that we are now able to **serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter** thus producing the fruit of the Spirit rather than fruit of death. **Oldness of the letter** and **newness of the Spirit** are equivalent terms, respectively, for the Old Covenant of Law—also called **the ministry of death in letters engraved on stones** (2 Cor. 3:7)—and the New Covenant, **the ministry of the Spirit** (1 Cor. 3: 8). There can be no service in the newness of the Spirit unless there has been termination of one's bondage to the law through death.

<sup>7</sup> What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!

On the contrary,

I would not have come to know sin  
except through the Law;

for

I would not have known about coveting  
if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

**What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?** introduces another development in Paul's argument against antinomianism. Since those who are **bound to the Law** cannot produce the kind of life pleasing to God (**fruit for God**), the question arises concerning the inherent (essential) quality and goodness of the Law. Surely, if the Law stimulates the very sin which it forbids, then the fault lies within the Law itself. To this question, Paul answers with his characteristic, **May it never be!**

Paul counters this accusation against the Law by saying that the Law is valuable and essential in defining what sin is. We would not know what sin is unless the Law had told us what it is. Does this mean, then, that there was no explanation of sin before the Law of Moses was written? No. Paul has already explained in chapters 1 and 2 that the holy attributes and ordinances of God have been revealed in creation and in man's conscience as the image of God since the creation of the world. He is well aware of the law of God. For example, Cain knew that he was subject to punishment for murdering Abel. Men also knew that homosexuality was sin, but they practiced it anyway, as they do today.

What the Law does is that it publishes the moral law of God in a more precise and distinct way. It also gets to the very root of sin which is the heart. Notice that Paul does not use the sixth commandment against murder nor the seventh commandment against adultery. He could have used these commandments as examples since Christ in the sermon on the mount dealt with these sins at

the very root rather than simply condemning the outward manifestations of these sins. Whoever lusts after a woman has committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5: 28). Moreover, murder begins in the heart with anger (Matt. 5: 22). The tenth commandment, however, **You shall not covet**, deals strictly with the heart, and it shows that all the sins in the decalogue (the Ten Commandments) begin in the heart—as Jesus clearly taught. In some sense, Jesus was not teaching anything which should not have already been understood; but considering the hardness of men’s hearts, it was necessary for Him to expound upon the deeper application of the Law. To illustrate:

"You **shall not covet** your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exod. 20:17 NASB)

We can see with this commandment that adultery begins with coveting your neighbor’s wife. It does not begin with sexual intercourse. Adultery is also a form of theft, stealing another man’s wife or another woman’s husband. Theft of other property—houses, servants, oxen, donkeys, land, etc.—also begins in the heart with coveting. Also, as we covet things that don’t belong to us, we are also guilty of breaking the first commandment, **You shall have no other gods before Me** (Ex. 20: 3). Rather than being satisfied with God and what He has given us, we make gods out of property and other men’s wives. Notice that the first and tenth commandments form an *inclusio* which “includes” every other commandment in the list of ten commandments.

<sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before Me..."

<sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself an idol..."

<sup>5</sup> "You shall not worship them or serve them..."

<sup>7</sup> "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,

<sup>8</sup> "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

<sup>12</sup> "Honor your father and your mother..."

<sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> "You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> "You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> "You shall not covet

your neighbor's house;

you shall not covet

your neighbor's wife

or his male servant

or his female servant

or his ox

or his donkey

or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exod. 20:3-17 NASB)

All the commandments hang together or fall together. The law of God is like the tablets of stone. Once the tablets are broken, all of them are broken together. James illustrates this principle.

<sup>1</sup>My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. <sup>2</sup> For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, <sup>3</sup> and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You

stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"<sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?<sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?<sup>8</sup> If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.<sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.<sup>10</sup> **For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**<sup>11</sup> For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (Jas. 2:1-11 NASB)

Note what James is saying. He is accusing some in his audience of breaking the sixth commandment against murder by disrespecting poor people. How often do we do this? How often do we do this by electing elders to office who are wealthy but spiritually immature rather than mature men who have humble means but who are well-versed in Scripture and exemplary in character? In the PCA, my denomination, we do this all the time, but no one seems to notice. The law of God is a seamless cloth that cannot be divided without ruining the whole cloth. I believe this is the reason Paul chose the law against coveting: this law, as the first law against idolatry, incorporates the whole law.

Were it not for the Law against coveting, Paul (and everyone else) would have developed a purely externalized version of law-keeping. As long as we didn't actually steal, kill, commit adultery, etc., then we would be lawful. Before his conversion, Paul himself had this kind of assessment of his own behavior.

<sup>3</sup>for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> **although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.** If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:<sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;<sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; **as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.** (Phil. 3:3-6 NASB)

Paul had the credentials. He was a "good" Pharisee, and everyone knew it. His prestige as a Pharisee was growing.

and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. (Gal. 1:14 NASB)

<sup>8</sup> But sin,  
    taking opportunity through **the commandment**,  
        produced in me coveting of every kind;  
for  
    apart from the Law  
        **sin is dead.**

Verse 8 introduces us to Paul’s internal anguish of heart and struggle with sin which he explains more fully later in the chapter. It was not the Law that was at fault, **but sin taking opportunity through the commandment**. In other words, Paul’s coveting resulted from inherent sin in his heart which used the law as an occasion, opportunity, or base of operations for coveting. Paradoxically, it was the knowledge of the law against coveting that exacerbated (aggravated) the practice of coveting. **Apart from the Law sin is dead** means that without the awareness of coveting which the Law supplies, sin is **dead to one’s consciousness**. The verb *is*, not supplied in the Greek text, is added by the translators and should, according to Murray, be added as *was* rather than *is*. Paul is speaking personally as one to whom the consciousness of coveting **was dead until the commandment came** to his consciousness (v. 9). Sin **was dead** in the subjective realm of consciousness until the law against coveting was fully understood.

As an illustration, consider a young man in his late twenties who has lived a sexually promiscuous life-style from his late teens. Suppressing the law of God in his conscience (Rom. 1) and following the consensus (agreement) of popular morality permitting illicit sex, he has grown up with the idea that sexual gratification is like eating lunch, a biological need which should not be suppressed. Providentially, he turns to a radio show featuring a well-known evangelical commentator preaching on the subject of sexual immorality. Hearing the word of God condemning fornication (sex before marriage with an unmarried partner), he is convinced for the first time that he must turn from this sin. Any illusions about his goodness and righteousness are destroyed. The law of God has **killed** his sense of being a good person.

This is how the law against coveting affected Paul. Paul believed he had mastered all the other commandments, but when the pervasiveness of coveting was fully appreciated, he knew that the law had brought death, not life—the curse, not blessing (Dt. 27—28). He had not only broken the tenth commandment, but all of them because all the commandments had both external and internal requirements.

There is merit to Moo’s conclusion that in vv. 7-11 Paul is

...describing his own involvement, as a member of the people of Israel, with the giving of the law to his people at Sinai [i.e. **when the law came**]...We conclude, then, that *egō* [I] denotes Paul himself but that the events depicted in these verses were not all experienced personally and consciously by the Apostle. It is in this sense that we argue for a combination of the autobiographical view with the view that identifies *egō* with Israel. *Egō* is not Israel, but *egō* is Paul in solidarity with Israel (*Romans*, p. 431).

We have startling evidence of Paul’s “solidarity” with the nation of Israel in Chapter 9 where his sorrow over unbelieving Israel leads him to make the astounding admission that he could wish himself accursed in their place. But there is also evidence for it in Rom. 7.

<sup>10</sup> and this commandment,  
which **was to result in life,**  
**proved to result in death for me;**

This statement is an allusion (subtle reference) to the promise of life in Deut. 30: 19 and elsewhere for the national commitment of Israel to keep the covenant stipulations of the Law. More on this

below. I differ with Moo that “the events depicted in these verses were not all experienced personally and consciously by the Apostle.” I believe they were.

Paul is continuing the argument against antinomianism which he started in chapter 6. He begins with a rhetorical question and continues with rhetorical questions into chapter 7: **What shall we say then?** (6: 1; 7: 7) or simply, **What then?** (6: 15). The entire narrative in Rom. 7 appears to be Paul’s personal experience down to the last rhetorical question of the chapter: **Who will set me free from the body of this death?** (7: 24). It would appear misleading to his readers if Paul were to present this narrative as the combined experience of Israel and himself without explicitly saying so, and this would, I think, diminish its personal impact upon his readers, especially Gentiles. Beginning in chapter 9, he deals with his wayward Jewish brethren, but it appears now that he is opening his heart to the Roman Christians as an example of what consciousness of the Law apart from the Spirit’s enablement actually does: rather than deterring and discouraging sin, it actually incites one to sin.

As an example of this, consider the scenario of a small child in the kitchen with his mother who had just baked some bread. The mother says sternly to the child, “Do not touch this bread until we have eaten supper!” The child had not thought about the bread until the mother gave him this warning, but now, all he can think about was eating a piece of this bread. The mother’s warning incites him to sneak a piece of bread from the table.

Consider another example from the United States which has a serious drug problem among young people. The government came out with an antidrug campaign with the slogan, “Just say no!” That is, say no to drugs. The intent of the campaign was to inform young people about the dangers of drugs, but the effect was not encouraging. Drug usage among young people in the US has not decreased since this campaign, but increased. Information alone does not change behavior. Even the law of God will not change behavior apart from the internal operation of the Holy Spirit.

I would also take issue with Moo’s remark concerning the discontinuation of the use of the Law.

The experience of Israel with the law should also remind Christians never to return to the law—whether the Mosaic or any other list of “rules”—as a source of spiritual vigor and growth (p. 441; emphasis mine).

I wish Moo had elaborated more, and I would be inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Does this eliminate what the reformers called the “third use of the Law” in which Christians benefit from the law as a practical guide for pleasing God, the very use to which Paul alludes in his admission of v. 7. We might ask Moo, “Is the Law sin?” If the problem Paul and everyone else experiences with sin is not the inherent “evil” of the law, then the solution is not abandoning the law altogether but not trusting it to provide the strength and power to keep it. The power to keep it comes exclusively from the Holy Spirit; but apparently, we still need reminders of what it says— if the Sermon on the Mount is any indication. In answer to his suggestion that we “never return to the law”, I am reminded of Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonians.

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God* (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.<sup>2</sup> **For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus**.<sup>3</sup> **For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality**;<sup>4</sup> that each



of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,<sup>5</sup> not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; (1 Thess. 4:1-5 NASB)

Paul was giving them **commandments** as the Lord's authorized apostle, commandments identical to those of the Law of Moses. There's nothing defective in that. The error comes in believing that we alone by our own strength are capable of keeping such commandments.

<sup>9</sup> I was once alive  
apart from the Law;  
but when **the commandment** came,  
**sin became alive and I died;**  
<sup>10</sup> and this commandment,  
which **was to result in life,**  
**proved to result in death for me;**

...**alive apart from the Law** does not mean that Paul was spiritually alive before the true implications of the law **came** to his consciousness. It simply means that he once considered himself blameless concerning the Law, and therefore, **alive** with respect to the Law's demands, "Do this and you will live." Although he imagined himself alive, he was not. Likewise, **sin became alive and I died** means that his awareness of personal sin—especially the sin of coveting—was stimulated in his mind to the point that Paul psychologically and emotionally **died** to any self-confidence that he was or ever had been successful in measuring up to the demands of the Law. Possibly he was alluding either to God's warning of curse to Adam in the garden or to the dual promise of blessing or curse to Israel at the second giving of the Law, or both.

but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it **you will surely die.**" (Gen. 2:17 NASB)

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.** So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, (Deut. 30:19 NASB)

Murray's comment:

[Paul] is speaking of the unperturbed, self-complacent, self-righteous life which he once lived before the turbulent motions and conviction of sin described in the two preceding verses, overtook him. We are not able to determine the time in the apostle's career when the commandment began to arouse the sinful passions (v. 5). But there is no need or warrant to restrict what he describes as being "alive apart from the law" to the years of unreflecting childhood (cf. Phil. 3: 4-6)...The coming of the commandment is undoubtedly the coming home to his consciousness and the registration in consciousness by which sin took occasion to work in him all manner of covetous lust. This latter is the reviving of sin. "I died" is placed in contrast with "I was alive apart from the law" and must, therefore, be interpreted as the death of the complacent self-assurance and calm which the former "being alive" denotes. He was no longer at rest in his self-complacency. This dying cannot be equated with the dying to sin by union with Christ in his death (6: 2) for two reasons. (1) The dying of verse 9 is a dying wrought through the instrumentality of the law, the commandment. It is not so with *death to sin*; the latter is through the gospel and union with Christ. (2) It is not *death to sin* that is in view here but the revival

of sin, the arousing of the inherent depravity to overt and more virulent activity. "Sin revived" is the opposite of "we died to sin". (*Romans*, p. 251, italic emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).

Verse 10 **...and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me** introduces what Paul says later about the commandment being **holy, righteous, and good** (v. 12). There was nothing inherently wrong with the commandment. The Law is not **sin** (v. 7). Rather, the Law promises life to those who keep the Law. When given to Israel, the Law promised the blessing of life if they kept it (cf. Deut. 30: 19 above and the verses below).

'So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, **by which a man may live if he does them**; I am the LORD. (Lev. 18:5 NASB)

And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, **By which if a man observes them he shall live**. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. (Neh. 9:29 NASB)

"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, **he shall surely live; he shall not die**. (Ezek. 18:21 NASB)

When approached by the rich ruler/lawyer, Jesus upholds the Law's promise of life to the doer of the Law.

And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"<sup>17</sup> And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; **but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments**." (Matt. 19: 16-17 NASB)

We have discussed this incident before under Rom. 2. Jesus, born under the Law and familiar with its blessing and curse, was simply repeating what the Law promised. When he attempts to purge the ruler's arrogant self-confidence by telling him to sell all that he had and follow Him, the man walks away, choosing to keep his money and forfeit Christ.

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."<sup>22</sup> But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. (Matt. 19:20-22 NASB)

Jesus was repeating the Law's stated promise of life. But, as with Israel and Paul, the ruler mistakenly believed he could keep it. Jesus showed him that he had failed to keep any of the law. He had failed to love God foremost, and he had failed to love his neighbor as himself (Matt. 22: 35-40).

This is essentially what happens to anyone who believes they can be saved by keeping the Law. They really do not understand the comprehensiveness of the Law's demands. Loving God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself (?) Yeah. Right! Anyone who believes he can do this is delusional—which proves that most people are delusional. They are delusional until the Holy

Spirit reveals the Law's demands and brings conviction of sin and death to their own self-assurance and self-righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> for sin, taking an opportunity  
through the commandment,  
**deceived me**  
and through it  
**killed me.**

<sup>12</sup> So then,  
the Law  
is holy,  
and the commandment  
is **holy and righteous and good.**

Paul personifies **sin** in v. 11. **Sin**, not the Law, is presented as the culprit (the guilty party) which **deceived** Paul into believing that he could expect the promise of life by keeping the Law. The Law itself was honest in its promise of life, but Paul was not aware of the pervasive effects of indwelling sin rendering him incapable of procuring or earning this life. This is the tragedy of all who believe that they have been “good enough” to go to heaven. They are simply **deceived**. Moreover, Paul says that through the Law **sin...killed me**. That is, rather than receiving the promise of life through the Law, he received the curse of death promised to those who fail to keep the Law. Moreover, the Law did not make him better; it made him worse by stirring up sin within his heart.

Paul then confirms his previous rejection of any accusation of the Law as sin. **May it never be!** On the contrary, he says, **the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.** The holiness of the Law reflects the “transcendence and purity of God” and is a written record of His perfection. The righteousness of the Law reflects the justice and fairness of God, and the goodness of the Law reflects God's intent of the Law for man's “highest well-being” (Murray, p. 253). To the extent that we keep the Law, we imitate the perfection of God transcribed in the Law. The Law was never the culprit (guilty party) in this deception and killing, but only the instrument that **sin** used to deceive and kill Paul. It was his inherent **sin** which deceived him into believing that he was “basically a good person” and could attain eternal life and improved character through “will-power” in keeping the Law.

And this is what happens in the case of every human being who attempts to obtain a right standing with God on the basis of law-keeping or anyone who attempts to be sanctified on the basis of Law-keeping. For the Jewish attempt to be justified and holy (sanctified) through the Law was but a paradigm or model of what men have been trying to do since the fall of Adam. By giving the Law in tablets of stone exclusively to the Jewish nation, God was using Israel as an example or test case (cf. 1 Cor. 10) for everyone else throughout human history (also Moo's opinion, p. 428).

While living under a written code with Moses as its leader and provided with visual miracles (the dividing of the Red Sea, manna from heaven, water from a rock, etc.), and supernaturally protected from hostile nations, sinful Israel was still incapable of keeping the good Law of God. For sinful people, the good word of God will neither justify nor sanctify because they (we) are thoroughly polluted with sin. Because of sin, we misuse all of God's good gifts: money, sex, authority, the natural creation (which we pollute with chemicals and plastic water bottles). Sex is not evil. Money is not evil. Authority is not evil. Nature is not evil. It's the way we use them that

is evil, and the way we use them reflects who we are and what we are as people: sinners. We also misuse the Law as the legitimate means of being holy rather than seeing in the Law the impossibility of measuring up to its potential and fleeing to God for mercy and forgiveness. Perhaps this is what Peter means when he says that the Law was a **yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear** (Acts 15: 10; cf. Paul's correction of Peter in Gal. 2: 14-21). But the Law is not the enemy. The enemy is inherent sin, and we may look at this enemy in the mirror.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore  
did that  
which is good  
become *a cause of death* for me?

**May it never be!**

Rather it was sin,  
**in order that**  
it might be shown to be sin  
by effecting my death  
through **that which is good,**  
**so that**  
through **the commandment**  
sin would become utterly sinful.

Paul illustrates with v. 13 the **utter** sinfulness of inherent sin. It's pernicious deception and death-dealing capability is demonstrated in the fact that **sin** can take something as **holy and righteous and good** as the commandments of God and utilize them to produce a sense of false righteousness which results in the death and damnation of the sinner. But not only this, sin is **utterly sinful** by its aggravation (increase) of the specific violation of the Law of God which is forbidden. The tenth commandment against coveting, far from diminishing the occurrence of coveting, actually increases its occurrence in Paul, the sinner. **You shall not commit adultery** serves the purpose of sin in seducing the sinner to commit adultery. Analogously, the banana (the Law) intended by God to feed the child (the person confronted with the law) is used by the child trafficker (sin) to lure the child into a trap. And so with all of God's commandments.

<sup>14</sup> For we know  
that the Law  
is spiritual,  
but I  
am of flesh,  
sold into bondage to sin.

**The Law is spiritual** [*pneumatikos*], meaning that the Law derives its origin from the Holy Spirit (Murray, *Romans*, p. 254, including citation below).

<sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup> which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual [*pneumatikos*] thoughts with spiritual [*pneumatikos*] words. <sup>14</sup> But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually [*pneumatikōs*]

appraised.<sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual [*pneumatikos*] appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. (1 Cor. 2:12-15 NASB)

Being derived from the Holy Spirit, the Law cannot be anything other than **holy, righteous, and good**. Thus, Paul is supporting his argument that his (and our) problem is not with the Law itself but with **sin** which is deeply embedded in human nature.

**...but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin** poses a more serious interpretive problem. Verses 7-11 indicate a time-frame in Paul's life when he was complacent in his belief that he was **blameless... as to the righteousness which is in the Law** (Phil. 3:6 NASB). He was a self-righteous unbeliever. But when he became aware of the true implications of the law against coveting, he knew that he was a law-breaker rather than a law-keeper in every respect. He knew that he had really violated all the commandments, not just one. As the stirrings of his conscience became more acute, his sensitivity to the demands of the law and his inadequacy to keep it became more pronounced. This sensitivity escalated to the point that in v. 14 he declares, **but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin**. Clearly, a transition has occurred in the apostle's self-evaluation from v. 9a: **I was once alive apart from the Law** to v. 14: **I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin**.

If Paul is speaking as a regenerate man, this statement is particularly confusing in light of his teaching in Rom. 6. In that chapter he says that the believer who has **died to sin** in the death of Christ is therefore **freed from sin as a controlling influence in his life**. He is also assured that since he is no longer **under law but under grace** that sin will not be **master over him**. But in v. 14, he appears to treat sin as a master to whom he is enslaved.

The interpretive problem arises in distinguishing the chronology of vv. 14-25. Is Paul still **in the flesh** in v. 14 as he was in v. 5? If so, then he is an unregenerate man.

<sup>7</sup> because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,<sup>8</sup> and **those who are in the flesh cannot please God**. (Rom. 8:7-8 NASB)

But if Paul is still **in the flesh** in v. 14, who is Paul in v. 22, **For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man**? Such delight in the law of God clearly identifies Paul with the redeemed Psalmist.

**But his delight is in the law of the LORD**, And in His law he meditates day and night. (Ps. 1:2 NASB)

**O how I love Your law!** It is my meditation all the day. (Ps. 119:97 NASB)

Verse 22 is clearly within the same context as v. 14, and there is no exegetical reason to suspect some drastic change in Paul's life from v. 14 to v. 22. Paul's innermost being, his **inner man**, agrees with and rejoices in the holy precepts of God's law; and in v. 24 he cries out in desperation, **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** His anguish is the direct result of his inability to do all that the law requires, all that he **want[s] to do** (vv. 15, 19, 21).

How can an unregenerate man feel and say such things? How do we apply this passage to our lives if we fail to understand at what point in Paul's experience he is making these statements—

unregenerate or regenerate? There has been much difference of opinion on this question since the time of Augustine.

I have taken the majority (I think) reformed position that vv. 14-25 is an honest autobiographical sketch of Paul's struggle with remaining sin in his life (cf. Hodge, Murray, Calvin) in contradiction to more modern commentators like Moo who believe that these verses describe an unregenerate man. There are interpretive problems with either position. One of the biggest obstacles to the regenerate interpretation is found right from the start in v. 14. How can a regenerate man say **I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin?**

In determining this question, the wording is important. In v. 14, Paul does not say that he is **in the flesh** [*en sarki*] but **of flesh** [*sarkinos*]. These are two different conditions. In the immediate context of Romans 7 and 8, **in the flesh** implies a situation in which the person is conditioned and controlled by the lusts of the flesh and is at enmity against God. The phrase does not mean this in other Pauline contexts. **Of flesh** in Rom. 7 merely states the obvious condition of being flesh, a human being living in the body of flesh. The interpreter must take special note of the context to determine how Paul is using the phrase **in the flesh**.

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (Rom. 7:5 NASB)

<sup>8</sup>and those who are **in the flesh** cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Rom. 8:8-9 NASB)

In these three verses, **in the flesh** is the condition of an unbeliever. It is in opposition to being **in the Spirit**. Note the verb tenses, **were** and **are not**. In the past, the Romans **were** in the flesh, but they **are not** in the flesh now as Paul writes them. Yet, Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:3 that **we walk in the flesh** and in Gal. 2: 20 that he lived **in the flesh**. Most of Paul's use of this phrase in other letters simply implies being or living in the fleshly body.

For though we walk **in the flesh**, we do not war according to the flesh, (2 Cor. 10:3 NASB)

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn **in the flesh**, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! (2 Cor. 12:7 NASB)

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Gal. 2:20 NASB)

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles **in the flesh**, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed **in the flesh** by human hands—(Eph. 2:11 NASB)

But if I am to live on **in the flesh**, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (Phil. 1:22 NASB)

It is clear from the above verses that **in the flesh** simply means “in the body of flesh”. The phrase in Gal. 2: 20, **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith** would be self-contradictory if **in the flesh** meant the same as it does in Rom. 8: 8. Someone who is in the flesh in the sense of Rom. 8: 8 cannot **live by faith**; he cannot **please God**. Likewise, **to live on in the flesh** in Phil. 1: 22 cannot mean living **in the [sinful] flesh**. This would not result in **fruitful labor**, but rather, it would **bear fruit for death** (Rom. 7: 5). Paul simply meant that his continued life on earth would result in continued ministry. The context is all-important to determining the meaning. **In the flesh** in the verse list above means the same as **of flesh** in Rom. 7: 14, but **in the flesh** in Rom. 7 and 8 means being under the power and dominion of sin rendering one incapable of pleasing God but **bearing fruit unto death**.

**Sold into bondage to sin** is literally **sold under [hupo] sin** (ESV). Does Paul at this point in his life see himself as a **slave of sin** (Rom. 6: 17)? However, the verb **sold** is passive; therefore, Paul is describing a situation in which he is not the “active agent”, but one who is “subjected to a power that is alien to his own will”. Contrarily, King Ahab actively **sold himself** to do evil by going along with Jezebel’s wicked scheme to have Naboth stoned to death. Ahab was not **sold** passively against his will to do evil; he sold himself willingly (Murray, p. 261). Paul on the other hand, says he is **sold under [hupo] sin**, that is, sold **under** the power of sin. When Paul says in 6: 14 that we **are not under [hupo] law but under [hupo] grace**, he means that we are not under the condemning power of the Law but, rather, we are under the forgiving and transforming power of grace. It is evident from the context that sin is now an alien—as opposed to a domestic—power in Paul’s life in conflict with his **inner man** which **joyfully concurs with the law of God** (v. 22).

Imagine sin as an animal. Either the animal is a wild animal from which you wish to escape or a domesticated animal that you wish to nurture and feed, one which demands much of your time, energy, and resources. People are at peace with domesticated animals, but they are at enmity with wild animals. Such is the difference between alien (wild) sin living in the Christian and domesticated sin dominating the unbeliever’s life and defining who he is. Sinners are at peace with domesticated sin, and they pay little attention to it, just as Paul paid little attention to coveting until he really understood the significance of coveting. But if approached by a lion, we are terrified. With Paul, every sin became a lion that terrified him. Every verse from v. 15 onward presents the picture of Paul’s frustration with sin which used the medium of his fleshly body to accomplish what he does not want to do.

Even those who argue that he reflects here upon preconversion experience acknowledge that he does so with Christian insight. “The misery of the unredeemed man is described from the standpoint of the redeemed man,” writes Günther Bornkamm. Thus if 7: 14b (“sold as a slave to Sin”) describes the nonbeliever, it is a condition which becomes plain only to the eyes of faith. For Sin deceives its slaves (7: 11), blinding them to their actual state. Only the Christian can know that “nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh” (7: 18), and perceive that one is (or used to be) Sin’s prisoner (7; 23) (Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 172, emphasis mine).

In other words, the unbeliever is not capable of understanding his sinful condition in the same way that Paul describes it in v. 14. He simply lacks this perspective. Therefore, even **sold under sin**,

while used to prove the perspective of an unregenerate man in vv. 14-25, does just the opposite. It suggests the perspective of the regenerate man.

<sup>15</sup> For

**what I am doing,**

I do not understand;

for

**I am not practicing**

what I would like to do,

**but I am doing**

the very thing I hate.

At this point in his autobiographical narrative, Paul does not comprehend (?) his own actions. For he is not actually doing what he intends to do or wants to do. In fact, he is doing the very opposite of what he wants to do, **the very thing I hate**. The phrase, **I do not understand** [from *ginōskō*] has also been interpreted as "I do not recognize" or "I do not approve".

Paul the Christian knows what he does, and he understands what he does (7: 15b), and why (7: 17-18). But he does not approve, or acknowledge the legitimacy of, what he does. Even when succumbing to the dictates of Sin, he repudiates and loathes what he does. Sin's claims on the Christian are always illegitimate (Rom. 6) (Chamblin, p. 173, emphasis mine).

Later in the narrative, he begins to explain more clearly what is happening. His self-examination is sincere. Paul is not attempting to mask his ultimate desire to indulge his flesh by offering flimsy excuses to his Roman audience. He sincerely **wants** to do good, and he sincerely **hates** to do evil. Again, if we assume his integrity—and we must—then we are compelled to the conclusion that this is the confession of a regenerate believer honestly engaged in a struggle against his own flesh—the flesh of his mind and the flesh of his body—and in favor of his **new self** (Rom. 6)—his true self—that wills to please God. If we are honest, all of us can identify with his struggle; indeed, all of us must identify with his struggle if we call ourselves Christians.

There is no necessity for denying that Paul here speaks of himself and describes the exercises of a renewed man. There is not an expression, from beginning to the end of this section, which the holiest man may not and must not adopt...The strongest declarations, as for example, "I am carnal, and sold under sin," admit, indeed, by themselves, of an interpretation inconsistent with even ordinary morality; but, as explained by the apostle, and limited by the context, they express nothing more than every believer experiences. What Christian does not feel that he is carnal? ...How cheerfully does he recognize his obligation to love God with all the heart, and yet how constantly does the tendency to self and the world, the law in his members, war against the purer and better law of his mind, and bring him into subjection to sin! (Hodge, p. 241, emphasis mine).

We must appreciate the change in verb tenses from vv. 5-13 to vv. 14-25. In v. 5, Paul speaks of being **in the flesh** as a condition of the past.

For while we **were in the flesh**, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, **were** at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (Rom. 7:5 NASB)



In vv. 7-13, the verbs are either aorist or imperfect, indicating past action.

v.7...I **would not have come to know** sin

v.7...I **would not have known** about coveting

v. 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, **produced** in me coveting of every kind

v.9 I **was** once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment **came**, sin **became** alive and I **died**;

v. 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, **proved** to result in death for me;

v. 11...**deceived** me and through it **killed** me.

But beginning in v. 14, he uses a series of present active indicative verbs—e.g. **am, am doing, understand, am practicing, like (or wish), wants, concur, hate, am serving, see**. In these verses, Paul is speaking of a condition which exists in the present. We have no reason from the context to believe that Paul is speaking of a hypothetical or generic "I" rather than himself. In other words, he is not simply speaking of the condition of the Jews or people in general, but of his own condition. In fact, he appears to make this clear in v. 25.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand **I myself** with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Rom. 7:25 NASB)

Where else in Pauline literature do we find Paul using the first person singular pronoun "I" as a reference to anyone but himself? Charles Hodge dismisses this notion.

It should be remembered that Paul uses this language [namely, first person pronouns and present tense verbs], not once or twice, but uniformly through the whole passage [in vv. 14-25], and that too with an ardor [emotional warmth] of feeling indicative [suggestive] of language coming directly from the heart, and expressing its most joyful or painful experience...To suppose that the apostle is [impersonating] another...the Jew first before the giving of the law, and then after it; or...a Gentile without the law, as opposed to a Jew under it; or...an ordinary individual under the influence of a knowledge of the law, is to suppose him to do what he does nowhere else in any of his writings, and what is entirely foreign to his whole spirit and manner...(Romans, pp. 240-241, emphasis mine).

Paul is speaking of himself in the present tense, and he is speaking of an ongoing struggle with sin in his own person, not someone else's struggle. However, he also speaks as Christ's apostle, as representative of all other Christians. He knows all too well that his struggle will be their struggle, too.

*...the counterthrust of Romans 7: 14-25 is inescapable. Paul's shift from the past tense to the present in verse 14 has no natural explanation save that he now moves on from talking about his experience with God's law in his pre-Christian days to talking about his experience as it was at the time of writing. Any other view represents him as an inept communicator, who, by making a needless and pointless change of tense, was asking to be misunderstood. The same representation follows from supposing that the I of verses 7-25 is not Paul himself, but some imaginary figure. It surely is unpalatable to accuse Paul, who ordinarily communicates so clearly, of being so stupid here (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 143-144, italic emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).*

Moreover, the anguish of soul expressed in v. 4, **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?** is not the cheap theatrics of a modern TV preacher attempting to win his audience and boost his ratings. It is the honest lamentation of someone who has tasted the "already" of the age to come but recognizes the "not yet" of his present experience of sanctification (cf. Chamblin, p. 174).

But what of reconciling Romans 7: 14-25 with Rom. 6 and Paul's guarantee of success in progressive sanctification for the Christian in union with Christ? Is Paul successful or unsuccessful, and what does this mean for us less mature believers? The answer to this question comes down to how we evaluate Paul's blow-by-blow account of his boxing match with sin (cf. 1 Cor. 9: 26). On the surface of things, he seems to be losing the match; and if this is true in every match, or most of them, then his guarantee of progress in Rom. 6 is surely questionable. But is this what is happening? Murray is to the point.

When the apostle says that he did not perform what he willed...we are not to suppose that his determinate [resolute or committed] will to the good came to no effective fruition in practice. This would be universalizing the apostle's language beyond all reasonable limits. It is surely sufficient that in this particular case, where the apostle is dealing with the contradiction which arises from the presence of sin and of the flesh, that he should declare and deplore the frustration of his determinate will to the good without giving us a statistical history of the outcome (*Romans*, pp. 272-273, italic emphasis his; underlined emphasis mine).

Murray does not elaborate further on this point, but I believe this is another key to determining Paul's identity in this passage, whether an unregenerate man or a regenerate man. If Paul is giving us a "statistical history" of his continuing fight with sin—as if he were keeping score: Sin 999, Paul 0—then sin clearly has the **mastery** over Paul, something Paul promises would not happen for the believer.

For sin **shall not be master over you**, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:14 NASB)

He would also deserve John's warning of 1 Jn. 3: 8.

**the one who practices sin is of the devil**; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn. 3:8 NASB)

But this is clearly impossible. By this time in his missionary history, Paul is well established as Jesus' chosen apostle to the Gentiles. No man other than Christ had suffered for the truth more than he had. There were no scandals against him other than the circulated lies that he was not a true apostle (Galatians) or that he taught antinomianism (Galatians and Romans). Nor can we say that Paul is puffed up with pride in his own record (Eph. 3: 8). Paul is certainly no son of the devil but is God's chosen vessel. Hodge concurs with Murray's denial that vv. 14-25 is a "statistical history" or a general characterization of Paul's life.

If, indeed, it were true, as has been asserted, that the person here described "*succumbs to sin IN EVERY INSTANCE of contest,*" the description would be inapplicable not to the Christian only, but to any other than the most immoral of men. It is rare indeed, even in the natural conflict between reason and passion, or conscience and corrupt inclination, that the better principle does not succeed, not

once merely, but often...Paul merely asserts that the believer is, and ever remains in this life, imperfectly sanctified; that sin continues to dwell within him; that he never comes up to the full requisitions [requirements] of the law, however anxiously he may desire it. Often as he subdues one spiritual foe, another rises in a different form; so that he cannot do the things that he would; that is, cannot be perfectly conformed in heart and life to the image of God (*Romans*, p. 241, emphasis mine).

In other words, if the failure exhibited in vv. 14-25 is absolute—as Paul seems to present it—it would not even fit the behavior of most unbelievers who are restrained by common grace—the work of God's law upon their hearts preventing them from being as sinful as they could be. No one is sinful **all** the time in the sense of violating the standard of God's law. Paul's failure should not be interpreted this way. Rather, Paul is speaking as a Christian whose sensitivity to any known sin in his life is intense and painful. He desires with his whole heart to be absolutely and utterly free of it. Thus, we see the now and the not yet of the Christian's freedom from sin. We are now freed from sin's dominating and enslaving power, but we are not yet free from its nagging, and often, debilitating influence which feels like slavery (cf. Murray's comments on reigning vs. remaining sin). Moreover, true believers can fall into serious sin as the culmination of a series of lesser failures, as King David's life proves. While kings were going out to battle, David sits in his castle with too much time on his hands. The next thing we know, he is in bed with Bathsheba and plotting to murder Uriah along with his 100 unsuspecting warriors. David was a man who wrote songs to the Lord under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit before he committed adultery.

But the safeguard to falling is seeing. In vv. 14-25 Paul expresses how he sees himself.

<sup>23</sup>but I **see** a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (Rom. 7:23 NASB)

As Chamblin says, "seeing" is the beginning of the struggle. "There are indeed passages where Paul the Christian expresses anguish and shame over his attitude as a Pharisee: but he does not portray a deeply troubled Pharisee" (*Paul and the Self*, p. 172, emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup> But  
if **I do**

the very thing I do not want to do,  
[then—implied] I agree with the Law,  
confessing that the Law is good.

<sup>17</sup> So now,  
**no longer am I the one doing it,**  
**but sin which dwells in me.**

Paul's revulsion against **the very thing I hate** or **the very thing I do not want to do** is confirmation of his agreement with the Law and his confession that the Law is good. His remark in v. 16 is in the form of an if...then conditional statement (see diagram). If he does what he doesn't **want to do**, then his disagreement with his sinful actions must imply his agreement with the Law. Contrarily, the unregenerate man does what he wants to do—sin. Spiritually and psychologically, he is not in agreement that the Law is inherently good; nor does he believe it is good for him personally. Sin is pleasurable, and it brings him the greatest sense of satisfaction which the Law

would deny him. The Law is something standing against his innermost desires to gratify his own flesh and please himself. Therefore, keeping the law of God is off the radar screen—or, at the best, only a blip easily ignored.

Paul's reasoning is just the opposite. He knows that **the Law is good** and also good for him. It is the highest expression of God's desire for man's well-being, and he wants with all his heart to keep it. Why then, does Paul **do the very thing** that he does **not want to do**? Why does he act against his determined, resolute will to keep God's law? There must be some principle within Paul which is operating in opposition to his expressed desire, a principle which will not allow him the fullest expression of doing the will of God from the heart—what he wants to do.

Paul then says something which can easily be taken the wrong way. **So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.** The statement is not a careless slip of the tongue because he repeats it in v. 20 along with the same line of reasoning: If he does what he doesn't want to do, it must not be him doing it, but sin dwelling in him. On the surface, the statement seems like a variation of "the devil made me do it" modified to "sin made me do it." Is Paul excusing himself? Is he passing his personal blame to a personified **Sin** (as if sin were a person) in order to explain why he continues to fail? This would appear to be a convenient way for all of us to be excused of sin. "It's not really me! It's sin dwelling in me; therefore, I am not responsible for my sin."

But this is not what Paul is doing—otherwise, this would not be in the Bible, for the Bible never excuses the sinner of his responsibility for sinning. Paul is not exonerating (absolving) himself of full responsibility for his sin. He admits in v. 16, **I do the very thing I do not want to do** and in v. 20, **I am doing the very thing I do not want.** Thus, he admits that he is the agent responsible for his actions. Nevertheless, Paul is quick to disassociate or disentangle his true, characteristic self—the new self who **joyfully concur[s] with the law of God in the inner man** (v. 22)—from the sins which once characterized and defined the person Paul once was, the old self.

It is because of this disassociation that many commentators have insisted on speaking of this section of Romans in terms of the desires of the **old man** pitted against the desires of the **new man**. But Paul does not speak of the old man or old self in this chapter. He has already dispensed with the old man in Romans 6. The old man has been crucified with Christ and is dead. (And dead men don't sin.) In vv. 14-25, Paul can either be regenerate or unregenerate, but he cannot be both at the same time. Being now the new man in Christ, Paul is capable through the inner working of the Holy Spirit—whom Paul does not mention until the next chapter—to say no to sin and yes to obedience. But he does not always do that. (And if Paul didn't, we don't either, however much some perfectionists would like us to believe they do!) Even as the new man, he still says yes to sin and often enough to inspire the seventh chapter of Romans.

A possible parallel to Paul's meaning is found in Galatians.

For **the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh**; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal. 5:17 NASB)

**The things that you please** [or, **will**], according to one interpretation, are the things we wish to do in cooperation with the Spirit, but because of the opposition of the **flesh**, we are hindered from

doing those things. This interpretation is consistent with the psychology of the struggle in Romans 7. The flesh often wins. (So interpreted by Calvin and Luther.)

A second interpretation is that **the things that you please [will]** are the cravings of the flesh which the Spirit within us hinders us from doing. This interpretation would appear more in keeping with the context of Gal. 5: 16 in which Paul assures us that if we walk by the Spirit we **will not carry out the desire of the flesh**. This assurance is followed by the explanation, **for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...** In other words, “You will not be able to bite and devour one another because as you walk by the Spirit, He (the Spirit) is opposing the desire of the flesh within you.” In 5:17 Paul is concerned to show the sufficiency of the Spirit in restraining the **will** of the flesh. (So interpreted by Chrysostom and John Brown.)

But there is a third position in which **the things that you please** can be interpreted as either the **will** (*thélō*) of the flesh or the godly **will** (*thélō*) to do good. There is an ongoing contest between **flesh** and **Spirit**, and the verse simply speaks of the contest itself, not of the result of this contest (as in Rom. 7). Sometimes the Christian follows the lead of the Spirit and does good, but at other times he follows the flesh and does evil.

"The spirit wrestles against your doing the things which [you] would [do] on the impulse of the flesh, and the flesh struggles against your doing the things which [you] would [do] on the impulse of the spirit" (John Eadie, *Galatians*, p. 411, emphasis mine).

This is also the opinion of Meyer.

*If he would do what is good, the flesh, striving against the Spirit, is opposed to this: if he would do what is evil, the Spirit, striving against the flesh, is opposed to that* (H. A. W. Meyer, *Galatians*, p. 236, emphasis his).

J.I. Packer further unpacks Paul's meaning in Gal. 5: 17 which will also give us a better perspective on Rom. 7: 14-25.

...there is no room for uncertainty as to what Paul is telling us here in Galatians about the reality of conflict in the Christian life. You must realize, he says, that there are two opposed sorts of desire in every Christian's makeup. [Notice that Packer does not mention the old man and the new man.] The opposition between them appears at the level of motive. There are desires that express the natural anti-God egoism of fallen human nature, and there are desires that express the supernatural, God-honoring, God-loving motivation that is implanted by new birth. Now because he has in him these opposite motivational urgings, one holding him back whenever the other draws him forward, the Christian finds that his heart is never absolutely pure, nor does he ever do anything that is absolutely right, even though his constant goal is perfect service of God...In this sense he is being prevented every moment from doing what he wants to do. He lives with the knowledge that everything he has done might and should have been better: not only the lapses into which pride, weakness, and folly have betrayed him, but also his attempts to do what was right and good. After each such attempt and each particular action, he regularly sees specific ways in which it could have been improved, both motivationally and in performance. What feels at the time like the best he could do does not appear so in retrospect. He spends his life reaching after perfection and finding that his reach always exceeds his grasp.

This does not of course mean that he never achieves righteousness in any measure at all. Paul is envisioning a Christian life not of constant, total defeat, but of constant moral advance. "...Walk by [in] the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh," is the direct summons of Galatians 5: 16, a summons to which verse 17 is attached as a mere explanatory footnote. It is clear both here and wherever else Paul teaches Christian conduct that he expects the believer always to be moving forward in the formation of godly habits and the practice of active Christlikeness...

The point I am developing out of Paul's words in verse 17 is only this: The Christian who thus walks in the Spirit will keep discovering that nothing in his life is as good as it should be; that he has never fought as hard as he might have done against the clogging restraints and contrary pulls of his own inbred perversity; that there is an element of motivational sin, at least, in his best works; that his daily living is streaked with defilement, so that he has to depend every moment on God's pardoning mercy in Christ or he would be lost; and that he needs to keep asking, in the light of his own felt weakness and inconstancy of heart, that the Spirit will energize him to the end to maintain the inward struggle. "You cannot achieve as much in the way of holiness as you want to achieve" (J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 35-37).

Further comment on Gal. 5: 17 comes later in Packer's book.

These words alert us to the reality of tension, the necessity of effort, and the incompleteness of achievement that mark the life of holiness in this world. The desires of the Spirit in Paul's sentence are the inclinations of our renewed heart; the desires of the flesh are the contrary inclinations of "...sin which dwells within me" (Romans 7: 20). The anti-God energy that indwelling sin repeatedly looses [i.e. releases] in the form of temptations, delusions, and distractions keeps total perfection beyond our grasp. By total perfection I mean what Wesley called "angelical" perfection, in which everything is as right and wise and wholehearted and God honoring as it could possibly be. The born-again believer who is in good spiritual health aims each day at perfect obedience, perfect righteousness, and perfect pleasing of his heavenly Father; it is his nature to do so, as we have seen. Does he ever achieve it? Not in this world. In this respect he cannot do what he would...

So we need to remember that any idea of getting beyond conflict, outward or inward, in our pursuit of holiness in this world is an escapist dream that can only have disillusioning and demoralizing effects on us as waking experience daily disproves it. What we must realize, rather, is that any real holiness in us will be under hostile fire all the time, just as our Lord's was. "Consider him," wrote the writer to the Hebrews "who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12: 3,4)—but you may have to one day, as did Jesus before you, for there are no holds barred in this struggle (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 110-111).

The Christian life is not one of passivity or quietism by which the Christian ceases from all effort and "lets" God live His life through him. We will speak more about this in Rom. 8, but Paul has already addressed this question in the imperatives of Rom. 6. Following up on what God has done for us in crucifying our old man and raising us up with Christ in His resurrected life, Paul then tells us what we must do.

<sup>11</sup>**consider yourselves** to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>**do not let sin reign** in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

<sup>13</sup>**do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin** as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

No passivity here; just strenuous effort. However, it is not effort separated from the divine energizing help of the Holy Spirit **who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure** (Phil. 2:13).

One further point should be made on Gal. 5. At no point in his description of the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh does Paul make mention of the old man fighting against the new man. The battle is between the new man or inner man energized by the Holy Spirit fighting against the desires of his sinful flesh. The only reason the believer can be relatively successful—although not perfectly successful—in this fight is that the old man has been crucified. Otherwise, there would be no battle at all.

<sup>18</sup>For

I know

**that nothing good**

dwells in me,

that is, in my flesh;

**Nothing good** may be derived from Paul's flesh. The **me** refers to Paul living in his fleshly body, but notice that he does not say that nothing good dwells in his body. The body is not inherently evil—a Gnostic heresy—and Paul never presents a dichotomy (complete separation) between the goodness of the spirit and the evil of the body. Man was created body and soul (or spirit), and God has saved both body and spirit (soul) for occupation in the new heavens and earth (cf. Rom. 8: 18-23). Moreover, the **deeds of the flesh** often include those evils which do not pertain specifically to the physical body, but rather, to the mind (Hodge, p. 233). For example:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> **idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,** <sup>21</sup> **envying,** drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21 NASB)

The emphasized sins in these verses indicate that most of the **deeds of the flesh** (*sarx*) are sins having their root and source in the mind. Nevertheless, they are called **deeds of the flesh**. In Col. 2: 18, Paul speaks of "the mind as the possession or organ of the flesh as the tool of sin" (Chamblin, p. 51).

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his **fleshly mind**, (Col. 2:18 NASB)

**His fleshly mind** is literally **mind of his flesh**.

This is significant when we consider the fact that Paul now **agree[s] with the Law** and confesses **that the Law is good** (v. 16). In other words, Paul's mind gives mental assent to the goodness of the Law. Later on, he says, **So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin** (v. 25). The state of Paul's mind in v. 16 is quite different from the state of the unbeliever's mind in Rom. 8: 7 which **is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so**. Paul is now surrendering his **mind** to the service of God rather than to the flesh in the service of sin. Yet, as we have seen, this service cannot be perfect while Paul lives in this world.

The limitations of **flesh** (*sarx*) can be noted throughout the NT.

Now I say this, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Cor. 15:50 NASB)

But a **natural man** does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Cor. 2:14 NASB)

because by the works of the Law **no flesh** will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20 NASB)

I am speaking in human terms because of **the weakness of your flesh**. (Rom. 6:19a NASB)

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, **but the flesh is weak**." (Matt. 26:41 NASB)

"**That which is born of the flesh is flesh**, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." <sup>7</sup> "Do not be amazed that I said to you, '**You must be born again**.'" (Jn. 3:6-7 NASB)

And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because **flesh and blood** did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 16:17 NASB)

For all that is in the world, **the lust of the flesh** and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 Jn. 2:16 NASB)

By itself, the **flesh**—considered ethically rather than biologically or anatomically—can produce nothing fundamentally good and acceptable to God, including repentance and faith. This truth is repeated in Paul's further explanation of the weakness of the flesh in chapter 8.

and those who are **in the flesh** cannot please God. (Rom. 8:8 NASB)

However, there is qualification as well as disqualification in Paul's statement. In his **flesh** there is **nothing good**; but if our conclusion is correct that Paul is speaking as a redeemed man, he cannot say that there is nothing good in Paul, the **new man** in Christ. Therefore, he qualifies the statement by saying, **that is, in my flesh**. Paul distinguishes between who he is characteristically as a Christian, and who he is as a sinner with remaining sinful pollution. Apart from the divine work



of the Spirit in Paul, there was **nothing good**, for flesh cannot produce anything fundamentally pleasing to God.

This may be confusing, since even unbelievers who are **in the flesh** are capable of doing good. They may be faithful to their spouses, loving parents to their children, honest workers and businessmen and women in the marketplace. But, as we have noted earlier, such works do not originate from the Spirit of God who produces these good works from the proper motive (love for God and others), and for the proper goal (the kingdom and glory of God). Recall Packer's comment that most of our failures are "at the level of motive." Even when we do good things, we often fail to do them with "God-honoring, God-loving motivation". God accepts no substitutes. He is good, and every good thing in this world derives its origin from Him.

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And **all our righteous deeds** are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isa. 64:6 NASB)

"For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba And the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable And your **sacrifices** are not pleasing to Me." (Jer. 6:20 NASB)

Why were Israel's **righteous deeds** and **sacrifices** not acceptable to God? God required both, but He also required repentance, faith, and love, none of which the Israelites gave Him. So then, those who are **in the flesh cannot please God** in the fundamental sense of the word. They are like a husband bringing flowers to his wife who knows that he is sleeping with another woman. The flowers do not impress her or make her happy. Good deeds do not impress God when He knows that we don't love Him. I am also reminded of Paul's later words to the Romans, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (14: 23). Whenever we do something, we must act with the faith that God exists, that His word is true, that He is righteous and good, and that He will reward those who seek to please Him. If God does not exist, then there can be no definition of good or evil in the first place. What we do in this case is nothing more than an arbitrary act of the will which is predetermined by impersonal forces like atoms and molecules bouncing around at random producing meaningless actions and reactions. Acting with faith does not guarantee the infallibility of our action, but without this faith, even an action consistent with God's law fails to please Him.

And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

<sup>18</sup> For

I know

**that nothing good**

dwells in me,

that is, in my flesh;

for

**the willing**

is present in me,

but

**the doing of the good**

is not.

The **me** of v. 18a has been qualified by **that is, in my flesh**. However, Paul seems to identify a different part of **me** in v. 18b in whom the **willing** to do good is **present** but the **doing of the good is not [present]**. Who is this **I** of v. 18a? It is the same **I** who:

- (1) knows that the Law is spiritual (v. 14) [**I** as a member of the **we**]
- (2) who doesn't **understand** why he sins (v. 15a)
- (3) because he **hates** to sin (v. 15b)
- (4) because he **agrees** with the Law and **confesses** the goodness of the Law (v. 16)
- (5) who recognizes **sin** as an alien force or principle **dwelling** in him waging war with his desire to do good (v. 17)

This is not the same **I** of vv. 5-13 who:

- (1) was **in the flesh** (v. 5a) [as a member of **we**]
- (2) whose **sinful passions** were aroused by the Law to **bear fruit for death** (v. 5b)
- (3) whose awareness of the Law against coveting **produced** more coveting (v. 8)
- (4) who was once complacently **alive** in his sin (v. 9)

There has been a clear transition from vv. 5-13 to vv. 14-25. But why does Paul say that the **willing** is present but the **doing** is not? Does this not contradict his assurance to the Philippians?

<sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, **both to will and to work** for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13 NASB)

Both verses are true, but neither verse by itself expresses the believer's present condition in totality. (This is why we still do systematic theology, examining many passages to determine the full range of biblical truth.) Rom. 7: 18b expresses the incompleteness and frustration of the believer's imperfect obedience. He wills to do good, but often falls short of the doing. Phil. 2: 13 assures us that our incompleteness does not mean that all is lost or that God has abandoned us. He is still at work in us to complete what He started.

*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6 NASB)

Moreover, just before assuring the Philippians that God is at work in them producing both the willing and the doing of good works, Paul offers the subtle warning that this willing and doing will be an uphill battle. It won't be easy.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2: 12 NASB)

While living out the Christian life, the Philippians must be ever mindful of their human frailty.

...conscious of their own insignificance and weakness and sinfulness and fallibility, and full of trembling and holy fear before God whose will is to be done, and for whose honor they have to work, and to whom an account will have to be given. To "work out" one's own eternal welfare or salvation does not mean that man can or must work and accomplish it himself, for God does that (verse 13);

but that the believer must finish, must carry to conclusion, must apply to its fullest consequences what is already given by God in principle. The believer is called to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life in himself, to the realization for the virtues of the Christian life, and to a personal application of salvation. He must "work" what God in His grace has "worked in" (Jac J. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*, p. 91, emphasis mine).

<sup>19</sup> For

**the good**  
that I want,  
I do not do,  
but I practice  
**the very evil**  
that I do not want.

Paul **wants the good**, but **the very evil** that he **do[es] not want** is the evil that he **practices**. Therefore, he is doing what is against his will. The question arises: which will is he talking about? Obviously, he is carrying out the sinful desires of his flesh with the cooperation of mind and body; therefore, how can Paul say that he is doing what he doesn't really **want** to do? But we must appreciate the difference between Paul's determinate, resolute, unwavering will to do the good and his non-resolute, uncommitted, conflicted will to do evil. He is a man living in conflict with himself, and this conflict is evident in all true believers.

Repeating what has already been said, there must be some principle within Paul which is operating in contradiction to his expressed desire, a principle which will not allow him the fullest expression and satisfaction of doing the will of God from the heart—what he wants to do. He identifies this principle in v. 23 as the **law of sin which is in my members**.

<sup>20</sup> But

if I am doing  
**the very thing**  
I do not want,  
I am no longer the one doing it,  
but sin which dwells in me.

<sup>21</sup> I find then the **principle** [*nomos*]

that evil is present in me,  
the one who wants to do good.

**Principle** (NASB) in v. 21 is literally *nomos* (law). In most English translations, it is rendered "law". But Paul is not speaking about the Law of God, but another "law" or **principle** at work in his heart which is opposing his desire to do good. In v. 22, he distinguishes this **principle** from **the law of God in the inner man** to show that this law is different from the one he has been speaking about in the rest of the chapter (Hodge, p. 234). It is a law contrary to the law of God. In v. 23 he calls this **law** or **principle** the **law of sin** or a **different law**.

<sup>23</sup> but I see

**a different law** [*nomos*]  
in the members of my body,

A

waging war against  
**the law**  
of my mind B  
 and making **me** a prisoner  
 of **the law of sin**  
which is in my members. A

**To do good** must mean to keep the Law of God which he has already said is **holy and righteous and good**. But the evil **principle** residing in Paul, that is, in Paul's **flesh**, will not allow him to do what his true, characteristic self, the new self, desires to do. (Recall Packer's discussion about "angelical perfection" and the impossibility of attaining it in this life.)

Both desires are resident within the true Christian—the desire of the Holy Spirit is set against the desire of the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit (Gal. 5: 17). In the true believer, the characteristic self is the new man who yields himself to the Spirit, and the only way that he can do this on a semi-consistent, habitual basis is that the old man he was before conversion was crucified (aorist). He is dead and no longer operative in the believer. This is the now of the Christian life. But the not yet is that his fleshly nature is still within him—**evil is present in me**. Because of this **principle** inherent in his flesh, he cannot render the obedience he wishes. Total perfection, although earnestly desired, is not possible while living in a fleshly body. Paul addresses this limitation in Rom. 8 when he describes the restoration of all things in Christ and the **redemption of our body** (Rom. 8: 23).

If you think I am repeating myself, you would be correct. If you think Paul is repeating himself, you would be correct again. If you see this repetition throughout vv. 14-25 as being necessary to Paul's purpose, you would be correct a third time. Paul knew that sorting out the psychology of the daily struggle with sin and the internal conflict with oneself was a matter worth repeating. It is fundamental to understanding and surviving the Christian life. Otherwise, all of us would be driven to continual despair (v. 25)—especially those of us who are more susceptible to depression and melancholy. But God does not wish us to live in despair, but hope—the main subject of Rom. 8. The sad thing is: Paul offers no quick-fix solutions. As we say in the US, "It is what it is." This doesn't imply surrender to the present status of the believer's incomplete sanctification, but realism and trust in God's gradual but sure work in the believer.

<sup>22</sup> For

I joyfully concur  
 with the **law of God**  
 in the inner man,

<sup>23</sup> but I see

**a different law**  
in the members of my body,  
 waging war against  
**the law**  
of my mind  
 and making **me** a prisoner  
 of **the law**  
of sin which is in my members.

Paul now offers further explanation of v. 21. The **I** of vv. 22 and 23 is Paul's most characteristic, truest self—the new man—who **joyfully concur[s] [agrees] with the law of God in the inner man**. The **inner man** is Paul's deepest, unvarnished self without pretense. It is not the man he is attempting to fabricate or manufacture for "sale" to his Roman audience—again, like many popular TV preachers. Paul did not wear two faces, one for himself in privacy, the other face for his audience. This **inner man** is who he is. This does not mean that his righteousness is internal but his sin is external. It means that when he examines himself to determine what is the most genuine expression of who he really is, he honestly concludes that he loves the law of God and hates sin. This **inner man** is parallel to **the law of my mind** in v. 25 which is **servicing the law of God**. Therefore, Paul is saying that in his most rational, lucid moments, he is serving God, not sin.

When confronted with a decision between righteousness and sin, obedience to the law of God is the believer's most rational, logical choice. Sin, resulting in ruin and eternal death, is irrational. Thus in the "practical" section, beginning in Rom. 12, Paul admonishes his audience:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your **spiritual** [*logikos*] service of worship.<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2 NASB)

The word **spiritual** is *logikos* (reasonable or rational). The New King James and Young's Literal Translation better reflect the Greek text.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your **reasonable** service.

<sup>YLT</sup> **Romans 12:1** I call upon you, therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice – living, sanctified, acceptable to God – your **intelligent** service;

<sup>23</sup> but I see

**a different law**

in the members of my body,  
waging war against

**the law**

of my mind  
and making **me** a prisoner

**of the law of sin**

which is in my members.

Nevertheless, **a different law** (the **principle** or **law** of v. 21) is **waging war against** this inner man and making Paul a **prisoner**. This **different law** is synonymous with **the law of sin** and both are antithetical (in contrast) to **the law of my mind** which is in agreement with **the law of God in the inner man**. This different law principle is said to be **in my members** or **in the members of my body** and is antagonistic with Paul's characteristic self, his **inner man**.

Once more, we should not interpret Paul as presenting a negative view of the body, as if sin had its source in the physical members of the body. We discussed this earlier and found that most of the catalog of sins found in Paul's letters describe sins of the mind, not the body. Paul represents

the **body** [*soma*] and the **members** of the body as something which the believer may **present** to sin as **instruments of unrighteousness** or to God as instruments of **righteousness** (Rom. 6: 13).

In the beginning of what is often called the "practical" portion of Romans, Paul encourages believers to present their **bodies** as acceptable sacrifices to God. He is not suggesting that only the body must be offered as a **living** and **acceptable sacrifice**, but the body as representative of the whole person. This is what is known as synecdoche, a literary figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. Sometimes the body is representative of the whole person, as in Rom. 12: 1; at other times, the mind is representative of the whole person, as in the very next verse, Rom. 12: 2. At other times, the **heart** is predominant in Paul's representation of the whole man (cf. Rom. 1: 21; Eph. 1: 18; 4: 18). Christians should not allow themselves—i.e. their **mind[s]**—**to be conformed to the world**.

<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that **I** am!  
Who will set **me** free from the body of this death?

<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then,  
on the one hand  
I myself with my mind  
am serving **the law of God**,  
but on the other,  
with my flesh  
**the law of sin**.

**Wretched man that I am** attributes responsibility to himself for his sinful thoughts and actions. He then cries out in desperation to be **set free** from **the body of this death**, i.e. the bodily members in which the **law of sin** operates (Murray, p. 269). Paul is speaking of the physical body which may be presented to sin and unrighteousness leading to death—**the wages of sin is death**. He does not fear being condemned to hell; this much is clear from 8: 1, **there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. Yet, he longs to be delivered from the persistent remnants of sin still present which prevent him from the full enjoyment of his salvation in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3: 8). He cannot fully enjoy that relationship so long as he falls short of reflecting the glory of God in his life (Rom. 3: 23).

Verse 25 is Paul's answer to his own question in v. 24. There will be deliverance from every trace and remnant of sin in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he can have comfort from his distress knowing that a sinless existence is forthcoming to all those who trust Jesus as their Savior. But this sinless existence is the "not yet" of the kingdom of God of which Paul speaks at the end of Rom. 8. Contrary to some perfectionist writers who claim that sinless perfection is possible in this life, Paul makes it clear that there is no escape from the daily struggle against sin described in vv. 14-25. Paul does not leave the struggle of Rom. 7 behind to emerge into the glory of Rom. 8. He continues to live in both Rom. 7 and 8. This struggle is part of the normal existence for all believers which he describes in Rom. 8 as "groaning".

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, **even we ourselves groan within ourselves**, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:23 NASB)

While he lives in the weakness of his flesh, he (**I myself**) will continue serving the law of God with his **mind** and the law of sin with his **flesh**. **I myself** serves both, yet another indication of Paul's complete acceptance of personal responsibility for his sin. This divided service is not how Paul wants it to be, but it is the reality of his situation and that of all other believers. Undivided service is reserved for the future eschaton (age).

## Romans 8

Having explained the deficiencies of the Law for justification (chapter 4, 5, and 6) and the deficiencies of the Law for sanctification (chapter 7), Paul is now ready to extol the sufficiency of the Spirit in accomplishing what the Law could not do. The Law could not save us from the penalty of sin, nor could it save us from the dominion of sin. The reason given for the Law's deficiency is not that there is anything wrong with the Law, but something is dreadfully wrong with us. Being helpless, God must do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Even in progressive sanctification—a process in which the person is active—the Holy Spirit must supply the energizing grace that is necessary for us to respond.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore  
there is now no condemnation  
for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Verse 1 does not seem to follow from Paul's admission in v. 25 that he continues to serve the law of sin with his flesh. That is not good news. Nevertheless, it is good news that Christ will set him free in due course from the weakness of human flesh. Though he condemns himself for serving the law of sin, Christ will not ultimately condemn him but will deliver him from the service of sin.

<sup>2</sup>For  
the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus  
has set you free  
from **the law of sin and of death.**

<sup>3</sup>For  
**what the Law could not do,**  
weak as it was through the flesh,  
God *did*:  
sending His own Son  
in the likeness of sinful flesh  
and *as an offering* for sin,  
He condemned sin in the flesh,

**For** (v. 2) indicates the reason for **no condemnation**. **The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** is the operational or regulative principle of life found in the gospel of Christ which says, "believe and live" rather than "do and live". **The law of sin and of death** is more difficult to identify. If Paul is speaking of the law principle of 7: 23, 25, then how does he now say that the believer is **set**

**free** from this principle when he himself admits—even as a regenerate man—that he is held **prisoner** to it (7: 23) (so also Hodge, p. 251)? Of course, this objection melts away if Paul is speaking as an unregenerate man in 7: 14-25. I have offered many reasons for rejecting this view. An alternative interpretation is that **the law of sin and death** is the Mosaic law pronouncing curses upon all who fail to keep it, and which—apart from the work of the Spirit—incites the conscience to sin.

For while we were in the flesh, **the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (Rom. 7:5 NASB)

<sup>8</sup>But sin, **taking opportunity through the commandment**, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. <sup>9</sup>I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; <sup>10</sup>**and this commandment**, which was to result in life, **proved to result in death for me**; <sup>11</sup>for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it **killed me**. (Rom. 7:8-11 NASB)

<sup>6</sup>who also made us adequate *as* servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life**. <sup>7</sup>But if **the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones**, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, <sup>8</sup>how will **the ministry of the Spirit** fail to be even more with glory? <sup>9</sup>For if **the ministry of condemnation** has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. (2 Cor. 3:6-9 NASB)

If this latter interpretation is correct, then **no condemnation** refers to Paul's discussion in the earlier part of chapter 7 that the believer is no longer under the administration of Law but under grace. He is not under condemnation because he has **died to the Law** (7: 4) as the means of being accepted by God and is **released from the Law... to serve in newness of the Spirit** (7: 6). As Paul's anguish in 7: 14-25 shows, **no condemnation** cannot refer to his complete sanctification and perfect success in keeping the law. It must refer to the fact that in Christ Jesus, the demands of the Law have already been kept through the perfect life and sacrifice of Christ. Moreover, the immediate context of 8: 3 supports this conclusion. The **Law** in v. 3 is, beyond all reasonable doubt, the Law of Moses which could neither justify nor sanctify the sinner. The inability of the Law (**what the Law could not do**) to do either has been the subject of chapters 1—7: 13.

But what the **Law can do** is pronounce judgment and death upon those who fail to keep it; and since no one is able to keep it, it is presented by the apostle as **a ministry of death** which **kills**. Once more, it must be stressed, as Paul does in chapter 7, that there is nothing wrong with the Law itself. It is **holy and righteous and good**, a reflection of God's perfection and His best interests for mankind. It is useful in restraining civic sin in society; and, for the believer, it constitutes the rules of God's household, His family. In the words of David, Christians should **love** God's law and **meditate** upon it in order to please God. The problem has always resided in the sinful human heart which cannot keep the law and the sinful principle operative in the heart which uses the law to incite one to sin.

What the Law could not accomplish (v. 3) by publishing the requirements of holiness, the promises of obedience, and the curses for violation, God accomplished by sending His Son to die on a cross. Once more we see the initiative of God the Father who was reconciling the world to Himself



through His Son. The Law was **weak...through the flesh**, that is, human flesh which could not keep it; nevertheless, God sent His Son **in the likeness of sinful flesh**. By saying, **in the likeness** [*homoioima*], Paul avoids attributing sinful flesh to Christ. He became incarnate in human flesh, but not sinful human flesh. No taint of sin was to be found in the incarnate Son. Nevertheless, it was necessary for Christ to live in human flesh for the purpose of being **tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin** (Heb. 4:15) since God Himself cannot be tempted (James 1: 13). As the second Adam, Christ subjected Himself to the probation of being tempted, but unlike Adam, He was utterly successful in resisting sin. Being sinless, He served as the unblemished sacrifice for sin. Thus, in offering His Son on the cross, God the Father **condemned sin in the flesh**. That is, He punished sin in the flesh of His Son, Jesus Christ. Sinful human flesh deserved punishment, but God punished sin, instead, in the sinless flesh of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> so that

the requirement of the Law  
might be fulfilled in us,  
who do not walk  
according to the flesh  
but according to the Spirit.

**So that** (v. 4) indicates God's purpose in sending Christ. Having demonstrated the failure of the Law to justify or sanctify, God ordained a way for **the requirement of the Law to be fulfilled in us**. A radical change in man's nature had to be effected through the crucifixion of Christ's flesh—a crucifixion in which all true believers are united by faith—so that we would be able to **walk...according to the Spirit** and not **according to the flesh**. Thus, the end goal of Christ's sacrifice was not to take us to heaven, but that we would be **fit** for heaven, i.e. spiritually fit for eternal fellowship with a holy God.

The word **fulfilled** is *pleróō* which means to make full or to complete. It is used in practically every reference to the completion or fulfillment of scripture, only a few of which are cited below.

Now all this took place to **fulfill** [*pleróō*] what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (Matt. 1:22 NASB)

He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to **fulfill** what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." (Matt. 2:15 NASB)

This was to **fulfill** what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: (Matt. 4:14 NASB)

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to **fulfill**. (Matt. 5:17 NASB)

"But all this has taken place to **fulfill** the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled. (Matt. 26:56 NASB)

"Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to **fulfill** the Scriptures." (Mk. 14:49 NASB)

This was to **fulfill** the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" (Jn. 12:38 NASB)

So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be"; this was to **fulfill** the Scripture: "THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS." (Jn. 19:24 NASB)

And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been **fulfilled** in your hearing." (Lk. 4:21 NASB)

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be **fulfilled**." (Lk. 24:44 NASB)

"Brethren, the Scripture had to be **fulfilled**, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. (Acts 1:16 NASB)

"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus **fulfilled**. (Acts 3:18 NASB)

As Scripture has been completed in Christ, God's purpose for humanity is being fulfilled or completed in the new man in Christ who is being renewed to the true image of God. Man is the crown of God's creation, and the renewed man in Christ who keeps God's law with his whole heart, mind, and body is the end goal of Christ's atoning work. Being renewed to the original image of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, man will now be able and willing to have dominion over the rest of creation in total obedience to God.

But this is the not yet of the kingdom of God. The now of this kingdom begins with justification and is followed by progressive sanctification. Although believers cannot yet serve God with a perfect heart (Rom. 7), they can still **walk** (present active) habitually in newness of life fulfilling their role in creation, not **according to the flesh**, but **according to the Spirit**. The persistent practical obedience of the Christian during this present life is the outcome of what God has done for him by uniting him to Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul begins his discussion of walking by the Spirit in Rom. 6 where he disputes the teaching of antinomianism. It is not God's purpose to save us only from sin's penalty but also from sin's dominion; and it is not God's purpose to save us from sin's dominion only in death but also in life.

<sup>5</sup> For

those who are  
according to the flesh  
set their minds [*phronéō*]  
on the things of the flesh,  
but those who are  
according to the Spirit,

*[set their minds on—elipsis]*  
the things of the Spirit.

The idea in this verse is the conscious orientation of the mind toward either the things which are of the flesh or of the Spirit. We find a good analogy of this verse in Colossians.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>**Set your mind** [*phronéō*] on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup>For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1-3 NASB)

In Col. 3: 1, the verb is imperative. We are commanded to orient our minds toward **the things above, where Christ is**. Our life on earth is only a temporary pilgrimage which lasts a relatively short time compared to eternity. Our affections, therefore, should be heavenward. However, Paul is not exempting the Christian from his earthly responsibilities but encouraging him to execute those responsibilities with the perspective of one whose citizenship is in heaven and not on the earth (Phil. 3: 20). **For you have died** (aorist) reminds us of Rom. 6: 2 where the same aorist verb is used. **Your life is hidden with Christ in God** reminds us that we do not yet fully understand who we really are in Christ and what we will become at the consummation. We are still physically and spiritually weak, and we have now only a faint glimmer of **the glory that is to be revealed to us** (8: 18). But even this glimmer of future reality should reorient our thinking. We should be preoccupied with spiritual things. This is Paul's equivalent of Jesus' command to "**Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.**"

Those who are **according to the flesh** are quite naturally preoccupied with **the things of the flesh**. They grab whatever pleasures they can wring from this life—like wringing water out of a soaked towel—with little thought for what happens to them when they die. Paul does not give us a catalog here, but turning to Colossians once more, we discover a sampling of the things which dominate the thinking of unbelievers.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:5 NASB)

We can see in this short list the unholy "trinity" of sex, money, and power, the **evil desire** to dominate others for selfish purposes. They are the three major competitors to the true religion found in the Scriptures. **Dead** means that we have died to the controlling influences of these things. Exegetically, either all of these things **amounts to idolatry**, or simply **greed** is idolatry. The verb is singular, but either interpretation is possible.

<sup>6</sup>For

the mind set  
on the flesh  
is death,  
but the mind set  
on the Spirit  
is life and peace,

The irony of unbelief is that the sinner **sets** his **mind** on the things which he is convinced will bring him **life and peace**, satisfaction, enjoyment, and fulfillment. Yet, **these things** bring only **death**.

Absalom wanted David's kingdom rather than his God, and he ended up hanging from a tree with three spears through his heart (2 Sam. 18: 14). Ahab lusted after Naboth's vineyard, and he got it; but the fruit of this vineyard was not enjoyed for very long. Only two years later, he was killed by a random arrow. Eternal death comes to everyone who seeks his own kingdom rather than God's.

For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, (Col. 3:6 NASB)

Only **the mind set on the Spirit** brings **life and peace**. The Spirit reorients the mind to things which are ultimately and finally important: peace with God and with others, helping others, and, in general, seeking the interests of the kingdom of God. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5: 22-23). Through this **fruit**, the Christian enjoys a good measure of life and peace on earth even before he gets to heaven.

<sup>7</sup> because the mind set  
on the flesh  
is hostile toward God;

for  
it does not subject itself  
to the law of God,

for  
it is not even able *to do so*,

<sup>8</sup> and those who are  
in the flesh  
cannot please God.

**Because** indicates the reason why **the mind set on the flesh is death**. Although immorality, impurity, evil desire, greed, et al, are violations of the law of God, the essence of the unbeliever's rebellion is idolatry and hatred (**hostile toward God**). Desiring to be his own god, he hates being subservient to another God. People don't like being told what to do—or who to be.

In the West, this hostility is now being manifested in very bazaar and irrational ways. People are **hostile** to the idea that God has chosen their biological sex by making them male or female; therefore, they are now seeking surgical procedures and hormone therapy to change their biological sex to their desired sex—known as transgenderism. Forty percent of transgenders commit suicide within 10 years of their transition, but the permanent biological and psychological damage to these people is not limited to adults. Young children are being encouraged by their parents, teachers, and psychologists to question their sexual identity and, if "necessary", to change their sex to their desired sex. All this insanity goes back to the garden. **And you will be like God, knowing good and evil** independently of what God says is good and evil. Homosexuality and transgenderism are clear examples of man's desire to be his own god, to re-create himself into the person he imagines and desires himself or herself to be.

Men will not **subject** themselves to **the law of God**, even though His law is in their best interests. Why? Because they hate Him. Do they know His law? Yes. Romans 1 makes this clear. **They know the ordinance of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death** (cf. Rom. 1:26-32). Therefore, man's rebellion against God is not due to ignorance of the true God or his law,

both of which are sufficiently revealed in creation. They simply don't want God to rule over them (Lk. 19: 27); they want to be their own gods and rule over themselves.

**For they are not even able to do so** (v. 7) does not imply that men are not responsible for keeping God's law since they are incapable of doing so. Paul simply means that they do not have the spiritual resources enabling them to keep it. Their culpability (blame) before God has been once and for all established in Rom. 1: 20.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, **so that they are without excuse.** (Rom. 1:20 NASB)

**Without excuse** is *anapologetos*, without apology or argument. Unbelievers have no argument against the inescapable evidence and witness of the true God—not simply a god—in creation. They know the truth, and they willfully turn away from the truth to worship false gods more to their liking. At my home in Ridgeland, MS, we often have birds flying into our closed windows, thinking that they are open. The windows are double-paned insulated glass which do not break when the birds crash into them. Often, they break their necks and die. Sometimes they damage a wing and can't fly. Their inability to fly away has nothing to do with some external force keeping them from flying. They can't fly because they are now unable to fly. People are like these birds. They cannot keep God's law because they are broken, and their brokenness is self-inflicted. They keep crashing into the law of God, but it never gives an inch.

**Cannot please God**, as we have seen, does not imply that unbelievers are incapable of keeping some of the standards of God's law. They may be faithful husbands and wives and honest in all their interactions with others. They may be generous philanthropists, but they cannot keep the law with the proper motive, love, and the proper goal, the glory and kingdom of God.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

...whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14: 23b)

Thus, even an outwardly good deed done without faith is sin. **Without faith** means without consideration for the fact that God is overseeing our actions and is either approving them or disapproving them. It also means lack of confidence in the reward God has in store for those who **seek Him**.

<sup>9</sup> However,

you are  
not in the flesh  
but in the Spirit,  
if indeed **the Spirit of God** dwells in you.  
But if anyone  
does not have **the Spirit of Christ**,  
he does not belong to **Him**.

Paul distinguishes between believers who are **in the Spirit** and unbelievers who are **in the flesh**. To be **in the flesh**, in the context of Romans 7-8 (see above for different meanings for different contexts) means being dominated and controlled by the flesh and having the mind **set on the flesh** demonstrated by the inability to subject oneself to the law of God. Thus, **in the Spirit** has reference to one's obedience in fulfilling the law and exhibiting the **fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5); it has nothing to do with the gifts of the Spirit. Those who are in the flesh **bear fruit for death** (7: 5) while those who are in the Spirit **bear fruit for God** (7: 4).

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, **did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?**'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matt. 7:22-23 NASB)

Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.<sup>29</sup> **All are not apostles, are they?** All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they?<sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? **All do not speak with tongues, do they?** All do not interpret, do they?<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still **more excellent way**. (1 Cor. 12:27-31 NASB)

The **more excellent way** is the way of love taught in 1 Cor. 13. The gifts of the Spirit do not substitute for the fruit of the Spirit as evidence that one is living **in the Spirit**. Giftedness is not the criterion Jesus uses to determine whether He "knows" or "does not know" someone. He does not question the legitimacy of the claims of those who cast out demons, performed miracles, or prophesied. Judas Iscariot did all these things, and he was in the audience when Jesus made this statement. The criterion of judgment is whether one keeps his law or **practices lawlessness [anomia]**. I mentioned earlier the sad stories of Ravi Zacharias and a Presbyterian minister in my own denomination, also a very gifted preacher. Giftedness is not the criterion. Love for Christ and His law **is**.

Paul speaks contingently, knowing that some in his audience may not be true believers: **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you** (v. 9). If someone does not have the Holy Spirit or **the Spirit of Christ**, then he is not a believer. **He does not belong to Him**, that is, Christ. The in Christ experience is the equivalent of being **in the Spirit**. It is through the mediatorial work of the Holy Spirit (also known as **the Spirit of Christ** or **the Spirit of God**, v. 9) by which the believer is mystically united by faith to the Son and belongs to the Son.

"All that the Father **gives** Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (Jn. 6:37 NASB)

"I am the good shepherd, and I know **My own** and **My own** know Me, (Jn. 10:14 NASB)

<sup>10</sup> If **Christ** is in you,  
though the body is dead  
because of sin,  
yet the spirit is alive  
because of righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> But if **the Spirit of Him**  
who raised **Jesus** from the dead  
dwells in you,

**He**  
who raised **Christ Jesus** from the dead  
will also give **life** to your mortal bodies  
through **His Spirit**  
who dwells in you.

The believer's earthly body is **dead because of sin**; that is, it is destined for death according to the promise of God's curse (Gen. 2: 15). The **wages of sin is death**, and **as in Adam all die**. Although Christ is our new federal head, and **in Christ all will be made alive** [*that is, all who are in Christ will be made alive*] (1 Cor. 15:22), the new birth does not nullify the physical consequences of the imputed sin of Adam. Even infants die (see discussion on Rom. 5: 12). The moment we are conceived in the womb, we are beginning to die, the end of man's unholy experiment to be his own god.

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, (Heb. 9:27 NASB)

**Yet, the spirit is alive because of righteousness** is the antithesis (contrast) of **the body is dead**. The **spirit** in this verse is the human spirit and not the Holy Spirit. Paul is speaking of the ultimate state of the present body on account of [*dia*] sin and the ultimate state of the spirit (or soul) on account of [*dia*] righteousness. The present physical body is **the body of this death**, the body from which Paul seeks deliverance (7: 24).

The question arising is: Which **righteousness** is Paul referring to—the imputed righteousness of the Christ to the believer or the personal experiential righteousness of the believer? The subject at hand (the context) is the experience of the believer who is not **in the flesh** but **in the Spirit** and who does not walk **according to the flesh but according to the Spirit**. Therefore, it would be inconsistent with the context for Paul to say that the human spirit is **alive** because of the imputed righteousness of Christ—although this is certainly true. However, Paul has already covered justifying, imputed righteousness. He is now speaking of the subjective, inherent righteousness or holiness of the believer (Hodge, p. 259). The believer's spirit is considered **alive** only because there is evidence of personal, experiential **righteousness**, as Paul says in v. 13,

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:13 NASB)

We must be careful to observe that there can only be experiential righteousness because of the imputed righteousness of Christ yielding its fruit in the believer. Yet, Paul is jealous in this context—the context of sanctification—to avoid any antinomian conclusions that imputed righteousness is present in the absence of experiential righteousness.

**But** [*de*] in v. 11 introduces a mild contrast with v. 10. Paul admits that **the body is dead because of sin** and that **the spirit is alive because of righteousness**. However, **if** the Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead dwells in the believer, then this same Spirit **will also give life to your**

**mortal bodies.** That is, even the mortal physical body will partake of the life-giving benefits of the Spirit. What follows in v. 12 supports this interpretation.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, **to live** according to the flesh—

<sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, **you must die**; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** (Rom. 8:12-13 NASB)

**So then** (v. 12) is a conclusion to what Paul has just said. The believer is not obligated to live according to the flesh because the flesh gives him nothing. On the other hand, the Spirit **will also give life to your mortal bodies.** That is, even though the mortal body is destined for physical death—Paul still describes it as **mortal**—this mortal body **will live** in the sense of living a righteous and holy life while it remains on this earth. In every sense imaginable, Paul presents **life** in terms of life lived "coram deo", before the face of God and enjoying the pleasure of God. Although we are all dying, our mortal bodies can enjoy the fruits of the Spirit's life reproduced in us while still living this life. Everyone else is a dead man walking. Again, it must be emphasized that Paul is speaking about sanctification in this present life, not physical resurrection at the consummation.

Verse 11 presents the coordinated work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the redemption of the believer. **The Spirit of Him** is the Spirit of God the Father, also known as the Holy Spirit. **He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead** is God the Father (cf. Acts 3: 15; 4: 15; Rom. 4: 24; 6: 4; Gal. 1: 1). Thus, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is the medium through whom God the Father raised Christ from the dead, and it is this same operation of the Spirit by which God the Father **will also give life to your mortal bodies.** The powerful operation of the Spirit essential to the resurrection of Christ is the same Spirit energizing the mortal bodies of believers to live for God in the here and now. Moreover, none of this would be possible apart from the atoning work of Christ satisfying God's wrath against sinners and bringing us into God's favor—satisfaction which is manifested in His resurrection from the dead. There is no other religion on earth that comes close to solving man's alienation to God and others. It took a Triune God, sovereignly powerful in all three persons, to solve this problem.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brethren,

we are under obligation,  
not to the flesh,  
to live according to the flesh—

**Obligation** is also translated **debt.** **Flesh** is presented here as a master ruling over us to whom we owe a debt. But believers have no debt to pay to the flesh, and we are no longer under the reign and rule of sin which employs the flesh as its base of operations. We owe nothing to the **flesh**, for the flesh has given us nothing of value, and we no longer must obey the urges of the flesh. By saying that we have no obligation to the flesh, Paul implies that we do have an obligation to live according to the Spirit. For from the Spirit we have life even in this mortal body.

"It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh profits nothing**; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. (Jn. 6:63 NASB)



"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>"Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (Jn. 3:6-7 NASB)

Now I say this, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Cor. 15:50 NASB)

<sup>13</sup> for

if you are living according to the flesh,  
**you must die;**  
but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body,  
**you will live.**

<sup>14</sup> For

all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Paul teaches with no assumption that everyone in the church hearing this letter is a true believer. There are some who may be **living according to the flesh** and indulging the desires of the flesh. These professing believers must be warned that those who habitually live this way are treading the broad way that leads to death (Matt. 7: 13-14).

No one who is born of God **practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he **cannot sin**, because he is born of God. (1 Jn. 3:9 NASB)

No one born of God **makes a practice of sinning**, for God's seed abides in him; and he **cannot keep on sinning**, because he has been born of God. (1 Jn. 3:9 ESV)

Notice that the ESV translation makes note of the present indicative verb *poiédō*—**cannot keep on sinning**—that is, the born-again believer **cannot keep on sinning habitually**. Neither Paul nor John is preaching salvation by works or Christian perfectionism. They are simply saying that the grace of God in the true believer is a dynamic force for good that changes the behavior of the one who receives it. However, if the person has not undergone this fundamental change of disposition whereby he shuns and repudiates the deeds of the flesh and practices righteousness—not perfectly, but as a general rule—then he will suffer the same fate as those who have never professed faith in Christ. Christ did not die for us so that we could go on living habitually according to the desires of the flesh. Paul's argument against this antinomian teaching began in Rom. 6: 1-2, **Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** These two rhetorical questions demand negative answers. It is impossible for the true believer to live in sin. If he does live in sin, then he is not a true believer. A true believer fallen in sin (like King David) will inevitably experience conviction of sin and repentance; or he may be subjected to death in which case others will wonder about his eternal state, as with Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5).

<sup>13b</sup>but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

By definition, the believer is one who fights against remaining sin. Although he no longer lives in the realm of sin or under the rule of sin, he is still subject to the harassment of the flesh which Paul describes in Rom. 7, harassment that often feels like being **sold into bondage to sin** or under the power of sin. Paul assures the Christian in this verse that if he is resisting sin and progressively

putting sin to death, **he will live**. Since even believers experience physical death, **you must die** and **you will live** must refer to spiritual death or spiritual life. The question arises: what about all those besetting sins in our lives which we have not been able to **put to death**? Does the existence of these remaining sins imply that we are not believers? In answer to the question: "Is my repentance real if I keep committing the same sin?" John Piper answers:

I would suggest that we not use the word *repent* for the way we respond to daily sinning as Christians. That may surprise people, but let me try to explain... the New Testament doesn't use the word *repentance* for the daily habit of dealing with our indwelling, recurrent sin. Rather, I would suggest that [1 John 1:8-9](#) proposes the word *confession*: "If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"...

What about sins, then, that we commit more than once — indeed, so often that they are threatening to destroy our assurance of being a Christian? Here's the way I would put it: there are two kinds of confession, and there are two kinds of sin, so test yourself now as to which you are doing.

First, there is confession that, at one level, is expressing guilt and sorrow for sinning, but underneath there is the quiet assumption that this sin is going to happen again, probably before the week is out...

In other words, this kind of confession is very superficial. It's a cloak for fatalism about your besetting sins. You feel bad about them, but you have surrendered to their inevitability. That's one kind of confession. The other kind of confession is that you express guilt and sorrow for sinning, just like with the first kind, but your hatred of the sin is so real that you have every intention as you confess of making war on that sin tonight, this weekend. You aim, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to defeat it. You are going to seek out whatever ways are going to help you put this sin to death. You are going to rob it of its power. That's the plan — no hypocrisy. Now, those are the two ways of confessing sin...

The two kinds of sin that I'm referring to are, first, the kind of sin that blindsides you. It's not premeditated or planned, and there is scarcely any battle in the moment when it happens. Before you realize what you're doing, it's done. In my own experience, I would illustrate with certain kinds of sinful anger that come over me, and almost instantly I can tell it's over the top — it's not holy; it's not righteous. Or maybe spontaneous unkind words that just pop out of my mouth, and I'm ashamed of them as soon as I say them...they are more or less spontaneous and not premeditated...

Here's the other kind of sin that I'm referring to; namely, it is premeditated. You actually sit there or stand there weighing whether to do it or not...You take ten seconds or ten minutes or ten hours wrestling, and then you do the sin...

Now, I think it's possible for a Christian to commit both kinds of sins and get into patterns of both kinds of confession for a season. But I would say that the confession that cloaks fatalism, hopelessness, peace with sin, and the sin that is premeditated are more dangerous to our souls. Both are dangerous. Don't get me wrong; both are dangerous. But the confession bordering on hypocrisy and the sin bordering on planned unrighteousness are more dangerous...

As much as I would like it for my own soul, I don't think we can provide a list of sins or a number for the frequency with which you can sin and get away with it. I don't think we can do that in a way that answers the question, How much sinning proves that I'm not a Christian?

Instead, I would say this: to the degree that your confessing of sin has made a kind of fatalistic peace with sin's inevitability, and to the degree that your sin falls into the category of premeditated unrighteousness, to that degree, you should be frightened that you are on a path that may well lead to destruction. I think that's what we can say ([desiringgod.org/ask-pastor-john](http://desiringgod.org/ask-pastor-john)).

This is not all that can or should be said on this difficult subject. We will continue the discussion when we get into Romans 12.

<sup>14</sup> For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

**For** introduces an explanation. If indeed we are putting sin to death, this is an indication that we **are being led by the Spirit of God**. Being **led by the Spirit** is not manifested in new revelations of the Spirit which guide us step by step and day by day in living the Christian life—"God told me to do this, and God told me to do that." In the history of special revelation, new revelations of the Spirit were rare even for those special saints who received them (Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Paul, et al). Being led by the Spirit means that the Spirit is convicting us of sin and enabling us to progressively put sin—**the deeds of the body**—to death, remembering that the deeds of the body include the sins of the mind. If we are persistently fighting against sin in our lives, we may be assured that we are also **sons of God**.

<sup>14</sup> For  
all who are being led by the Spirit of God,  
these are sons of God.

<sup>15</sup> For  
you have not received  
**a spirit of slavery**  
leading to fear again,  
but you have received  
**a spirit of adoption as sons**  
by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

As you can see from the structure, **a spirit of slavery** is parallel to **a spirit of adoption as sons**. This is the second criterion (benchmark or standard) for the believer's assurance of salvation. The first is that the believer is fighting against sin and putting to death sinful behavior in his life. The second benchmark Paul mentions is the reception of the **spirit of adoption as sons** giving him a filial spirit of sonship and love for the Father which is the antithesis of **fear**.

The first question concerns why Paul says **leading to fear again** [*palin*]. Keep in mind that Paul's audience in Rome was partially Jewish, and they were familiar with God's designation of Israel as **My son**. Out of all the nations of the earth, God chose Israel and called Israel His son. Though this relationship was not as developed as what it would become with individual Christians, it was still a special relationship distinguishing them from every other people group or nation on earth.

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "**Israel is My son**, My firstborn. (Exod. 4:22)

When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called **My son**. (Hos. 11:1 NASB)

The Jewish audience would also remember the awe-inspiring story of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the **fear** and trembling which this experience produced in the hearts of the Israelites, including Moses.

"You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; **whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.**' (Exod. 19:12 NASB)

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, **so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.** (Exod. 19:16 NASB)

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, **and many of them perish.** (Exod. 19:21 NASB)

The author of Hebrews draws the antithesis between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in the following way:

For you have not come to *a mountain that can be touched* and to a blazing fire, and **to darkness and gloom and whirlwind**,<sup>19</sup> and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.<sup>20</sup> For they could not bear the command, "**IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED.**"<sup>21</sup> And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."<sup>22</sup> **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God**, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,<sup>23</sup> to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. (Heb. 12:18-24 NASB)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest **who has passed through the heavens**, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.<sup>16</sup> **Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** (Heb. 4:14-16 NASB)

For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?<sup>3</sup> But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year.<sup>4</sup> **For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.** (Heb. 10:1-4 NASB)

On the one hand, we have, "Don't touch the mountain, lest you die"; on the other, "Draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." We have the yearly sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple, on the one hand; and on the other, the once-for-all-sacrifice of Christ. We have the fear and trembling of the Israelite at the giving of the Law versus the bold confidence of the New Covenant believer who appears before God in prayer based on the perfect atonement of Christ. On the one hand, the high priest enters the holy of holies only once per year; on the other, Christ has entered the holy

of holies permanently to make intercession for us (Heb. 9:7; 10:19-20; Rom. 8:34). Clearly, something climactic and comprehensive has occurred in the sacrifice of Christ during which the veil of the temple (six inches thick) was torn apart making way for the believer to come directly into the presence of God through the mediation of Christ, his High Priest.

Old Covenant	New Covenant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Don't touch the mountain, lest you die"</li> <li>• Yearly sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple</li> <li>• Fear and trembling of the Israelite</li> <li>• High priest enters holy of holies once a year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Draw near with confidence to the throne of grace."</li> <li>• Once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ</li> <li>• Bold confidence of the new covenant believer</li> <li>• Christ enters holy of holies permanently to intercede for us</li> </ul>

Further analogy comes from Paul's epistle to the Galatians in which he describes the former dispensation of Law as an administration of **slavery** in comparison with the new administration or dispensation of grace.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a **slave** although he is owner of everything,<sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.<sup>3</sup> So also we, while we were children, **were held in bondage** under the elemental things of the world.<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,<sup>5</sup> so that He might **redeem** those who were under the Law, **that we might receive the adoption as sons.**<sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**<sup>7</sup> Therefore **you are no longer a slave, but a son**; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal. 4:1-7 NASB)

From Gal. 4, Paul's comparison is between the relative slavery of the OT Israelite living under a covenant of law and the relative freedom of the believer living under the New Covenant administration. The national adoption of Israel has matured into the more intimate adoption of the believer whereby he calls God, **Abba, Father**. As John Calvin indicates, even the best of OT saints did not enjoy the same freedom and joy of saints living under the economy of grace.

To sum up: the Old Testament [the Old Covenant] struck consciences with fear and trembling, but by the benefit of the New they are released into joy. The Old held consciences bound by the yoke of bondage; the New by its spirit of liberality emancipates them into freedom.

But suppose that our opponents object that, among the Israelites, the holy patriarchs were an exception: since they were obviously endowed with the same Spirit of faith as we, it follows that they shared the same freedom and joy. To this we reply: neither of these arose from the law. But when through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled for refuge to the gospel. It was therefore a particular fruit of the New Testament [New Covenant] that, apart from the common law of the Old Testament they were exempted from those evils. Further, we shall deny that they were so endowed with the spirit of

freedom and assurance as not in some degree to experience the fear and bondage arising from the law. For, however much they enjoyed the privilege that they had received through the grace of the gospel, they were still subject to the same bonds and burdens of ceremonial observances as the common people. They were compelled to observe those ceremonies punctiliously [very careful about every detail], symbols of a tutelage [education] resembling bondage (cf. Gal.4:2-3); and the written bonds (cf.Col.2:14), whereby they confessed themselves guilty of sin, did not free them from obligation. Hence, they are rightly said, in contrast to us, to have been under the testament of bondage and fear, when we consider that common dispensation by which the Lord at that time dealt with the Israelites (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter XI, Section 9, emphasis added).

The next question emerges concerning whether in Romans 8: 15 Paul is referring to the human spirit of slavery or adoption or to the Holy Spirit who produces either a disposition of slavery or a disposition of freedom. Eagerness to interpret **spirit of slavery** as a “disposition of slavery” arises from the hesitancy of theologians to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of fear and slavery. It is simple enough to associate His work with adoption and freedom, but how can we connect the inward work of the Spirit to fear? At the same time, how can we be consistent in our exegesis if we interpret **spirit** in two different ways in the same verse? John Murray addresses this problem.

It would seem arbitrary to take “Spirit” in the one case as a proper name and not in the other. The Holy Spirit, however, cannot be called “the Spirit of bondage” for as noted above, where he is, *there* is liberty [2 Cor. 3: 17]. The solution resides in the consideration that the proposition respecting the “Spirit of bondage” is negative and there is no reason why we should not interpret the thought to be, “Ye did not receive the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of bondage but as the Spirit of adoption (*Romans*, pp. 296-297).

Martin Lloyd Jones also interprets both references to **spirit** in Rom. 8: 15 as the Holy Spirit (see my commentary on Galatians for a summary of his argument). However, in Galatians 4: 6, the definite article **the** is used before **Spirit** while in Rom. 8, the definite article is missing in both **spirit of fear** and **spirit of adoption** influencing some translators to interpret it as **a spirit**, either of slavery or adoption or as **a spirit of fear** and **the Spirit of adoption**.

Other translations of the text are as follows:

ESV Romans 8:15 For you did not receive **the spirit** of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received **the Spirit** of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

NIV Romans 8:15 **The Spirit** you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, **the Spirit** you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

YLT Romans 8:15 for ye did not receive **a spirit** of bondage again for fear, but ye did receive **a spirit** of adoption in which we cry, 'Abba – Father.'

NKJ Romans 8:15 For you did not receive **the spirit** of bondage again to fear, but you received **the Spirit** of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

<sup>16</sup> **The Spirit** Himself

testifies with **our spirit**

that we are children of God,

<sup>17</sup> and if children,

heirs also,

heirs of God

and fellow heirs with Christ,

if indeed we suffer with Him

so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Verse 16, I believe, provides substantial—although not definitive—support for the NASB and YLT translation of **a spirit** rather than **the Spirit** in both locations within v. 15. Two distinct spirits are mentioned in v. 16. One is **the Spirit** or the Holy Spirit, and the other is **our spirit** (a reference to **a spirit** in v. 15) to whom the Holy Spirit **testifies...that we are the children of God**. The effect of this testimony is that the believer no longer has a disposition or spirit of fear and trembling characteristic of the Old Covenant dispensation, but a disposition or spirit of adoption and freedom—that we are the children of God. Lloyd-Jones claims that this testimony of the Spirit is not based on a logical deduction from Scripture, nor is it connected exegetically to being **led by the Spirit** in living exemplary lives (see my notes on Galatians).

I now think Lloyd-Jones is incorrect. Beginning in v. 12, Paul lays out his argument that we are not under any **obligation** to live according to the flesh and that those who do live this way **must die**. Those who are saying "no" to fleshly desires **will live**, practically demonstrating that they are being **led by the Spirit** and are **sons of God** (v. 14). I can scarcely see how the Spirit's testimony would be completely separate from the believer's obedience, and this testimony would be an incentive for believers to walk in the Spirit further enhancing their joy and confidence in their adoption.

If we are willfully embracing known sin in our lives, the Spirit will convict us of sin and remind us that we have died to the realm of sin and death and must not act as if we were still the person we once were, the old man. Yet, we must not think that we will have no assurance that God is our Father if we have known sin in our lives. If we must be perfect to enjoy our sense of adoption, none of us would enjoy it, thus giving us a spirit or disposition of fear. It is during the dark moments of disobedience in our lives that the Spirit may sovereignly break through to us and remind us, "You are children of God; so, act like it!" thus bringing us to repentance and renewed joy. I think we see something of this in Ps. 51 written after David was confronted by Nathan the prophet for his sin with Bathsheba.

<sup>1</sup>Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions...<sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, **the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness**.<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. <sup>16</sup>For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.** (Ps. 51:1,14-17 NASB)

David was an OT believer living under the dispensation of the Law of Moses, yet we see here that there was no absence of grace in the OT nor the total absence of the believer's sense of adoption and the love of God toward repentant sinners. To repeat Calvin,

But when through the law the patriarchs felt themselves both oppressed by their enslaved condition, and wearied by anxiety of conscience, they fled for refuge to the gospel.

Indeed, the "good news" (gospel) of God's grace in forgiveness was the only thing to which they could flee, for the Law simply declared what God required but not the remedy for failure. The remedy for failure was depicted in the sacrifices, yet the sacrificial offerings which were devoid (empty) of heart-felt repentance and confidence in God's mercy would not please God (Isa. 1: 11).

<sup>17</sup> and if children,  
heirs also,  
**heirs** of God  
and fellow heirs with Christ,  
if indeed we suffer with Him  
**so that** we may also be glorified with Him.

Our sense of being God's children also brings with it the confidence that we will inherit the kingdom of God. We are His legitimate **heirs** [*kleronomos*] because we are **fellow heirs with Christ**. It is in Christ that we become the true descendants of Abraham, **heirs according to promise** given to Abraham (Gal. 3: 29). The promises of a place (land; Gen. 12: 7), presence (i.e. the presence of God; Gen. 26: 3), and people (Gen. 12: 2) were given to Abraham on the basis of his faith, not obedience to the Law.

"Sojourn in this land and I will be with you [*Isaac*] and bless you, for to you and to your **descendants** I will give all these **lands**, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. (Gen. 26:3 NASB)

For if those who are of the Law are **heirs**, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; (Rom. 4:14 NASB)

This same promise belongs to believers. We will have a place in the new heavens and earth, the presence of God, and people, namely, the community of the saints living in heaven with us. Consideration of the inheritance leads us back to Paul's statement that we are not obligated to the flesh since the flesh offers no permanent benefit. On the contrary, living according to the flesh leads to spiritual death while living according to the Spirit leads to spiritual life in the new inheritance. In the immediately succeeding verses, Paul speaks in more detail about the inheritance we have in Christ but does not do so without a short conditional statement: **if indeed we suffer with Him**. Conditional (if—then) statements in Romans are common for Paul (2: 25-27; 6:5,8; 8:9-11,13), and he does not wish his hearers being presumptuous about their spiritual condition. We may be confident that we will be **glorified with Him** only if we are willing to **suffer with Him**. Young's Literal Translation renders v. 17 as follows:

<sup>17</sup>and if children, also heirs, heirs, indeed, of God, and heirs **together** of Christ – if, indeed, we suffer **together**, that we may also be glorified **together**. (Rom. 8:17 YLT)



Notice the three **together's**: **Heirs together, suffer together, and glorified together.** The word **Him** is not in the text but may be implied from the context while the verb forms (single words) imply the corporate activity of Christ and His church **together**. The idea is that the promise of our inheritance, our remaining life on earth, and our eternal destiny are all connected to Christ and to each other. In Rom. 6, Paul implies that we are together with Christ in His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Here, Paul says that we are together with Christ in His inheritance, suffering and glorification. Being an **heir** of something implies a future benefit which must await the full bestowal of the benefactor. God is the benefactor who has a wonderful, incomprehensible inheritance waiting **for those who love [Him]...and are called according to His purpose** (Rom. 8: 28). Glorification is a future blessing (John Piper calls it a "future grace") for believers whose dead physical bodies will be raised from their graves to receive and occupy a new heavens and earth (see below)—**if indeed we suffer with Him.**

Willingness to suffer voluntarily with Christ for the sake of His kingdom is the ordinary cost of discipleship not limited to apostles, pastors, and missionaries. It is the paradigm (model) established by Christ in His incarnation, ministry, and death intended for every believer.

For you have been **called** for this purpose, since Christ also **suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps**, (1 Pet. 2:21 NASB)

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, **but also to suffer for His sake**, (Phil. 1:29 NASB)

The suffering mentioned in v. 17 is voluntary suffering, indicated by the words, **if indeed**. It is a conditional statement. However, involuntary suffering in this life is the condition of everyone, believer and unbeliever alike. Everyone in this fallen world must suffer by virtue of his existence; there are no exceptions, but only believers will suffer voluntarily because of their relationship to Christ, something which Christ makes plain on a number of occasions.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. (Matt. 5:10-11 NASB)

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (Jn. 15:20 NASB)

"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matt. 10:22 NASB)

All Christians will be persecuted to one degree or another, determined to a large extent by the religious make-up of the country in which he lives. Those living in countries hostile to Christianity will be persecuted more than those whose cultures have been significantly shaped by Christianity. I live in the US, and my readers live in sub-Saharan Africa where there are critical masses of people who either profess Christianity or are tolerant of it. This is not true in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Libya, and many other countries in the 10-40 latitudes. On the other hand, even in the US and sub-Saharan Africa, there will be hostility toward believers who are more radically committed to their faith than most professing believers. In the US, those who have opposed

abortion are accused of hating women, or those opposed to homosexuality of hating homosexuals, neither of which is true.

In Nazi controlled Germany before WWII, Dietrich Bonhoeffer strenuously opposed Hitler's fascist government which eventually exterminated six million Jews in gas chambers. His comments give us an important perspective on **if indeed we suffer with *Him***.

The cross is neither misfortune nor harsh fate. Instead, it is the suffering which comes from our allegiance to Jesus Christ alone. The cross is no random suffering, but necessary suffering. The cross is not suffering that stems from natural existence; it is suffering that comes from being Christian. The essence of the cross is not suffering alone; it is suffering and being rejected. Strictly speaking, it is being rejected for the sake of Jesus Christ, not for the sake of any other attitude or confession. A Christianity that no longer took discipleship seriously remade the gospel into only the solace of cheap grace. Moreover, it drew no line between natural and Christian existence. Such a Christianity had to understand the cross as one's daily misfortune, as the predicament and anxiety of our natural life. Here it has been forgotten that the cross always also means being rejected, that the cross includes the shame of suffering. Being shunned, despised, and deserted by people, as in the psalmist's unending lament, is an essential feature of the suffering of the cross, which cannot be comprehended by a Christianity that is unable to differentiate between a citizen's ordinary existence and Christian existence.

...Those who enter into discipleship enter into Jesus' death. They turn their living into dying; such has been the case from the very beginning. The cross is not the terrible end of a pious, happy life. Instead, it stands at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death (*Discipleship and the Cross*, pp. 52-53).

My wife, Fran, recently had breast cancer requiring surgery, but her cancer was not the equivalent of taking up her cross, for many women who are not Christians also contract breast cancer. Fran took up the cross voluntarily when she left three of our adult children behind in the US to serve with me in Africa. However, I would also say that when we choose to accept involuntary suffering for the sake of God's glory, it then becomes voluntary suffering for the sake of Christ. We may choose to embrace our cancer—and Fran has done that—or our economic destitution, our teenager's drug addiction, a difficult divorce, even many difficulties which may be the consequences of our sins. These are not situations we initially chose voluntarily, but we may then say, "Lord, glorify yourself in the suffering you have inflicted upon me. May you receive glory in my suffering, even the suffering which is the consequence of my sin."

In Colossians 1: 24, Paul seems to imply that there is a necessary quota of suffering for the corporate church to endure before Christ consummates His kingdom.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, **in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions**. (Col. 1:24 NASB)

In this verse, Paul cannot mean that there is any deficiency in Christ's atoning work on the cross or that the suffering and affliction of believers, Paul's included, can add any efficacy or value to Christ's accomplished work. In this sense, Christ's atoning work is complete, "finished" (Jn. 19: 30). What Paul must mean is that there are necessary works for the church to finish in application

of Christ's atonement—works which require suffering and sacrifice. These works must be completed before the consummation of the kingdom of God; and until they are completed, Christ will not return in glory.

...there are...aspects from which the sufferings of the children of God are to be **classified** with the sufferings of Christ himself. They partake of the sufferings which Christ endured and they are regarded as **filling up the total quota of sufferings** requisite [necessary, DM] to the consummation of redemption and the glorification of the whole body of Christ (cf. 1: 24). (*Romans*, p. 299).

Christ did not come as an earthly king with all the privileges of royalty, nor even as the son of rich parents, but as the son of a humble, poor carpenter with no political or economic power.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake **He became poor**, so that you **through His poverty** might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9 NASB)

Moreover, before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples no instructions for taking over the Roman government but gave them the mission of preaching the gospel, baptizing, and teaching others to obey all things that He had commanded them—including the moral Law and His exposition of this Law in the Sermon on the Mount. His kingdom was not of this world (Jn. 18: 36), and His method for victory was not of this world.

But it worked. The gates of hell did not prevail against Christ's church. Christianity took root even in hostile political and moral environments. Christians were put to death in the arenas by wild animals and gladiators because they would not participate in emperor worship or acknowledge that there was any other Lord (*kurios*) other than Christ Jesus. They were banned from the craft guilds (organized labor unions) and ostracized in the markets for being disloyal to Rome or even being sacrilegious—Christians were accused of cannibalism for "eating" the body of Christ and "drinking" His blood. Nevertheless, Christianity changed the world for the better, making it a more habitable place for all people to live, especially common people (see *How Christianity Changed the World* by Alvin Schmidt). It continues to change the world for the better even though this is a very slow process and one that is providentially subject to the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the church in fulfilling the mission given to it.

We must not deny the relative success of the church throughout history. This would also be a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Christian faith has spread all over the world! But the church is made up of people—still sinful—who are often distracted from their duty as believers. This leads us to the requirement of suffering. Self-sacrifice is not an option for the Christian. As Jesus voluntarily laid aside His privileges as God and finally His life to save us (Phil. 2: 7), then His people must follow His example by laying aside their privileges and even their lives for the sake of others around the world. Christians must give their money and their people—including their grown children—for the purpose of evangelizing and discipling those who have never heard the gospel. This would include a vast portion of the world's population, especially in places missiologists call the "10-40 window" (from the 10<sup>th</sup> degree latitude to the 40<sup>th</sup> degree latitude) where the gospel has not been as widely heard. Christians must give their money for education—the education of their pastors and their children—so that they will not be taken captive by worldly philosophies and the false wisdom of this world. But if we become preoccupied with worldly

possessions and earthly comforts, then we will be unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices to promote the kingdom of God around the world. Therefore, Jesus said,

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'<sup>32</sup> "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.<sup>33</sup> **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt. 6:31-33 NASB)

Jesus wasn't preaching primarily to rich people in the Sermon on the Mount. His audience was predominately poor, yet He commanded even poor people to put the kingdom of God first in their lives. The Apostle Paul also warns of **greed** as one manifestation of **idolatry**. Greed is not limited to rich people; it affects everyone: rich, poor, and everyone in between.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed**, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:5 NASB)

**So that we may also be glorified with Him** introduces us to vv. 18-25 and **the glory that is to be revealed to us**. What does this **glory** include?

<sup>18</sup> For I consider

that **the sufferings**  
of this present time  
are not worthy to be compared with  
**the glory**  
that is to be revealed to us.

In this verse, **the sufferings** to which Christians are **called** (1 Pet. 2: 21), are **compared** to the future glorified state which every believer will enjoy. Paul is inviting us to endure momentary **suffering** in this present, fleeting life because of our future, eternal **glory**. Such suffering is, by comparison, **not worthy to be compared with** the future **glory** to be eternally experienced by believers in the restored heavens and earth. Therefore, we must place comparatively little emphasis on our present suffering and much more emphasis on the future glory. Only as we focus on the glorified state will we be able to endure the present afflictions that are sure to come in one degree or another. Christ himself endured the cross as He focused on the joy of saving His people and bringing them safely into His father's kingdom as well as the joy of seeing the fulfillment of the prayer taught to His disciples, **"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."**

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,<sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**<sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:1-3 NASB)

Like the athlete who endures the rigorous suffering of physical training in order to win the glory of victory, so Christians must also endure the voluntary suffering of discipleship to enjoy the glory of eternal victory.

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (1 Cor. 9:25 NASB)

But suffering is not a meritorious work as a means of earning one's salvation; rather, suffering for the sake of Christ, like sanctification, is the natural outcome of one's faith. Having the mind of Christ and experiencing the love of the Father renders us willing to sacrifice ourselves, possessions, and time for the sake of God's kingdom.

<sup>19</sup> For

the anxious longing of **the creation**  
waits eagerly  
for the revealing of the sons of God.

<sup>20</sup> For

**the creation**  
was subjected to futility,  
not willingly,  
but because of Him who subjected it,  
in hope

<sup>21</sup> that **the creation** itself also

will be set free  
from its slavery to corruption  
into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

In the next few verses, **creation** is personified (treated as a human being) as a pregnant woman who is ready to give birth. Though she is in severe pain (**groans and suffers**), she **waits eagerly** for the birth of her new child, the new creation which is no longer **subjected to futility and slavery to corruption**. Paul is speaking of the corruption and futility brought upon the non-rational creation through the sin of Adam. Moreover, although it was through the sin of Adam, it was not Adam himself who brought the **futility**, but God—**Him who subjected it**. Mankind is not included as part of this portion of creation subjected to futility since the words **not willingly** cannot be properly applied to Adam's original sin or to mankind's continuing sin. Adam sinned willingly, and his willful sin was the occasion of God's wrath and curse upon the non-rational creation: **cursed is the ground because of you** (Gen. 3: 17).

What does this **futility** and **slavery to corruption** include? For the animate non-rational creation (animals) it includes starvation, sickness, violence from other animals, as well as abuse, cruelty, and mismanagement from man. It would also include the normal use of animals for food, something not allowed until after the flood (Gen. 9: 3). In the original creation there was no death for man or animal. Death came as the result of God's curse, and this death was also applied to the animal world. Evolutionary theory maintains that the animal world was living and dying millions of years before the first man (6 million years ago), but the so-called "evidence" for evolution is based on much speculation and unprovable assumptions. The point I am making here is that death is not a natural process. Death is part of the futility subjected upon the earth through the sin of man

and God's response to his sin. To say otherwise means that sickness, death, starvation, and violence in the animal world are natural and have nothing to do with the curse.

For the inanimate creation (plant life and every aspect of the geophysical world—mountains, rivers, plains, oceans, etc.) this futility includes destructive volcanic activity, hurricanes, tornadoes, dust storms, earthquakes, etc. that destroy everything in their path for miles around. It includes tsunamis, floods, glaciers, and other phenomena which produce uninhabitable places on the earth like deserts and polar icecaps. It includes, of course, thorns and thistles which remind us that making a living on this earth will continue to be a difficult task, even for the computer programmer in Silicon Valley, California. Adam was placed in a garden of plenty, and his task was to multiply and fill the earth—that is, to extend the garden beyond the original boundaries thus incorporating the whole earth as a luxurious place to live, work, and worship. He failed, and as a result, God's original plan to develop the entire globe as His temple-garden was sovereignly postponed until the consummation of His kingdom mentioned here, Revelation 21—22, and other places in Scripture.

Creation now **waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God**. What is this **revealing** and why does creation long for it? Creation has been subjected to the futility of man's sin through the instrumentality of God's wrath. It has also endured the mismanagement of sinful man who often treats creation as his own possession rather than acting as God's humble steward over creation. This has often resulted in the exploitation of creation rather than its wise and respectful use. In repetitive wars, man has destroyed vast portions of the planet to accomplish selfish goals of world conquest or seizure of lands and resources. Mankind often pollutes the air, rivers, seas, land, and oceans needlessly. He uses up topsoil without rotating crops, and he fills the earth with chemicals—pesticides and fertilizers—rather than using techniques which enrich the soil naturally. Corporations process edible animals inhumanely in overpopulated feed lots and slaughter facilities.

Not everything man does is wrong. There are existing regulations for forest management, emission controls, etc. which minimize air and water pollution and forest depletion. These regulations are sometimes effective, sometimes not; and often they overly restrict human freedom. Therefore, the non-rational creation (personified) longs for the day when Christ will consummate His kingdom on earth, and this consummation includes the reversal of the curse upon creation and upon man's labor. Redeemed man will one day exercise dominion over creation with a new heart and a new mind that better understands how the various ecosystems of the world work together. Creation will be "happier" under this new management.

<sup>22</sup> For we know

that **the whole creation**

groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

<sup>23</sup> And not only this,

but also **we ourselves**,

having the first fruits of the Spirit,

**even we ourselves**

groan within ourselves,

waiting eagerly

for *our* adoption as sons,

the redemption [*apolutrosis*] of our body.

Not only is **creation** groaning, but **also we ourselves...groan within ourselves**. As believers, Paul says, we are also groaning and **waiting eagerly for our adoption**. Paul has said that we have the spirit of adoption already which also means that we have been given the filial spirit of sonship by which we experience the love of God and consider him our Father. Why, then, does Paul say that we are still **waiting** for our adoption as sons?

Once more, he is speaking in the terms of realized and non-realized eschatology—the now and the not yet of the kingdom of God and the now and the not yet of our inheritance. Although we enjoy the status of adopted sons, we have not yet realized the full benefits of adopted sons. We still live in these fatigue-prone, sickness-prone, death-prone, aging bodies which will one day wither away and die of sickness or old age or be killed by some unexpected trauma. We may still live in poverty and in want of the daily necessities and securities of life. But one day, we will have our glorified bodies that are subject to none of the limitations of our present bodies, and we will also inherit the earth as our possession. Physical bodies need a physical place, and that place will not be some cramped, run-down apartment in the middle of the slums of Kampala, Nairobi, New York City, or Los Angeles with no grass, trees, or flowers. It will be a luxurious paradise filled with the beauty and glory of God with fresh air and sunshine.

But how do we know for sure that all of this awaits us? It is because we have **the first fruits of the Spirit**. Paul alludes to the regulation of the Old Covenant for Israelites to bring the first of the harvest and the firstborn of the livestock as an offering to the Lord. This was done in faith before the rest of the harvest was mature as a demonstration that Israel trusted God for the remainder of the harvest and the flocks. The **first fruits of the Spirit** refer to the indwelling of the Spirit who grants believers the spirit of adoption as well as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23) and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). With these first manifestations of the Spirit in the believer's life and consciousness, he is confident that there is more to come. These are only the beginning of God's blessings, the down payment of his future inheritance. Paul speaks likewise in Ephesians and 2 Corinthians.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,<sup>14</sup> who is given as a **pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption [*apolutrosis*] of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory**. (Eph. 1:13-14 NASB)

A **pledge** is an earnest payment in guarantee of full payment in the future. For example, when purchasing property, the seller will require the buyer to give him a pledge or earnest money as a guarantee that he will not back out on the purchase. Paul is using a business or financial term which his audience would have readily understood. God has promised us eternal life through Jesus Christ, and this will consist in both physical and spiritual life in the new heavens and earth. As a guarantee of this, the Holy Spirit has been given to us as the **first fruits** (Romans) or **pledge** (Ephesians) assuring us that God will keep His promises. Of course, the Bible teaches us that God does not change and cannot lie; but the gifts, fruit, and internal witness of the Spirit give us additional assurance. We might say that God is condescending to our weakness of faith with a constant reminder that we are heirs of the kingdom of God and heirs to the world: **Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth** (Matt. 5: 6). **Redemption** [*apolutrosis*] is the same word found

in Rom. 8: 23 referring to the redemption of our bodies. **Redemption of God's own possession** refers to all believers who have been **bought with a price** (1 Cor. 6: 20), that is, we have been purchased or **redeemed** with the blood of Christ. God's possession also consists of the new heavens and new earth which he grants as an inheritance to believers.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is **torn down**, we have a building from God, a **house not made with hands**, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For indeed **in this house we groan**, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, <sup>3</sup> inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found **naked**. <sup>4</sup> For indeed while we are in this tent, **we groan**, being burdened, because **we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed**, so that what is **mortal** will be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, **who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge**. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are **at home in the body** we are **absent from the Lord**—for we walk by faith, not by sight—<sup>8</sup> we are of good courage, I say, and **prefer** rather to be **absent from the body** and to be **at home with the Lord**. <sup>9</sup> Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Cor. 5:1-9 NASB)

While we are in this **mortal** body—our **earthly tent**—we **groan** [*stenazo*], the same word used in Rom. 8: 23. Why do we groan? We know that this earthly tent will one day be **torn down**; it will die. Even Paul did not look forward to being **naked** or **unclothed**—being without a physical body. However, he did **prefer** being **absent from the body** if this meant being **at home with the Lord**. Nevertheless, Paul encouraged the Corinthians that if they died, they would no longer be **absent from the Lord** and that one day they would be **clothed** with a **house not made with hands**, a new glorified body.

Paul is speaking of the intermediate state of believers who die before the return of Christ at the consummation or completion of this age. All OT and NT believers who have died before Christ returns will enter the intermediate state of spiritual life in heaven absent of the body. The author of Hebrews calls such believers the **cloud of witnesses** (Heb. 12: 1). This intermediate state, although unspeakably blissful, is not the climax (highpoint) of the Christian's heavenly state. God created us body and spirit, and He intends for His elect people to live eternally in this dual state; but until the general resurrection of the dead (1 Thess. 4, Jn. 5: 28-29), we will live happily without our bodies.

<sup>24</sup> For  
     in **hope** we have been saved,  
     but hope that is seen is not hope;  
 for  
     who hopes for what he *already* sees?

<sup>25</sup> But  
     if we hope for what we do not see,  
     with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

While the verb, **have been saved** (aorist tense; action in the past), indicates that our salvation has already occurred, **in hope** indicates that it is not yet complete. We still **wait eagerly** or **hope** for the final complement or component of our salvation which includes the **redemption of our body**. Upon believing in Christ, Christians **have been saved** already, but they are also being saved from the dominion of sin; and further, they will be saved in the future through the resurrection of the



body and the restoration of creation. **Hope** in Pauline literature is not interpreted as wishful thinking disconnected from reality. Hope is an assurance of God's promised blessings in the future. God does not give us **hope** to disappoint us.

<sup>5</sup>and **hope does not disappoint**, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom. 5:5 NASB)

It is called **hope** in distinction from empirical evidence—evidence we can **see** with physical eyes. The Christian is required to have faith in things that he cannot verify with his eyes or any other empirical evidence. **For we walk by faith, not by sight** (2 Cor. 5: 7).

Now faith is **the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** (Heb. 11:1 NASB)

And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a **rewarder of those who seek Him.** (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

No one hopes for something he already possesses—**for what he already sees.** But if we do not yet possess the final blessings of "future grace", then we must continue **with perseverance** (v. 25) believing that these future blessings of salvation are just as sure and certain as those we already possess.

<sup>26</sup> In the same way

**the Spirit also**  
helps our weakness;  
for  
**we**  
do not know  
how to pray as we should,  
**but the Spirit Himself**  
intercedes for us  
with **groanings** too deep for words;

<sup>27</sup> and **He who searches the hearts**

knows  
what the **mind of the Spirit** is,  
because **He**  
intercedes for the saints  
according to *the will of God.*

**In the same way** forms a connection with the multitude of ways that the Spirit **helps** believers to experience the benefits of life in Christ. Believers are given a spirit or disposition of adoption, a filial spirit, to recognize and experience the love of God and their status as sons (vv. 15-17). We are given the testimony of the Spirit who gives us confidence in the hope of our glorified state in the new heavens and earth (vv. 17-23). Likewise, **in the same way**, the Holy Spirit also **helps our weakness**, specifically, our spiritual weakness in prayer. Being sinful human beings, we often do not know **how to pray as we should.**

This is true for various reasons. First, our knowledge of God's revealed will is limited. Although we have the Scriptures—Christians in Rome had the OT—we don't know the Bible as we should. We don't read it as often as we should, and we often don't understand what we read; therefore, our limitation is both culpable (blameworthy) and excusable at the same time, limited by our finite human comprehension. Inadequate knowledge makes for a limited understanding of God's revealed will and undercuts our ability to pray as we should for those things which are most important to God.

Secondly, our weakness includes our inability to know the secret, decreed will of God. There are many things God does not disclose to us, and we can't be expected to comprehend all the intricate connections between people and events which affect us from day to day. Often the world does not appear to be guided by an infinitely wise, good God (Job's problem, as well as the "preacher" in Ecclesiastes), and we must trust that what God is doing in the world is the best of all possible actions resulting in the best of all possible outcomes. But this requires faith.

Amid all our uncertainties, the Spirit **intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words**. Here is the word, **groan**, again, used three times in Rom. 8. The creation groans, we groan, and the Spirit groans. The non-rational creation and believers (rational creation) groan in anticipation of the consummation and restoration of all things in Christ at the end of the age (see above). Specifically, believers groan for the **redemption of the body** in glorification as the final installment of their salvation. Creation groans for new management by a redeemed humanity and for freedom from the harmful effects of man's sin. Specifically, the Spirit is groaning in intercession. **He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God**. Since we ourselves do not know how to pray as we ought to pray—given our sinfulness and limited knowledge—the Spirit compensates for this weakness by praying **for us**.

For what does the Spirit pray? **According to the will of God** indicates that He prays for us in ways that are fully consistent with God's will for our lives. The Spirit is God, and God's intention for His people is that they be holy. Holiness may not be at the top of the list of things we desire most, but it tops the list of God's priorities for us. The Spirit prays for those things which will make us holy. We may desire wealth, comfort, and a care-free life. Such things are generally at the top of most people's wish-list, even believers. It seems clear from the history of the church, however, that such things are not God's priorities; and He knows that our progress in sanctification is often disproportionate (not in proportion) to the quantity of wealth, comfort, and carefree-ness in our lives. Thus, the things we often desire are contrary to our well-being. Considering the explanation that follows, I believe this is what Paul means by the Spirit's intercession for us according to God's will.

<sup>28</sup> And we know  
that God causes all things to work together for good  
to those who love God,  
to those who are called according to His purpose.

Despite all our troubles, **God causes all things to work together for good**. Other translations read differently:

And we know that **all things work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. (Rom. 8:28 NKJ)

And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28 ESV)

Regardless of the translation, Paul's intended meaning is the same. **All things** don't simply work out accidentally for the believer, but God **causes** them to **work together for good**. **All things** means that nothing is left to chance. All the divergent, seemingly conflicting, threads of our lives are intricately woven together like the threads of a tapestry. Look underneath the tapestry and the threads seem incoherent, confusing, and purposeless. But turn the tapestry over and the weaver's **purpose** becomes clear, presenting a beautiful artwork of skillfully woven design. God is the one who is weaving our lives together (troubles and all ) to make a beautiful tapestry. **Work together** is one word in the Greek, *sun + ergéō = sunergéō*. Things work together for our good because the Master Weaver has a plan, a design. This plan includes suffering (8: 17), but it results in good things for the believer.

But can we truly say that God is causing even our sinful actions, or the sinful actions of others, to **work together for good**? Sin is the very opposite of His nature, and it is impossible for Him to sin or to entice anyone to sin (James 1: 13). Nevertheless, God ordains all things that come to pass, declaring the end from the beginning, and by implication, everything in the middle (Isa. 46: 10). He works all things after the counsel of His will.

<sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, (Eph. 1:11 NASB)

If we believe that sin is outside God's ordained will, then we must also believe that majority action of humanity throughout history has been independent of God's control or foreordination. Joseph, on the other hand, recognized that the sin of his brothers in selling him into slavery were intended by God from the beginning for the purpose of saving the lives of his family.

"Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, **for God sent me before you to preserve life**.<sup>6</sup> "For the famine *has been* in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting."<sup>7</sup> "**God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth**, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."<sup>8</sup> "Now, therefore, **it was not you who sent me here, but God**; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Gen. 45:5-8 NASB)

"As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (Gen. 50:20 NASB)

Three times (Moses' emphasis in the story) Joseph insists that the sinful actions of his brothers were merely the secondary means for God to accomplish His primary purpose of saving the tribes of Israel. This good outcome does not in any respect absolve (excuse) the brothers of their self-serving sins, but God is clearly the primary actor in the whole story—**it was not you who sent me here, but God**. God uses sin sinlessly to accomplish His will, and it is God's will to do **good** to

His people regardless of their external circumstances and sometimes regardless of their disobedience. This is the providential love of God.

**To those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose** (v. 28) sets the boundary of God's benevolent activity. The promise of all things working for good is for believers only. It does not apply to unbelievers. On the subjective side, believers are those **who love God**. Paul wishes us to know that we can be assured of God's providential love for us if we truly love Him. On the divine side is the sovereign activity of God's sovereign call whereby He brings us to Himself through the effectual **call** of the Holy Spirit and sets us apart for His divine **purpose**.

<sup>29</sup> For

those whom

**He foreknew,**

**He also** predestined

*to become* conformed to the image of His Son,

so that

He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

<sup>30</sup> and these whom

**He** predestined,

**He also** called;

and these whom

**He** called,

**He also** justified;

and these whom

**He** justified,

**He also** glorified.

**For** introduces a further explanation of v. 28, often referred to as the unbroken chain of salvation. The chain of salvation described here is from first to last the sovereign work of God who is the subject of all but one verb. The verbs are orist; the action is presented as happening in the past. This is significant in that many of the recipients of this saving activity have yet to be born, indicating that in the mind of God, who has ordained the end from the beginning, every sovereign act is certain to happen. Moreover, the glorification of all believers is future, yet this too is presented in the orist as something that is already accomplished. In the mind of God, it already is accomplished.

**Those whom He foreknew** refers not to people that God knew factually before the foundation of the world, but those whom He loved before He created the world. God has factual knowledge of everyone—including what they ate for breakfast two weeks ago—but He **knows His sheep intimately** and **loves** them even before He created the world.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup> **just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. **In love** <sup>5</sup> **He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1:3-5 NASB)

Notice that God **chose** us and loved us before He created the world. In contrast, Jesus says that on the day of judgment there will be many who claim to know Him, but He will not know them.

"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> 'And then I will declare to them, 'I never **knew** [*ginōskō*] you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matt. 7:22-23 NASB)

Jesus doesn't mean that he will have no factual knowledge of such people, but that he never **knew** them intimately as His **sheep**.

"I am the good shepherd, and I **know** [*ginōskō*] My own and My own **know** [*ginōskō*] Me, <sup>15</sup> even as the Father **knows** [*ginōskō*] Me and I **know** [*ginōskō*] the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (Jn. 10:14-15 NASB)

**Foreknew** in Rom. 8: 29 is *proginōskō*, to know intimately beforehand.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen** <sup>2</sup> according to the **foreknowledge** [*prognōsis*] of God **the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Pet. 1:1-2 NASB)

<sup>23</sup>this Man, delivered over by the predetermined [*horizō*] plan and **foreknowledge** [*prognōsis*] of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:23 NASB)

**Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father** does not mean that God **foreknows** that we will believe in Him and chooses us on the basis and merit of our future faith. Rather, we are foreknown because of God's **predetermined plan** that included the crucifixion of Christ. Paul does not unfold the details of God's electing grace in this chapter but saves that for Rom. 9. There, he will explore the election of Jacob and the passing over of Esau, not because either one had done good or bad, but before either were born, so that the sovereign choice of God might be established.

<sup>29</sup> For

those whom He foreknew,  
**He also** predestined  
to become conformed to the image of His Son,

Whoever were foreknown were also **predestined** [*proorizō*]. There is no attrition or loss between the two blessings of being foreknown and predestined. **Predestined** comes from the root *horizō* which means to "mark off by boundaries" (cf. Acts 2: 23 above). **Predetermined plan** may be translated **determinate plan**, **definite plan**, or **determinate purpose**. Jesus was not delivered over to Pilate by "accident, blind fate, or bad luck"—mental constructs of people who do not believe in a sovereign God. He was delivered over to death according to the definite plan or determinate purpose of God to save His people—even as Joseph was delivered over to the Egyptians to save Israel. Likewise, those whom God **foreknew** were "marked off beforehand" (**predestined**, *horizō*) according to God's predetermined purpose **to become conformed to the**

**image of His Son.** Being conformed to the image of Christ means conformity to His moral perfection. Thus, the grand design of election and predestination is complete sanctification to holiness.

so that

He would be the **firstborn** among many brethren;

The **firstborn** son received the main portion of his father's inheritance but also the responsibility of being the new family head at the death of the father. He was the beginning of the patriarchal line which hopefully would be continued with other sons. Culturally, females did not have the ranking of sons since only sons could carry on the father's name. In Christ Jesus, however, there is neither male nor female in God's ranking (Gal. 3: 28); both males and females have the ranking of sons through faith in Christ (Gal. 3: 26). "Daughters of God" does not appear in the NT because the term does not convey the elevated status of women in the new covenant. They have the same status as sons. Christ is **the firstborn among many brethren**, including females, meaning that Christ is the beginning of a long line of God's people who will carry His name to the ends of the earth. Thus, it is through Christ that the promise to Abraham to have descendants numbering as the stars of the heavens is fulfilled.

"But he shall acknowledge the **firstborn**, the son of the unloved, by giving him a **double portion** of all that he has, **for he is the beginning of his strength**; to him belongs the right of the firstborn. (Deut. 21:17 NASB)

And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (Gen. 15:5 NASB)

<sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined,

**He also** called;  
and these whom He called,  
**He also** justified;  
and these whom He justified,  
**He also** glorified.

Whomever is **predestined** by God is also **called** [*kaleō*] by God. This is the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit whereby the Spirit convinces us of sin and effectively draws us to God the Father through faith in Christ. Question 31 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

WSC 31 What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit,(1) whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery,(2) enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ,(3) and renewing our wills,(4) he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will **call** [*proskaleo*] to Himself." (Acts 2:39 NASB)

God is faithful, through whom you were **called** [*kaleō*] into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:9 NASB)

but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are the **called** [*kletos*], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:23-24 NASB)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.** (Acts 16:14 NASB)

This calling is called "effectual" by the Westminster Shorter Catechism because God never calls someone who fails to come to Him in repentance and faith. Moreover, He never calls an individual who is not **predestined** according to God's predetermined plan. As the verse shows, predestination and calling go together from which we discern the truth of irresistible grace. Though the sinner may resist the movement of the Spirit for a time, eventually the Spirit will effectively break down this resistance until he comes willingly and freely. Calling, therefore, like predestination, is a sovereign, supernatural act of God without which no one would come to Him. As 1 Cor. 1: 23-24 shows, the gospel was, and still is, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles; but to those who are **called**, this offensive, foolish gospel becomes powerful unto salvation. It makes sense only to them.

Paul continues the chain of salvation by saying that those who are called are also **justified**, further proof that this calling is effectual unto repentance and faith leading to justification. Once more, there is no attrition; no one is lost in the process. All who are called, not some, are **justified**. The continuation of the use of **these whom** in every phrase indicates the continuation of the sovereign activity of God in every believer until the very end of the salvation experience, **glorified**. The popular consensus among evangelicals is that the Holy Spirit extends the call to everyone and that some believe while others do not. Moreover, Arminians believe that some who are **justified** are eventually lost; they are never **glorified**. But this is not what the passage teaches. Verses 29-30 explain how God causes all things to work together for the good of the believer. Everything that happens to the believer is calculated to produce holiness—conformity to the image of Christ. But holiness (sanctification) is not wasted on those who will eventually perish; it finds its destination point in the **glorified** believer in heaven, the restored universe. The unbroken chain of salvation begins with **foreknew** and ends with **glorified**, and nothing—not even the believer's sin or the devil's temptations—will be allowed to break this inevitable progress to eternal salvation.

and these whom He justified,  
**He also glorified.**

**Glorified** is *doxazō*, the same word used of Jesus being glorified by the Father.

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet **glorified** [*doxazō*]. (Jn. 7:39 NASB)

We conclude from this text that Jesus was not fully glorified until He had accomplished His atoning work, risen from the dead, and ascended. Not until after the ascension on the Day of Pentecost was the Spirit given. Though He had a glorified body after being raised from the dead, the fuller glory of Christ was not manifested until the ascension. But there is another sense that the fullest

manifestation of the glory of Christ will not take place until Christ comes in glory for His people at the consummation. At that point in time, every knee shall bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2: 8-11).

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the **glory** of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

It is in Christ's glorification by the Father that we may find a key to the glorification of believers at the consummation. Only at the consummation will believers be manifested in their full glory as the followers of Christ.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col. 3:2-4 NASB)

The true life of the believer is **hidden** to the world. If people on earth could get a glimpse of the majesty of the future life of the believer, they would be amazed at the transformation. Those who were considered nothing in this life will be **revealed...in glory**. Though often perceived as weak and lowly in this age believers will be revealed as the sons of God who will reign with Christ in the new heavens and earth with bodies that are not subject to fatigue, disease, or death. Though sinful now, they will be sinless. Though often ignorant, they will be wise in the knowledge of God and knowledge of the created world. As the glory of the believer is not fully manifested until the consummation, the full manifestation of Christ's glory awaits the revealing of the sons of God. Then, and only then, will the world realize how glorious this Christ really is. Christ will be glorified in His glorified people.

<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that **every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:10-11 NASB)

And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and **gave glory to the God of heaven.** (Rev. 11:13 NASB)

The confession in Philippians 2 and giving glory to God in Revelation 11 are not voluntary. The context of both passages is the judgment and consummation. Both verses speak of condemned unbelievers who are forced to acknowledge by what they see that Jesus is the very person He claimed to be during His state of humiliation on earth.

Though future for all believers, glorification is presented in the aorist tense as though it has already occurred. It is just as sure and strong as all the other links in the chain of salvation: foreknown, conformed to the image of Christ, predestined, called, and justified.

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things?

If God *is* for us,

**who *is* against us?**

<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son,



but delivered Him over for us all,  
how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

<sup>33</sup> **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?**

God is the one who justifies;

<sup>34</sup> **who is the one who condemns?**

Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised,  
who is at the right hand of God,  
who also intercedes for us.

<sup>35</sup> **Who will separate us** from the love of Christ?

Will tribulation,  
or distress,  
or persecution,  
or famine,  
or nakedness,  
or peril,  
or sword?

<sup>36</sup> Just as it is written,

"FOR YOUR SAKE

WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

<sup>37</sup> But in all these things

we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For

I am convinced

that neither death,  
nor life,  
nor angels,  
nor principalities,  
nor things present,  
nor things to come,  
nor powers,

<sup>39</sup> nor height,

nor depth,

nor any other created thing,

will be able to separate us from the love of God,  
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Considering all that God has done for His chosen people, Paul follows with a series of rhetorical questions all of which demand negative answers. There is no clearer, more extensive declaration of the security of the believer in all of Scripture than that found here.

If God *is* for us,

**who *is* against us?**

<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son,

but delivered Him over for us all,

how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

He begins by asking, **If God is for us, who is against us?** Indeed, who can be against those who have God on their side? God did not spare Jesus, and He will assuredly not spare anything else—**all things**—necessary for the ongoing welfare and security of His children. In Christ we are heirs to the kingdom of God with all its privileges and protection.

<sup>33</sup> **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?**

God is the one who justifies;

<sup>34</sup> **who is the one who condemns?**

Christ Jesus is He

who died,

yes, rather

who was raised,

who is at the right hand of God,

who also intercedes for us.

Who can bring any legal **charge** against God's elect when God Himself has acquitted us of our sins and declared us righteous in His sight? Who can **condemn** us when there are no grounds for our condemnation? Christ Jesus has died for us, thus taking upon Himself the judgment due our sins. How then can God still punish us for our sins when Christ has fully atoned for our sins? God is not so unjust to punish the same sin twice, once in the death of Christ and again by sending us to hell. Moreover, God has fully accepted Christ's death as the full payment and propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins and has demonstrated His satisfaction by raising Christ from the dead and seating Him at His right hand. In addition, Christ Himself advocates for us at God's **right hand**, pleading the merits of His blood in our behalf before God the Judge. How could the intercession of Christ fail? Satan wished to sift Peter like wheat, but Christ prayed for him that his faith would not fail—and it didn't.

<sup>35</sup> **Who will separate us** from the love of Christ?

Will tribulation,

or distress,

or persecution,

or famine,

or nakedness,

or peril,

or sword?

In this verse, Paul eliminates all threats and circumstances which, apart from divine providence, could be the undoing or death of God's people. The **who**, as opposed to "what", indicates that most of these things can be caused by others, particularly people in power who bring **tribulation, distress, famine**, etc. on their own people and on other people groups or nations. **Tribulation** and **distress** are general terms which could include many forms of injustice, including the **great tribulation** mentioned in Revelation. Such things discourage the saints, but they will not cause them to lose their faith in God's intervention. Beginning in the middle of the first century, and continuing off and on for three more centuries, **persecution** by Roman emperors and officials was designed to root out Christianity as the major competitor to emperor worship. Christians were torn

into pieces by wild animals and beheaded by gladiators to entertain the Roman crowds. Instead of suppressing the church, persecution fanned the flames of faith even more.

Persecution of believers has not abated since then, and more Christians have died for their faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than the 19 previous centuries. Yet, the church continues to grow in countries which are openly hostile to the Christian faith. Communist China is one notable example, now having an estimated 120 million Christians.

**Famine** may cause believers to lose their families and their lives, but Jesus is the bread of eternal life. **Nakedness** or poverty will cause public shame and exposure to the cold, but they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. **Peril** describes various dangers which could either be man-made or "natural disasters"—fire, floods, storms, winter cold—but God controls the weather. There are no "natural disasters" in the technical sense of the word, for God is personally controlling all the elements of this universe to accomplish His goal. **Sword** could be a reference to war or personal harm from violent attack. Jesus tells us not to fear those who may only kill the body, but God who can both kill the body and cast the soul into hell. None of these things can separate us from God's love.

<sup>36</sup> Just as it is written,

"FOR YOUR SAKE

WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

<sup>37</sup> But in all these things

we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Paul is quoting from Ps. 44: 22, a lament from the sons of Korah complaining that God seems to have abandoned them in battle despite their faithfulness.

All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant. (Ps. 44:17 NASB)

Often, God's people feel this way and wonder why God has allowed tribulation, distress, persecution, et al to come upon them despite being faithful to Christ. And since God's people often do not have the political power to resist their enemies, they cry out, **we are considered sheep to be slaughtered**. Paradoxically, God's seemingly powerless people **overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us**. They do not conquer through carnal weapons, political, judicial, or financial power, or through superior intellect and education. What is it that overcomes the world?

For whatever is born of God **overcomes the world**; and this is the victory that has **overcome the world**—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is the one who **overcomes the world**, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 Jn. 5:4-5 NASB)

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; **I have overcome the world**." (Jn. 16:33 NASB)

The paradox (apparent contradiction) of the kingdom is that Christ has overcome the world by dying for the world, and His death establishes the paradigm for the church. In **faith**, Christians lay

down their lives in suffering sacrifice in the same way Christ laid down His life, and through our self-sacrifice, the world is subdued by the love of God manifested in His people. None but God would have planned it this way, but this is the way it has worked for 2000 years.

<sup>38</sup> For

I am convinced  
that neither death,  
nor life,  
nor angels,  
nor principalities,  
nor things present,  
nor things to come,  
nor powers,  
<sup>39</sup> nor height,  
nor depth,  
nor any other created thing,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God,

Having mentioned ordinary dangers threatening to overcome the church, Paul now broadens the list to every conceivable danger, natural or supernatural, that might separate us from God's love. He begins his list with **neither death nor life**. These two things serve as the comprehensive summary of every circumstance that potentially threatens us. As we contemplate the future—predictably turbulent and troubling—we can imagine all the difficulties we may face along the way until finally, and inevitably, **death** will overcome us. But neither **death** nor **life's** troubles will be able to sever us from the love of God in Christ.

Moving from the earthly sources of danger in v. 35, Paul moves to supernatural sources: **angels** (evil angels) and **principalities**. The word for **principalities** is *arche* which is translated **beginning** or **origin** in other passages, yet the major translations have rendered it either **principalities**, **powers**, or **rulers** in this context and other contexts. The following verses are examples of this rendering:

Remind them to be subject to **rulers** [*arche*], to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, (Tit. 3:1 NASB)

For **rulers** [*archōn*] are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; (Rom. 13:3 NASB)

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the **rulers** [*archōn*] of this age, who are passing away; <sup>7</sup> but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; <sup>8</sup> the wisdom which none of the **rulers** [*archōn*] of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; (1 Cor. 2:6-8 NASB)

But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their **rulers** [*archōn*], to

mistreat and to stone them, <sup>6</sup> they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; (Acts 14:4-6 NASB)

<sup>25</sup>who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? <sup>26</sup> 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE **RULERS** [*archōn*] WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' (Acts 4:25-26 NASB)

"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your **rulers** [*archōn*] did also. <sup>18</sup> "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (Acts 3:17-18 NASB)

"When they bring you before the synagogues and the **rulers** [*arche*] and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; (Lk. 12:11 NASB)

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the **rulers** [*archōn*] of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. (Matt. 20:25 NASB)

<sup>14</sup>having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> When He had disarmed the **rulers** [*arche*] and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col. 2:14-15 NASB)

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or **rulers** [*arche*] or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Col. 1:16 NASB)

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers** [*arche*], against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12 NASB)

<sup>10</sup>so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the **rulers** [*arche*] and the authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph. 3:10 NASB)

Several points emerge from these passages.

(1) Sometimes *arche* or *archōn* (rulers or principalities) refer to human rulers and at other times to angelic rulers (Eph. 6: 12 compared with Matt. 20: 25).

(2) In most contexts, angelic rulers are presented as a negative menace (danger) to the church (Eph. 6: 12) with the possible exception of Eph. 3: 10 in which heavenly rulers may be interpreted either positively or negatively.

(3) All rulers and authorities, whether in heaven or on earth, have been created by God to accomplish his purposes of blessing or curse (Col. 1:16).

(4) God's benevolent purpose for human rulers is to restrict or minimize human evil, providing a safer environment for law-abiding citizens (Rom. 13:3; Tit. 3: 1). (We will cover this passage more in detail later).

(5) More often than not, human rulers work in opposition to the kingdom of God and not in cooperation with it (Matt. 20: 25; Lk. 12: 11; Acts 3: 17-18; 4: 25-26; 14: 4-6; 1 Cor. 2: 6-8).

(6) By dying on a cross rather than ruling as an earthly king, Christ triumphed over all kings, authorities, and rulers (human and angelic) (Col. 2: 14-15).

Romans was written about 57 AD during the reign of Nero, known as one of the cruelest and most ruthless dictators of ancient Rome. This was seven years before the Neronian persecution of Christians in 64 AD which Nero hoped would avert common suspicion that he had set fire to the city for the purpose of rebuilding it, leaving many common Romans homeless. Here is one account.

In the summer of 64, Rome suffered a terrible fire that burned for six days and seven nights consuming almost three quarters of the city. The people accused the Emperor Nero for the devastation claiming he set the fire for his own amusement. In order to deflect these accusations and placate the people, Nero laid blame for the fire on the Christians. The emperor ordered the arrest of a few members of the sect who, under torture, accused others until the entire Christian populace was implicated and became fair game for retribution. As many of the religious sect that could be found were rounded up and put to death in the most horrific manner for the amusement of the citizens of Rome. The ghastly way in which the victims were put to death aroused sympathy among many Romans, although most felt their execution justified (eyewitnesstohistory.com).

To the Christian population of Rome in AD 64 and beyond, Paul's words, **nor principalities** (either human or angelic) **...will be able to separate us from the love of God**, came as a great encouragement. Persecution did not end with Nero; it had just begun. The emperors who actively persecuted Christians were Domitian (81-96), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Decius (249-251), Valerian (253-259), Diocletian and Galerius jointly (284-305 and 311). Constantine became emperor of Rome in 312 and in 313 issued the Edict of Milan ending persecution of Christians. In 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Before Theodosius' reign, a relative of Constantine, Julian the Apostate (361-363 AD), attempted to revive paganism in the Roman Empire by reinstating the persecution of Christians; but his reign as emperor was short-lived. He was mortally wounded in a battle. As he lay dying, he grabbed a fist-full of sand saturated in his own blood, threw it into the air and cried, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!"

In Rom. 8: 38, Paul could be speaking about angelic rulers or principalities. For a biblical analogy of this, we have Daniel 10.

Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup> He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. <sup>12</sup> Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. <sup>13</sup> "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the

kings of Persia.<sup>14</sup> "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet *future*." (Dan. 10:10-14 NASB)

The angelic being talking to Daniel came in response to Daniel's prayers from the first day he began to pray but was opposed by the **prince...of Persia** for **twenty-one days**—corresponding to the three weeks of Daniel's mourning, fasting and praying. **The prince...of Persia** is another angelic being at the disposal of Satan as the guardian angel [demon] of Persia (E.J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 227). Some commentators believe the heavenly being speaking with Daniel in 10:10-14 is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, as in Dan. 10:1-9. I believe that the being in vv. 10-14 is not the pre-incarnate Christ, but a different angelic being. We may ask: Is a demonic prince of Persia any match for Christ so that he can prevent Christ from coming to Daniel's aid for three weeks? Moreover, why does Christ need Michael, **one of the chief princes** (v. 13) to come **help** him? Does God need any help from angels, or does He simply choose to use angels in the prosecution of His plans? For that matter, does God need Daniel's prayers, although assuredly God chooses to use the prayers of His people to accomplish His will?

We understand that the created angelic beings like Gabriel, Michael, and others need our prayers in the accomplishment of their work, and we need them in the accomplishment of our prayers (Daniel Wallace, *Daniel*, pp. 178-179). Wallace says that in this passage "We are indeed given a remarkable revelation of the communion of heaven and earth in the cosmic conflict."

The passage brings up many theological questions about the doctrine of angels and the power struggle in heaven which manifests itself in the earthly realm (Eph. 6: 10-20). The world we see with our eyes is not the only world in existence. There is another unseen world of angelic and demonic struggle which is intimately relevant to the events of current affairs and world history. We know this from Daniel 10 and the entire book of Revelation. At the very least, we can say that the angelic world is energetically employed in the execution of our prayers. In the words of Scripture, **are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation** (Heb. 1: 14)? We may also say that it is the good pleasure of God to work out His providential will not all at once with one terrifying word of judgment (something He is quite capable of doing), but gradually throughout human history.

I am not certain whether Paul is speaking of human rulers or angelic rulers in Rom. 8: 38. He could be speaking of both since both are **created thing[s]** (v. 39). Whatever the interpretation, we can be certain that neither evil human rulers nor evil angelic rulers are capable of separating us from the love of God. God is sovereign over all rulers and will hold all of them accountable for refusing to bow in submission to His Son (cf. Ps. 2).

nor things present,  
nor things to come,  
nor powers,  
<sup>39</sup> nor height,  
nor depth,  
nor any other created thing,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God,

Paul now explores the dimensions of time (**things present** and **things to come**) and the dimensions of space (**height** and **depth**) which cannot separate us from God's love. No event or combination of events going on in our world either now or in the future can overturn or prevent the accomplishment of God's promises to those who love Him. God not only knows the future, but He has ordained every single event in the future.

<sup>11</sup>also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose **who works all things after the counsel of His will**, (Eph. 1:11 NASB)

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground **apart from your Father**. (Matt. 10:29 NASB)

If insignificant sparrows do not die apart from **the counsel of His will**, then surely we can say that more significant events are under God's direct control. God controls **all, not some**, of the events of the past, present, and future because He declares **the end from the beginning** and, by implication, everything in between the end and the beginning.

"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, <sup>10</sup> **Declaring the end from the beginning**, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isa. 46:9-10 NASB)

Open Theism, on the other hand maintains that God does not have knowledge of future events; otherwise, man would not be free to act. His actions would be predetermined and, therefore, not free.

Open Theism is the thesis that, because God loves us and desires that we freely choose to reciprocate His love, He has made His knowledge of, and plans for, the future conditional upon our actions. Though omniscient, God does not know what we will freely do in the future. Though omnipotent, He has chosen to invite us to freely collaborate with Him in governing and developing His creation, thereby also allowing us the freedom to thwart His hopes for us. God desires that each of us freely enter into a loving and dynamic personal relationship with Him, and He has therefore left it open to us to choose for or against His will.

While Open Theists affirm that God knows all the truths that can be known, they claim that there simply are not yet truths about what will occur in the "open," undetermined future. Alternatively, there are such contingent truths, but these truths cannot be known by anyone, including God (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, emphasis mine).

Heresy is always error cloaked in a thin garment of truth. All evangelicals believe that "God loves us and desires that we freely choose to reciprocate His love" and that "God desires that each of us freely enter into a loving and dynamic personal relationship with Him". But one truth of the Bible cannot contradict another. We must believe, in accordance with the Bible, that God first changes the sinful human will, and then this renewed human will freely chooses to repent and believe. Otherwise, he remains in bondage to sin, and such bondage is not freedom. The statements made in the above quote are clearly in contradiction to what the Scriptures teach us about God.



For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR **WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?** (Rom. 11:34 NASB)

This verse does not imply that God needs us to “collaborate with Him in governing and developing His creation”. He does that very well by Himself. The God who is infinitely wise doesn't need our advice. If Exodus 32 appears to teach otherwise, consider that God was feeding Moses all sorts of hints on how to plead with Him in prayer for the Israelites.

James Sire makes comments in *The Universe Next Door* leading me to believe that he is either an Arminian or an Open Theist. Sire says,

The system [i.e. the universe] is *open* and that means it is not programmed. God is constantly involved in the unfolding pattern of the ongoing operation of the universe. And so are we human beings! The course of the world's operation is open to reordering by either. So we find it dramatically reordered in the Fall. Adam and Eve made a choice that had tremendous significance. But God made another choice in redeeming people through Christ (*The Universe Next Door*, p. 32, underlined emphasis mine).

If Sire is saying that God uses the actions of human beings as secondary causes to accomplish his predetermined purposes, then I would agree. God uses the preaching of the gospel to save those who were chosen in Christ before He created the world (Eph. 1: 4). But Sire makes it sound like God had no “program”—no decree—to start with and that both God and humans are equally changing the course of world events with God reacting to human choices. This forces God into a cosmic juggling act whereby He is constantly making decisions to counter or cooperate with human action. Adam and Eve chose to sin, but God then chose to redeem, as if God was reacting to their choice. This denies the immutability (unchangeableness) of God's eternally decreed will. The Bible says that God declares the end from the beginning, and that Christians are chosen in Christ before God made the world, that is, before Adam and Eve sinned. According to Sire's view, the “unfolding pattern” will have to be decided in the temporal present, not by God's eternal decree. But if God's decreed will is perfect—the result of infinite knowledge and wisdom—any change in that plan would make it imperfect. Sire continues.

The world's operation is also reordered by our continued activity after the Fall. Each action of each of us, each decision to pursue one course rather than another, changes or rather “produces” the future. By dumping pollutants into fresh streams, we kill fish and alter the way we can feed ourselves in years to come. By “cleaning up” our streams, we again alter our future. If the universe were not orderly, our decisions would have no effect. If the course of events were determined, our decisions would have no significance. So theism declares that the universe is orderly but not determined. The implications of this become clearer as we consider humanity's place in the cosmos (p. 32).

Again, I have no problem in agreeing with Sire that human activity is “significant” and that human actions have real consequences like polluted streams. I disagree that humans “reorder” creation with their activity. Rather, human activity actualizes or brings into temporal existence the order—or disorder—God has decreed. (Warfare, a human activity, is quite disorderly, but also ordained by God. Amos 2: 1-5). I also disagree with his premise that “if the course of events were

determined, our decisions would have no significance.” As I said earlier, if even sparrows cannot perish apart from God’s will, then far more important events are also determined by God. Human decisions are significant because God has ordained human activity and freedom to accomplish his ordained purposes.

Human participation in God’s plan—“program” if you will—is very significant, otherwise Jesus would not have commanded us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” and “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” The book of Revelation assures us that God’s kingdom is, indeed, coming in its consummation and that Satan and all his demonic forces cannot stop it (Matt. 16: 18: “upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.”). Yet, mysteriously, God uses our prayers and efforts to build his church; otherwise, they are mere formalities—like the queen of England inviting the newly elected prime minister to set up his government. Moreover, God’s omnipotence implies his ability to make a universe in which he controls all events while giving people real freedom. None of us live without making real decisions hour by hour, day by day. We choose what clothes to wear, what to eat or whether to eat, with whom to speak, etc. While making these decisions, none of us are wondering what God has ordained for us to do at that moment or that day.

Human freedom is not inconsistent with God’s power; they are not incompatible. If I don’t quite understand how God does this, it is because I am not God; but God is not limited by my rational ability to understand him. Some things are supra-rational, beyond human rationality and comprehension, but nevertheless rational. Why? Because they make perfect sense to God. And God has not left us in the dark about such things because He has given us sufficient explanation in the Bible.

The relevance of Open Theism for Rom. 8 is this: God’s sovereign ordination and control of every event, person, and created thing is essential to Paul’s declaration that nothing can separate us from God’s love. Neither human nor supernatural powers are capable of thwarting God’s plans of blessing for His elect people.

Back to Rom. 8: 38, **powers** [*dunamis*] could be a reference to the demonic evils which lurk in time and space (cf. Eph. 6: 12 above).

<sup>22</sup>who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and **powers** [*dunamis*] had been subjected to Him. (1 Pet. 3:22 NASB)

We do not live in a dualistic universe in which the forces of evil are equal to the forces of good. All supernatural forces, even the devil himself, are **created things** that are **subjected** to the authority of Christ seated at the right hand of God the Father.

## Romans 9

Possibly more than any other text of the Bible, this chapter unveils the ultimate cause of our salvation, both individually and corporately. Although the Apostle Paul will give passing mention to man’s responsibility to repent and believe (vv. 30-33), this is not the primary burden or emphasis of the text which is clearly the sovereign mercy of God.

I believe the natural divisions of the text are as follows:

I. Despite its many privileges, Israel has failed to believe the gospel (vv. 1-5).

II. Despite Israel's unbelief, the word of God has not failed.

The promises to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to natural birth, but to Israelites according to supernatural birth (vv. 6-9).

A. God promised Abraham that Sarah that they would have a son—a supernatural birth by a woman too old to bear children.

B. God promised Rebecca that he loved and chose Jacob instead of Esau before they were born and before they had done either good or bad, although they would have the same mother and father. Both would be biologically related to Isaac and Rebekah and also to Abraham and Sarah.

III. Salvation was never according to man's works, but always according to God's sovereign choice (vv. 10-13).

IV. Paul answers two objections to God's sovereign choice in election (vv. 14-29).

A. First Objection (v. 14): God is unjust because He has mercy on some but hardens others. Answer (vv. 15-18): All are sinners, and God owes mercy to none. Therefore, He has the right to show mercy to some but to harden others.

B. Second Objection (v. 19): If salvation does not depend on the will of man, but on the will of God, why does God find fault with unbelief since no one can resist the sovereign will of God?

1. First Answer (vv. 20-21): God is the Creator who can do what he wishes with His creatures.

2. Second Answer (vv. 22-29): The chief purpose of God is to glorify Himself. The sovereign election of some and the hardening of others is the "grand demonstration" (Jay Adams) of mercy and grace upon those He chose to save, and it is the grand demonstration of wrath and power upon those He chose to harden.

Furthermore, this demonstration of wrath and mercy applies to both Jews and Gentiles.

V. The sovereign election of God does not eliminate human responsibility (vv. 30-33).

Concluding Application

<sup>1</sup>I am telling the truth in Christ,

I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit,

<sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart.

<sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself

were accursed,

*separated* from Christ

for the sake of my brethren,

my kinsmen according to the flesh,

<sup>4</sup>who are Israelites,

to whom belongs

the adoption as sons,

and the glory

and the covenants

and the giving of the Law

and the *temple* service  
and the promises,  
<sup>5</sup> whose are the fathers,  
and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh,  
who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Paul is grieved because his countrymen, the Jews, do not believe the gospel. His grief is so intense that he could wish—if it were possible, and if it were just—that he himself were damned if his damnation would result in the salvation of his countrymen according to the flesh—the Israelite people. He is not exaggerating his grief but utters an oath bearing witness to the truth of his statement.

One could have expected better from the Israelites. God had blessed them above all peoples, and Paul makes a long list of their privileges in vv. 1-5. God adopted them as His national people. He revealed His glory to them in all the miracles He performed for them in the wilderness and in the ministry of Christ. He gave them His Law, the temple sacrifices which depicted the sacrifice of Christ, and the promises made to Abraham. Not only this, but God gave them the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose lives were types (pictures) of Christ and who were ancestors of Christ.

Despite these great privileges, Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Their unbelief begs an urgent question which is not directly stated but implied: Have the promises to Abraham failed because of Israel's unbelief? Paul anticipates this question in v. 6 and answers it.

II. Despite Israel's unbelief, the word of God has not failed. Why not? Because the promises to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to natural birth, but to Israelites according to supernatural birth (vv. 6-9).

<sup>6</sup> But *it is* not as though the **word of God** has failed.

**For** they are **not all Israel**  
who are *descended* from **Israel**;

<sup>7</sup> **nor** are they **all children**  
because they are Abraham's descendants,

**but**: "**THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.**"

<sup>8</sup> **That is**,  
it is **not** the **children of the flesh**  
who are **children of God**,

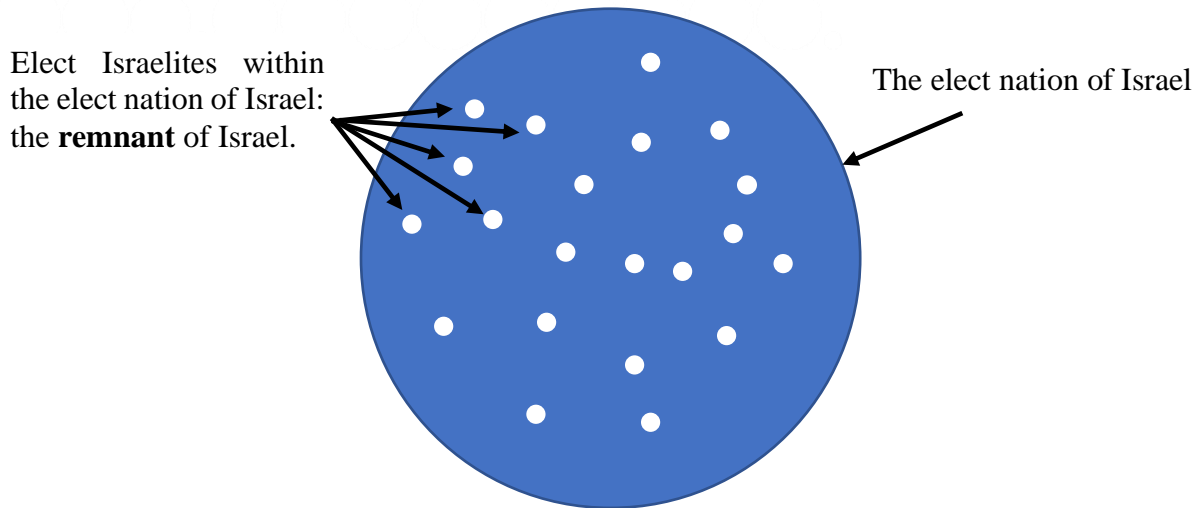
**but** the **children of the promise**  
are regarded as **descendants**

<sup>9</sup> **For** this is the **word of promise**:  
"**AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.**"

Not all of those who descended naturally (biologically) from the nation of Israel are actually the true Israel. Those who are the natural descendants of Abraham are not necessarily the true **children**

**of God.** The reason for this is that both Isaac and Ishmael were natural descendants of Abraham, but the promises of God were given only to Isaac, not to Ishmael.

The **children of God** and the fleshly descendants of Abraham are not the same group of people. Just as the promise was made to Isaac and not Ishmael, so also the promise is made only to the true children. It is **the children of the promise** who are the real **descendants** of Abraham, the true children, and not merely fleshly descendants. Thus, the children of God, the children of the promise are the true Israel within Israel. There are elect Israelites within the elect nation of Israel.



promise? Sarah is 90 years old, so how will Sarah have a son? She will have a son supernaturally by the power of God. This does not mean that she conceived in the same way Mary conceived Jesus, solely through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sarah and Abraham had normal sexual relations resulting in the birth of Isaac. Yet, Isaac was conceived through a special measure of divine power since Sarah was too old to have children. Ishmael, on the other hand, was born naturally since Hagar was still young enough to bear children. Having said this, we would all agree that all children are born through God's providential power (Ps. 139). God is active in the conception and birth of every child on earth; yet Isaac's birth was through a special measure of this power. (We have all heard other stories of 90-year-old women giving birth. Frankly, I don't believe any of these stories except this one in the Bible.)

Therefore, the supernatural birth of Isaac is a type, a foreshadowing of the supernatural birth of all the true children of God—Christians who are born not once, but twice. The common thread between all believers and Isaac is that all of us are supernaturally born.

In Galatians 4, Paul uses the births of Ishmael and Isaac as representative of children who are produced either naturally by the covenant of works or supernaturally by the covenant of grace.

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?<sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.<sup>23</sup> **But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, [that is, naturally] and the son by the free woman through the promise. [that is, through the supernatural promise of God to Abraham and Sarah]**

<sup>24</sup>This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are **two covenants**: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be **slaves**; she is Hagar.... <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is **free**; she is our mother. (Galatians 4:21-24, 26 NASB)

The **slaves** in Gal. 4: 24 are everyone, Jews particularly but anyone else who attempts to be saved by human effort—keeping some kind of law, the law of God or the law of one's conscience, the moral consensus of society, the Quran, et al. This is the natural, fleshy means of being right with God. This method of salvation produces slavery because a person can never do enough to win his freedom or his acceptance with God. How many times must a person attend church, read his Bible, witness, pray, give to charity, etc., before he is pleasing to God? He never knows how much he must do. A slave can never live in the master's house—someone working his way to heaven will never get there.

On the other hand, the free children are those who are saved supernaturally by grace. They are accepted by God because they are united to Christ who bought their freedom through His perfect righteousness. God accepts the work of Christ, and He therefore accepts them because of their relationship to Christ. Free children are accepted because of a relationship. Christ is their Brother, and they are the adopted sons of God. They already live in the house because they are not slaves; they are children of God. And because they are children of God who love their heavenly father, they will do as much as they can—not as little as they can—to be pleasing to Him.

It would not be correct to say that the promise of God to the physical Jewish nation has not been fulfilled since they—with few exceptions—failed to believe in Jesus Christ. The promises of salvation were never really made to the whole nation in the first place. They were made only to a small remnant of Jewish believers who were saved.

In other words, God did not choose the whole Jewish nation for spiritual salvation. He chose the whole nation for physical salvation from Egypt, but this was only a type or picture of a better salvation—salvation from sin. For this better salvation, God chose only a relatively small number of Israelites from the whole nation known as the **remnant**. So, Paul is arguing here that God's promises have not fallen to the ground. He has fulfilled His original promise to Abraham to make him a great nation. It just so happens that this great "nation" of believers now consists mostly of Gentiles, not Jews. But even some Jews are included, for he says later in Rom. 11: 1 that God has not rejected all His chosen nation, for Paul is also a Jew.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. (Romans 11:1 NASB)

This brings us to the third point in Paul's argument. The first two points were:

I. Despite its many privileges, Israel has failed to believe the gospel (vv. 1-5).

II. Despite Israel's unbelief, the word of God has not failed.

The promises to Abraham were never made to Israelites according to natural birth, but only to Israelites according to supernatural birth (vv. 6-9).

Third,

III. Salvation was never according to man's works, but always according to God's sovereign choice (vv. 10-13).

Here, Paul unveils the ultimate cause of salvation, and we will see that it is not about us; it's about God. In Rom. 9:10, Paul hints at two ways of salvation—salvation by works and salvation by the gracious calling and election of God.

<sup>10</sup> **And not only this,**

**but** there was **Rebekah** **also**, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac;

<sup>11</sup> **for though** *the twins*

were not yet born  
and had not done anything good or bad,

so that

God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand,

**not** because of works

**but** because of Him who calls,

<sup>12</sup> **it was said** to **her**

"THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

<sup>13</sup> **Just as it is written,**

"JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

We may be able to understand that Ishmael was not a true descendant (a child of God) because he was not the son of Sarah, but the son of Hagar, a concubine. But what do we make of Esau, who was not only the son of Isaac but also the son of Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, and not the son of a concubine like Ishmael? Esau was even the twin brother of Jacob, conceived in the womb at the same time. Moreover, Esau was the firstborn son, delivered only moments before Jacob. Therefore, God reversed the order of blessing, making Jacob, not Esau, heir to the covenant promises.

If we are inclined to believe that Jacob—and not Esau—was selected as the child of the promise because he had done something good, consider the fact that God chose Jacob instead of Esau before either of them had been born and before either of them had done anything good or bad. Furthermore, it would not be accurate to say that God chose Jacob instead of Esau because God knew beforehand that Jacob would do something good after he was born. It is true that Esau despised the covenant promise made to Isaac. He sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. But Jacob lied to his own father when he pretended to be Esau, and many years passed before he shows evidence of genuine faith.

Moreover, if God chose Jacob because Jacob would later value the promise of the covenant, then God's **purpose** would not be **according to His choice**, but it would be according to Jacob's choice. In other words, God's choice would be constrained by Jacob's decision to value the birthright. God would be forced to choose Jacob because Jacob chose to value the covenant promise. To say it another way, God would choose Jacob because Jacob did something good and "the something good" is choosing God, the predominant opinion among evangelical Christians today.

But the burden of the text is to show us that God's choice is free and not dependent upon the actions of anyone else. It depends only upon God, who makes His choice freely and independently. It is true that the possessive pronoun *His* before **choice** is not in the original text but inserted by some translators. The text reads literally, **so that the purpose of God, according to choice, might remain** (Rom. 9:11 YLT). Yet, the whole context of Romans 9 is God's sovereign selection of some but not others to salvation. Isaac is chosen rather than Ishmael. Jacob is chosen rather than Esau. Israel is chosen rather than Edom, Pharaoh, and Egypt. But even in the immediate context of the verse, the genitive of possession is used: **the purpose of God**.

Moreover, the phrase **and had not done anything good or bad** eliminates any contingency upon the individual's behavior, present or future. Although Paul does not speak of future good or bad, these words are used deliberately by Paul to negate any argument to the effect that one's future behavior will be the ground or basis of God's choice. This is confirmed in the next antithesis (contrast) between **works** and the effectual **call** of God. God's purpose is according to His **call**, not according to a person's **works**. If God choosing Jacob was conditioned upon Jacob choosing God, then Jacob was chosen because of his **works**, not because of God **who calls**. The antithesis removes all doubt about the individual's contribution to God's choice: **not because of works, but because of him who calls**.

The word for **choice** in v. 11 is the word from which we get the word **election** (*ekloge*). Therefore, v. 11 could be translated, **so that God's purpose according to election would stand**. This is the way the English Standard Version and New International Version translates the verse.

<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 9:11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad— **in order that God's purpose of election** might continue, not because of works but because of <sup>a</sup>him who calls— <sup>12</sup> she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

<sup>NIV</sup> Romans 9:11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad<sup>a</sup>—**in order that God's purpose<sup>b</sup> in election might stand**: <sup>12</sup> not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

So then, who is electing whom? It is clear from the text that Jacob has not elected himself to God's favor through good works. God has elected Jacob according to His sovereign purpose. Those who hold to the view that God foresees some good in a person and shows him favor upon that basis are basically saying that we choose ourselves for salvation. But there is no evidence for this view in Romans 9 or elsewhere in the Bible.

In v. 11, human works are clearly opposed to God's calling.

**not** because of works  
**but** because of Him who calls.

What is this calling [*kaleo*] that Paul is talking about? We have seen this word before in Rom. 8: 30. This is the inward, effectual call of the Holy Spirit. God sovereignly draws men to Himself by means of the Holy Spirit convincing the sinner of his personal sin and the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. A form of this verb is used in Peter's sermon in Acts 2.



"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are **far off** [*makran*], as many as the Lord our God will **call** [*proskaleo*] to Himself." (Acts 2:39 NASB)

Moreover, the calling of God is not limited to Jews but extended to Gentiles. Notice both Paul's and Peter's use of the words, **far off**, in Acts 2 and Eph. 2.

Therefore remember that formerly you, **the Gentiles in the flesh**, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—<sup>12</sup> *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were **far off** [*makran*] have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:11-13 NASB)

In Ephesians, Paul clearly identifies the Gentiles in Ephesus as those who had been **far off** but were **brought near by the blood of Christ**. In Acts 2, Peter addresses the Jews as **you and your children** and the Gentiles as **all who are far off**. Although Peter and the disciples did not yet fully comprehend to what extent Christ had elevated the Gentiles to a position equal with Jews, the Gentile proselytes of the OT (Ruth, Rahab, Uriah, etc.) proved that God had not abandoned the Gentiles to their unbelief, but had extended the blessings of Abraham to them as well (Gen. 12: 3b, **and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed**).

As we have seen, Romans 8: 29-30 presents a clear picture of the effectual calling of God unto salvation. When God the Holy Spirit calls people to Christ, they will not be able to resist this call indefinitely. They may resist for a time; but eventually, those who are truly called of God will come to Him in faith—not against their will, but willingly and freely.

Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED [*miseo*]." (Romans 9:13 NASB)

When did God **love** Jacob and **hate** Esau? Again, He **loved** Jacob before he was born and had not done anything good or bad, and He **hated** Esau before he had been born or done anything good or bad. Paul gives us more detail about the origination of God's love in Ephesians.

<sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. **In love** <sup>5</sup>**He predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (Eph. 1:4-5 NASB)

Here we see that election is something which occurs before the world was created and that election is always **in Him**, that is, in Christ Jesus. The parallel phrase, **In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, confirms that election and predestination occur simultaneously in the mind of God. As He elects us in Christ unto holiness, He also predestines us to adoption through Christ. **According to the kind intention of His will** in Ephesians is parallel to **so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand** in Romans.

In Rom. 9: 13, Paul is quoting from Malachi.

The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. <sup>2</sup> "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "**Was not Esau Jacob's brother?**" declares the LORD. "**Yet I have loved Jacob;** <sup>3</sup> **but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.**" <sup>4</sup> Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and *men* will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever." (Mal. 1:1-4 NASB)

In the Greek Septuagint translation of Malachi, the word used for **hated** [*miseō*] is the same as that used in Rom. 9: 13. We know from Obadiah that the nation of Edom (the descendants of Esau) either sat idle and allowed the Babylonians (?) to devastate Jerusalem or they took an active part with the Babylonians in destroying it.

"On the day that you stood aloof, On the day that strangers [*Babylonians?*] carried off his wealth, And foreigners entered his gate And cast lots for Jerusalem—You too were as one of them. (Obad. 1:11 NASB)

Edom is warned not to gloat over Judah, for the day will come when the name of Edom will be forgotten.

"Do not enter the gate of My people In the day of their disaster. Yes, you, **do not gloat over their calamity In the day of their disaster.** And **do not loot their wealth In the day of their disaster.** <sup>14</sup> "Do not stand at the fork of the road **To cut down their fugitives;** And do not imprison their survivors In the day of their distress. <sup>15</sup> "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. <sup>16</sup> "Because just as you drank on My holy mountain, All the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow And become as if they had never existed. <sup>17</sup> "But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, And it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. <sup>18</sup> "Then the house of Jacob will be a fire And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau will be as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, **So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,**" For the LORD has spoken. (Obad. 1:13-18 NASB)

There are many interpreters of Romans who believe that the word **hated** means "loved less" as if to say that God loved Esau less than Jacob (Hodge). Clearly, by choosing Jacob for covenant privileges, God loved Esau less. Yet, it is not sufficient to say that the opposite of loving Jacob and including him in the covenant promise is loving Esau less. There is nothing in the text or in the history of Esau's descendants which remotely suggests that Esau was ever favored by God. In fact, the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, were later set apart for complete destruction and annihilation (Obadiah).

It can readily be suspected that in the original context, as it pertains to the Edomites (Mal. 1: 1-5), the mere absence of love or favor hardly explains the visitations of judgement mentioned [in vv. 3-4]. These judgements surely imply disfavor. The indignation is a positive judgment, not merely the absence of blessing. In Scripture God's wrath involves the positive outflow of his displeasure. What we find in Malachi 1: 1-5 is illustrated by instances in the Old Testament where God's hatred is mentioned and where either persons or things are the objects (cf. Ps. 5: 5; 11: 5; Prov. 6: 16; 8: 13; Isa. 1: 14; 61: 8; Jer. 44: 4; Hos. 9: 15; Amos 5: 21; Zech. 8: 17; Mal. 2: 16). The divine reaction stated

could scarcely be reduced to that of not loving or loving less. Thus the evidence would require, to say the least, the thought of disfavor, disapprobation, displeasure. There is also the vehement quality that may not be discounted. We must not predicate of this divine hate those unworthy features which belong to hate as it is exercised by us sinful men. In God's hate there is no malice, malignancy, vindictiveness, unholy rancor, or bitterness. The kind of hate thus characterized is condemned in Scripture and it would be blasphemy to predicate the same of God. But there is a hate in us that is the expression of holy jealousy for God's honor and love to him (Psalms 26: 5; 31: 6; 139: 21, 22; Jude 23; Rev. 2: 6). This hate is the reflection in us of God's jealousy for his own honor. We must, therefore, recognize that there is in God a holy hate that cannot be defined in terms of not loving or loving less. Furthermore, we may not tone down the reality or intensity of this hate by speaking of it as "anthropopathic" or by saying that it "refers not so much to the emotion as to the effect". The case is rather, as in all virtue, that this holy hate in us is patterned after holy hate in God...

On the basis of biblical patterns of thought and usage, therefore, the statement "Esau I hated" is not satisfactorily interpreted as meaning simply "not loved" or "loved less" but in the sense that an attitude of positive disfavor is expressed thereby. Esau was not merely excluded from what Jacob enjoyed but was the object of a displeasure which love would have excluded and of which Jacob was not the object because he was loved (Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, pp. 22-23, emphasis mine).

There are also those who believe that Jacob and Esau represent the corporate nations only rather than two individual persons. The corporate application cannot be completely absent from Paul's use of Malachi; however, if only the national election of Israel is in view in Rom. 9, then Paul's whole argument fails. The question he is primarily dealing with in chapter 9 comes in v. 6.

**But it is not as though the word of God has failed.** For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; (Rom. 9:6 NASB)

Has, indeed, the word of promise to Israel failed? Since most of Israel had not believed at the time Paul is writing Romans, this would surely seem to be the case. His argument against this conclusion consists in the fact that genuine descent from Abraham did not belong to Israelites according to the flesh but those who were chosen according to the promise. Later he will argue that only a remnant of Israel was saved and the rest were hardened like Pharaoh. Therefore, if he is saying here that God **loved** the whole corporate nation of Israel but **hated** the whole corporate nation of Esau, then we must account for His rejection of most of the corporate nation of Israel. In other words, the entire chapter 9 makes no sense in terms of the corporate election of Israel in distinction from Edom (Rom. 11: 7; Heb. 3: 14-19).

Murray continues.

...the differentiation which belongs to Israel as a whole in virtue of the theocratic election does not meet the question the apostle encounters in this whole passage, namely, the unbelief of the mass of ethnic Israel. There must be another factor at work which will obviate [remove] the inference that the word of God has come to naught [nothing]. This factor is found in the particularity of election, that is, in a more specific and determinative election than is exemplified in the generic [general or corporate] election of Israel as a people. So now, in terms of *love*, the only criterion that will meet the demands of the situation is a more specific love than that exemplified in the love that distinguished Israel as a

people from Edom as a people (Murray, *Romans*, p. 21, italics emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).

IV. Paul answers some objections to God's sovereign choice in election (vv. 14-24).

A. First objection (v. 14). God is unjust because He has mercy on some but hardens others. Answer: All are sinners; therefore, God owes mercy to none. Therefore, He has the right to show mercy to some but to harden others.

<sup>14</sup> What shall we say then?

There is no injustice with God, is there?

May it never be!

<sup>15</sup> For He says to Moses,

"I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY,  
AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

<sup>16</sup> So then

it does not depend  
on the man who wills  
or the man who runs,  
but on God who has mercy.

If God loved Jacob because of some good found in Jacob, then no one would not accuse God of **injustice**. It would only be just if God loved Jacob for his goodness, for this is what Jacob would deserve. And if He hated Esau because of some evil found in Esau, we would not accuse God of **injustice** to Esau because this is what Esau would deserve. But if God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born and not because of some good or evil found in them after they were born, then we are tempted to accuse God of **injustice**, and this is exactly the accusation Paul now addresses and refutes.

It sounds unfair or unjust only because of our limited human perspective and our denial of the creature-Creator distinction. Paul simply responds with, **May it never be!** or to paraphrase, "God forbid that we should accuse God of injustice!"

**For He says to Moses** introduces Paul's answer to the objection that God is unjust. What He says to Moses may not sound like an answer to modern readers, but it made perfect sense to Moses at the time. God was essentially saying, "No one has any claim on my mercy; therefore, I can give it to whomever I wish." The context of this OT quotation in Rom. 9: 15 is Moses' request for God to show him His **glory**. But before Moses asks to see God's glory he requests that God show him and Israel His favor by continuing His presence with Israel.

"For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?" (Exodus 33:16 NASB)

God grants Moses his request, but He then says,

"I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; **and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**" (Exodus 33:19 NASB)

We must understand the context of Ex. 33 to understand what appears to be a cryptic (obscure) answer in v. 19. In Ex. 32, the nation of Israel worships the golden calf, and God threatens to destroy the whole nation. Moses intercedes; and although many die, the nation is spared. Then in Ex. 33, Moses pleads with God to continue His presence with the nation of Israel—one of the three blessings promised to Abraham: place, His presence, and people. God makes it plain to Moses that neither the people of Israel, nor even Moses himself, have any claim or entitlement to His mercy and compassion. His agreement to Moses' request is an act of grace and grace alone (Keil and Delitzsch, *Exodus*, p. 238). The nation is rebellious and idolatrous, none deserving of His presence. He is obligated to none; therefore, He will show mercy and compassion to whomever He pleases. In fact, He will later show compassion to the Gentiles who will one day be distinguished and favored more than the Jews. As far as showing Moses His glory, God insinuates (implies) that His glory consists in His sovereign privilege to show compassion to whomever He wills.

Consistent with the purpose of the original text in Ex. 33: 19, Paul says in Rom. 9:16 that salvation does not depend on the person who exercises his **will** or on him who exerts strenuous effort (**runs**) to save himself but on God who exercises His sovereign will to show mercy to some. This is also consistent with John's gospel.

<sup>1</sup>He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. <sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup>who were **born**, not of blood **nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God**. (John 1:11-13 NASB)

Being **born...of God** is equivalent to being born of God's sovereign will.

<sup>7</sup>"Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup>"The **wind blows where it wishes** and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born of the Spirit**." (John 3:5-8 NASB)

God the Spirit does His work wherever and whenever He wishes. He cannot be predicted or controlled because He is sovereign (the word for **wind** and **spirit** are both the same in Hebrew, *ruach*, and Greek, *pneuma*).

<sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,

"FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP,  
TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU,  
AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE  
WHOLE EARTH."

<sup>18</sup>So then

He has mercy  
on whom He desires,

and He hardens  
*whom He desires.*

God's word to Pharaoh in v. 17 is parallel to God's word to Moses in v. 15. In the Bible, **God says** and **Scripture says** are the same thing. Thus, Paul is upholding the divine inspiration of the OT. It is God's word.

Paul now uses Pharaoh as an illustration of the principle taught in vv. 15-16. As Esau is contrasted with Jacob, now Pharaoh is contrasted with Israel. God had compassion on Israel after they worshipped the golden calf even though they deserved His wrath as much as Pharaoh, perhaps more. Nevertheless, God has no mercy upon Pharaoh. He has compassion on whom He chooses, but he didn't choose Pharaoh. God chose to raise Pharaoh to power in Egypt, and he became one of the most powerful men in the entire world at that time.

What was God's **purpose** in raising Pharaoh to power? Two purposes: First, God would destroy Pharaoh's power as a demonstration of His superiority to Pharaoh. Second, Pharaoh's destruction—and the destruction of every other Egyptian god—would serve to proclaim God's sovereign **name** throughout the whole earth so that all people would recognize that He is God, exclusively, and there is no other.

—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, **whose name is Jealous**, is a jealous God—  
(Exod. 34:14 NASB)

If anyone had the power to exercise his will independently of God, Pharaoh had such power. If anyone had the power to demonstrate independent effort to save himself and the Egyptian people, Pharaoh did. But Pharaoh could not save even his own firstborn. Paul's conclusion is confirmed that salvation does not depend on man's independent will or effort, but on God who exercises His sovereign will in doing what He wants to do. **He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

Someone may object that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. After God removed the plague of frogs and the swarm of insects, the Scripture says so.

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, **he hardened his heart** and did not listen to them, **as the LORD had said**. (Exodus 8:15 NASB)

But **Pharaoh hardened his heart** this time also, and he did not let the people go. (Exodus 8:32 NASB)

Yet, we notice from the OT text that Pharaoh **hardened his heart...as the Lord had said**. But God never said, "Pharaoh will harden his heart", in those exact words. Rather, God said to Moses,

"When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but **I will harden his heart** so that he will not let the people go. (Exodus 4:21 NASB)

And again, later in Ex. 7: 2-5 and Ex. 14: 4 God says,

"You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. <sup>3</sup> **"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart** that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 7:2-3 NASB)

"Thus **I will harden Pharaoh's heart**, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so. (Exod. 14:4 NASB)

God said, **I will harden Pharaoh's heart**. He never said, "But Pharaoh will harden his heart." Nevertheless, we know that Pharaoh did harden his heart just **as the Lord said**—that is, because the Lord hardened his heart.

Notice also in Ex. 7: 4 that God does not say, "If Pharaoh does not listen to you". Rather, He says, **When Pharaoh does not listen to you**. There was no doubt in God's mind that Pharaoh would not listen. Not because God knew beforehand that Pharaoh would make an independent decision to harden his own heart, but because God had willed to harden Pharaoh's heart.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "**FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, ...**

For this same reason, other leaders rise to power: namely, for God to demonstrate His power against them. For this reason, God raised up Idi Amin in Uganda, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Qaddafi in Libya, Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy, Genghis Kahn of Mongolia, and—fill in the \_\_\_\_\_—all other godless leaders—to show His superior power against them. But only those with the eyes of faith can see what God is doing. Even faithless Israel could not see the power of God. They were blinded by unbelief, until most of the generation of Israel coming out of Egypt died in the wilderness before entering God's rest in the promised land.

Paul then concludes his argument in Rom. 9: 18.

**So then** He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

The concluding statement in v. 18 is essentially the same as Paul's statement in v. 16 which also begins with **so then** or **therefore** (NIV). Notice the parallels from vv. 15-18.

<sup>15</sup> **For He says to Moses,** "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

<sup>16</sup> **So then** it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

<sup>17</sup> **For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,** "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

<sup>18</sup> **So then** He **has mercy**  
on **whom He desires**,  
and He **hardens**

whom He desires.

Also note the parallels within v. 18. The antithesis of **has mercy** is **hardens**.

In v. 19 Paul anticipates another objection to the doctrine of election. He anticipates the first objection in v. 14.

<sup>14</sup> What **shall we say** then? There is no injustice with God, is there? **May it never be!**

Answer: Because God is not obligated to show mercy to anyone.

B. Second objection (v. 19): If salvation does not depend on the will of man, but on the will of God, why does God find fault with unbelief since no one can resist the sovereign will of God?

1. First Answer (vv. 20-21): God is the creator who can do what he wishes with His creatures.

<sup>19</sup> **You will say** to me then,

"Why does He still find fault?

For who resists His will?"

<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, who are you, O man,  
who answers back to God?

The thing molded **will not say** to the molder,

"Why did you make me like this," will it?

<sup>21</sup> Or does not the potter have a right over the clay,  
to make from the same lump

one vessel for honorable use  
and another for common use?

It is clear from the OT text that Pharaoh could not **resist** the decreed will of God to harden his heart. This brings up the question, **Why then does God find fault? For who resists His will?** If Pharaoh is the independent actor in the Exodus event, then Paul's illustration and argument fails. The question, **For who resists His will?** doesn't make any sense if Pharaoh does, indeed, resist the will of God independently of divine sovereignty.

At this point, Paul's imaginary opponent says, "What if I agree that salvation does not depend on the will of man, but the will of God who either decides to show mercy or to harden? But why does God find fault with someone who does not believe since this person is simply demonstrating the sovereign will of God in his unbelief?" Paul's answer to this objection is found in vv. 20-21.

The argument is essentially the same as the one in vv. 15-18—the sovereign privilege of God. But here, it is the privilege ascribed to God as Creator. God created us, and this gives Him the privilege (or prerogative) to do with us whatever He wants to do. The potter decides what to do with a **lump** of **clay**. Some of this clay he will use to make a vessel for **honorable** use—a vessel for carrying water or for eating food. From another part of this **lump** he will make a vessel for **common** or **dishonorable** use—a garbage pot or a chamber pot for disposing of human waste. In the same way God decides what to do with the whole **lump** of humanity.



The potter is not deciding what to do with lumps of clay which are essentially different from one another, but which are essentially the same. Some of the clay is not more suitable for honorable use and the other more suitable for dishonorable use. The only difference is in the independent will of the potter to use the clay as he wishes: Or does not the potter have a right over the clay? The word **right** is *exousia* which may be translated **authority**. The potter has full and unquestionable **authority** to use the clay as he determines. The analogy is fitting to illustrate the Creator-creature distinction. Man was made from the dust of the ground, and to dust he shall return. Paul uses an OT metaphor common to the prophets.

You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, "He did not make me"; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, "He has no understanding "? (Isa. 29:16 NASB)

"Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands '? (Isa. 45:9 NASB)

But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. (Isa. 64:8 NASB)

But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>6</sup> "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. (Jer. 18:4-6 NASB)

God sovereignly decides what to do with the creatures He has made—some He will save, and others He will not save. It is His decision to make—and His alone—and His decision is not in any sense influenced by the quality of the individual. All humanity belongs to the same **lump**, and we have already seen from Jacob and Esau that this lump is bad, wicked, completely polluted. The picture of common clay arguing with a human potter is presented by the prophets and Paul as absurd.

It is likewise absurd for a man, a mere creature, to argue with God. No one can say to God, "What do you think you are doing? Why did you make me for this purpose? Why didn't you make everyone for honorable use? Explain yourself!" And this is Paul's answer to the question, "Why does God find fault, for who resists his will?" We may not find his argument very satisfying. It surely does not answer all our questions about the way God deals with humanity.

The argument is very similar to God's response to Job. Job thought God had treated him unfairly, and he demands an explanation. God's first answer to Job occurs in Job 38-39 and basically amounts to this: "You didn't create the world; I did. And you do not sustain the world, I do." And this could have been the end of the argument, but God has pity on Job and continues His argument in chapters 40-41 in which He essentially says, "You cannot control the world; I can, and I control it according to my infinite wisdom, wisdom you cannot possibly understand. And Job, this is the end of the argument."

Paul could also have ended his argument right here, but he continues.

2. Second Answer to the objection (vv. 22-29).

The objection is: Why does God find fault since no one can resist His will?

Second Answer: The most important purpose of God is to glorify Himself. The sovereign election of some and the hardening of others is the grand demonstration of mercy upon those He chose to save, and it is the grand demonstration of wrath and power upon those He chose to harden.

- 22 **What if God,**  
although willing  
to demonstrate His wrath  
and to make His power known,  
endured with much patience  
vessels of wrath  
prepared for destruction?
- 23 **And He did so**  
to make known the riches of His glory  
upon vessels of mercy,  
which He prepared beforehand for glory,
- 24 **even us,**  
whom He also called,  
not from among Jews only,  
but also from among Gentiles.
- 25 **As He says also in Hosea,**  
"I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'"  
26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."
- 27 **Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,**  
"THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY."
- 29 **And just as Isaiah foretold,**  
"UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

The **election** of some and the rejection of others is the “Grand Demonstration” of God’s mercy as well as the “Grand Demonstration” of His wrath and power (see Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration—A Biblical Study of the So-Called Problem of Evil*.)

He has already said something about this grand demonstration in v. 17.

<sup>17</sup> **For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,** "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

But now Paul explains this demonstration further. Throughout human history, God patiently **endured** (tolerated) rebellious unbelievers in order to demonstrate the riches of his glory upon believers. What does Paul mean when he says God **endured** or tolerated unbelievers? He means that God tolerated their sinful behavior and rebellion—their ill-treatment of other people, their covetousness and greed, their lies, their sexual immorality and perversion, and most importantly, God tolerated their ingratitude and hatred toward Him. He endured all this. He did not have to do this, but He did so to demonstrate His final wrath upon unbelievers on the day of judgment. Most importantly, He wanted to demonstrate His mercy upon believers in salvation.

Believers were **prepared** beforehand for glory. Unbelievers were **prepared** for destruction—like Pharaoh. What God has done with the whole lump of mankind is not a reaction to what man has done or would do. It is the outworking of His predetermined plan which He ordained before He made the world. As Paul says in Ephesians,

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,<sup>4</sup> just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love<sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will**,<sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6 NASB)

The whole history of humanity is a stage upon which the drama of redemption is played out for the salvation of God's people. We would not comprehend the light without darkness. We would not be able to see the stars apart from the blackness of space. Likewise, we would not understand or appreciate the **glory** of God's grace without understanding the glory of His **wrath** upon unbelievers.

Furthermore, Paul says, this grand demonstration of mercy applies to both elect Jews and elect Gentiles.

<sup>24</sup> *even us*, whom He also called, **not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.** (Romans 9:23-24 NASB)

Paul now comes full circle back to his original argument in Rom. 9: 6-13. The objections to the sovereignty of God in election and Paul's answers to these objections are found in verses 14-23. But these verses are merely an interruption to Paul's major theme: namely, God's promises have not failed because of Israel's unbelief. The promises of God were never intended for those who were merely fleshly descendants of Abraham. From the very beginning, they were intended only for those whom God had chosen. Isaac was chosen; Ishmael was rejected. Jacob was chosen; Esau was rejected. Most of the Israelites were not chosen, but many Gentiles were chosen. National descent does not guarantee the promise. It is not even necessary (Moo). It really has nothing to do with it. The deciding factor is God's sovereign choice.

Paul will now explore the doctrine of election as it relates to the Gentiles.

He uses two texts in the prophecy of Hosea 1: 10 and 2: 23 to show that the Gentiles are included in the grand demonstration of God's mercy to elect sinners. To get the context, we will look at Hosea 1: 6-11.

Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "**Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel**, that I would ever forgive them. <sup>7</sup> "**But I will have compassion on the house of Judah** and deliver them by the LORD their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen." <sup>8</sup> When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. <sup>9</sup> And the LORD said, "**Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.**" <sup>10</sup> **Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered**; And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "*You are* the sons of the living God." <sup>11</sup> And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be **gathered together, And they will appoint for themselves one leader**, And they will go up from the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:6-11 NASB)

The second child is a daughter named **Lo-ruhamah** (meaning, "she has not obtained compassion") to symbolize that God will no longer have compassion on Israel. This prophecy was not credible to Hosea's audience; for at the beginning of his prophecy, Jeroboam II was still on the throne with undisputable military and economic success. Even toward the end of his prophecy some 30 to 40 years later, the people of Israel thought Hosea was a fool (9: 7).

God will have compassion on Judah, at least for now, but 150 years later they will fall as well. Verse 7 may be a reference to the 185,000 Assyrians put to death by the angel of the Lord in response to Hezekiah's prayer (2 Ki. 19). The third child, a son, is named **Lo-ammi (for you are not my people)**. Therefore, the second and third children are illegitimate, born of whoredom. Although God is rejecting his covenant people, he will not renounce his covenant. There will be a restoration of his people, both of Judah and Israel in which they will have a common ruler. The main question is: When did this restoration take place? Some would interpret the fulfillment during the return of the exiles in the days of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Jehozadak, the priest, in 538 BC under the orders and protection of Cyrus. This interpretation is unlikely.

Although Hosea's message is strictly to Israel, Paul applies it to the influx of elect Gentiles in Rom. 9: 25-26. In the same way that the Gentiles were not the people of God in the Old Covenant, they shall be called the sons of God in the New Covenant. The restoration of fallen Israel was a type of which the calling of the Gentiles into favor is the antitype (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, p. 38). Calvin, Matthew Henry, and Keil, on the other hand, apply the passage in Hosea to the calling of both elect Jews and Gentiles into the church and not to the restoration of Israel as a nation (Calvin, *Hosea*, p. 64; Henry, *Hosea*, p. 1123; Keil, *Hosea*, p. 49). Just because God has cast off his people, this does not imply that his covenant promise has fallen to the ground. God never intended to save the whole ethnic nation.

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel" (Rom. 9: 6).

This last interpretation is supported by the reference in v. 11 to the **one leader** who would only be poorly represented in Zerubbabel (see *Haggai*) but abundantly fulfilled in Christ. Also, the number

of Israelites returning to Jerusalem in 539 BC was relatively few (see *Ezra*), not corresponding to **the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered**.

Hosea 1:10-11 reverses God's judgment upon Israel, and by implication, Judah, with the little word, **Yet**. Despite Israel's spiritual adultery and the judgment of God which follows, God will restore Israel and have compassion on Israel. Israel who was called **Lo-Ammi, not my people**, will once again be called **Ammi, my people**.

Continuing His address to Israel in chapter 2, God says,

<sup>1</sup>Say to your brothers, "Ammi," [*my people*] and to your sisters, "Ruhamah." [*she has received compassion*]

Hosea is prophesying God's treatment of Israel and Judah over a period of hundreds of years, maybe even thousands of years depending on how we interpret Rom. 11. Israel was, indeed, judged. She was completely devastated by the Assyrians and taken into exile in 722 BC. After this, the northern Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist, and Israel became **Lo-Ammi**, not God's people. Judah was devastated by the Babylonians and taken into exile from 605 BC to 587 BC. Nevertheless, Romans 11 could be a prediction of Israel and Judah's restoration which has yet to be fulfilled.

During the exile, Israel was reduced to the same level as the Gentiles who were not the people of God (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*). She had lost her covenantal privileges because of her disobedience.

Beginning in v. 2 of chapter 2 of Hosea, the prophet once again repeats God's judgment of Israel.

<sup>2</sup>"Contend with your mother, contend, For she is **not my wife**, and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her **adultery** from between her breasts, <sup>3</sup>Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst. <sup>4</sup>"Also, **I will have no compassion on her children**, Because they are children of harlotry. (Hosea 2:1-4 NASB)

What follows in 2: 5-13 is a continuation of Israel's judgment if they fail to repent—and they did fail. But in Hosea 2:14 and 3:4-5 we see once again a reversal of God's judgment upon Israel like the reversal we saw in 1: 10-11 and 2: 1.

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar and without ephod or household idols. <sup>5</sup>Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days. (Hos. 3:4-5 NASB)

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness And **speak kindly** to her. (Hosea 2:14 NASB)

God would not renounce His covenant with Israel forever. Like Hosea going after his adulterous wife, God would pursue His adulterous wife, the nation of Israel, and bring her back to Him. After treating her severely during her destruction and exile, he would woo her back to Himself.

"I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In **lovingkindness and in compassion**, (Hosea 2:19 NASB)

"I will sow her for Myself in the land. I **will also have compassion on her** who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were **not My people, 'You are My people!'** And they will say, '*You are my God!*'" (Hosea 2:23 NASB)

Paul's immediate application of this prophecy in Hosea is not to the Jewish people to whom it was originally written, but to the Gentiles. This becomes clear from Rom. 9: 23-24. He speaks of **vessels of mercy...prepared for glory...**

<sup>24</sup> *even* us, whom He also called, **not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.** (Romans 9: 24 NASB)

This verse is followed by Paul's citation from Hosea. **As he says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE'** (v. 25). Once more, we see from Paul's use of the text in Hosea that the forsaken Israelites become a picture or type of the once-forsaken Gentiles. The Gentiles were once **Lo-Ammi**, not the people of God. At one time they were **Lo-Ruhamah**—they had not received the compassion of God.

God did not give the Gentiles the Law, the Covenants, or the promises which He had given the Israelites (Rom. 9: 4). Likewise, the Israelites who were given these things had them taken away from them, reducing them to the same status as Gentiles. Throughout the history of Israel, the Gentiles had remained in spiritual darkness, and God had done little—in comparison to Israel—to eliminate that darkness except by saving a few isolated Gentiles—Rahab the prostitute in Jericho, Ruth the Moabite, Uriah the Hittite, the Assyrians of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah—all of these are representative of other Gentiles whom God saved. But whole nations of Gentiles had remained in spiritual darkness—Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, etc.

From the point of view of God's sovereign election, it seemed as if the Gentiles had not been chosen—they were **not His people** and they **had not received compassion**. But this would change, for God would not overlook the Gentiles forever. The question is: When would it change? The answer, as we have seen already, is found in Hosea 1: 11a.

<sup>11</sup> And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel **will be gathered together**, And they will appoint for themselves **one leader**...

The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy could be none other than the gathering of Israel together under their **one leader**, their Messiah, Jesus Christ. This must be the fulfillment, because the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were never again united into one kingdom with one king after the kingdom was divided during the reign of Rehoboam. But when the Apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, three thousand Jews were converted under one king, the risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

But what does this have to do with the Gentiles? The growth of the church did not stop at Pentecost with only Jewish converts. Not long after Pentecost, the church of Antioch (Acts 13) began to send

missionaries—Paul and Barnabas—to the Gentiles in Asia Minor, and then they went to Achaia and Macedonia, and the rest is history. The Gentiles have now been fully incorporated into the people of God—the church of Jesus Christ. And because of the ingathering of the Gentiles into the church, the number of the sons of Israel, also called the sons of God, are like **the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered**.

For you are **all sons of God** through **faith** in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26 NASB)

Where does this leave the Jewish people? I believe the Hosea passages referring to the reversal of God's anger toward Israel (Hos. 3:4-5; 2:14, 19, 23) are only partially fulfilled. Before the second coming of Christ, the Jewish people will once more return to their God through the preaching of the gospel. This has yet to take place, for even when thousands of Jews were converted at Pentecost and soon afterwards, the Jews as an ethnic people have remained **hardened** in unbelief (Rom. 9) and only a **remnant** had been saved by the time Paul wrote Romans (Rom. 10). This situation will change (Rom. 11).

Paul now turns to Isaiah's prophecy in v. 27

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, **IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED**;" (Romans 9:27 NASB)

But how could the chosen nation be reduced to such a small number of believers? There are two reasons. Paul has already told us the first reason.

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He **hardens** whom He desires. (Romans 9:18 NASB)

The hardening of the nation of Israel—just like the inclusion of the Gentiles—is the sovereign will of God. He does not explicitly answer the question: “Why then does God find fault with unbelievers if no one can resist His will?” Rather, he says, “God does what He pleases, like a potter molding clay.”

But this is not Paul's only answer. There is another reason why the whole elect nation has been reduced to a small remnant of individual Israelites: Israel and Judah did not believe the truth.

FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY." <sup>29</sup> And just as Isaiah foretold, "UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH." (Rom. 9:28-29 NASB)

Drawing once more from the OT prophets, Paul uses a quote from Isaiah to explain why there was only a remnant of Jewish believers. Israel and Judah had been unfaithful in Isaiah's day, like godless Sodom and Gomorrah whom God had utterly destroyed.

Unless the LORD of hosts Had left us a few survivors, We would be like Sodom, We would be like Gomorrah. <sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. (Isa. 1:9-10 NASB)

As we have seen, both Israel and Judah continued their rebellion after the predictions of all the prophets that both nations would be overcome by foreign enemies and taken into exile. Nevertheless, throughout their exile, God reserved a **remnant** of His people according to His **gracious choice** (Rom. 10).

God is sovereign, but man is responsible for his actions. God’s sovereignty is on one side of the coin, and man’s responsibility is on the other. Paul assumes that his audience understands that these two things are not contradictory to one another.

This leads us to the fifth heading which begins with another rhetorical question.

V. The sovereign election of God does not eliminate human responsibility (Rom. 9: 30—10: 21)

<sup>30</sup> **What shall we say then?**

That <b>Gentiles,</b>	A		
who did not <u>pursue</u> righteousness,		B	
<b>attained</b> righteousness,			C
<b>even the righteousness which is by faith;</b>			D
<sup>31</sup> but Israel,	A		
<u>pursuing</u> a law of righteousness,		B	
<b>did not arrive</b> at <i>that</i> law.			C
<sup>32</sup> Why? Because <i>they did not pursue it</i> <b>by faith,</b>			D
but as though <i>it were</i> by works.			
They stumbled over the stumbling stone,			

<sup>33</sup> **just as it is written,**

**"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."**

The Gentiles did not pursue the kind of righteousness taught in the Law of Moses. They had no idea of being in right standing with God through keeping the Law. They didn’t have the special revelation of the Law of Moses, and they did not pursue the special kind of right standing with God which was the religious tradition of the Israelite nation (cf. Murray, *Romans*, p. 43; but also Moo, *Romans*, who takes issue with Murray’s interpretation of “law” in v. 31, p. 626). Surprisingly, however, the Gentiles **attained** the righteousness which they **did not pursue**.

**Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness** reminds us of what Paul had said previously in v. 16.

So then it *does* not *depend* on the man **who wills or the man who runs**, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 9:16 NASB)

The Gentiles were not pursuing the righteousness of God by their own efforts. They were not “running” toward God, but they nevertheless **attained** (or “obtained”) the righteousness of God apart from the law through faith in Jesus Christ.



Israel, on the other hand, pursued righteousness which is through the Law, but failed to attain it. They pursued this righteousness **as though it were by works**. But it was not by works. Indeed, it had never been by works.

For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. (Gal. 3:21b NASB)

This situation continues today with millions of church goers who believe that they are saving themselves through regular church attendance and outward conformity to the moral law. They are pursuing a righteousness by the law while simultaneously stumbling over Christ. On the other hand, those who are not pursuing a salvation **by works** are being pursued by God in the farthest corners of the globe and in countries with the least exposure to the gospel. They have no knowledge of the Mosaic Law, nor have they ever heard the gospel before the one, single time they heard a missionary (Rom. 10). But this is the mystery of providence. God will find and save those who are not **pursuing Him**.

**They stumbled over the stumbling stone** is a reference to Isaiah's prophecy of Israel's rejection of their Messiah.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* **will not be disturbed**. (Isa. 28:16 NASB)

"Then He shall become a **sanctuary**; But to both the houses of Israel, **a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem**. (Isa. 8:14 NASB)

While Christ is a **sanctuary** to all who believe, He became a **stone of stumbling** and a **rock of offense** for Jews. They "tripped" over this Stone in their pursuit of righteousness through law-keeping. The **sanctuary** represented the presence of God with His people. Christ is **Immanuel**, the incarnate embodiment of God dwelling with us (Matt. 1: 23). In the OT, God condescended to live among His sinful people. He continued that humble condescension through the earthly ministry of Christ who stooped low—living in poverty—to dwell with His remnant people among the Jews and to eventually live in all His people, Jew and Gentile, through His Spirit.

But the Jews were **disappointed** with Jesus. He did not come in power and glory, brandishing a steel sword like King David and vanquishing their physical enemies, the Romans. Judas Iscariot himself was disappointed with this seemingly powerless Messiah who did not rally an army to drive Rome out of Judea, even as Mattathias and his sons had driven Antiochus IV Epiphanes out of Judea during the Maccabean Revolt of 167-160 BC. This revolt had begun well, with Mattathias refusing to defile the temple with pagan sacrifices; but it ended with a confusion of the office of priesthood with the office of king. Consequently, the distant priestly successors to Mattathias became worldly and morally compromised. This didn't matter to most Jews, because the success of Judas Maccabeus (son of Mattathias) and the Hasmonean Jews (militaristic) who followed him in ousting Antiochus gave them 75 years of political independence from the Seleucid (Syrian) dynasty. This is what the Jews wanted most of all, a political kingdom rather than freedom from the bondage of sin (cf. my introduction to the Synoptic Gospels).

The world today, for the most part, is also **disappointed** in Jesus. Faith in Christ does not give them worldly wealth or freedom from sickness and sorrow. The health and wealth preachers of Africa and the US have attempted to "correct" this problem by assuring their hearers that Jesus is the answer to their financial and physical woes. If they truly trust in Jesus, these sorrows will melt away. But since they don't melt away, the health and wealth peddlers of a false gospel depend on a steady following of upper middle-class admirers who are flourishing quite well with this "gospel" as well as a revolving door (here one day and gone tomorrow) of lower income people who are finally disillusioned with empty promises of worldly bliss.

But the message and method of the gospel remains unchanged. Jesus did not come to offer us a worldly kingdom, but a kingdom which is **not of this world** (Jn. 18: 36). No one who embraces this Savior will be **disappointed**.

## Romans 10

Brethren,  
my heart's desire  
and my prayer to God  
for them  
is for *their* salvation.  
<sup>2</sup> For I testify about them  
that they have a **zeal for God**,  
but not in accordance with knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> For not knowing  
about **God's righteousness**  
and seeking to establish  
**their own**,  
they did not subject themselves  
to **the righteousness of God**.

Observations:

1. First, Paul was convinced that the Jews who rejected Christ were not saved. His **desire** and **prayer** was for *their salvation*, implying that their salvation had not yet occurred. This observation may appear unnecessary except for the fact that many evangelicals today would consider sincere, orthodox Jews to be saved—as well as sincere Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Before Saul became Paul, he also was sincere, but he was sincerely lost until God met him on the road to Damascus. The Jews under Paul's examination—those who rejected Christ—were sincere in their **zeal for God**, but zeal alone will not save; it must be combined with **knowledge** [*epignōsis*].

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] of God, and we are taking every thought captive to **the obedience of Christ**, (2 Cor. 10:5 NASB)

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] of Him [*that is, Christ*] (Eph. 1:17 NASB)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] of the **Son of God**, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of **Christ**. (Eph. 4:13 NASB)

and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] according to the image of the One who created him—(Col. 3:10 NASB)

who desires all men to be saved and to come to the **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:4 NASB)

with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the **knowledge** [*epignōsis*] of the truth, (2 Tim. 2:25 NASB)

We could multiply verses, but those cited are clear proof of the absolute necessity for understanding the truth content of the gospel in order to be saved. Sincerity in one's religion may win our sympathy, even our admiration, but if the content of that religion is false, no amount of sincerity will be sufficient to save. God will never save anyone through belief in a lie—e.g. that the non-triune god, Allah, is the only God, or that Buddha offers the way to peace and oneness with the universe, or that good performance in an individual's previous life will bump him or her to a higher status in the next life (Hinduism)—or even in the Judaist notion that one can keep the law to be right with God. All these are lies because all religions other than Christianity are merely different forms of salvation by works—**another gospel which is really not another** (Gal. 1:6,9) Being such, they are also forms of idolatry hated by God, and not deserving of our admiration. To be saved, we must believe the truth—the truth about Christ, the truth of the gospel. The Jews' **zeal** was not lacking; their **knowledge** was, and this deficiency was deadly.

Zeal is a neutral quality and can be the greatest vice. It is that to which it is directed that determines its ethical character. The criterion, therefore, is "knowledge" (Murray, p. 48, emphasis mine).

2. Second, although all men are aware of the true God through general revelation, this general revelation is insufficient to reveal the way of salvation (see extended discussion under Rom. 1). Moreover, even though the Jews should have understood a righteousness based on faith through the OT—they were, after all, the physical descendants of Abraham (Rom. 4)—this righteousness must nevertheless be **revealed** through the work of the Holy Spirit. Unless men are born again, they **cannot see the kingdom of God** (Jn. 3: 3). The Jews did not **know** about God's righteousness because a **veil** lay over their hearts (2 Cor. 3:15); therefore, they set out to **establish their own** righteousness based on human merit. This effort to achieve a right status before God through human effort has been the default paradigm of humanity. Their ignorance of God's way of righteousness was culpable (worthy of blame). Although the Law offered life to those who kept the Law, it never once implied that men would be capable of keeping it. Thus, the sacrificial system was always in place, even at the beginning (Gen. 4), and fully developed during the Mosaic covenant to point the way to redeeming grace.

Through the phrase, **God's righteousness**, Paul is alluding to the beginning of his letter to the Romans.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.<sup>17</sup> For in it [*i.e. in the gospel*] the **righteousness of God** is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Rom. 1:16-17 NASB)

3. Third, while the righteousness of God for salvation is good news to the repentant sinner, it is also news which must be **obeyed**. The resistant Jews did not **subject themselves** [*hupotasso*: **place under, obey**] to this means of righteousness (10: 3). The gospel is an invitation from God to be in right relationship to Him by believing in His Son—His virgin birth, His deity, His moral perfection, His atoning sacrifice on the cross, His resurrection. Refusing such an invitation is a serious offense.

For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,<sup>7</sup> and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,<sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution

**to those who do not know God**

and **to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** (2 Thess. 1:6-8 NASB)

We can see from the parallel structure that **those who do not know God** are the same people as **those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. Knowing God is contingent upon obeying the gospel. One cannot sidestep the gospel in his quest to know God. He can only know God through **the power of God**, the gospel (Rom. 1: 16). I belabor this point because of the pernicious doctrine of inclusivism pervading the evangelical church. This doctrine maintains that while a person must be saved by the atoning work of Christ, he does not necessarily have to be knowledgeable of this atoning work, or even the existence of Christ, to be saved.

<sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Some have interpreted this verse to mean that the Law of God in the OT is no longer relevant for those believing in Jesus Christ, something denied in chapters 1 and 2 and throughout Romans.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.<sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,<sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;<sup>32</sup> and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:25-32 NASB)

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.<sup>2</sup> And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. (Rom. 2:1-2 NASB)

Note the references to OT law found in these verses:

1. Verse 25—**Idolatry:**

"You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exod. 20:3 NASB)

2. Verse 26—**Homosexuality:**

'If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. (Lev. 20:13 NASB)

3. Verse 29—**Murder:**

"You shall not murder. (Exod. 20:13 NASB)

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> "But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. <sup>14</sup> "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from My altar, that he may die. (Exod. 21:12-14 NASB)

4. Verse 29, 30—**Deceit** (as well as **gossiping** and **slandering**):

"You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Exod. 20:15-16 NASB)

"If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, <sup>17</sup> then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days. <sup>18</sup> "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, <sup>19</sup> then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. <sup>20</sup> "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. (Deut. 19:16-20 NASB)

5. Verse 29—**Haters of God:**

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deut. 6:5 NASB).

6. Verse 30—**Disobedient to Parents:**

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. (Exod. 20:12 NASB)

"If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, <sup>19</sup> then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. <sup>20</sup> "They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' <sup>21</sup> "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear *of it* and fear. (Deut. 21:18-21 NASB)

The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it. (Prov. 30:17 NASB)

7. Verse 21—**Unmerciful**:

"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matt. 18:35 NASB; from the parable of the unmerciful slave who refused to forgive the debt of his fellow slave)

None of these verses in Romans indicate that the law of God in the OT is no longer relevant or applicable to the NT believer. Paul never says that the NT believer does not have to obey the moral will of God found in the Law, and neither does our Lord.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does the will** of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. (Matt. 7:21 NASB)

If **Christ is the end of the law for righteousness** does not mean that the law is irrelevant for moral behavior, then what does it mean?

One alternative: Christ is the termination point—the end of the road—for all who wish to be in right standing before God. It should not be inferred from the **end of the law for righteousness** that at one point in salvation history the Law was the beginning point of achieving righteousness before God. This would be in clear contradiction of Gal. 3: 21 to the effect that the Law of Moses was never given for the purpose of making men righteous before God. The dispensation of the Law never contradicted or replaced the gracious promise of the Abrahamic covenant: **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.** (Gen. 15: 6)

Paul could mean, therefore, that Christ is the **end** (*telos*) or the termination point of any speculation or hope about earning a right standing before God based on performance. Had performance been a possible way forward in achieving this standing, then Christ would not have gone to the cross. But, in fact, He **did** go to the cross, **ending** any speculation of whether man could achieve righteousness through his own efforts. The sacrifice of Christ was the only way.

A second, more likely alternative is that Christ is the end of the law as a covenant administration for God's elect people. We have seen this kind of language before in Romans 7 and 2 Cor. 3.

Therefore, my brethren, **you also were made to die to the Law** through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (Rom. 7:4 NASB)

But now **we have been released from the Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. (Rom. 7:6 NASB)

For if **that which fades away was with glory**, much more that which remains *is* in glory.<sup>12</sup> Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech,<sup>13</sup> and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently **at the end [telos] of what was fading away.** (2 Cor. 3:11-13 NASB)

The termination point of the Old Covenant, as the controlling administration of God's people, is more explicit in Hebrews.

For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; (Heb. 8:8 NASB)

Recall our earlier discussion concerning the textual variant of this verse which says, **For finding fault, He says to them...**

For finding fault, He saith to them, 'Lo, days come, saith the Lord, and I will complete with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, a New Covenant, (Heb. 8:8 Young's Literal Translation)

[Young's Literal Translation is a translation of the Bible into English, published in 1862. The translation was made by Robert Young, compiler of *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible and Concise Critical Comments on the New Testament* (Wikipedia)]

That is, finding fault with His own covenant, the Old Covenant or Mosaic Covenant, God promises a New Covenant. God ordained from the beginning that the Old Covenant would be a temporary arrangement with His people giving way to the permanent New Covenant.

When He said, "A New Covenant," **He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.** (Heb. 8:13 NASB)

The word, *telos* is usually translated **end** (or termination point) in the NT. In all the verses below, **end** is *telos*.

"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the **end** who will be saved. (Matt. 10:22 NASB)

"But the one who endures to the **end**, he will be saved.<sup>14</sup> "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:13-14 NASB)

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the **end**. (Mk. 13:7 NASB)

and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no **end**." (Lk. 1:33 NASB)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the **end**. (Jn. 13:1 NASB)

who will also confirm you to the **end**, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:8 NASB)

then comes the **end**, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Cor. 15:24 NASB)

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the **end**, (Heb. 6:11 NASB)

whose **end** is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Phil. 3:19 NASB)

The **end** of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. (1 Pet. 4:7 NASB)

'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the **end**, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; (Rev. 2:26 NASB)

Again, since the termination point of the law cannot be interpreted as the irrelevance of the moral law of God for our behavior, it most likely means that Christ is the termination of the Mosaic Law as the current covenant administration for God's people.

But there is a qualification to this statement. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for believers only—to everyone who believes. For those who do not believe, the Law as the only means of being in right standing with God remains in place. Theoretically, there are two ways of being right with God: one is genuine faith in Christ, the other is keeping the law. And since no man can keep it, this leaves only one possible means of salvation, believing in Christ. As I said earlier, except for Christianity, all religions are legalistic. Salvation is acquired by the works of the religious worshipper, not by the works of someone else who vicariously stands in the place of the worshipper as his representative.

<sup>5</sup> For <b>Moses</b>	A		
<u>writes</u>		B	
that the man who <u>practices</u> [ <i>poieō</i> ]			C
<b>the righteousness which is based on law</b>			E
<u>shall live</u>			C
<b>by that righteousness.</b>			E

<sup>6</sup> But <b>the righteousness based on faith</b>	A		
<u>speaks as follows:</u>		B	
"DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART,			
'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?'		C	
(that is, to bring Christ down),			F
<sup>7</sup> or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?'		C	
(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."			F

<sup>8</sup> But <u>what does it say?</u>	B		
"THE WORD IS NEAR YOU,			
IN YOUR MOUTH			
AND IN YOUR HEART "			
—that is, the word of faith			
which we are preaching,		C	



Paul refers to two passages from Moses, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, texts with which the Jewish segment of his audience would be very familiar. (LXX refers to the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint).

'You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> 'So you shall keep [*poiéō*—LXX] My statutes and My judgments, **by which a man may live if he does [*poiéō* —LXX] them**; I am the LORD. (Lev. 18:4-5 NASB)

...if you obey the LORD your God **to keep [*poiéō* —LXX] His commandments and His statutes** which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. <sup>11</sup> "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. <sup>12</sup> "It is not in heaven, that you should say, '**Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?**' <sup>13</sup> "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, '**Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?**' <sup>14</sup> "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. <sup>15</sup> "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. <sup>17</sup> "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. <sup>19</sup> "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you **life and death**, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order **that you may live**, you and your descendants, <sup>20</sup> by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, **that you may live** in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (Deut. 30:10-20 NASB)

In Rom. 10: 5-6 Paul is making a contrast between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the Law. The same Greek verb *poiéō* (“to do” or “practice”) used in Rom. 10:5 is also used in the LXX (Greek translation of OT) in Lev. 18: 4 and 5 and Deut. 30: 10. If a man **keeps, does, or practices the commandments and statutes** as a means of justification, he will **live—IF he is successful in keeping it**. Jesus reiterates this promise to the rich ruler in His effort to expose his self-righteousness.

And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but **if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.**" (Matt. 19:17 NASB)

It seems odd that Paul would use this passage as a reference to **the righteousness of faith** when it appears in its original context to be a reference to the righteousness of the Law.

What did Moses mean when he said, **For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach** (NASB)? The translation of the word, **difficult** (*pala*, Hebrew) is critically important for our interpretation. The KJV translates the word **hidden** and the NKJ uses **mysterious**. Both translations are preferred to the NASB which gives the impression that the Law is not difficult in terms of performance. But Moses is not talking about the difficulty of performance but the difficulty of understanding or comprehension. The Law was not written in “mysterious” or esoteric language which only a select few could understand. The

Law was not written for intellectuals, philosophers, and theologians but for ordinary people: farmers, carpenters, housewives, and children. Keil and Delitzsch translate the text as “hard to grasp or unintelligible” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Deuteronomy*, p. 454). Matthew Henry likewise comments,

“...nor is the commandment within the reach of those only that have a great estate or a refined genius....It is not communicated in a strange language; but it is in thy mouth, that is, in the vulgar tongue that is commonly used by thee....It is not wrapped up in obscure phrases or figures....Thou hast therefore no reason to complain of any insuperable [hard to overcome] difficulty in the observance of it” (*Deuteronomy*, pp. 853-854).

Calvin’s interpretation is similar.

...God does not propound [set forth] to us obscure [hard to understand] enigmas [confusing statements] to keep our minds in suspense, and to torment us with difficulties, but teaches us familiarly whatever is necessary, according to the capacity, and consequently the ignorance of the people...But Moses here invites them to learn, because they had an easy and clear method of instruction set before their eyes....Moses, therefore, declares that the Law is not hard to be understood, so as to demand inordinate fatigue in its study; but that God there speaks distinctly and explicitly, and that nothing is required of them but diligent application (*Deuteronomy*, p. 412).

But Calvin later distinguishes between the easy intelligibility of the Law and its performance.

Does he [Moses] state that the keeping of them is within the compass of our strength? Surely the words convey nothing of the sort; neither can this sense be elicited from them, if his intention be duly weighed. For he merely encourages the Jews, and commands them to be diligent disciples of the Law, because they will easily understand whatever is enjoined [required] by God therein. But the power of performance is a very different thing from understanding (p. 413, emphasis mine).

Dt. 30: 12 is employed by Paul to preach the gospel, not the Law (Rom. 10: 6). In this verse, notice that Paul does not say that **Moses** speaks this way, but that **the righteousness based on faith** (personified) speaks this way. This is understandably confusing since he is quoting directly from Dt. 30:12 in which Moses is speaking about the Law. He also quotes from Lev. 18: 5 which is also a reference to the Law. So how do we make sense of this? The answer is that Paul sometimes uses Scriptural language to express ideas which may be only indirectly related to the subject under discussion. For example, in Rom. 10: 18 he uses a quote from the Psalms to express the idea that the Jews had adequately heard the gospel. The passage, Ps. 19: 4, is talking about the witness of **creation**, not the witness of the **gospel**, but Paul uses it to express the witness of the gospel (see explanation on that verse).

But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD." (Rom. 10:18 NASB)

He is doing the same thing in v. 6, using Scriptural language to express his own ideas. He is not putting the gospel into Moses’ mouth but is simply using Moses’ words to express the gospel (Murray, *Romans, Vol. 2*, p. 52). Moses uses this expression to explain that the words of the Law are not unintelligible or difficult to comprehend; therefore, no one should claim any necessity to

send someone to heaven or across the sea to receive the Law. The word of God was already accessible to them in the form of the written code and in their hearts if they would simply heed it. The question to the Israelites was this: Will you submit to the Law?

In the same way (Rom. 10: 6-8) there is no necessity to send someone up to heaven to bring Christ down from heaven; He has already come down out of heaven in the incarnation. To ask the question, **Who will ascend into heaven?** is a denial of the incarnation. And there is no need to descend into the abyss (the place of the dead) to bring Christ up from the dead because He has already risen from the dead. To ask the question, **Who will descend into the abyss?** is a denial of the resurrection (Murray, p. 53). Just as the Law was intelligible and easy to understand in the form it was given, the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is also intelligible and easy to understand. It is not hidden to us. It takes no special intelligence or education to understand the basic message of the gospel—thank God!—and it is easily accessible to Paul's audience and to most of the world today with some exceptions. So, also, Haldane.

The language, then, that describes the clearness of the revelation of the precepts of God to Israel, was a figure of the clearness of the revelation of the Gospel.

Moses gave the Israelites a law which was to abide with them for their constant instruction. They were not obliged to send a messenger to heaven to learn how they were to serve God, nor to search out wisdom by their own understanding. Nor had they to send over the sea to distant countries, like the heathens, for instruction. God by Moses taught them everything with respect to His worship and service in the fullest, clearest, and most practical manner. This was a shadow of the clearness of the revelation of the righteousness received by faith, which we are not left to search for by means through which it never can be obtained. Salvation is brought nigh to us, being proclaimed in the Gospel by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word is in our mouth (Robert Haldane, *Romans*, p. 505, emphasis mine).

The question is the same to us as it was to the ancient Israelites: Will we submit to that which God has clearly revealed—in this case, the gospel, not the Law? Do we believe that God became a man in the person of Jesus, and do we believe that he died and rose again from the dead? If we believe this, then we will be saved by believing.

What has Christ done for us? The way of salvation cannot be through the law—not because the law never promised life, but because men are sinners who cannot keep the law. Far from bringing life, the Law brings a curse. Recall the curses of the covenant given in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 and Paul's words in Galatians.

Christ redeemed us from **the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"—(Gal. 3:13 NASB)

In Romans 7: 10 Paul confesses, **and this commandment, which was to result in life proved to result in death for me.** The Law promised life to those who kept it but proved to result in death because none kept it, even a rigorous Pharisee like Paul. When he realized that the essence of law-keeping was not merely outward action, but inward attitude, motive, and goal, he realized that he had broken the Law and incurred its **curse** of death.

But God did not leave Israel simply with the Law. He also gave them the gospel (good news) in the pictures and types of the sacrificial system.

For indeed we have had **good news** preached to us, **just as they also**; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; <sup>5</sup> and again in this *passage*, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." <sup>6</sup> Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and **those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience**, <sup>7</sup> He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." (Heb. 4:2-7 NASB)

When they broke the Law, the Israelites could come in faith to the gospel by bringing their animal sacrifices upon which the guilt of their sins was imputed. If they did this sincerely, not as a mere liturgical formality, God would forgive their sins provisionally until such time as Christ the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice would take upon Himself their sin and God's wrath against it.

<sup>9</sup> that if you <b>confess with your <u>mouth</u></b>	A		
<u>Jesus as Lord,</u>		B	
and <b>believe in your heart</b>	A'		
<u>that God raised Him from the dead,</u>		B'	
you will be saved;			C
<sup>10</sup> for <b>with the heart a person believes,</b>	A'		
resulting in righteousness,			C
and <b>with the <u>mouth</u> he confesses,</b>	A		
resulting in salvation.			C

<sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

The **mouth** and the **heart** comprehend the entirety of the believer's profession. I believe Paul is using them metonyms or substitutions for one's faith. The **mouth** is an organ of the body by which a person speaks his confession, but we must not limit the meaning of the verb, **confess**, to a mere verbal assent to the truth of the gospel apart from a total commitment including the whole body. **For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.** (1 Cor. 6:20). There is no dichotomy (separation or contradiction) in Paul's thinking between obedience to Christ with the mind and obedience with the body. The one implies the other; they are mutually exclusive. Likewise, the **heart** is another metonym (substitution) representing the total commitment of the mind and consciousness. It is the physical organ representative of man's inner being and total worldview and commitment. Packer defines **heart** as "the center and focus of one's inner personal life: the source of motivation, the seat of passion, the spring of all thought processes and particularly of conscience" (*Rediscovering Holiness*, p. 22).

To **confess** [*homologéō*] Christ means to order your life and worldview around Christ Jesus as the very center of your being and your purpose in life. To **believe in your heart** supports the view that the confession is not a mere liturgical gesture by which one joins a religious sect. It is total commitment, or it is nothing—however much it is true that our commitment falls pathetically short of God's perfection. Genuine confession is from the **heart** and does not convey the idea of a

mechanical repetition of the Apostle's Creed but the daily confession before men that one believes in Christ and is willing to obey all that He has taught His disciples until the end. One's behavior and speech before men, therefore, is indispensable to this confession (cf. Matt. 10: 32-33)

"Therefore <u>everyone</u>	A			
who <b>confesses</b> [ <i>homologéō</i> ]		B		
Me			C	
<u>before men,</u>				D
	A			
will also <b>confess</b> [ <i>homologéō</i> ]		B		
him			C	
<u>before My Father who is in heaven.</u>				D
<sup>33</sup> "But <u>whoever</u>	A			
<b>denies</b>		B		
Me			C	
before men,				D
	A			
will also <b>deny</b>		B		
him			C	
before My Father				
who is in heaven.				D

Confessing **Jesus as Lord** includes the willingness to **obey** everything He has commanded us (Matt. 28: 18-20), inclusive of every moral commandment in the OT interpreted through the lens of the NT scriptures. Remember that the first major discourse in the Gospel of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus expounds the proper meaning of the Law, inclusive of the case laws of Exodus through Deuteronomy (cf. Matt. 5: 31-34, in which Jesus refers to case laws in Deut. 24: 1, Lev. 19: 12, and Num. 30: 2). Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, and what the Law could not do for us in terms of justification or sanctification, God did by sending His son so that we could live holy lives, not living according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8: 3). The greatest of all the commandments is to love God with all of one's heart and the second is like unto it, to love our neighbor as ourselves. If one fulfills these two, he has kept the whole law (Rom. 13: 9; Matt. 22: 35-40).

Believing **that God raised Him from the dead** implies faith in the entire truth concerning who Christ is and what He accomplished on the cross. By dying, Christ proved that He was truly human. By raising Christ from the dead, God the Father proved that He was fully satisfied with Christ's atoning sacrifice. Otherwise, He would have left Him in the grave. By accepting this sacrifice, God proved that Christ was the perfect Son of God pleasing to Him in every way. But who can be perfectly pleasing to God except God—the God-man, Jesus Christ? Who is good, but God? (Matt. 19: 17). We could continue with this line of reasoning, but we must see from Paul's inclusion of the resurrection—**and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead**—that faith in Christ is incomplete without belief in the resurrection and that the resurrection is essential to the gospel message.

Theologians may split hairs about which biblical truths must be believed to be saved. Must one understand comprehensively how Christ can be both God and man simultaneously, or must he

simply believe that He is both God and man? Must one have substantial knowledge of the OT sacrificial system to really believe that Christ died for His sins? Must one intellectually sort out the profound truths of the three distinct persons of the Trinity or God's sovereignty and man's responsibility? If so, then there must be some minimum intelligence quotient (IQ) for a person to be a genuine Christian. But according to the testimony of the Old and New Testaments, this cannot be so.

But Jesus said, "Let the **children** alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matt. 19:14 NASB)

and said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF **INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES** YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF?'" (Matt. 21:16 NASB)

From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. (Ps. 8:2 NASB)

The simplest minds can understand the gospel. One does not have to have exhaustive knowledge to have sufficient knowledge unto salvation. Yet, it is also clear from the "knowledge" verses cited above that **knowledge** (*gnōsis* or *epignōsis*) is essential for everyone who has the mental capacity to receive it. (We will not discuss, at this point, the question of the salvation of infant children or the mentally ill. Cf. *The Theology of Infant Salvation* by R.A. Webb.) To put it simply, Jesus' sheep will hear His voice and follow Him. They are His sheep because they were given to Him by the Father, and none will perish due to insufficient knowledge of the truth.

Genuine confession results in **salvation**; genuine belief results in **righteousness**. However, I don't believe Paul is making a distinction between **salvation** and **righteousness**, nor is he prioritizing either activity of **confess** or **believe**. **Confess** is mentioned first in v. 9, but **believe** is mentioned first in v. 10 (Murray). Both **confess** and **believe** lead to **salvation** in v. 9 while **believe** leads to **righteousness** and **confess** to **salvation** in v. 10. There is no salvation without the declaration of a right standing before God (**righteousness**), and there is no **righteousness** without the result of **salvation**. Paul thinks and writes as a Hebrew, and the constructions of his sentences with multiple parallels demonstrates his Hebrew heritage.

Whatever way the verse is dissected, **whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed** (v. 11), the second time that Paul has cited Isa. 28: 16 (cf. 9: 33; see above). To Paul's dismay, the Jewish people for whom Paul would have wished himself accursed for their sake (9: 3) had stumbled over Christ in their search for a different kind of Messiah. They had been **disappointed**, as well as **disturbed**, by this simple carpenter who was more concerned with holiness than political power (see above). But as for those who believe in this lowly Savior, **a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**, born into poverty, they will most assuredly **not be disappointed**. With this second citation of Isa. 28: 16, Paul is reaching out to those Jewish readers who may still be on the edge of saving faith. "Believe me when I tell you," Paul pleads, "You will not be disappointed!"

<sup>12</sup> For there is **no distinction**  
between Jew and Greek  
for **the same Lord**

	<u>is Lord of all,</u>			
	abounding in riches	A		
	for <b>all</b> who <b>call</b> on Him		B	
<sup>13</sup> for	" <b>WHOEVER</b> WILL <b>CALL</b> ON THE NAME OF THE LORD	B		
	WILL BE SAVED."		A	
	<sup>14</sup> <u>How</u> then will they <b>call</b> on Him		B	
	in whom they have not believed?			C
	<u>How</u> will they believe in Him		B	
	whom they have not heard?			C
	And <u>how</u> will they hear		B	
	without a preacher?			C
	<sup>15</sup> <u>How</u> will they preach		B	
	unless they are sent?			C
	<u>Just as it is written,</u>			
	"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE			
	WHO BRING <u>GOOD NEWS</u> OF GOOD THINGS!"			
<sup>16</sup> However,	they did not all heed			
	THE <u>GOOD NEWS</u> .			
	<u>for Isaiah says,</u>			
	"LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR <u>REPORT</u> ?"			
<sup>17</sup> So	faith <i>comes</i>			
	from hearing,			
	and hearing			
	by the word of Christ.			
<sup>18</sup> But I say,	surely <u>they have never heard, have they?</u>		A	
	Indeed <u>they have</u>			B
	"THEIR VOICE		C	
	HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH,			D
	AND THEIR WORDS			C
	TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."			D
<sup>19</sup> But I say,	surely <u>Israel did not know, did they?</u>		A	
	First <b>Moses says,</b>		B	
	"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS		A	
	BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION,		C	
	BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING			D
	WILL I ANGER YOU."			D
	WILL I ANGER YOU."		C	
<sup>20</sup> And <b>Isaiah</b> is very bold and <b>says,</b>	"I WAS FOUND		A	
	BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,		C	
	I BECAME MANIFEST			D
	TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."		C	
				D

<sup>21</sup> But as for Israel **He says,** A  
"ALL THE DAY LONG  
I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS C  
TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE. D

Observations from the text:

### *1. Hereditary Lineage is Not Necessary*

<sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction  
between Jew and Greek  
for the same *Lord*  
is Lord of all,

**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same *Lord is Lord of all* is the sixth time, so far in this epistle, that Paul has mentioned the distinction between Greeks and Jews. His insistence each time is that there is **no distinction** so far as the judgement of God and the promise of the gospel were concerned. The only distinction was the order of priority both in receiving the gospel and in receiving the just retribution of God. The blessings of the gospel came sooner to the Jews because of their priority in election as a nation, but they are also first in priority for the curses of unbelief.**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** (Rom. 1:16 NASB)

*There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of **the Jew first and also of the Greek,**<sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**<sup>11</sup> For there is **no partiality** with God. (Rom. 2:9-11 NASB)

But if you bear the name "**Jew**" and rely upon the Law and boast in God...You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?<sup>24</sup> For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE **GENTILES** BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. (Rom. 2:17, 23-24 NASB)

For **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly,** nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.<sup>29</sup> But **he is a Jew who is one inwardly;** and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom. 2:28-29 NASB)

In chapter 11, Paul will engage in a rather lengthy description of the prospects of the ethnic nation; but thus far, he has said nothing that gives them any impression of God's continuing favor upon an unbelieving, disobedient people. He reserves any optimism for chapter 11. For now, he makes it clear that professing Jewish Christians should not in any way become high-minded against their Gentile brothers that they somehow enjoy a special status before God on the basis of Jewish lineage. We may now emphasize the word **whoever**.

<sup>13</sup> for "**WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.**"

### *2. Human Response to the Gospel is Necessary*



We will now emphasize the words, **will call**.

<sup>12b</sup> *abounding in riches* for all who call on Him

<sup>13</sup> for "WHOEVER **WILL CALL** ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

The **riches** of the kingdom of God are not reserved for Jews but are abundant **for all who call on Him**, both Jews and Greeks. While emphasizing sovereign election in chapter 9, chapter 10 emphasizes man's responsibility to believe the gospel. Although it is not **the man who wills or the man who runs** that constrains God's gracious choice in election; nevertheless, election does not eliminate the necessity of believing the message, and nowhere in his epistles does Paul ever demonstrate any inherent contradiction between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Chapter 9 would have been a good place to attempt a detailed explanation, but one is not forthcoming from that chapter. Instead, the privileges of divine sovereignty suffice for Paul's answer. We will discuss man's responsibility to believe more in detail later.

### ***3. Discernible Content in the Gospel Message is Necessary***

We will now emphasize the words, **on the name of the Lord**.

<sup>13</sup> for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Since men cannot know God in a saving way through general revelation, the proclamation of the gospel is essential in revealing the plan of salvation exclusively in Jesus Christ. The necessity of a clear theological message is also evident in Paul's thematic statement in Rom. 1: 16.

For I am not ashamed of **the gospel**, for it is **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16 NASB)

The **gospel** is good news (*euangelion*), a term which begs the obvious question: Good news about what? The proclamation of the gospel involves **discernible content** about what constitutes "good news". It is **good news about Christ**, God in the flesh, dying for sinners. "God exists" is **NOT news**, and for many it is not even **good news**; most people would prefer that the God of the Bible didn't exist. Everyone knows that God exists as well as something of His eternal attributes—the plain meaning of Romans 1: 18-21. It is also true that most sinners **suppress the truth in unrighteousness**.

But if the **good news** is that Christ has died for sinners, this naturally leads to another question, "Why did Christ have to die?" The answer to this question is "bad news". But without this bad news, the good news will be unintelligible or incoherent. The bad news is God's inevitable judgment against sinners, and although intuitively or innately understood by all (Romans 1: 18-19), it must be more clearly explained from the special revelation of Scripture.

I am not of the opinion that this bad news will be seen by most people in the world as totally alien and absurd despite the current trend toward an unbiblical "contextualization" in which the gospel is expressed in ways calculated not to offend people of other faith systems. After all, we have

already seen from Romans 1: 19-20 that the being and nature of the true God has been revealed in creation and has been **clearly seen**. They also know that those who live ungodly lives are worthy of death (Rom. 1: 32). Contextualization, rightly understood, simply means we must communicate the content of the gospel—unaltered in its basic meaning—in a manner best comprehended by our audience, however offensive it may be. (For example, Paul preached to the philosophers in Athens in a manner quite different to those in the Jewish synagogues.) Nevertheless, we should expect the comprehensive presentation of the gospel to be offensive. It is inherently offensive to proud, self-righteous sinners—and everyone is self-righteous.

But not only have God's benevolent attributes been seen, but also his **wrath** against sin and the terrible prospect of his judgment.

For the wrath of God **is revealed from heaven** against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Rom. 1:18 NASB)

and although they **know** the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are **worthy of death**, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:32 NASB)

Therefore, apart from any professed agnosticism ("I don't know") about the judgement of God, people are fully aware of God's justice and retribution. It is built into their nature as the image-bearers of God. They often even applaud this retribution toward others (thieves, murderers, rapists, sex-traffickers, etc.) whom they believe are evil and deserving of God's wrath while unwilling to recognize themselves as evil (Lk. 18: 11-13; the self-righteous Pharisee).

One must **call** specifically **on Him**, even **the name of the Lord**, Jesus Christ, not upon some generic god known by many names. God has forever been **jealous** for His own name, and He will not give His glory to another god or another name.

—for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, **whose name is Jealous**, is a jealous God— (Exod. 34:14 NASB)

"I am the LORD, **that is My name**; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. (Isa. 42:8 NASB)

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, '**What is His name?**' What shall I say to them?"<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM**"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '**I AM** has sent me to you.'" (Exod. 3:13-14 NASB)

The very name of God, **I AM**, implies that He is **jealous**, like a husband who finds his wife cheating on him. He is righteously jealous of anyone who would intrude upon his marriage and the loyalty owed to him alone by the wife. (This would also apply to wives whose husbands are unfaithful.) **I AM** implies that God is God, and that there is no other god—no other husband of His people. Thus, His name is **jealous** (Ex. 34: 14).

"To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; **there is no other besides Him.** (Deut. 4:35 NASB)

"Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; **there is no other.** (Deut. 4:39 NASB)

Taking the name of the Lord in vain is often interpreted as the rash use of God's name as an expletive or curse word. It certainly includes this sin, but there is more to taking God's name in vain than this. The third commandment is closely related to the first commandment: **You shall have no other gods before me.** In keeping both these commandments, we must ascribe to God the glory and attributes which are due His name. He alone must be worshipped as the only God, Savior, and Creator. To ascribe creation and salvation to another god is not only to take His name in vain but to have some other god **before Him**—i.e. in His presence. The stories of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and the ark of the Lord in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam. 5) illustrate God's jealousy for His own name. The prophets of Baal were slaughtered; and Dagon, the god of the Philistines, was found beheaded and his hands amputated. No other god can stand **before** the true God. God's jealousy for His own name will not allow of any syncretism or mixture of other religions with the only true religion.

"You will be **hated** by all **because of My name**, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matt. 10:22 NASB)

"But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death,<sup>17</sup> and **you will be hated** by all **because of My name.**<sup>18</sup> "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. (Lk. 21:16-18 NASB)

No Christian was ever **hated** or **put to death** in the Roman arenas for worshipping both Christ and the Roman gods. They were put to death for worshipping Christ exclusively and for flatly refusing to acknowledge any other god, including any Caesar who claimed to be god. Like Daniel's three friends who refused to bow before the statue of Nebuchadnezzar, Christians refused to bow before marble statues of Caesar. And also like Daniel's three friends, they were looking for God's approval rather than the approval of men.

Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing [*homologeo*] Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue;<sup>43</sup> **for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.** (Jn. 12:42-43 NASB)

"For whoever is **ashamed of Me and My words** in this adulterous and sinful generation, **the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him** when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mk. 8:38 NASB)

"But whoever **denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father** who is in heaven. (Matt. 10:33 NASB)

**Whoever denies Me**, Jesus says—not Allah, Buddha, Vishnu, or any other god known by name. The inclusivist error suggests that one may remain a Muslim in good standing at his favorite mosque. He would

have no necessary occasion of denying the name of Jesus, since Jesus is accepted as a prophet inferior to Mohammed. The theory makes martyrdom for the faith a arguable question.

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.<sup>24</sup>" **For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.** (Lk. 9:23-24 NASB)

If we endure, we will also reign with Him; **If we deny Him, He also will deny us;** (2 Tim. 2:12 NASB)

The Apostle Peter knew what was at stake in proclaiming **the name** of Jesus as the only Savior, for Caesar Augustus had been proclaimed the divine Savior of the Roman Empire before Christ was born. Therefore, risking his life, Peter declared,

**"And there is salvation in no one else;** for there is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NASB)

Moreover, Paul declared to the Athenian philosophers that although God had **overlooked the times of ignorance** in which men worshipped man-made idols of gold, silver, or stone, He was now demanding that everyone should repent of their idolatry. Why? Because He had **furnished proof** that He would judge men for their false worship by raising Christ from the dead.

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent,<sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 NASB)

Paul was not implying that God had not punished anyone in hell before the advent of Christ. He certainly had (Rom. 1). But rather, unbelievers would now be even more culpable (blameworthy) before God since God the Son had become flesh, died on the cross, and risen from the dead. All who hear this message and reject it will receive greater judgment. Unreached unbelievers who never hear it will be judged with the same punishments of pagan unbelievers before Christ's first advent.

Despite the possibility, indeed likelihood, of martyrdom, Jesus insisted on the necessity of boldly proclaiming Him exclusively as Lord and His words as true; otherwise, He would be **ashamed** of any half-hearted believer when He returned. For those who claim that sincere Muslims can be saved while worshipping Allah in Muslim mosques, we must ask: What philosophical and exegetical gymnastics justify their position? Devout Muslims themselves are not so understanding of those who claim the deity of Christ or even His resurrection. According to the above texts, no Muslim can be saved by secretly believing in Jesus as the exclusive Lord and Savior while publicly proclaiming Allah as the one true God. Jesus would be ashamed of Him when He returned. The Quranic text below is unambiguously opposed to attributing divinity to Jesus.

Then, groups of the Christians disagreed in regards to Jesus. Some of them say, "He is a god", and some say, "He is the son of God", and others say, "He and his mother are both gods", so woe be to those who oppress themselves by attributing godhood to Jesus, or sonship, or saying that he is one of the Trinity! Woe be to them from a painful punishment that awaits them on the Day of Judgement. (Abridged Explanation of the Quran, quran.com 43:65, emphasis mine).

There may be shades of meaning in the word **ashamed** in Mk. 8: 38 and **denies** in Matt. 10: 33a, but we must admit that Christians being martyred in the first through the fourth century in Rome were not inclined to justify Caesar worship with the rationalization that "in their hearts" they were really worshipping Jesus. They were willing to die because they were not willing to admit of any divine competitor to Jesus Christ. The martyrdom of Christians for the last 2000 years from the Roman gladiatorial arenas, to the fire pits of Uganda where kings roasted Christians alive in the late 1800's, to this very day in Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and throughout the 10-40 window is meaningless nonsense apart from the plain meaning of Jesus' words. No Christian has ever been killed for worshipping a generic god but for claiming that all other gods are false imaginations.

Therefore, just as faith without works is a contradiction in terms, so is faith without confession of the exclusive lordship and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Commenting on Rom. 10: 9-10, Carson says,

We are a long way from an abstract "faith principle" that does not have Jesus as its content. On the face of it, Paul thinks of Jesus not only as an ontological necessity, but as an epistemological necessity...(The Gagging of God—Christianity Confronts Pluralism, p.312)

Carson is alluding to the inclusivist claims that although the person and work of Christ is necessary for salvation, the conscious understanding and belief in Christ and His work is not essential (see Excursus on inclusivism at the end of chapter 10).

Paul did not go on to list a host of other basic Christian fundamentals that are necessary. I do not believe that he intends to be exhaustive here, but the brevity of the list seems to imply that theological depth is not a requirement for salvation. The simplest believer can intelligently assimilate the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved without understanding the more complicated doctrines of the Christian faith; otherwise, young children and the mentally handicapped would be hopelessly beyond the reach of salvation, as would have been the thief on the cross. The believer need not have an **exhaustive** understanding of his faith to have a **sufficient** understanding of his faith; otherwise, none of us would be saved, for no one possesses this exhaustive understanding. But the very fact that an intelligent grasp of specific content is included in the Christian confession proves that the impossibility of exhaustive knowledge is no excuse for denying epistemological necessity—namely, the necessity of the true knowledge of Christ, His person and work. People will not be saved by calling upon Allah, Buddha, Shiva, or Vishnu. God is **jealous** for His **own** name, and no one will be held guiltless for **taking His name in vain** by calling upon another name for salvation, the very idolatry for which the twin sisters, Israel and Judah, were forced into exile.

Corroborating evidence for the necessity of true epistemological content is found in Paul's anguished letter to the Galatians. It is clear from the very beginning of the letter that the church's desertion of the true gospel was equivalent to the desertion of God Himself.

I am amazed that you are **so quickly deserting Him** who called you by the grace of Christ, **for a different gospel**; <sup>7</sup> which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say

again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!  
(Gal. 1:6-9 NASB)

The context of Paul's warning was the legalistic message of the Judaizers who believed that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient for salvation; one must also keep the law of Moses by submitting to circumcision. Thus, while nothing must be subtracted from the message of the gospel, nothing must be added to this gospel, either. Otherwise, the gospel becomes a non-gospel—“**a different gospel...which is really not another**”—that is, a gospel which is not **good news**.

Quite clearly, Paul did not believe that such a “gospel” could convey the essential informational content to lead one to a saving knowledge of God; otherwise, he would not have been so vehemently opposed to anyone who promoted it, even pronouncing a curse upon anyone who preached such a gospel. Here we find a clear example of Paul's unwillingness to recognize any message which strayed from the fundamental sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Conversely, he was more than willing to recognize the authenticity of the message of others who were **preaching Christ** with impure motives to make him jealous.

Some, to be sure, are **preaching Christ** even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;<sup>16</sup> the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;<sup>17</sup> the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.<sup>18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is proclaimed**; and **in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice**, (Phil. 1:15-18 NASB)

Thus, the authenticity and accuracy of the message did not depend on the motive or purity of heart behind the message. It depended on the content delivered, resulting in the salvation of those who heard it. Lest we believe that Paul's curse applied exclusively to those who preached a false gospel and not to those who believed such a gospel, we have only to look further.

And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.<sup>4</sup> You have been **severed from Christ**, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have **fallen from grace**. (Gal. 5:3-4 NASB)

If indeed righteousness is based on keeping the law, symbolized by receiving circumcision, then Christ is no benefit to them. If we must add our circumcision, baptism, obedience to social or cultural norms, obedience to God's law, or anything else to the work of Christ, then His work is unnecessary since the critical, deciding factor in our salvation is not His work but our work. Hence, Christ's atonement is no benefit to us (Gal. 2: 21). More forcefully, if anyone wishes to rely on circumcision, baptism, church attendance, generosity, or to rely on any personal merit of his own, he must then comply with the whole law (v. 3). We are not at liberty to pick and choose which commandments of God we wish to keep and which we wish to ignore. The result of such a message is salvation by works, rendering grace null and void.

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice.<sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, **otherwise grace is no longer grace**. (Rom. 11:5-6 NASB)

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, **then Christ died needlessly.**" (Gal. 2:21 NASB)

The beauty of the Christian religion is that Christ is the all-sufficient Savior, providing everything God requires for the salvation of his people. In this respect, Christianity is unique among other religions which are invariably based upon human performance. Therefore, any gospel worthy of the name must be the gospel that bears the good news that God in the flesh came into the world, died for sinners, and rose again.

#### 4. *Heralds or Messengers are Necessary*

<sup>14</sup> <u>How</u> then will they <b>call</b> on Him	B	
in whom they have not believed?		C
<u>How</u> will they <b>believe</b> in Him	B	
whom they have not heard?		C
And <u>how</u> will they <b>hear</b>	B	
without a preacher?		C
<sup>15</sup> <u>How</u> will they <b>preach</b>	B	
unless they are sent?		C

In a series of rhetorical questions demanding negative answers, Paul lays out the end goal of the missionary enterprise and four necessary steps in reverse order leading to this goal. The end goal is calling upon the name of the Lord—to **call on Him** (v. 14)—a goal that will not be achieved apart from the four necessary steps leading to it. How, then, Paul asks, can people call upon Christ unless they **believe** in Him? Thus, the last necessary step before **calling upon** the Lord is **believing**.

#### Step 4: **Believing** —————→ **Goal: Calling upon the Lord**

The necessity of calling on **the name of the Lord** (v. 13) constricts or limits the object of the verb **believed** that Paul has mentioned in v. 14. Paul is not concerned for the Jews or the Gentiles to call upon any kind of god or deity of one's choosing as if all roads lead to heaven, but to call upon the true and living God. And to call upon this God, one must direct his call (petition) to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the only mediator between God and man. ("**no one comes to the Father but through Me** Jn. 14:6). **Call on** is *epikaléō* or **call upon**. The same Greek verb is used in the Septuagint, LXX (Greek translation) of Isaiah 55:6.

Seek the LORD while He may be found; **Call upon** [*epikaléō*—LXX] Him while He is near. (Isa. 55:6 NASB)

The parallel terms in Isaiah indicate that **seek** and **call upon** are equivalent. Therefore, to **call on** the Lord means to put one's trust in Him or petition His help, and this requires faith in Him. But one cannot put faith in someone in whom he does not **believe**. The unbelief of Israel was the result of their blind skepticism that Jesus could possibly be their Messiah. Surely the promised Messiah would not have yielded himself to the curses of the covenant by hanging on a cross (Gal. 3: 13). Gentiles would have trouble believing in someone who (1) claimed to be God in the flesh, (2) claimed to die for their sins, and (3) was resurrected from the dead (cf. Acts 17: 18).

<sup>18</sup>And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—**because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.** <sup>19</sup>And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming?...<sup>32</sup>Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." (Acts 17:32 NASB)

Thus, the cross was not credible to most people, either to Jews or to Gentiles; and this "unbelievable" gospel requires the necessity of messengers who would proclaim Christ unashamedly with passion and confidence. The Holy Spirit would then use this proclamation as the means of producing belief in this "unbelievable gospel". This leads Paul to step 3 in the missionary enterprise: **hearing**.

### **Step 3: Hearing → Step 4: Believing → Goal: Calling upon the Lord**

How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?

People cannot **believe** in someone **whom they have not heard**, and since it will not be Christ preaching the gospel in person, this implies that the messenger or preacher may be considered as Christ Himself speaking (Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, p. 58). To the extent that the gospel is accurately and faithfully communicated, Paul presents this communication as if it were coming directly from Christ Himself. This puts a tremendous responsibility upon those who dare to preach and teach the word of God. Their proclamation, if accurately conveyed, is the word of Christ; Christ is preaching through the messenger. If it is inaccurately and carelessly preached, those who hear it may be hindered from entering the kingdom of God.

Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. (1 Tim. 5:22 NASB)

Paul warns Timothy not to appoint elders too hastily, including those who are responsible for the instruction of the congregation. To do so would implicate (involve) him in the sins of those elders who may fall into serious sin or who teach the word inaccurately. Not everyone is called to teach others. But the verse also indirectly applies to anyone who presents the gospel in evangelism. When we are sharing the gospel, we must attempt to the best of our ability to "get it right." We must not be careless in our presentation which may mislead others into thinking that they are saved when they may be lost. Conversely, we must not strip someone of their assurance of salvation by presenting a legalistic message.

**Whom they have not heard** also places limitations upon the content of the message being delivered. People must **hear** specifically about **Christ as the exclusive way to God (I am the way)** the clear implication of Paul's address in Athens in which all other gods were discredited.

So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. <sup>23</sup>"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' **Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.** <sup>24</sup>"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, **does not dwell in temples made with hands;** <sup>25</sup> **nor is He served by human**



**hands, as though He needed anything**, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; (Acts 17:22-25 NASB)

Far from accommodating his message to the Athenians general understanding of deity, Paul tells them that their conception of God was fundamentally flawed. **What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.** Their worship was based upon insufficient information. If we consider Paul's address on the Areopagus along with Romans 1, we must conclude that although the Athenian philosophers **knew** something of the being and attributes of God and were for that reason **without excuse** for their **ignorance**, nevertheless, they **suppressed** what they knew about God in **unrighteousness**. Even what they knew about God became distorted and twisted so that it no longer resembled the truth. We have already seen from Romans 1 that although all men know something about the true God from creation, even his true nature and attributes, they purposely choose to worship a god of their making. This true knowledge of God from creation was, and continues to be, ineffective in bringing men into a saving relationship with God, not because the information is deficient in any way, but because men suppress this truth through vain speculation. Something else must be provided to bring them into this relationship. This "something else" is the special revelation of the gospel which must be **heard**, leading Paul to step 2 in the necessary steps to calling upon the name of the Lord.

**Step 2: Preaching → Step 3: Hearing → Step 4: Believing**  
**→ Goal: Calling upon the Lord**

And how will they hear **without a preacher**?

The necessity of **hearing** will not be achieved without the efforts of those who proclaim Christ, **preachers** (or "heralds", *kerusso*). Contrary to the intuitive knowledge of a supreme being common to all men through the medium of creation, the knowledge of Christ must be communicated through the medium of human messengers or heralds. The rhetorical question: **And how will they hear without a preacher**, like all the others, demands a negative answer: They cannot hear Christ without Christ communicating through His messenger. The word **preacher** should not be limited to those who are ordained as pastors and elders, a Roman Catholic misconception but not an evangelical understanding of the text.

Anyone who communicates the message of Christ accurately—although not perfectly—may be considered a herald of the gospel. Stephen, chosen to distribute food to the needy in Jerusalem, was **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit** (Acts 6: 5), and **performing great wonders and signs among the people** (Acts 6: 8). He was also a powerful evangelist and became the first Christian martyr (Acts 7). After Saul began persecuting the church, Luke records that Christians in Jerusalem became **scattered**. Moreover, **and those who had been scattered went about preaching [euaggelizo] the word** (Acts 8:4 NASB) according to Jesus' prediction.

<sup>8</sup>but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses [*martus*] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NASB)

The word for **preaching** in Acts 8: 4 is not the same as that in Rom. 10: 14 (*kerusso*); however, I don't think we must determine whether the people preaching the word were "ordained" preachers.

The context does not lead us to this conclusion. The persecuted church in Jerusalem was made up of ordinary people who became the targets of Saul's campaign to stamp out Christianity. When this happened, they followed Jesus' instructions in Matt. 10: 23, **But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.** And as they were fleeing, they were preaching to anyone who would listen to them telling them the reason for their flight. They became **preachers** or heralds of the gospel.

This brings up another question of whether a person can be saved merely by reading the Bible. The answer is yes. The Holy Spirit is not constrained to speak exclusively through the human medium but may also illumine the minds of those who read His word rather than hear His word. Countless stories have been told of those who have been saved by reading a Gideon's Bible in a lonely hotel room. We may not limit the way God uses the Word of Christ. We must also remember that Paul wrote in a time before the invention of the printing press when every copy of the Bible had to be meticulously and laboriously reproduced one word at a time through a human copier. Very few people in the first century would ever have an opportunity to read the Bible privately. They would have to hear it read publicly.

At the same time, we must not conclude that preaching, teaching, witnessing, or evangelizing in the modern era is now passé (out of date). It is not and never will be. God is infinitely wise, and He ordained the immeasurable changes in the mode of communication that would come—computers, videos, internet, et al. He will use every digital and technological medium necessary for the communication of His gospel. God created the world, and He also made known to man all the science essential for technological innovation. All knowledge is derived from the mind of God. It is doubtful, however, that the means of personal (incarnational) communication known as preaching, teaching, etc. will ever become outdated by "virtual" missions. Screen to screen is not the same as eyeball to eyeball and nose to nose. The computer screen, Google Meet, and Zoom will never be sufficient substitutes for personal, flesh and blood communication of the gospel through word and deed by heralds living among those to whom they have been sent. There will never come a day when robots will replace the preacher of the gospel.

<sup>18</sup>And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, **how I was with you the whole time**,<sup>19</sup> serving the Lord **with all humility and with tears and with trials** which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;<sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and **teaching you publicly and from house to house**,<sup>21</sup> solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21 NASB)

<sup>5</sup>for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also **in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**; just as you know **what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake**.<sup>6</sup> **You also became imitators of us** and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, (1 Thess. 1:5-6 NASB)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a famous Scottish preacher once said, "The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness." He died at only thirty years of age, having ministered in Scotland a mere eight years; but his influence has remained to this day since 1843.

Implicit in the necessity of the herald, the **preacher**, is that there will be sufficient information about the Christ communicated to facilitate salvation. As I have said before, Paul believed that sufficient communication did not require exhaustive and perfect communication. After all, God chose to communicate the message of salvation in Christ through flawed human vessels, not angels. Yet He would assure that the message, though not exhaustive or perfectly communicated, would be sufficient unto salvation. Throughout this series of rhetorical questions, Paul assumes that men will not **call upon the Lord** in the absence of the essential message of the gospel. I emphasize this point again because of inclusivism which maintains that the essential message of salvation through Christ is not needed for salvation. The only thing essential is the subjective sincerity of the worshipper being loyal to whatever god he worships.

Likewise, God has providentially protected and transmitted His word, the Bible, throughout the ages by the medium of human vessels, not angels, inspired by the Holy Spirit; and this Bible has been translated—imperfectly though sufficiently—into thousands of languages resulting in the phenomenal growth of the church. Our evangelism and missiology are also not infallibly inspired, but Paul believed that these imperfect evangelists sent by an imperfect church would communicate the message of salvation clearly enough to bring men to God.

At the same time, Paul believed that this message could be sufficiently distorted to such an extent that it would fail to communicate the truth about Christ or qualify as the gospel. Some of the Christians in Asia Minor were being duped by Judaizers teaching salvation by works rather than grace.

But *it was* because of the **false** brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, **in order to bring us into bondage**.<sup>5</sup> But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that **the truth of the gospel** would remain with you. (Gal. 2:4-5 NASB)

But when I saw that they were **not straightforward about the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? (Gal. 2:14 NASB)

In Paul's view, there was **the truth of the gospel** which brought **liberty** as well as **false brethren** preaching something other than the true gospel leading to **bondage**. Apparently, then, there was the necessity of remaining true to the original message communicated through the apostles. Anything else was a **false** message which would not facilitate salvation. Yet, Clark Pinnock and others would have us to believe that "the issue for God is not the **content** of theology but the **reality** of faith...What God really cares about is faith and not theology, trust and not orthodoxy" (*A Wideness in God's Mercy*). This is true to a point. God does not require perfect, exhaustive orthodoxy from those who believe; but it is obvious on the surface that He discriminates between that which is essentially and fundamentally false and that which is essentially and fundamentally true. To insist otherwise makes utter nonsense of Paul's insistence on theological accuracy in conveying the gospel message.

Paul was not alone among the apostles for setting a minimum standard of orthodoxy. Peter, admitting the difficulty of understanding some of Paul's scholarly treatment of the Christian faith, nevertheless agreed that Paul's writings were inspired with **the rest of Scripture**, and that those who distorted his teaching did so **to their own destruction**.

<sup>15</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, **which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** (2 Pet. 3:15-16 NASB)

Likewise, the Apostle John warned his audience that whoever failed to abide in the apostolic tradition concerning the person and work of Christ forfeited a relationship with God and acceptance in the body of Christ.

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, **does not have God**; the one who abides in the teaching, **he has both the Father and the Son.** <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and **do not give him a greeting**; <sup>11</sup>for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 Jn. 1:9-11 NASB)

Doubtless, John was not requiring a high level of theological sophistication, but rather a basic understanding of the fundamental tenets of the person and work of Christ—distorted by Gnosticism and neo-Platonic philosophy—without which Christianity cannot be distinguished from any other faith.

God’s arm is not too short that he cannot save (Ps. 44: 3), and it is no limitation upon God to say that He will save people only in the manner which is expressly stated in the Holy Scriptures. And this is the crux of the matter—by what authority do we claim that there is any other way, or by any other name, to be saved other than the one plainly given to us in the Bible? It is conventional “wisdom” that claims God would be unfair for damning sincere Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, animists, et al. But we have already covered this objection from Romans 1. Everyone knows about the true God, but not sufficiently unto salvation. And they are not innocent, but suppress the truth consciously and maliciously. Is there any other **name**—Allah, Vishnu, or any other—that God will recognize as an acceptable substitute for the name of Christ simply because the worshipper is sincerely committed to this name? None. Moreover, if we have learned anything from Rom. 9 and 10 considered together, we have learned that if God elects people to salvation, He also elects the means by which they will be saved, the faithful preaching of the gospel. We must not separate the ends from the means.

If preachers, missionaries, et al, are necessary for the salvation of the lost, the initial step, Step 1, is for the church to send out missionaries at home and abroad for evangelization and discipleship.

**Step 1: Sending messengers → Step 2: Preaching → Step 3: Hearing → Step 4: Believing  
→ Goal: Calling upon the Lord**

<sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent?

For someone like Paul who passionately believed that God had sovereignly ordained every step in the chain of salvation—foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification—he was equally convinced that God had ordained the only means to this end, namely, the preaching of the gospel and the discipling of the nations. Unless the church sends messengers to proclaim the gospel, people will not believe in Christ, and they will not call on the name of the Lord but

upon the names of other gods. Consequently, they will not be saved. The only means of salvation presented to us in the Bible is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Although we may wish, sinfully, that God would have provided another way—thus relieving us of any responsibilities or obligations—our wishful thinking does not make it fact. If there had been another way to save us, God the Father would not have sent His Son into this sewer of a world to die on a cross. **And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12 NASB). Therefore, the church is faced with the necessity and obligation of sacrifice and suffering to ensure that those who have not heard the gospel will one day hear it. There is no other way.

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. <sup>24</sup> "For whoever wishes to **save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.** <sup>25</sup> "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels. (Lk. 9:23-26 NASB)

The way that many of us in our day take up the cross is to hang a crucifix around our necks, but I don't think that meets Jesus' requirements. Taking up the cross was a crystal-clear expression of submitting oneself to cruel and painful execution—the most prolonged execution known at the time. There are many ways that we may attempt to **save** our lives. We may stay at home in our comfort zones rather than going to a foreign country or a foreign people group to share the gospel. We may attempt to save our lives by keeping all our excess income for old age rather than giving a portion to pastors who labor among us or missionaries who are willing to risk their lives in countries hostile to Christianity or by giving it to those in need who live in our own villages.

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:14 NASB)

<sup>9</sup>and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> *They* only *asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do. (Gal. 2:9-10 NASB)

The paradox (apparent contradiction) of the Christian faith is that we will receive the reverse of what worldly unbelievers would expect. If we choose to save our lives (and money) by playing it safe, we will lose them; but if we choose to sacrifice our lives (and our money) for the interests of the kingdom of God, we will save them.

"**Do not store up** for yourselves treasures **on earth**, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> "**But store up** for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup> "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! <sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matt. 6:19-24 NASB)

These words were not spoken primarily to rich people. Very few, if any, listening to the Sermon on the Mount were wealthy. Yet, He warns them about serving money rather than God. Jesus never prohibited us from storing up **treasures**. He only prohibited us from storing up treasures **on earth**. He actually commanded us to store up treasures—**in heaven**. We do this by being consistent with our profession as Christians. About 150 years ago, Robert L. Dabney (a Presbyterian theologian) explained what this means.

The external likeness of the church to the world is the bane [curse] of our efficiency in saving souls. We profess a difference between ourselves and the unrenewed, as radical as that between light and darkness, almost as wide as that between heaven and hell. But in all the visible and practical concerns which interest the unrenewed heart, we nearly resemble them.

Our words say that we believe riches to be vanity and emptiness. Our acts seem to say that we love and seek them as intensely as those do who make them their all and their god. We say in words that “we have here no continuing city,” but in act are as eager to adorn our dwellings here as though they were our only home...What is the result? The world believes our conduct and not our words, like a shrewd world as it is. Practical skepticism seals their consciences against the teachings of the pulpit. Our worldly conformity gives the lie to all our assertions of nobler principles, of the birth of a new and higher nature, and the treachery of earthly good.

However inefficient the world’s conscience may be to control its own sins, it is abundantly acute to perceive the demands of consistency; and men feel that those who have the hopes and principles, those who acknowledge the tremendous obligations to a dying world of brethren, which Christians profess, ought to use their wealth in a manner utterly unlike the world. When they see us use it on the same selfish and groveling principles with themselves, the inevitable impression... is that religion is a “sham.” But now let Christians seek and use wealth wholly for God...The world will at least believe that Christians believe that there is a heaven, a hell, and a strict day of account...*[that]* men have souls to be saved worth a little more than [our conspicuous success]... (*Discussions, Vol. 1, “Principles of Christian Economy”*, emphasis mine).

It was not long after the establishment of the church in Antioch, the new epicenter of the church after Jerusalem, that Paul and Barnabas were sent out on their missionary journey to Asia Minor.

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”<sup>3</sup> Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3 NASB)

Notice that the Holy Spirit is the initiator of the missionary enterprise. He was not content to let the two prized members of the church of Antioch, Paul and Barnabas, settle into a stationary lifestyle, building a megachurch with thousands of members. This would have been much easier for the apostle, for Paul often supported himself as a missionary. Whenever they were available, he would accept gifts from the churches he had planted.

<sup>3</sup> and because he [*i.e. Apollos*] was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, **for by trade they were tent-makers**. (Acts 18:3 NASB)

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you*, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (1 Thess. 2:9 NASB)

"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. <sup>34</sup> **"You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.** <sup>35</sup> "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33-35 NASB)

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; <sup>16</sup> for even in Thessalonica **you sent a gift more than once for my needs.** (Phil. 4:15-16 NASB)

Paul was often lacking even the basic necessities of life, like food and shelter; but through his experiences and God's help he had learned the secret of a contented life.

*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, **in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.** (2 Cor. 11:27 NASB)

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup> I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned **the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.** <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:11-13 NASB)

Missions is not one activity among many which the church does—like church picnics or wedding parties. The church exists for the purpose of mission which involves evangelism, baptizing, and making disciples, teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded us. The church does not exist for the purpose of building church buildings unless those building programs can truly be justified for the fulfillment of the church's mission—something which is seldom true. As a general rule in the western church, "the tail is wagging the dog".

Rather than focusing on the mission of the church in making disciples, the focus in western churches has been real estate, land and buildings. We have cluttered the ground with unnecessary buildings which fail to serve the purpose of missions. Instead, they have served the purpose of making us comfortable in more aesthetic, pleasing environments for what we often mislabel as "worship". The African church has followed the lead of the western church and focused on buildings, sound systems, and music (for entertainment, not worship) instead of discipleship, leaving God's people starving for the true milk of the word of God—even though they don't know they're starving. African pastors are not paid, and foreign missionaries from sub-Saharan Africa are almost non-existent. Meanwhile, their northern neighbors in Muslim lands are going to hell. Allah cannot save them because he doesn't exist. There is only one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Either Christianity is true, or Islam is true, but both cannot be true.

<sup>15</sup>Just as it is written,

"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE  
WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

<sup>16</sup> However,

they did not all heed the good news;

for Isaiah says,  
 "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"  
 17 So  
 faith  
     *comes* from hearing,  
 and hearing  
     by the word of Christ.  
 18 But I say, A  
     **surely they have never heard, have they?**  
 Indeed they have; B  
     "THEIR VOICE C  
         HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, D  
     AND THEIR WORDS C  
         TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD." D  
 19 But I say, A  
     **surely Israel did not know, did they?** B  
 First Moses says, A  
     "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS C  
         BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A **NATION,** D  
         BY A **NATION** WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING D  
     WILL I ANGER YOU." C  
 20 And Isaiah is very bold and says, A  
     "I WAS FOUND C  
         BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, D  
     I BECAME MANIFEST C  
         TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME." D  
 21 But as for Israel He says, A  
     "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS  
     TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE." C

Having mentioned the first step in the missionary enterprise, sending messengers, Paul finishes the series of questions with a familiar picture to his ancient readers, that of a messenger coming into view by the city watchmen. Communication in the ancient world was often on foot. The picture offered in v. 15b is that of a courier or messenger carrying—hopefully—**good news** to those in the next city. Sometimes it was bad news of an attack or defeat by a foreign invader, but Isaiah views the messenger in a good light as a bearer of God's deliverance.

How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings **good news**, Who announces peace And brings **good news** of happiness, Who announces **salvation**, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa. 52:7 NASB)

The quotation, according to Moo, serves two purposes. First, it confirms the necessary means of preaching as the means of communicating the gospel (good news). Secondly, it implies that God had already sent His messengers to preach this good news in the Roman world of the first century (Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p. 664). If *Romans* is written about 56-57 AD at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, then he as well as others had already preached the gospel in many places representative of the civilized world—Asia Minor, Achaia, and Macedonia—not to speak of



Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1: 8). During those journeys, the Jews in many synagogues had been exposed to the **good news** that their Messiah had already come and had accomplished His mission of saving His people. The problem was that they were still not listening to the message.

Paul carries the metaphor forward into his description of the Christian's armor in Ephesians by saying, **and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE** (Eph. 6:15 NASB)

<sup>16</sup> However,

they did not all **heed** the good news;  
for Isaiah says,  
"LORD, **WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?**"

The word, **however**, douses the reader's enthusiasm with cold water. **Good news** is only good for those who **heed** it. In Isaiah's historical context, Israel had not believed the prophets who brought them good news of God's forgiveness if they would repent, and they had not believed Isaiah's prediction (**report**) of the suffering Servant who would bear the grief and sorrows of Israel, who would be **pierced** for their transgressions and **crushed** for their iniquities (Isa. 53: 4-5)—possibly the clearest Messianic prophecy in the whole Bible. Moreover, the Jews of the first century would not believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah continues his parallel sentence in 53: 1 with another rhetorical question demanding a negative answer, "**And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**" (Isa. 53:1 NASB) Israel did not believe Isaiah's report because the power of God unto salvation had not been sovereignly **revealed** to them. It takes more than the message itself. Proclamation of the good news does not guarantee that it will be effectually **heard**. This becomes more evident in John's use of the same prophecy in his gospel.

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. <sup>38</sup> **This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet** which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" <sup>39</sup> **For this reason they could not believe**, for Isaiah said again, <sup>40</sup> "**HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.**" (Jn. 12:37-40 NASB)

The fuller prophecy of Isaiah reads as follows predicting the devastation of Israel and Judah by the Assyrians and Babylonians:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" <sup>9</sup> He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'<sup>10</sup> "**Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.**" <sup>11</sup> Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, (Isa. 6:8-11 NASB)

Jesus uses Isaiah's prophecy in answer to His disciples' question concerning why He spoke to the multitudes in **parables** instead of straightforward prose (ordinary speech).

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered them, "**To you it has been granted** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, **but to them it has not been granted**. <sup>12</sup> "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup> "**Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** <sup>14</sup> "In their case **the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled**, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; <sup>15</sup> FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND **THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES**, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' <sup>16</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. (Matt. 13:10-16 NASB)

While the Isaiah passages emphasize the sovereignty of God in actively blinding the eyes of Israel, hardening their hearts, and stopping their ears, Jesus emphasizes the personal responsibility of the Jews in His day who purposely dulled their hearts, closed their eyes, and stopped up their ears so that they would not understand, see, and hear Jesus' message, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy and God's **purpose according to His choice** (Rom. 9: 11).

<sup>17</sup> So

faith  
comes from hearing,  
and hearing  
by the word of Christ.

This verse seems puzzling given the context of the question of v. 16, **Lord, who has believed our report?** It may simply be a repetition of one of the essential steps toward the end goal of calling on the name of the Lord found in v. 14, **How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?** The connection with the previous verse (v. 16) is that there is more to it than just hearing. Israel heard the message, but the message was not united with faith.

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they [*i.e. the Israelites*] also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not **united by faith in those who heard**. (Heb. 4:2 NASB)

Nevertheless, Israel's unbelief does not invalidate the divinely ordained means of salvation. While it is true that some will not hear the message with faith, some form of preaching **the word of Christ** will continue as the only means of producing saving **faith**.

<sup>18</sup> But I say,

surely **they have never heard**, have they?  
Indeed they have;  
"THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH,

AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

As the context of vv. 16 and 19 indicates, **surely they have never heard** must refer to the Jews. The apostle anticipates the natural question arising from Israel's unbelief. Surely if Israel had heard the good news, they would have responded in faith; therefore, they must not have heard it. But Paul answers this question with **indeed they have**.

His quotation from Ps. 19: 4 may be confusing since the Psalmist is speaking of the general revelation of creation and not the special revelation of the gospel.

For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are **telling** of the glory of God; And their expanse is **declaring** the work of His hands. <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth **speech**, And night to night reveals knowledge. <sup>3</sup> There is **no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard**. <sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth, And **their utterances to the end of the world**. In them He has placed a tent for the **sun**, <sup>5</sup> Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man **to run his course**. <sup>6</sup> Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. (Ps. 19:1-6 NASB)

**There is no speech, nor are there words** means that although the **voice** of general revelation is inaudible, it nevertheless speaks clearly. **Their utterances to the end of the world** mirrors Paul's argument in Romans 1 that the nature and attributes of God in creation have been **clearly seen**, rendering everyone **without excuse** for failing to believe in the God who created the world.

Paul now uses a passage concerning general revelation as an illustration of the universal proclamation of the gospel up until the time he is writing Romans. By the end of his third missionary journey, the gospel had already been preached throughout the civilized world (see note above), the world of which the apostle was familiar (Murray, Haldane, Moo). (We cannot interpret Paul to mean that the gospel had been preached everywhere in the world: e.g. the Han Dynasty of China, the Satavahanna Dynasty of India, the Kushite Dynasty of Africa, the Mayan civilization of South America, the Parthian civilization, or any number of others.) Therefore, Ps. 19 is a type of which the spread of the gospel is the antitype (Robert Haldane, *Romans*, p. 514). As the **sun** stretches from east to west **to run his course**, so also the gospel had reached from east to west across the then-known Roman Empire.

Therefore, if Israel did not **heed** the gospel message, it was not because they had never **heard** it. As men have **no excuse** for their failure to worship the true God, given the general revelation of creation (Rom. 1), Israel has no excuse for their failure to believe in Christ since they have received the special revelation of the prophets (Isaiah particularly) and the gospel.

<sup>19</sup> But I say,

surely <b>Israel did not know, did they?</b>	
First Moses says,	A
<u>"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS</u>	B
<b>BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION,</b>	C
<b>BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING</b>	C
<u>WILL I ANGER YOU."</u>	B

20 And Isaiah is very bold and says,	A		
<u>"I WAS FOUND</u>		B	
BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,			C
<u>I BECAME MANIFEST</u>		B	
TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."			C
21 But as for Israel He says,	A		
"ALL THE DAY LONG			
<u>I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS</u>		B	
TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."			C

**Surely Israel did not know, did they?** is parallel to **surely they have never heard, have they?** Paul proves that Israel **did know** by appealing to the Lord's own words through Moses and Isaiah. He first quotes from Deut. 32, the **song** of Moses predicting Israel's apostasy after his death (Deut. 31: 29-30).

"Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end *shall be*; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness. <sup>21</sup> **They have made Me jealous with *what* is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with *those who are not a people*; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation** (Deut. 32:20-21 NASB)

From ancient times Israel was warned of their future apostasy from the faith. As they had made God jealous with other gods, God would also make them jealous with other people by favoring a **foolish nation** (Isa.), **a nation without understanding**. Both phrases are clearly references to the Gentile nations who would embrace the gospel from the first century until today. However, they would also include even Gentiles in ancient times who embraced the God of Israel, especially the city of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah, the reluctant prophet who didn't want to God to spare Nineveh. Jesus warned the Jews that this day was coming.

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken away** from you and **given** to a people, producing the fruit of it. (Matt. 21:43 NASB)

"I say to you that **many will come from east and west**, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; <sup>12</sup> **but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness**; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 8:11-12 NASB)

The question now becomes: What, exactly, did Israel **know**? They knew—or should have known—that they would be replaced by the Gentiles, a people producing the fruit of the kingdom of God. Paul is preparing his audience for a more expanded treatment of Israel in Romans 11.

I say then, they [*i.e., Israel*] did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, **to make them [*Israel*] jealous**. (Rom. 11:11 NASB)

For if you [*i.e., the Gentiles*] were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these [*i.e., Jews*] who are the

natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? <sup>25</sup> For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in** (Rom. 11:24-25 NASB)

**Without understanding, those who did not seek Me, those who did not ask for Me** are parallel statements describing the Gentiles who were not looking for God and had no **understanding** of the covenant God had made with Israel.

"I permitted Myself to be sought by **those who did not ask for Me**; I permitted Myself to be found by **those who did not seek Me**. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name.

<sup>2</sup> "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk *in* the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, (Isa. 65:1-2 NASB)

The verb forms in Isaiah are *niphal* (either passive, **was sought**, or reflexive, **permitted myself to be sought**) giving the verse a paradoxical flavor (an apparent contradiction). Although the Gentiles were not seeking God or asking for Him, He allowed Himself to be found by them. Paul's citation of Isaiah buttresses (supports) his argument in Rom. 9 that election was not based upon **the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy** (9: 16).

By means of the missionary enterprise, uninformed Gentiles had entered the kingdom of God while knowledgeable Jews had remained outside. The description of the Gentiles in vv. 19-20 makes a stark contrast with that of national Israel in v. 21, **All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people**—namely, the Jews. We are reminded of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the city* that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you would not *have it!* (Lk. 13:34 NASB)

Although God actively sought out His people through the OT prophets and now the apostles, still they would not come. The Jews were the first to receive all God's blessings (the law, the covenants, the fathers) as well as the first to receive the opportunity to embrace their Messiah. Compared to His active pursuit of Israel, God was comparatively passive with the Gentiles, allowing them to find Him much later in salvation history and through the medium of Jewish apostles. We would be tempted to conclude that God was now through with His **obstinate people**, that He was ready to shake the dust off His sandals, so to speak, as He had instructed His disciples to do when they were rejected (Matt. 10: 14; 6: 11). If this is our conclusion, we are mistaken. God is not through with His ethnic people, as we shall see from the next chapter.

## Romans 11

The concern of Romans 11 is the future of ethnic Israel. The majority of Israel did not believe during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness or during their entire history as a nation. Nor did the majority of Israel believe when their Messiah appeared, and their unbelief begs the question of whether God had permanently **rejected His people whom He foreknew**.

I say then,

**God has not rejected His people, has He?**

May it never be!

For I too am an Israelite,  
a descendant of Abraham,  
of the tribe of Benjamin.

<sup>2</sup> **God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.**

**I say then** anticipates the conclusion drawn naturally from Israel's unbelief: namely, that God has rejected His chosen ethnic people. Since it has become plain in Paul's teaching that **they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel**, then Israel as an ethnic nation must have been set aside and replaced by the Gentiles who were producing the fruit of the kingdom of God. But Paul is forthright in his denial of this conclusion: **May it never be!**

Paul is also an **Israelite** from the line of **Abraham** and **Benjamin**; therefore, one cannot say that God has rejected every individual, national Israelite just because the majority had apostatized through their entire history. Moreover, Paul is leading up to his major point in Romans 11, namely, that there will be a widespread awakening of the Jewish consciousness that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah.

**Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about Elijah*,  
how he pleads with God against Israel?**

<sup>3</sup> "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS,  
THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS,  
AND I ALONE AM LEFT,  
AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."

<sup>4</sup> But what is the divine response to him?

"I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN  
WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL."

To prove his assertion, Paul uses the historical record of **Elijah**. I will take some space here to present the Elijah's story in historical context.

The behavior of the Jewish people during the historical-redemptive period of Elijah's day was no better than that during the first century. King Ahab was on the throne of Israel, and his wife Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal (meaning, "with Baal") and was instrumental in seducing the Northern Kingdom into the wholesale worship of Baal. Baal and his wife, Asherah, were fertility gods whose help was needed to produce rain for the fertility of the soil. If Baal and Asherah engaged in sexual intercourse, the rain would come at just the right time to produce a bumper crop, but if they didn't, there was drought, and the yield was poor. So, how does one arouse Baal and Asherah to have sex? By the worshipper going to the temple of Baal and having sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute, either male or female. Small wonder that idolatrous and lustful Israelites would enjoy this kind of religion.

Against this background, we understand why Elijah was sent by God to call forth a drought during Ahab's reign for three years and six months (1 Kings 17: 1; James 5: 17; Lk. 4: 25). God wanted to make an example of Baal by proving that rain was under His providential control and not governed by the sexual appetites of false gods.

According to the story in 1 Kings 18, the prophets of Baal are unable to get Baal to send fire upon their sacrifice—because Baal did not exist—but God listens to Elijah's pleas and sends fire to consume his water-soaked sacrifice. The prophets of Baal are executed, but Jezebel is still unconvinced of Yahweh's power. Unbelief is seldom about the facts; it's about one's refusal to yield his life to God's lordship over his life. Jezebel now seeks to murder Elijah (1 Kings 19: 2) leading him to believe that the whole rotten spiritual state of Israel was hopeless.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; **and he requested for himself that he might die**, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, **take my life**, for I am not better than my fathers." (1 Ki. 19:4 NASB)

According to Ralph Davis, to whom I owe much of my understanding of this story (see his *The Wisdom and the Folly*), Elijah's lament, **I am not better than my fathers**, indicates the conclusion that his prophetic ministry in Israel had yielded no better results and had been no more effective than that of other prophets who had preceded him, including Moses, Samuel, Nathan, et al. Perhaps Paul could identify with Elijah's despondency since, for the most part, Israel as a nation had persisted in their stubborn recalcitrance to Paul's message. Although Elijah had successfully demonstrated the superiority of Yahweh to Baal, the Mt. Carmel episode had shown that the hearts of Israel had not changed, particularly that of the leadership, Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah was not feeling sorry for himself, nor was he afraid to die. In fact, the text above shows that he welcomed death. He ran from Jezebel, not from fear, but only to deny her the victory and pleasure of putting him to death by her own hands. Moreover, by this time Elijah had no fear of Jezebel reaching him. By the power of the Spirit, he had traveled all the way from Jezreel in the extreme northern part of Israel to Beersheba in the extreme southern part of Judah, over 100 miles. Adding distance, he had also traveled a day's journey into the desert from Beersheba. Even if Jezebel's army had traveled all the way to Beersheba from Jezreel, they would not have been able to find Elijah when they got there. Clearly, he was in no danger.

Then there's the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for **fear**, *yare*, could have been substituted by a well-meaning scribe who could not make sense of the Hebrew text which may have originally read *raah*, to **see**. To the scribe, **fear** may have made more sense given Jezebel's threat to take Elijah's life mentioned in the immediate context. But as we have seen from the text, Elijah would have welcomed death—but not from Jezebel. Execution would have been interpreted as the victory of Baal over Yahweh, something Elijah didn't wish to happen. So, he ran—not for his life—but for God's honor. You will notice from the ASV, NKJ and KJ versions of the text, that the variant reading, **saw**, was acceptable to these translators.

And when he **saw** that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Ki. 19:3 ASV)

And when he **saw** that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Ki. 19:3 KJV)

And when he **saw** that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. (1 Ki. 19:3 NKJ)

The question then becomes: **Saw what?** When Elijah **saw** that the power of Yahweh had made no effectual change in Jezebel's heart—she would rather kill the Lord's prophet than worship the Lord—he believed that nothing God did through his prophetic ministry would make any difference. It was much the same as Israel's golden calf episode shortly after Yahweh delivered them through the Red Sea. No matter what empirical proofs God presents to demonstrate His superiority to other so-called gods, they will continue to be idolatrous. Seeing is not necessarily believing. Empirical proofs do not convince people of spiritual truth. We are reminded that after Jesus rose from the dead—and His body could not be found—the Jewish leaders still were not convinced that He was their Messiah, even paying the guards to lie about the empty tomb. This is a lesson to those who preach and teach. You are not the first pastor who has been discouraged from the seeming lack of effectiveness in your ministry. You are in good company—with Elijah. No matter how well you preach, nothing will happen unless God chooses to make it happen. Jeremiah preached 40 years without ever mentioning a single conversion, and he ended his life in exile in Egypt because the Jewish thugs in control wouldn't let him stay in Judea (Jer. 43). There was nothing wrong with Elijah's "experiment" on Mt. Carmel or Jeremiah's preaching. The failure is in the human heart which chooses not to believe the obvious truth.

Although Elijah felt that he was all alone as a Yahweh-worshipper in the land of Israel, God assured him that he was not.

"Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Ki. 19:18 NASB)

God had reserved 7,000 people in Israel for Himself who had not worshipped Baal. This brings us back to Romans 11. Although it seems to everyone that God has **rejected His people whom He foreknew**, this was not the case. It also seemed this way to Elijah, but God assured him that he was not alone; God had reserved 7,000 committed believers in Israel, the **remnant** whom He had chosen.

<sup>5</sup> **In the same way then,**

there has also come to be at the present time  
a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice.

<sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace,  
it is no longer on the basis of works,  
otherwise grace is no longer grace.

**In the same way then** (v. 5) sets up the analogy between the situation in Elijah's day and Paul's day (**at the present time**). Spiritually, it looks as hopeless in Paul's century as it did in Elijah's century. A majority of the Jews have not believed. Everywhere Paul had gone in Asia Minor, Achaia, and Macedonia, he had met the resistance of the Jews in the synagogues. Nevertheless, God has His elect people everywhere, and many of them are Jews. Just as God selected 7,000 Israelites in Elijah's day, He has also selected **a remnant** of Jews to be saved in Paul's day.

Once more, he reminds his readers that God's selection is not based on human merit (see Rom. 9). Those who are part of the **remnant** cannot take pride in their election. They have been chosen because of God's grace, not because of what they have done. **Otherwise** (v. 6), we confuse the



definition of **grace**. Grace is unmerited favor. Going further, it is receiving the opposite of what we really deserve, God's wrath. If God chooses us on the basis of works, then He is merely paying us back what we deserve, and **grace is no longer grace**; it becomes wages. Therefore, we are either chosen on the basis of **works** or on the basis of **grace**. It cannot be both grace and works as Roman Catholicism and Seventh Day Adventism insist (see Excursus on Roman Catholicism above). In Biblical mathematics, Grace + Works = Works. At the end of the day, salvation depends on what you do, not who you believe in. You cannot mix oil and water, and you cannot mix grace and works as far as God's favor is concerned. While it is true that grace produces good works, it is not true that good works produce grace. Grace comes from a God who chooses to be **gracious** independent of man's work.

For the **wages** of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23 NASB)

<sup>7</sup> **What then?**

What **Israel** is seeking,  
it has not obtained,  
but those who were **chosen**  
obtained it,  
and the **rest** were hardened;

Alluding to Rom. 9: 31 and 10: 3, Paul says that Israel **has not obtained** what they were **seeking**, namely, God's **righteousness**. Alluding to Romans 9: 18 he says, **but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened**. Paul now makes a separation between two groups of Jews: the remnant who were **chosen** and **the rest** who were **hardened**. This hardening is described in v. 8.

<sup>8</sup> **just as it is written,**

"GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR,  
EYES TO SEE NOT  
AND EARS TO HEAR NOT,  
DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY."

This verse refers to the blinding of Israel's eyes, the hardening of their hearts, and the dulling of their ears in Isa. 6 as well as other passages.

"Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. (Deut. 29: 4 NASB)

He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'<sup>10</sup> "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." (Isa. 6:9-10 NASB)

For the LORD has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers. (Isa. 29:10 NASB)

"Son of man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. (Ezek. 12:2 NASB)

<sup>9</sup> **And David says,**

"LET THEIR TABLE  
BECOME  
A SNARE AND A TRAP,  
AND A STUMBLING BLOCK  
AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM.  
<sup>10</sup> "LET THEIR EYES  
BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT,  
AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

This verse is cited from Ps. 69 (with slight modification), an imprecatory psalm of David against his enemies.

May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their loins shake continually. (Ps. 69: 22-23 NASB)

The psalm is clearly Messianic, as the following verses will demonstrate:

Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, And for comforters, but I found none. <sup>21</sup> They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. (Ps. 69:20-21 NASB)

And those passing by **were hurling abuse at Him**, wagging their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27:39-40 NASB)

Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he **filled it with sour wine** and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. (Matt. 27:48 NASB)

Ps. 69: 20-21 is followed by the imprecations (curses) of vv. 22-23 cited above which are uttered by David but not by Christ Himself who refrained from cursing those who crucified Him.

<sup>23</sup>and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He **uttered no threats**, but kept entrusting *Himself to Him who judges righteously* (1 Pet. 2:23 NASB)

As the lamb of God who takes away sin, Jesus was led to His slaughter. While being beaten and crucified, He had no need of uttering imprecations (**threats**) since vengeance belonged to God the Father who would—and must—pay back Christ's enemies with retributive justice—**Let their table become...a retribution to them** (Rom. 11: 9). Christ entrusted Himself to the Father who would judge righteously, but the Father's judgment would require punishment for all who remain the enemies of Christ. By rejecting the gospel, Israel had brought upon themselves the curses of the covenant. The **table** symbolizing "the bounties of God's providence" (Murray, p. 74) and kindness would instead become a **snare and a trap** (11: 9) to overcome them on the day of retribution and judgment.

The application of these Old Testament passages to the unbelief of Jewry in Paul's day has relevance surpassing anything that could have been true in Israel's earlier history. The movements of redemptive revelation and history had reached their climax in the coming and accomplishments of Christ, and the contradiction (cf. 10: 21) which Israel offered correspondingly climaxed the gravity of the sin which had been exemplified in the successive stages of Israel's history (Murray, p. 74).

The chilling self-maledictory oath of the Jews, "**His blood shall be on us and on our children!**" (Matt. 27:25 NASB) has echoed throughout the hallways of their homes and institutions to this very day. It is a fearful thing **to trample underfoot the Son of God** and thus **fall into the hands of the living God**.

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?<sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."<sup>31</sup> It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:28-31 NASB)

<sup>11</sup> I say then,

they did not **stumble** so as to **fall**, did they?

May it never be!

But by their **transgression**

salvation *has come* to the Gentiles,

to make them jealous.

<sup>12</sup> Now if **their transgression**

is riches for the world

and **their failure**

is riches for the Gentiles,

how much more

will **their fulfillment** be!

From the description of the Jews in vv. 8-9, one might be inclined to think that the judgment of the ethnic nation is conclusive and irreversible, but in v. 11 **stumble** is contrasted to **fall**. To fall is to stumble completely, but Paul is careful to negate the conclusion that Israel's fall is conclusive or permanent. **May it never be!** Moreover, the complete **fall** of Israel was not God's design in their stumbling. Note the words **so as** (*hina*) in v. 11, a word having the connotation (meaning) of purpose or design. The question then becomes, "Was God's purpose for Israel's stumbling to make them fall completely?", stated differently, "Was God's design simply to destroy the nation spiritually?" to which Paul gives his strong negative reply, **May it never be!**

God's ultimate purpose in Israel's stumbling was not to make them fall completely and permanently, but initially to hasten the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles. **But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles...** However, the salvation of the Gentiles is not the exclusive purpose of Israel's stumbling, which Paul implies in the latter part of v. 11, **to make them** [*i.e., the Jews*] **jealous**. The exact nature of this jealousy does not become apparent until a few verses later, but there is a subtle hint here that God is not yet through with His obstinate nation.

The **transgression** of Israel, in this context, is their **failure** as a nation to believe the light of special revelation received through the person and work of Jesus Christ. They had also failed the OT experiment by rejecting Moses and the prophets, but their resistance to the prophetic word pales in comparison to the heinousness of rejecting the final word—Jesus Christ. But there is a silver lining in the dark cloud of Israel's rejection. It is by this failure that **salvation has come to the Gentiles**. Paul is speaking about Israel's failure as the chosen ethnic people, not as individual Israelites, many of whom have believed, including Paul (vv. 1-4). The national dimension of vv. 11-12 must be carefully considered throughout the interpretation of the remaining portion of chap. 11. The Jewish salvation of which Paul will be speaking is not individual election of the remnant of Israel. This has already occurred at different periods of salvation history, including Paul's salvation, as well as the seven thousand during Elijah's day. Something far more comprehensive will occur within the ethnic nation. It is the ethnic nation that has failed, and it is the ethnic nation which will become **jealous** unto salvation (so also Murray, p. 78).

We may now ask: How has the unbelief of Israel been the occasion or reason for the salvation of the Gentiles? We know that God's promise to Abraham was that he would be a father of many nations and that in him "**all the families of the earth will be blessed.**" (Gen. 12:3b NASB) The fulfillment of this promise was none other than the blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham. Yet, before Christ came, the Jewish nation was designated to be a light to the Gentiles, symbolized by the **lampstand of pure gold** with seven lamps to light the tabernacle (Ex. 37: 17). This symbolism is carried forward in Revelation with Christ walking among the seven churches represented by the **seven golden lampstands** (Rev. 1—2). While the good news was proclaimed by the one nation symbolized with one lampstand with seven lamps, the good news of salvation is now proclaimed by the worldwide church represented by seven lamps, seven being a number signifying completion. Moreover, since Israel failed to be a light to the nations, and instead was the occasion of God being blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their idolatry, sin, and resultant judgment (Rom. 2:24; Isa. 52: 5), God took Israel's lamp away from them by destroying the temple in Jerusalem in 587 BC. The temple was restored in 520 BC, but the hearts of the majority were not restored, as the prophecies of Haggai and Malachi and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate.

Nevertheless, God's program of redemption for the Gentiles would not be set aside because Israel failed in its mission to them. Instead, God would raise up Christ, His Servant, to be the light of salvation not only to Israel but to the Gentiles. Speaking through Isaiah some 700 years before Christ,

"Behold, **My Servant**, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations..." "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, **As a light to the nations,**<sup>7</sup> To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. (Isa. 42:1, 6-7 NASB)

He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the **preserved ones** of Israel; **I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**" (Isa. 49:6 NASB)

Only a remnant of the Jews (**preserved ones**, Isa. 49: 6) believed in Jesus during His earthly ministry, and Luke records a small number of 120 disciples waiting in an upper room after Christ's ascension (Acts 1: 15). But Peter preaches a rousing sermon on the Day of Pentecost resulting in 3,000 conversions (almost exclusively Jews celebrating Pentecost), followed by 5,000 men at Solomon's portico (Acts 4: 4). After the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7), scattered Christians found their way to Antioch where the new epicenter of the church was established. From there we see Paul and Barnabas sent out to take the gospel into Asia Minor, Achaia, Macedonia, and finally Rome where Paul was later imprisoned and martyred. Throughout Paul's missionary journeys, a remnant of Jews would be saved; but more often, they would reject the gospel, stirring Paul to change the focus of his mission from the Jewish audience in the synagogues to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you [*i.e.*, *the Jews*] first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, **behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.** (Acts 13:46 NASB)

But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. <sup>6</sup> But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. **From now on I will go to the Gentiles.**" (Acts 18:5-6 NASB)

When they had set a day for Paul, they [*i.e.*, *the Jewish leaders in Rome*] came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. <sup>24</sup> Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup> And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving **after Paul had spoken one parting word**, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, <sup>26</sup> saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; <sup>27</sup> FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'" <sup>28</sup> **Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.**" (Acts 28:23-28 NASB)

**They will also listen** has proven to be the most important understatement of the first Millennium AD. The gospel has now been preached in practically the whole world resulting in the ingathering of millions of Gentiles who now make up virtually the entire NT church. Therefore, the rejection of the gospel by the Jews diverted the missionary efforts of the apostles to the Gentiles. This was especially true of Paul. Although he knew from his conversion that he would go to the Gentiles (Acts 9: 15), the rejection of the gospel by his countrymen further impressed the Gentile mission upon his consciousness.

But this change of focus was not the only reason why the Jewish failure hastened the growth of the Gentile church. Charles Hodge suggests two other reasons and implies a third.

The Jews, even those who were professors of Christianity, were, in the first place, very slow to allow the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles; and in the second, they appear almost uniformly to have desired to clog the gospel with the ceremonial observances of the law. This was one of the greatest hindrances to the progress of the cause of Christ during the apostolic age, and would in all human

probability, have been a thousand-fold greater, had the Jews, as a nation, embraced the Christian faith. On both these accounts, the rejection of the Jews was incidentally a means of facilitating the progress of the gospel. Besides this, the punishment which befell them on account of their unbelief, involving the destruction of their nation and power, of course prevented their being able to forbid the general preaching of the gospel, which they earnestly desired to do (*Romans*, pp. 361-62).

Therefore, the three hindrances to the Gentile mission were overcome by the general apostasy of the Jews. Rephrasing Hodge's comments,

(1) The reluctance of Jewish Christians in preaching to the Gentiles. One example of this was the Jewish reaction to Peter's mission to the house of Cornelius (Acts 11: 1-3). If the Jews had continued to be the predominate element of the church, it is quite possible that this overwhelming majority would have suppressed missionary outreach to Gentiles who were still considered unclean.

(2) The mixture of the gospel with outmoded ceremonial requirements. Ironically, Peter's posture toward uncircumcised Gentile Christians in Antioch upon the arrival of strict Jews is one example (Gal. 2: 12). A more serious threat took place at the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 where this very issue required apostolic consideration. Had there been a predominately Jewish church, strict adherence to Jewish ceremonial law, particularly circumcision, might have prevailed much longer, thus discouraging Gentiles from entering the church.

(3) Because of their earlier failure to believe before Christ's coming, God had subjugated the nation to various foreign powers. They remained subjugated in the first century, rendering them incapable of wielding political pressure against the gospel during Paul's missionary journeys.

<sup>12</sup> Now if **their transgression**

is riches for the world

and **their failure**

is riches for the Gentiles,

how much more

will **their fulfillment** be!

Thus far, we have explored only one of God's purposes for the Jewish **transgression**—namely, the acceleration of the Gentile mission and their salvation. By their failure **riches** have come to the Gentile **world**. But there is another. **To make them jealous** in v. 11 gives only a hint of this purpose, which is given further disclosure in v. 12, **their fulfillment**. Paul will elaborate further on the meaning of Jewish fulfillment. For now, the two words, **transgression** and **fulfillment** are set in parallel contrast to one another in this verse; therefore, if Israel has transgressed the covenant through disbelief, then their fulfillment will involve nothing less than belief in the gospel on a scale proportionate to their former disbelief (Murray). Thus, if the mass of Israel has rejected the gospel, then the mass of Israel will experience **fulfillment** through believing the gospel. This does not mean that every Jew living during this restoration will be saved, but that the reception of the gospel will be more widespread among ethnic Jews than anything the world has seen so far. Ironically, then, the **riches** that have come to the Gentiles through the transgression of the Jews will come full circle back to the Jews themselves. It seems that God is determined to bless His ethnic people despite their apostasy.

The flow of blessings never cease, for when the Jews as an ethnic entity begin to experience the joy of salvation, their mass conversion will accelerate missionary outreach to the Gentiles still further. Paul's argument in v. 12 is from the lesser to the greater. If Israel's **transgression** resulted in **riches** for the Gentiles, **how much more will their fulfillment be!** Paul's Gentile audience may have reasoned that the reversal of God's wrath upon the Jews might mark not only His future blessing upon the Jews but also the cessation of blessings or even His future disfavor upon the Gentiles. Paul assures them that God's returning favor upon the Jewish nation would bring them just the opposite; it would bring even more blessings to the Gentiles than God's rejection of the Jews.

<sup>13</sup> **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles.**

Inasmuch then

as I am an apostle of Gentiles,

I **magnify** my ministry,

<sup>14</sup> if somehow

I might move to jealousy

**my fellow countrymen**

and save some of them.

Paul now directly addresses the Gentile segment of his Roman audience in the same way he directly addressed the Jewish audience in 2: 17. In that chapter, he admonishes the Jews for their sinful hypocrisy in being high-minded about their Jewish heritage while at the same time violating the very law which defined that heritage. Paul now has another task in view: to admonish the Gentiles for being high-minded about God choosing them over obstinate, unbelieving Jews. Election to salvation should not produce pride, but the very opposite, humility. As he proceeds, he lets them know in no uncertain terms that God could reject them for the same reason that He rejected the Jewish nation, unbelief. He is not saying that those who are truly elect can be lost, but that there are potentially some in the Roman church who presume to be elect but are not. Peter was also keenly aware of the need for diligence in the Christian life.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; <sup>3</sup> seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup> For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. <sup>5</sup> Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, <sup>7</sup> and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. <sup>8</sup> For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> **Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing [eklego] you;** for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Pet. 1:2-11 NASB)

**I magnify my ministry** is defined by the next statement to the effect that **if somehow** Paul's ministry among the Gentiles is successful, then the spread of the gospel among Gentiles would have the effect of drawing his **fellow countrymen** to the gospel.

<sup>15</sup> For

if their **rejection**  
is the reconciliation of the world,  
what will *their* **acceptance** be  
but life from the dead?

**Rejection** and **acceptance** are contrasting parallel terms. The English word **rejection** is ambiguous and could be interpreted either as Israel's rejection of God or God's rejection of Israel. The Greek word *apobole* removes this ambiguity and is translated as **the casting away** (KJV) and **being cast away** (NKJ). Moreover, **rejection** is also antithetically parallel to **reconciliation**. Thus, the activity of God in **the casting away** of Israel has resulted in **the reconciliation of the world**. Corresponding to this, their **acceptance** must refer to God's acceptance of His wayward people. God had elected Israel in the past, and this national election had never been terminated or rescinded through Israel's apostasy. Although they had paid a steep price for their apostasy, that price did not include permanent rejection (vv. 26-29).

While **reconciliation of the world** clearly refers to Gentile salvation, **life from the dead** has proved problematic. One interpretation (represented by Moo, *Romans*, pp. 694-96) is that this phrase refers to the general resurrection of believers. His reasoning is based primarily upon his interpretation of vv. 25-26 as referring to the consummation at the end of the age.

And vv. 25-26 suggest that the salvation of Israel comes only after God has brought into the kingdom all the Gentiles destined to be saved. No room is therefore left for a spiritual quickening of the world; all that remains is the consummation (*Romans*, p. 695, emphasis mine).

If Moo is correct, then we wonder how the mass conversion of Jews at the very end of the age will bring more blessing to the Gentiles than their being cast off (v. 12). If "no room" is left for the spiritual quickening of the Gentiles, then also no room is left for a greater blessing to them—indicated by Paul's **how much more**—than they had with Israel's rejection of the gospel.

Both Hodge (p. 366) and Murray (p. 83) make a strong case against **life from the dead** being a reference to the physical resurrection at the consummation. While Paul repeatedly refers to the resurrection from the dead (*anastasis nekros*), he never uses the terms found in v. 15, *zoe nekros* (cf. Rom. 1: 4; 1 Cor. 15: 12-13; 2 Tim. 2: 18; Phil. 3: 10). For Paul to depart from the normal word usage would leave him open to misunderstanding. However, Paul has used similar words in Rom. 6:13, **alive from the dead**, which clearly refer to spiritual life rather than physical resurrection. As we have already seen from the context of that chapter, **in the likeness of His resurrection** (6: 5) refers not to the physical resurrection but to the spiritual resurrection of believers to the newness of life lived in obedience to Christ. The same kind of reasoning can be applied here. **Life from the dead** implies the spiritual blessings which come from Israel's conversion, not to the Jews only, but to the Gentiles—**how much more will their fulfillment be!**



What these additional blessings to the Gentiles will be is left unsaid. Haldane offers the enthusiastic possibility of revival.

It will occasion a revival among the Gentile churches, from a dead and almost lifeless state, which will resemble a resurrection. The numbers then converted will be as if all the dead had risen out of their graves (*Romans*, p. 534, emphasis mine).

Albert Barnes is more detailed in his interpretation.

...If their rejection and punishment, their being cut off from the favor of God, an event apparently so unlikely to promote the spread of true religion, if their being *withdrawn* from all active influence in spreading the true knowledge of God, be yet the occasion of so many blessings to mankind as have attended the spread of the gospel in consequence of it; how much more shall we expect when they shall be restored; when the energy and zeal of the Jewish nation shall unite with the efforts of others in spreading the knowledge of the true Messiah. In what way, or when, this shall be, we know not. But it is easy to see, that if the Jewish people should be converted to the Christian faith, they would have facilities for spreading the truth which the church has never had without them. (1). They are scattered in all nations, and have access to all people. (2). Their conversion, after so long unbelief, would have all the power and influence of *a miracle* performed in view of all nations. It would be seen *why* they had been preserved, and their conversion would be a most striking fulfilment of the prophecies. (3.) They are familiar with the languages of the world, and their conversion would *at once* establish many Christian missionaries in *the heart* of all the kingdoms of the world. It would be kindling at once a thousand lights in all the dark parts of the earth. (4.) the *Jews* have shown that they are eminently fitted to spread the true religion. It was by *Jews* converted to Christianity, that the gospel was first spread. Each of the apostles was a Jew; and they have lost none of the ardor, enterprise, and zeal that always characterized their nation. Their conversion would be therefore, to give to the church a host of missionaries prepared for their work, familiar with all customs, languages, and climes [climates] and already in the heart of all kingdoms, and with facilities for their work in advance, which others must gain only by the slow toil of many years (Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Romans*, pp. 245-46, italics emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).

Nothing could stop the advancement of the gospel among the Gentiles after Christ's declaration that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1: 8). Philip began preaching to the Samaritans (Acts 8: 5), and Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10). When Paul, Barnabas, and other Messianic Jews were converted, there was no stopping the advancement of the gospel. But can we imagine tens of thousands, possibly millions, of Jewish Christians combing the world today with the exuberant joy of their newly discovered Messiah? New life would be breathed into the slumbering, apathetic Gentile church, and tens of millions of unsaved Gentiles worldwide would come under the evangelistic outreach of Jewish missionaries.

<sup>16</sup> If the **first piece of dough**  
    is holy,  
the **lump**  
    is also;  
and if the **root**  
    is holy,

the **branches**  
are too.

By this statement, the apostle wishes to assert that the whole ethnic nation of Israel is **holy**. What does he mean? He does not intend to say that the whole nation is saved. This would be a contradiction of what he has said previously (10: 1-3; 9: 6). He uses **holy** [*hagios*] in its common biblical meaning: set apart or consecrated for God. Israel was from its inception set apart to God to be a holy nation. The **first piece of dough** or **root** (v. 17) of this holy nation was Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob later designated as **the fathers** (v. 28). Abraham was set apart by God from the idolatry of Mesopotamia, and both Isaac and Jacob received the covenantal promise. If Abraham was set apart, so was the **lump** descended from Abraham, the ethnic nation. Paul is referring to the offering of the **first** of the dough offered to the Lord when Israel entered the land of promise. The first part of the dough represented the whole crop reaped from the new land (Num. 15: 17-21; cited from Murray). Likewise, if the **root is holy**, then so are the **branches** which grow from this root.

While going to great lengths to show that not all who are descended from Israel are true Israelites in the Spirit, Paul is now eager to show that the small remnant of Israel who has been saved does not imply that the national election of Israel has been canceled. It is national election, not the particular election of the individual remnant, that is the subject at hand in the latter part of chapter 11.

<sup>17</sup> But if **some of the branches**  
were broken off,  
*and you, being a wild olive,*  
were grafted in  
among **them**  
and became partaker  
with **them**  
of **the rich root of the olive tree,**  
<sup>18</sup> *do not be arrogant*  
toward the **branches;**  
*but if you are arrogant,*  
*remember that it is not you*  
*who supports*  
the **root,**  
but **the root**  
*supports you.*

**Some of the branches were broken off** is a generous understatement of the fate of the Jewish nation in which most remained in unbelief during the first century until this very day in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, it is not Paul's purpose here to discuss statistics, but the future of the Jewish nation.

**Were broken off** is passive, with God as the implied subject. It is God who broke off the spiritually dead branches of the Jewish **olive tree** and replaced them with the branches of a **wild olive**, the Gentiles, who were **grafted in among** the natural branches. Thus, the full olive tree of the church

has both **natural branches** (v. 21), professing Jewish Christians, and unnatural branches, professing Gentile Christians. The word "Christian" must be qualified by "professing" since some of these Gentile branches that have been ingrafted into the olive tree may later be **cut off** (vv. 21-22) because of failure to continue in covenantal faithfulness—the same failure as national Israel. Paul makes no assumptions that everyone in the Roman church is a true believer. Whoever perseveres in faith to the end will be saved (Mk. 13: 13).

"I am the vine, **you are the branches**; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>"**If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.** (Jn. 15:5-6 NASB)

By being **grafted in among** the natural Jewish branches of the natural olive tree (the remnant of Israel, 11: 5), the Gentiles were given the benefits of all the covenant blessings of Abraham (**the rich root**) listed by Paul in Rom. 9: 4-5. Apparently, this had been the occasion of becoming **arrogant toward the [natural, Jewish] branches** which were broken off. Paul counsels the Gentiles that they should not be arrogant but should **fear** (v. 20). The **root** of the Gentile church is Jewish, not Gentile. Although Gentile salvation comes exclusively from the Lord, it nevertheless came to them through the means of the Jewish nation and Abraham's faith, something all of us Gentiles should remember. God possessed a people for Himself long before Christ died on the cross to secure His people.

The church of the NT is not a new invention of God but a continuation of what He started with Adam's creation and formalized with Abraham and his descendants. Election to salvation includes Abel who was chosen instead of Cain, and Seth, whose line was distinguished from Cain's, and so on. The church—*ekklesia*, from *kaléō*, "called" and *ek*, "out" (the "called out ones")—has always consisted in those who were called out of the world to be God's possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (compare Ex. 19: 5-6 and 1 Pet. 2: 9-10 in which Peter applies OT Jewish vocabulary to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles). The inclusion of Gentiles into Israel throughout their history (Uriah the Hittite, Ruth the Moabite, Naaman the Syrian, et al) indicated that God's program of salvation would encompass all peoples into one people and one church, a people for God's own possession. There are not two churches and two peoples, Jew and Gentile.

<sup>19</sup> *You will say then,*

"**Branches were broken off**  
so that  
*I might be grafted in.*"

<sup>20</sup> *Quite right,*

**they were broken off**  
for their unbelief,  
*but you stand*  
by your faith.

*Do not be conceited, but fear;*

<sup>21</sup> *for*

**IF GOD DID NOT SPARE**  
**the natural branches,**

HE WILL NOT SPARE

*you, either.*

<sup>22</sup> BEHOLD THEN THE KINDNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD;

to those who fell,

SEVERITY,

*but to you,*

GOD'S KINDNESS,

*IF you continue*

IN HIS KINDNESS;

otherwise

*you also*

*will be cut off.*

Continuing with his warning against Gentile arrogance toward the Jews, Paul puts words into the mouths of those who might be tempted to do so (**You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."**). Paul admits that this is an accurate understanding of what has happened (**Quite right**), but then proceeds to interject the human cause underlying the breaking off of the natural branches and the grafting in of the new branches. The Jews were **broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith**. The word **stand** is *histemi*, the same word used in Rom. 5:2 and Eph. 6: 11. The last reference has the context of standing firm in battle.

through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we **stand** [*histemi*]; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:2 NASB)

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able **to stand firm** [*histemi*] against the schemes of the devil. (Eph. 6:11 NASB)

It is clear from these verses that the believer does not **stand** by his election, but by an active **faith** fully committed to winning his fight against sin and error. Without continuing faith and the works which faith produces (James 2), there is no evidence of election. Israel was the elect nation, but most of them presumed that national election to God's favor would work automatically to their benefit apart from faith. The distinction between Israel's national election and the believer's individual election must surely be considered; however, the fatal presumption of Israel is consistently held up to the believer as a fallacy to be avoided (1 Cor. 10: 6, 11). The certainty of our election is rooted in our conformity to the divine nature (see 2 Pet. 1: 2-11 cited above).

If this **divine nature** (2 Pet. 1: 4) is lacking in the professing believer, his outcome will be the same as unbelieving Jews. **Faith without works is dead** (James 2: 26). God **did not spare** the natural descendants of Abraham, and He also **will not spare** Gentiles who pretend to be Abraham's spiritual descendants. They, too, **will be cut off** just like the natural branches were cut off. In order for the Gentiles **to continue in His kindness**, they must **continue** to believe in Him, a belief that emancipates a person from slavery to sin (Rom. 6).

<sup>23</sup> **And they also,**

**IF they**

**do not continue in their unbelief,**

**will be grafted in,**

FOR GOD IS ABLE TO GRAFT THEM IN **AGAIN.**

<sup>24</sup> *For if you*

*were cut off*

*from what is by nature*

*a wild olive tree,*

*and were grafted*

*contrary to nature*

into a **cultivated olive tree,**

how much more

**will these who are the natural *branches***

**be grafted into their own olive tree?**

**If they do not continue in their unbelief** is parallel to **if you continue in His kindness** of v. 22. The condition of covenant blessing (**kindness**) is genuine belief producing good works—**faith working through love** (Gal. 5: 6) and the diligence to **work out your salvation in fear and trembling** (Phil. 2: 12). Gentiles who continue believing will continue receiving God's kindness, but Jews who do not persist in their stubborn unbelief will no longer be under God's curse (**severity**) but **will be grafted in** along with believing Gentiles into **their own olive tree** (v. 24). It should be noted that the text speaks of only one cultivated olive tree, not two trees—one for national Jews and one for Gentiles. As I noted above, the church of Jesus Christ is one, not two. All believers, Jew and Gentile, are grafted into the one olive tree whose root begins with God's promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations.

**God is able to graft them in again** does not refer to individually elect Jews who had been cut off because of unbelief and who may now be grafted in again because of faith. This would be a contradiction in terms. Individuals who are individually elect will believe and will continue believing and never be cut off. Recall the chain of salvation in Rom. 8: 29-30. Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, and justification lead inexorably (inevitably) to glorification. The word, **again**, refers to the fact that nationally elected Israel had once enjoyed the favored-nation status but had forfeited this status through unbelief. Yet, their fall as a national entity did not have to be permanent. As easily as God removed them from favor, He could restore **again** them to favor. As easily as He cut them off, he could **graft them in again** on a massive scale proportionate to their national apostasy.

The context of Paul's burden pertains to the mass of Israel as a corporate nation, not as individual Israelites. The fact that he, an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin, had been saved proved that Israel's national rejection was not complete (v. 1)—a small remnant had been saved. But now he is proving that Israel's national rejection was not permanent (Hodge, p. 361). Paul's individual election could not by itself prove that God's covenant curse against the nation would one day be lifted. He is now giving Jewish Christians in Rome—who may be as anxious about their nation as Paul—hope in a national revival of faith.

In v. 24, Paul argues that it is only reasonable that if **wild** branches could be grafted into the **cultivated olive tree**, then those which were **natural branches** could be also. Moreover, God's purpose in restoring Israel is fully consistent with His eternal purpose in redemptive history.

The doctrine involved in this argument is the one pervading this passage, that the provisions of God's redemptive grace for Jew and Gentile have their base in the covenant of the fathers of Israel. To use Paul's figure here, the patriarchal root is never uprooted to give place to another planting and thus it continues to impart its virtue to and impress its character upon the whole organism of redemptive history. The ingrafting of Israel is for this reason the action which of all actions is consonant [in agreement with] with the unfolding of God's worldwide purpose of grace. This signally exemplifies the great truth that the realization of God's saving designs is conditioned by history (Murray, *Romans*, p. 90, emphasis mine).

<sup>25</sup> For

I do not want you, brethren,

to be uninformed of this **mystery**

*—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—*

that a **partial** hardening

has happened **to Israel**

until

the **fullness** of the Gentiles

has come in;

<sup>26</sup> and so **all Israel** will be saved;

just as it is written,

"THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,  
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

<sup>27</sup> "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,  
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

**Mystery** in Pauline literature is something previously hidden or veiled in the Old Covenant dispensation but revealed in the New. One example of a mystery in the NT is that believing Gentiles are equal heirs of salvation along with believing Jews, an idea which took a considerable length of time for Jewish Christians to comprehend and accept. Another mystery is the gospel itself, that God in the flesh would come to die for sinners.

By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the **mystery** of Christ,<sup>5</sup> which **in other generations was not made known to the sons of men**, as it **has now been revealed** to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;<sup>6</sup> *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, (Eph. 3:4-6 NASB)

<sup>7</sup>but we speak God's wisdom in a **mystery**, the **hidden wisdom** which God predestined before the ages to our glory;<sup>8</sup> *the wisdom* which **none of the rulers of this age has understood**; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; (1 Cor. 2:7-8 NASB)

In Romans 11, Paul reveals another **mystery**, namely, **that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness [pleroma] of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved.**

He has already mentioned the **fulfillment** (or **fullness**) of the Jews (v. 12), using the same Greek word, *pleroma*. Now we are informed of the *pleroma* of the Gentiles. The **fullness** of the Jews was Paul's preliminary hint of what he was about to say in vv. 25-26. If their transgression and failure had resulted in the **riches** of the gospel being offered to and received by the Gentiles, **how much more** will gospel blessings flow to the Gentiles through ever greater numbers of Jews being saved. Two questions emerge: (1) What is the meaning of **all Israel will be saved**, and (2) What is the **fullness of the Gentiles**?

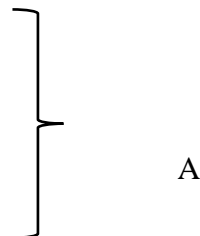
It is not likely that Paul intends **all Israel** to mean "all the elect remnant will be saved". This much is self-evident from what he has said so far: **those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened** (v. 7), and **there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice** (v. 5). If this were all he meant, the statement in v. 26 would appear repetitive and unnecessary. Moreover, the salvation of the remnant would not constitute a **mystery**. No additional revelation from Paul would be necessary to prove that the elect remnant of Israel would eventually be saved as if to say, "All elect Israel will be saved" (cf. Murray, Hodge). The mystery presently at hand pertains to the future of the ethnic nation, not individual Jews.

Now he is informing his readers that the hardening of **the rest** was only a **partial** hardening, not a **complete** hardening. It is also exegetically untenable that **all Israel** includes every individual Israelite without exclusion. Even as the hardening of Israel had exclusions, so also the **fulfillment** of Israel will have exclusions. Paul is using hyperbole, literary exaggeration, to highlight the magnitude of Israel's future restoration. Until now, most of Israel had not believed, but the day would come when most of Israel would believe, giving the impression that **all Israel** is believing the message with only a minority excepted. The spiritual desolation of Israel as an ethnic people will be reversed to the end that they will experience the manifold blessings of salvation.

Another question pertains to the **fullness of the Gentiles**. Does Paul mean the "full number of Gentiles" or the fulfillment of the Gentile mission? Will the **partial hardening** of Israel continue until every elect Gentile has been saved? This interpretation would lend support to Moo's conviction that the mass conversion of the Jews does not occur until the consummation at the end of the world (see above). But as noted earlier, this leaves no room for greater blessings to the Gentiles from Israel's spiritual restoration, a situation which Paul describes in v. 12 as **their fulfillment** [*pleroma*] and in v. 15 as **life from the dead**. Verses 12 and 15 are parallel statements.

<sup>12</sup> Now

if their **transgression**  
     is riches for the world  
 and their **failure**  
     is riches for the Gentiles,  
     how much more  
 will their **fulfillment** be!



<sup>13</sup> **But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles.**

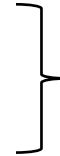


Inasmuch then  
 as I am an apostle of Gentiles,  
 I **magnify** my ministry,  
<sup>14</sup> if somehow  
 I might move to jealousy  
     **my fellow countrymen**  
 and save some of them.

B

<sup>15</sup> For

if their **rejection**  
     is the reconciliation of the world,  
 what will *their* **acceptance** be  
     but life from the dead?



A

**Transgression** and **failure** are parallel to **rejection**, and **fulfillment** is parallel to **acceptance**. The transgression and failure of Israel has resulted in **riches** for the Gentiles, but the far greater blessing to the Gentile world will result from Jewish **acceptance** into God's favor. Since nothing is greater than salvation, the **much more** of v. 12 and the **life from the dead** of v. 15 must refer to greater numbers of Gentiles being saved after the Jewish nation is spiritually restored. Logically, room must be allowed for the Jewish mission, not merely to fellow Jews, but to the Gentiles. The Jewish nation which failed to be a light to the Gentiles will now succeed in that mission! Spiritually **dead** Gentiles all over the world will receive new **life**.

In other words, the **fullness** (*pleroma*) of the Gentiles in v. 25 must be comparable to the fullness (or, **fulfillment**, *pleroma*) of the Jews in v. 12. The **fullness** of the Jews in v. 12 cannot mean the full number of elect Jews who will come to salvation only gradually through all generations—something which is self-evident (Murray, p.94). Something far bolder is in view, namely, the mass conversion of Israel—a **mystery**. The same can be said for the **fullness** of the Gentiles. That is, it does not refer to the full number of elect Gentiles gradually coming into the kingdom of God throughout history—again, this is self-evident—but a fuller manifestation of Gentile conversions than the world has ever seen before. This mass conversion (**fullness**) of Gentiles takes place before the full restoration of Israel. That is, the **partial hardening** of Israel continues until the mass conversion of the Gentiles.

All that can be safely inferred from this language is that the Gentiles, as a body, the mass of the Gentile world, will be converted before the restoration of the Jews, as a nation. Much will remain to be accomplished after that event; and in the accomplishment of what shall then remain to be done, the Jews are to have a prominent agency. Their conversion will be as life from the dead to the church (Hodge, p. 374, emphasis mine).

Likewise, Murray.

The partial hardening of Israel will have a terminus [termination]. This is marked as "the fulness of the Gentiles". What is this "fulness"? The term as applied to Israel (vs. 12) has the complexion [nature] of meaning appropriate to that context. It is contrasted with their trespass and loss. Without doubt the present context yields its own complexion [nature] to the term as applied to the Gentiles. But it would not be proper to discard the basic meaning found in verse 12. There, "fulness", like the "receiving" in verse 15, refers to the mass of Israel in contradistinction [contrast] from the remnant, the mass restored to repentance, faith, the covenant favor and blessing of God, and the kingdom of God. In



other words, the numerical cannot be suppressed. To exclude this notion at verse 25 would not be compatible with the indications given in this chapter as to the import of the term in question. To say the least, we would expect that the "fulness" of the Gentiles points to something of enlarged blessing for the Gentiles comparable to that expansion of blessing for Israel which "their fulness" (v. 12) and their "receiving" (v. 15) clearly involve (*Romans*, p. 93, emphasis mine).

Also, Barnes.

[Fulness] doubtless refers to the future spread of the Gospel among the nations to the time when it may be said that the *great mass*, the abundance of the nations, shall be converted to God. At present, they are, as they were in the times of the apostle, idolators, so that the *mass* of mankind is far from God. [Barnes wrote his notes on Romans in 1847.] But the Scriptures have spoken of a time when the gospel shall spread and prevail among the nations of the earth; and to this the apostle refers. He does not say, however, that the Jews may not be converted until *all* the Gentiles become Christians; for he expressly supposes (ver. 12-15) that the conversion of the Jews will have an important influence in extending the gospel among the Gentiles. Probably the meaning is, that this blindness is to continue until *great numbers* of the Gentiles shall be converted; until the gospel shall be extensively spread; and then the conversion of the Jews will be a part of the rapid spread of the gospel and will be among the most efficient and important aides in completing the work. If this is the case, then Christians may labor still for their conversion. They may *seek* that in connection with the effort to convert the heathen; and they may toil with the expectation that the conversion of the Jews and Gentiles will not be separate, independent, and distinct events; but will be intermingled, and will be perhaps simultaneous (*Romans*, p. 253, italics emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).

The eschatological implications of the **fulness** (*pleroma*) of both Jews and Gentiles at some point in history are significant. First, not only will the Jews as an ethnic entity return to God on the basis of faith in Christ, but there will also be a corresponding massive conversion of the Gentiles as the result of their return. Second, converted Jews will have a significant role in Gentile evangelization. Third, this mass conversion of both Jews and Gentiles will occur in the future. **Fullness** refers to the mass conversion of Jews in v. 12 and the mass conversion of Gentiles in v. 25. This has not yet occurred as a simultaneous event in the history of mankind.

<sup>26</sup> and so **all Israel will be saved**;

just as it is written,

"THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION,  
HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

<sup>27</sup> "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM,  
WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

**And so all Israel will be saved** does not refer to the salvation of the elect remnant of Israel. As stated earlier, this would be no **mystery** but unnecessary repetition of what Paul had said earlier in the chapter (11: 1-4). The mystery which Paul wishes to reveal to the Roman church, particularly its Gentile members, is that (1) there will be a mass conversion of the elect Jewish nation. Furthermore, (2) this mass conversion will also bring greater spiritual blessings to the Gentiles—the **how much more** of v. 12. Paul supports his confidence in Israel's national restoration from Isaiah and Jeremiah. Zechariah 12: 10 could be added to the list.

"A Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD. <sup>21</sup>"As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the LORD, "from now and forever." (Isa. 59:20-21 NASB)

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup>"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup>"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jer. 31:31-34 NASB)

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, **so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced**; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10 NASB)

The Zechariah passage is somewhat unique in that the spiritual awakening of Israel is given a timeframe after the crucifixion of Christ. This prophecy could not refer to the return of the exiled Jews to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, nor could it refer to the Jewish conversions during Jesus' ministry. It must refer to a time after the death and resurrection of Christ (**they will look on Me whom they have pierced**). Although this leaves room for the thousands of Jews who believed at Pentecost, the prophecy of Zechariah appears far more optimistic than the subsequent history of Jewish unbelief would permit.

The new covenant would be **not like** the covenant He made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. How would it be different? First, it would not be a covenant which they would break (Jer. 31: 32), that is, a fragile covenant in which fulfillment of the promises was conditional upon the obedience of people whose hearts were unregenerate. It should be noted that while Isaiah 59: 20 emphasizes Israel's obligation to obey (**to those who turn from transgression in Jacob**), Paul's citation of the passage emphasizes the "divine monergism" of God (Murray, p. 100) in saving His covenant people (**HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB**).

Second, it would be a covenant not limited by an externalized administration of laws written on tablets of stone. This would be an internalized covenant written on human hearts (v.33). Third, the administration of the law upon the heart would produce a situation among God's people unlike the rebellious spirit of the Israelites in which only a very small minority knew the Lord. Under the new covenant, **they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them** (v.34). God was going to accomplish this by putting His people under a New Covenant (or, as Paul puts it Romans, **under grace**) in which the resources of grace secured by the work of Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit would transform God's people into the **holy nation and royal priesthood** they were designed to be. The promise in Jeremiah, as it turns out, is being fulfilled not exclusively in

the Jewish nation separate from the Gentiles, but in the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles (Heb.8:7-13; 11:39-40).

The question arises: Have these specific promises of the New Covenant been fulfilled, particularly the promise that **they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**? Is it no longer necessary to preach the gospel in the church? Does every professing believer in the church truly know the Lord? Although the New Covenant has been inaugurated in Christ, there is a now and a not yet to the fulfillment of the New Covenant. The kingdom of God is (1) inaugurated in the coming of Christ, (2) is continuing during the church age, and (3) will be consummated (completed) when Christ returns. Therefore, the New Covenant will not be fully realized during the church age, but only at the consummation (cf. *Third Millennium* on the Covenants, Lesson 9).

Like its type, Israel, the church as the antitype still consists of those who are true and false Christians. Although believers in the visible church are never mentioned in the NT as the **remnant** of the church (cf. 2 Kings 19: 30-31; Isa. 10: 22; Rom. 9: 27; especially Rom. 11: 2-5), it is clear from the warnings in the gospels and epistles that many in the church will fall away in disbelief and apostasy. Examples of these warnings include our Lord's word in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13; Luke 8) and the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24: 10), Paul's word to Timothy (1 Tim. 4: 1), and the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 6). The command, **know the Lord**, will always be necessary until all God's elect are safely gathered into His kingdom at the consummation.

Paul utilizes these OT quotations to support his thesis that **all Israel will be saved**. They are promises which have not yet been realized in the history of Israel. There will, indeed, come a day in which it is no longer necessary for anyone to say, **know the Lord**. The salvation of all the elect, both Jew and Gentile, will be complete. Paul's application of these OT predictions is a paradigm of how modern interpreters must apply many of the promises made to national Israel in the OT.

This express application is an index to the principle of interpretation which would have to be applied to many other Old Testament passages which are in the same vein as Isaiah 59: 20, 21, namely that they comprise the promise of an expansion of gospel blessing such as Paul enunciates in verse 25, 26 (Murray, p. 99, emphasis mine).

<sup>28</sup> From the standpoint  
of the gospel  
they are **enemies** for your sake,  
but from the standpoint  
of *God's* choice  
they are **beloved** for the sake of the fathers;  
<sup>29</sup> for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Jewish opposition to the church had been brutal. Paul should know since he once stood vehemently opposed himself and would have remained so had it not been for his face-to-face encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. The Jews were both **enemies** of the church and enemies of God. They were, as Paul put it earlier, rejected by God (v. 15). Yet, at the same time they are also **beloved for the sake of the fathers**. **The fathers** is an obvious reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had chosen Abraham and his descendants, and His love for Israel as a nation had not been extinguished through Israel's sin. The explanation for this steadfast love is found in the

explanatory **for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable** (v. 29). God had not chosen Israel because they were more numerous or wiser than all the other nations. They were chosen simply because God loved them.

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,<sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:7-8 NASB)

This statement contains no explanation for the love of God beyond His own purpose and covenant **oath**. There was nothing in Israel that merited His love, but neither was there any special merit in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers, that would constrain God's choice of any of them (see Rom. 9). Abraham was worshipping false gods with his father Terah before God spoke to him (Josh. 24: 2), and he endangered his wife to both Pharaoh and Abimelech requiring God's intervention (Gen. 12 and 20). Isaac did the same with Rebekah (Gen. 26) and refused to acknowledge God's choice of Jacob over Esau even after Rebekah had been informed of Jacob's election (Gen. 25: 23). Jacob deceived his father Isaac and was appropriately named "heel-grabber, the over-reacher" (Gen. 27: 36; cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, p. 227). He estranged his unloved wife Leah by making her a virtual widow in the presence of her sister, Rachel (Gen. 29: 31,33), thus violating a command later codified in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18: 18). The descendants of Jacob were also lacking integrity. Judah, the ancestor of Christ, consorted with prostitutes (Gen. 38), and Simeon and Levi conspired to slaughter Hamor, Shechem, and every male in the city (Gen. 34), thus violating another law later codified (Deut. 24: 16).

The reason for Israel's election—and ours—is another **mystery** fully revealed in the NT. We call it electing grace. And because the basis of Israel's call had nothing to do with merit, their calling will not be forever forfeited by what they have done in the past.

**The gifts of God** refer us back to Romans 9: 4-5. The **calling** of God refers to the calling of Abraham and his descendants in Gen. 12: 1-3. Both the gifts and the calling are **irrevocable**, things that God will not revoke or take back. They were given on the basis of God's grace. Although Israel lost favor with God and forfeited His blessings, the nation will not be cast off permanently due to God's promise of a new covenant which they will not break, a covenant in which the mass of Israel will be given new hearts.

<sup>30</sup> For

just as **you**  
once  
were **disobedient** to God,  
but now  
have been shown mercy  
**because of their disobedience,**

<sup>31</sup> so **these also**

now  
have been **disobedient,**  
that **because of the mercy shown to you**

**they also**  
now  
may be shown mercy.

<sup>32</sup> For  
God has shut up  
all  
in **disobedience**

so that  
He  
may show mercy  
to all.

In vv. 30-32, Paul wraps up his argument concerning God's methodology of saving both Jews and Gentiles. For the Gentiles, who once were disobedient (cf. Rom. 1), God used the **disobedience** of Israel as the means of transferring the missiological attention of the Jewish church away from their own countrymen and toward the rest of the world made up of Gentiles (see discussion above). God will now use the salvation of the Gentiles to make his chosen nation jealous, and their jealousy of Gentile blessings will draw them to the gospel.

**For God has shut up all in disobedience** contains the idea of being hemmed in or enclosed so that there is no possibility of escape (Murray, p. 102). The word **shut up** is *sugkleiō*, also used in Galatians.

But the Scripture has **shut up** [*sugkleiō*] everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.<sup>23</sup> But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being **shut up** [*sugkleiō*] to the faith which was later to be revealed. (Gal. 3:22-23 NASB)

**Kept in custody under the law** is parallel to **shut up to the faith**. The law of God—whether the Mosaic law or the moral law of God governing one's conscience—keeps the elect imprisoned to the sensibility of their unrighteousness from which they cannot escape. They are enclosed or hemmed-in to their inability to save themselves, thus leading them to embrace the gospel of God's free grace. But this imprisonment has a benevolent purpose. God wishes to **show mercy to all**—i.e., to all kinds of people, both Jews and Gentiles, who once were disobedient. (Paul is not implying that all without exception are shown mercy.)

Had we humans devised a method of salvation, we would have inevitably developed a salvation based on human merit. God, on the other hand, displays His glory more abundantly by showing mercy to sinners who deserve the very opposite; and in so doing, He discloses the very meaning of **mercy**, a concept which would otherwise remain non-existent. The idea of mercy is irrelevant apart from its application to those who are **disobedient**, for the obedient need no mercy (cf. Murray, p. 102).

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches  
both of the wisdom  
and knowledge  
of God!  
How unsearchable

are His judgments  
and unfathomable

His ways!

<sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN  
THE MIND OF THE LORD,  
OR WHO BECAME  
HIS COUNSELOR?

<sup>35</sup> Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN  
TO HIM  
THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK  
TO HIM AGAIN?

<sup>36</sup> For  
from Him  
and through Him  
and to Him  
are all things.

To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Paul ends the chapter with a doxology of praise for God's providence. The ways of God are beyond human comprehension. Who would have imagined that the rejection of Israel (1) would open the door of salvation to the Gentiles, (2) that the salvation of the Gentiles would be God's instrument in restoring His elect nation to repentance and faith, and (3) that the spiritual restoration of Israel would come full circle with more blessings to the Gentiles?



Paul could be speaking of God's wisdom in every event of his life, the world was created

God says to Job, "Who has given to Me that I should repay *him*? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine." (Job 41:11 NASB)

erring to the entirety of Paul's intention, foreordained before good advice, and as

**from Him and through Him and to Him are all things** describes God as the comprehensive source from whom everything derives its existence, the agent through whom everything continues

to exist and survive, and the goal to whom everything and every event in the universe is moving (Murray).

**To Him *be* the glory forever** acknowledges that all things in heaven and on earth have their proper purpose in exhibiting and demonstrating the glory of God.

## Romans 12

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren,  
by the mercies of God,  
to present your bodies  
a living and holy sacrifice,  
acceptable to God,  
*which is* your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12 begins what is commonly known as the "practical" section of Paul's letter. In actual fact, the whole book is very practical for living the Christian life. There seems little immediate connection between the end of chapter 11 and the opening remarks of chapter 12; therefore, Paul must be referring to everything he had taught in the preceding eleven chapters.

**Present** [*paristemi*] **your bodies** refers us back to Paul's exhortations in Romans 6.

and do not go on presenting [*paristemi*] the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present [*paristemi*] yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom. 6:13 NASB)

Murray elaborates.

It is the body alive from the dead that the believer is to present, alive from the dead because the body of sin has been destroyed. The body to be presented is a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6: 15,19). It is possible that the word "living" also reflects on the permanence of this offering, that it must be a constant dedication (*Romans*, p. 111).

**By the mercies of God** indicates that the circumstances necessary to obeying the command to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice** have been achieved by the work of God. It is through the Lord's mercies that we have been made agreeable to His will and His way in our lives. Moreover, our continued sacrifice will not be possible apart from divine assistance. By himself, the believer cannot live a life which is **acceptable to God**. The Christian life is a supernatural life lived in non-conformity to the world and to the way the rest of the world (humanity) thinks and acts. There is common grace given to each person by virtue of the image of God; but the Christian is, by definition, an alien to even his own culture and people group. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who has transferred him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col. 1: 13; Eph. 5: 8). He has died to the former manner of life and thought, and he has been raised to a new life to walk with Christ. Nevertheless, as Romans 7 indicates, the believer still struggles with the desires of the flesh waging battle against the desires of the Spirit within Him (also Gal. 5: 17 and discussion).

**A living and holy sacrifice** is an allusion (a subtle hint) back to the sacrificial system of the OT. In some of those sacrifices, the sinner would place his hand on the head of the sacrificial animal and with the other would kill the animal, thus transferring his guilt. There is now no more need for animal sacrifices since Christ has fully atoned for our sin (Hebrews). What God now requires are **living** sacrifices: believers who are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of others and for the sake of the gospel day by day and year by year. Our lives are not our own but have been bought with the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 7: 23); therefore, having been released from our slavery to sin, we are now purchased slaves who must live for the sole purpose of pleasing our new Master.

for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. 14:8 NASB)

**Holy sacrifice** describes the quality of our sacrificial living. We must be holy or set apart for God, distinguished in behavior from the sinful world in which we live. It is the holiness of our sacrifice that makes our lives sacrificial. That is, we are willing to give up sins which were once pleasurable to us but which we now wish to banish from memory. We are willing to share our possessions with others who are needy and forego purchases of items we don't really need or even purchase less of what we do need, like food and clothing. For the Christian, living must be sacrificial. We are saved by grace, but the life of true discipleship is costly, described by Jesus as a life of self-denial and taking up the cross.

And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."<sup>24</sup> "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. (Lk. 9:23-24 NASB)

Grace is free, but it is not cheap. Many professing Christians think that they are saved by cheap grace because the grace of God, once received, does not require anything of them. Life goes on as before, characterized by sexual impurity, selfishness, self-indulgence, and self-centeredness. They are still the center of their universe. But true grace changes the way we think and live. As we have seen from Rom. 6, those who have received grace cannot continue living in sin—i.e., a life focused on self-gratification. Self-denial is not the same thing as asceticism. Asceticism was practiced in the early church as a means of winning favor with God. It could take extreme forms like self-flagellation (beating oneself). The Christian believes all things are given by God for our benefit and enjoyment and nothing is to be rejected (1 Tim. 4: 4-5); however, he also believes that things-in-themselves do not bring satisfaction in life and that everything is to be used for the glory of God. This means that the things we have from God should be shared with others who—according to God's inscrutable providence—are not as well-endowed with God's blessings as we are (1 Tim. 6: 17-18).

**Your spiritual service of worship** is literally, **your reasonable service of worship**. The word used in the NASB for **spiritual** is *logikos* (reasonable or thoughtful), from which we get the word logic.

KJV Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable** service.



NKJ Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your **reasonable** service.

I am not sure how *logikos* was ever translated as “spiritual”. Certainly, it is “spiritual” for the child of God to offer up his body as a living sacrifice, but Paul purposely uses a word—not used elsewhere by Paul—with the idea of intelligent activity. As I noted earlier, the believer must use his mind to worship God. So much of the NT, particularly the Pauline epistles, is concentrated on doctrinal purity and God's providential works in history. It is inconceivable that God can be pleased with us if we are indifferent to the great doctrines of our faith. Certainly, we cannot know God exhaustively, but this does not imply that we cannot know Him truly and sufficiently.

Every believer will have an individual level of ability to understand the “grand demonstration” of God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ, and there are many who study the bible under great mental and educational handicaps. Nevertheless, each believer is responsible for apprehending the doctrines of his faith to the full extent of his mental ability, and it is the responsibility of pastors and teachers (Eph. 4) to make them as plain as possible even for the comprehension of little children. Christian practice does not consist in the “mechanical externalism” (Murray) of attending church services while remaining careless of who it is one is worshipping or why the Christian faith is true while other religions are false. At the same time, we must be careful not to become mere scholastics or “arm-chair” theologians who discuss theology with emotional detachment. We must not only believe the doctrines of the bible, but we must also love them and be thankful to God for them.

<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed  
to this world,  
but be transformed  
by the renewing of your mind,  
**so that**  
you may prove  
what the will of God is,  
that which is good  
and acceptable  
and perfect.

Murray describes conformity to the world as being

...wrapped up in the things that are temporal., to have all our thought oriented to that which is seen and temporal. It is to be a time-server. How far-reaching is this indictment! If all our calculations, plans, ambition are determined by what falls within life here, then we are children of this age (*Romans, vol. 3, p. 113*).

The word **conformed** is *suschematizo*, also used in 1 Pet. 1: 14.

As obedient children, do not be **conformed** to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, (1 Pet. 1:14 NASB)

Thus, conformity to the world implies not only conformity to the way this world thinks and acts, but conformity to the values of this world and the unholy trinity of money, sex, and power. The alternative world-view is the mind set on eternal things and the kingdom of God.

**Set your mind** [*phronéō*, to think] on the things above, **not on the things that are on earth**.<sup>3</sup> For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.<sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col. 3:2-4 NASB)

This is another reference from Paul indicating the importance of reasoning or logical thought. Christianity is not only a heart faith but a reasonable faith. The Christian should not think that he must abandon reasoning and take a leap of faith in seemingly illogical doctrines: e.g., the two distinct natures of Jesus (human and divine) and the resurrection.

In fact, closer examination will demonstrate that only Christianity can account for all the things people assume to be true without empirical proof. This would require a long discussion, but two examples would be morality and the universally accepted law of cause and effect. Morality cannot be defended on the basis of a materialistic universe in which nothing exists but matter and energy. John Frame uses the example of an armed man in a convenience store holding up the cashier. He steals the money and leaves. You are there when this happens, and you say to yourself, “That is evil.” But if the only things that exist are material, you can’t say this. What you saw is a man holding up another man with a gun. You didn’t see any evil, because evil is non-material—but it still exists, and everyone knows it. Therefore, things really exist in this world that are non-material, things like good and evil. In a strictly materialistic universe, even God does not exist because God is immaterial. He is a spirit being (Jn. 4: 24). But everyone also knows that God exists (Rom. 1).

Moreover, you cannot assume the law of cause and effect in a universe in which only material things exist. A predictable universe of cause and effect is a universe in which one event causes another event every time under the same conditions. In a chance universe, anything can happen. No predictions of future events can be made—like predicting that a stone thrown in the air will come down—because such laws of cause and effect and predictions based on such laws are non-material. Moreover, you cannot make predictions based upon empiricism (“I believe what I see.”) since no one except God can see the future. I hope you get the point. But the Bible teaches that God has ordained the beginning and the end, implying that He has also ordained every event in between the beginning and the end. Every event is connected to every other event, and all of them are caused by God. Therefore, future events like stones falling rather than floating are predictable because this is the way God has put the universe together—all recorded in Scripture.

<sup>18</sup>while we look not at the things which are **seen**,  
but at the things which are **not seen**;  
for the things which are seen are temporal,  
but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18 NASB)

This verse teaches us that the world which we can now see is unsubstantial and temporary while the unseen world is substantial and eternal. Therefore, the focus of our attention must be on the unseen kingdom of God which will one day be realized in the new heavens and new earth (Rom. 8: 18-25). This does not imply that we must isolate ourselves from the daily routines and duties of life like many of the hermits of the church who lived in the desert meditating on God. Our faith

must be one which engages life as we now have it on earth and others who do not know God; but our faith in the eternal kingdom must govern our thoughts and activities in this world.

Everything we do as husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, or workers in the marketplace, must be done with a focus **on the things above**, i.e., with a view to pleasing our Father in heaven.

Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father...Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, (Col. 3:17, 23 NASB)

This transformation of world-view will not take place overnight; it is a gradual process—in my case, painfully gradual—by which the believer learns to think God's thoughts and see things as God sees them. The necessary ingredient to this transformation is reading the word of God, fellowship with true believers, prayer, and God's secret curriculum of suffering (see earlier citations from Packer). Suffering concentrates the believer's mind in applying the Scripture to difficult situations and forces him to make firm decisions to believe and rely on the truth of Scripture—for example, **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.** Is this verse really true? So many things happen to us that cause us to question it. Suffering brings us to the point of decision to believe or not to believe.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas. 1:2-4 NASB)

The **will of God** in Rom. 12: 2 is not God's decreed will (cf. Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4: 35) but his preceptive will or precepts (cf. Ex 20—24; Matt. 5—7). The phrase, **so that you may prove what the will of God is**, does not imply empirical proof through experimentation. Moral precepts are beyond empirical proof and must be accepted on faith, no matter whose moral precepts are in question. God's moral will does not need our empirical proof for validation as if His law must be subjected to some arbitrary standard of human reasoning or logic. It is true and good and acceptable whether anyone believes it or not. The principle in v. 2 is that through personal application of the law of God—which is the mind of God—to practical life situations, we will **prove to ourselves** experientially that God's precepts are true, **good, acceptable, and perfect.** God's revealed **will** found in the Scriptures is the transcript of His moral perfection and is given to us for our maximum well-being.

<sup>3</sup> For through the grace given to me  
I say to **everyone among you**

not to think

more highly of himself  
than he ought to think;

but to think

so as to have sound judgment,  
as God has allotted **to each**  
a measure of faith.

Paul is now introducing a subject that is of utmost importance in the proper functioning of the church—the subject of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, the *ekklesia*. It is also a doctrine which is much neglected by the church to its detriment. Christians believe they understand what the church is and how it should function, but there is sufficient evidence in the practice of the church on every continent that this is not so.

Before one begins his study of ecclesiology, it would serve him well to avoid many theological books on the subject and to immerse himself in the NT. He will find in the NT that the church is the family or professing community of God’s “called out ones” who care for one another, suffer together, and work together in the proclamation of the kingdom of God. This includes mutual encouragement and exhortation as well as mutual accountability to other believers for one’s behavior and the evangelistic outreach to unbelievers outside the community of faith. Evangelical community involves the community of sharing with one another, especially those in special need, and sharing even with those who are not believers—the ministry of mercy which Christ demonstrated throughout his life through healing the sick and feeding the poor. The subject of the church is too vast to treat here, but at least we may begin by examining Romans 12.

It seems a bit odd that Paul would introduce the subject of spiritual gifts—the gifts of Christ to the church through the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 4: 7)—with a warning **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think**. A gift should evoke humility, not pride; but sinful human nature being what it is, even the undeserved gifts of Christ may produce pride. The phrase **think more highly** is *hyperphronéō* (literally, to have high thoughts, *BibleWorks*). Christians should not entertain “high thoughts” about their own abilities or spiritual gifts. Rather, they must **think [phronéō]** clearly **so as to have sound judgment**. Sound judgment concerning one’s spiritual gifts is the opposite of being high-minded and proud. This would imply that we understand how the spiritual gifts should function within the body of Christ. Their function is the building up of the whole body, not for the promotion of one’s personal reputation or prestige.

<sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, **to the building up of the body of Christ**; (Eph. 4:12 NASB)

<sup>7</sup>But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. (1 Cor. 12:7 NASB)

At the same time, **sound judgment** would prohibit any tendency to minimize one’s spiritual gift as insignificant or unimportant. This would amount to the sin of denying the grace of God given to each of us for a specific purpose in His church. None of us will ever preach like Charles Spurgeon or write like J.I. Packer or John Murray (an educated guess), but we must use whatever gift we have for God’s kingdom. If God had wanted a million John Murrays or Charles Spurgeons, He could easily have produced them. God’s love for diversity is evident in the diversity in creation, the diversity of people and cultures, and the diversity of gifts within His church. There is individuality of person and function but unity of purpose (Phil. 2:2).

...that which is commended must be observed no less than that which is forbidden. We are to “think so as to think soberly”. Thus humble and sober assessment of what each person is by the grace of God is enjoined. If we consider ourselves to possess gifts we do not have, then we have an inflated notion of our place and function; we sin by esteeming ourselves beyond what we are. But if we underestimate, then we are refusing to acknowledge God’s grace and we fail to exercise that which

God has dispensed for our own sanctification and that of others. The positive injunction is the reproof of a false humility which equally with over self-esteem fails to assess the grace of God and the vocation which distinguishing distribution of grace assigns to each (Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, pp. 117-118, emphasis mine).

As the first epistle to the Corinthians suggests, the church was having some confusion concerning the function of the gifts to the effect that some were esteeming themselves as superior to others.

And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (1 Cor. 12:21 NASB)

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have *the gift of* prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-2 NASB)

Without love, the spiritual gifts will not serve for the mutual benefit of the whole professing community of God's people but will be used by their possessors to build self-esteem (now considered a positive trait by western culture) and prestige within the church. Some people whose gifts are more public and exceptional than others—teachers, preachers, evangelists, healers (1 Cor. 12: 9)—will be esteemed as more important and necessary within the body while those whose gifts are less exceptional and private—the gifts of service, mercy, giving, etc.—will be considered unnecessary. Historically, these less public gifts have been so minimized in the church that they are all but forgotten, and the only gifts being recognized or exercised are teaching and preaching. In charismatic churches which believe in continuing revelation, prophecy and tongues among the more essential gifts.

**As God has allotted to each a measure of faith** underscores or stresses the fact that these are the gifts of God to His church. Notice that while they are **gifts** of Christ (Eph. 4: 7) and **manifestations** of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 7), they are at the same time a specific **measure of faith** which is **allotted** to each Christian by God the Father. All three persons of the Trinity are involved in allocating gifts to the church. Notice also that **each** Christian is allocated at least one gift which implies that each Christian has some function to accomplish within the body of Christ. No one is allowed to sit on the sidelines like a spectator in a football game rather than a player.

**Measure [metron] of faith** also implies that the exercise of the gifts requires faith on the part of every believer and that the degree to which these gifts are exercised will vary according to the degree of **faith** of the individual believer. Not all believers are equally gifted—even those with the same gift—and not all believers will carry out their particular functions within the body of Christ with the same degree of fruitfulness. Some believers with the gift of giving, service, or mercy will be far more productive in the building up of the body than others whose same gift of service is exercised with more reserve or hesitancy. The same is true of the gift of teaching or preaching. Some preachers and teachers will work more diligently in the cultivation and usefulness of their gifts than others. Some preachers and teachers are more gifted than others. **God has allotted to each a measure of faith** indicates a difference in the amount of faith that God gives each person in the exercise of his gift and does not refer to saving faith. God is sovereign in the distribution of both the gifts and the faith in administering the gifts. This unequal distribution of faith is not about saving faith but the faith each believer exercises in living the Christian life, exercising his gifts,

and as Paul puts it, working out his salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2: 12). In 1 Cor. 12: 9, **faith** is mentioned as a spiritual gift; and since all believers have faith, Paul must be indicating that some believers have been given a greater measure of faith than others, faith that is manifested in the intensity of one's labors.

But to each one of us grace was given **according to the measure** [*metron*] **of Christ's gift**. (Eph. 4:7 NASB)

But one and **the same Spirit** works all these things, **distributing to each one individually just as He wills**. (1 Cor. 12:11 NASB)

Gordon Fee says that the last verse is Paul's version of the Spirit blowing wherever He wishes in His sovereign and free administration of grace (Jn. 3: 8). Likewise, His distribution of gifts is according to His will and not constrained by the equality that the world may insist upon.

Throughout the created world, we find abundant evidence that God is not an egalitarian, i.e., an advocate of the belief that all men should have equal right to economic, social, and political good. Some people are born in undeveloped countries affording them unequal opportunities in education, employment, and income while others are born in rich, affluent countries with abundant opportunities. Even in wealthy countries, some are born into upper income families while others into poor families. Some are born with high intelligence and ambition, thus facilitating their upward mobility even when they have little economically to start with, while others are born into rich families but have learning disabilities which preclude making the most advantage of their wealth educationally. Examples of inequalities abound, flying in the face of utopian, socialistic dreams of the equal distribution of wealth and property among all people in a particular society and ultimately around the world. However, not one single society in the history of mankind has exhibited this kind of equality, and the elites which have attempted to create such "utopias" have become the most bloodthirsty tyrants in history producing countries rife with poverty and bloodshed.

We might think that somehow these inequities would be absent in the church; but they are not. God does not remove social, intellectual, educational, or economic inequalities within the Christian community. Nor does He remove spiritual inequalities. In one sense He creates them through the inequitable and sovereign distribution of gifts and grace. Nor do we discover any indication in Scripture that everyone in the church must serve the same function or have equal access to the same function. (Women should not become elders, regardless of any innate intellectual abilities or cultivated spiritual character. 1 Tim. 2) Every Christian is equal before God ontologically in terms of his objective being: he, or she, is an adopted **son** (recall the earlier comment on the status of full-grown sons in ancient Greco-Roman culture as opposed to daughters). Like a good father, God does not play favorites in showing love and affection to His children. Christ's accomplished atonement is applied equally for each one of us. However, none of us has the same function to perform or part to play in this great drama of redemption; and for this reason, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit distributes to **each** one of us a particular **measure** of His grace to accomplish the specific task ordained for us.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:10 NASB)

<sup>4</sup> For just as we have

**many members**

in *one body*

and **all the members**

do not have the same function,

<sup>5</sup> so we, **who are many,**

are *one body in Christ,*

and individually **members**

*one of another.*

The unity and diversity of the body of Christ is explained in more detail in this section. The church has **many members**, but the many members make up **one body**, not many bodies, making each part of the body **members of one another**. As each member of the human body is organically connected with every other member to make one physical body, the members of the body of Christ are spiritually connected through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; (Eph. 4:4 NASB)*

Not every member of the human body has the **same function**. The legs have a much different function than the arms and hands. The eyes have a much different function than the ears, mouth, and nose. Yet, all the members function for the good of the body. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 12,

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1 Cor. 12:17-18 NASB)

Analogously, since all the members serve a different function, all of them are necessary for the well-being of the body. None of us would consider any part of our body, however small and seemingly insignificant, to be unimportant.

<sup>6</sup> Since we have gifts that differ

according to the grace given to us,

*each of us is to exercise them accordingly:*

if prophecy,

according to the proportion of his faith:

<sup>7</sup> if service,

in his serving;

or he who teaches,

in his teaching;

<sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts,

in his exhortation;

he who gives,

with liberality;

he who leads,

with diligence;



he who shows mercy,  
with cheerfulness.

<sup>9</sup> *Let love be without hypocrisy.*

As Christ is the sovereign giver of all spiritual gifts, distributed through His Spirit, He is also the giver of different measures of **grace** in the administration of these gifts. **According to the grace given to us** and **according to the proportion of his faith** are parallel phrases emphasizing, first, the sovereign gift of grace, and secondly, the human responsibility in the exercise of the gift.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually **just as He wills**. (1 Cor. 12:11 NASB)

God gives grace, but the believer must exercise faith in **performing** the task God has given him to do. **According to the proportion of his faith** modifies each of the gifts listed; thus, **if service** [*according to the proportion of his faith*] **in his serving, or he who teaches** [*according to the proportion of his faith*] **in his teaching**, and so on with every gift, although the phrase is not explicitly stated, but implied.

For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*;<sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10 NASB)

This verse teaches that God has ordained a checklist of **good works** for each Christian to accomplish in his lifetime. Some of these **good works** will remain unknown to us; others may seem insignificant. However, the combination of these good works along with all the good works of all Christians throughout the history of the church creates a significant impact upon this world.

The gift of **prophecy** is mentioned first in Romans 12 possibly because it was still a necessary manifestation of the Spirit to complete God's special revelation to first century Christians who did not have access to a finished NT canon.

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. (1 Cor. 14:3 NASB)

The NT canon was not yet compiled, nor were copies of the gospels and NT epistles available to all the churches. This probably did not occur until the first part of the second century; moreover, very few individuals had a copy of the OT scriptures. The gift of prophecy is no longer needed since the canon of Scripture has been completed. I deny that anyone today speaks infallible words which are received directly from the Holy Spirit. Prophesying in the form of preaching is still necessary in that the preacher is reminding the audience of what the Spirit has already spoken in the infallible word of God, the Bible. Most written prophecy in the OT is not concerned with predicting the future, but in calling attention to the sins of Israel and Judah and reminding them of their obligation to keep the covenant stipulation of the Mosaic Law. In this same sense, modern preaching should be prophetic in reminding Christians of their obligation to keep the law of God



and giving them practical instructions on how this law applies in their own historical and cultural context. Moreover, the preacher must continue reminding his hearers of the work of redemption without which no one would be able to please God.

For **what the Law could not do**, weak as it was through the flesh, **God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering for sin*, He condemned sin in the flesh,** <sup>4</sup> so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4 NASB)

**Serving** includes a multiplicity of activities and comprehends the giftedness of most members. One may employ his natural or acquired talents in the service of others in the church and thereby demonstrate his spiritual gift through his natural and acquired ability. The spiritual gift itself is service, not the natural or acquired talent; however, the gift of serving is expressed through this talent. For example, a carpenter may use his skills to repair the home of a financially underprivileged member of the church, thus bringing praise to God from the destitute member and others within and outside the church. People who are good cooks may use their natural or acquired talents in cooking to feed the hungry or those who are too sick to prepare meals for themselves. Computer technicians may use their gifts for coordinating sound, audio, and recording of preached messages. The potential ways believers may use their natural and acquired talents in service to others is practically endless. It is to the detriment of the kingdom of God that God's people have not been more thoroughly educated concerning the diversity of ways their abilities could be used for the advancement of the gospel.

**Serving** also includes those activities which require no special skills: washing dishes, cleaning the church auditorium, and many other examples of non-skilled labor. Once more, the gift of the Spirit is the willingness to humble oneself in service of others, doing whatever needs to be done. This humility of service is God-given; it is not our natural inclination which is self-exaltation. No Christian, however educated or skilled, should be too proud to perform ordinary tasks which are helpful to other members of the congregation. I heard a story of a very highly paid executive in a US corporation who made it a habit of washing the dishes after every men's prayer breakfast. Paul encouraged **slaves** to do their work heartily unto the Lord. If slaves could serve their masters in the most menial of tasks, every member of the church, pastors included, should be willing to humble themselves to perform whatever task is necessary to serve others.

Possibly, serving is mentioned second in the list because every gift represents some expression of serving others, including the gifts of **teaching** and **exhortation**.

**Teaching** and **exhortation** generally go together and are gifts commonly possessed by the same person. However, the one who has the gift of exhortation is not always a teacher. He may possess a special gift of encouragement and comfort. The word is *paraklesis*, literally, "calling to one's aid" (*BibleWorks*). Some wise saints in the church may possess the unusual ability of encouraging those who are discouraged through various circumstances, perhaps even better than an elder. **Teaching** and **exhortation** involve a high degree of accountability, knowledge, and wisdom.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man builds on the

foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,<sup>13</sup> each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.<sup>14</sup> If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.<sup>15</sup> If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:10-15 NASB)

This passage teaches that there will be Christians—particularly teachers—who will be saved, but their works will not stand the test of examination. Their work, specifically their teaching, was seriously deficient in some way. Not only is knowledge necessary, but also wisdom to apply the knowledge plus the ability to communicate this knowledge. The gift of teaching is not mentioned in 1 Cor. 12 but is included with the **word of knowledge** and the **word of wisdom** (1 Cor. 12: 8). This knowledge and wisdom must be clearly communicated to others so that they also will live a godly life equipped with this same knowledge and wisdom.

For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,<sup>10</sup> **so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (Col. 1:9-10 NASB)

Considering the high expectations that the word of God places upon teachers, it is appropriate for those who are training pastors to be frankly honest with ourselves and those we are training. Paul warns Timothy not to be too hasty in ordaining others to be elders, for by doing so he would implicate himself in the sins of those who were not ready for this responsibility.

Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. (1 Tim. 5:22 NASB)

While Paul is speaking primarily of behavioral sins (see context of 1 Tim. 5), we may not eliminate the application of this verse to the sin of culpable (blamable) doctrinal error. If an elder is intellectually lazy and not a diligent student of the Bible, his false teaching is not simply mistaken but also sinful. I must emphasize that if an elder does not enjoy reading—particularly reading the Bible and other publications related to the Bible—he is not called to be an elder. For along with calling comes the desire to express that calling with the highest degree of competence possible according to his ability. Moreover, if he does not possess the necessary mental competence to capably lead people into a correct understanding of the Bible—regardless of his zeal to do so—he is not called to be an elder.

I know that many of those reading this are involved in pastoral training all over sub-Saharan Africa, and I enthusiastically encourage this. However, let me say once more that not everyone who believes he is called as a pastor/elder has received this calling from the Holy Spirit. He may have the zeal and desire, but if he lacks the requisite mental and verbal skills to execute this calling, he will not be helping the church but hurting it. This is a sensitive subject, and none of us wish to crush the desire of someone who aspires to this calling or dismiss them too quickly. I have been dismissed myself in the past by Christians who were unwilling to patiently wait for my gifts to mature. Nevertheless, those who have the gift of teaching and preaching must protect God's sheep from being subjected to those who cannot lead them into the knowledge of the truth. I do not wish to be misinterpreted here to mean that a certain style of delivery is necessary to confirm one's ability to preach or teach. The Bible says nothing about delivery but much about the content of one's teaching. There are many in the pulpits of the world who are dynamic speakers, and they can hold their audiences spell-bound with their oratorical skills, humor, illustrations, and stories. But there is one

main problem: They have nothing substantial to say about the scriptures or their application to Christian living.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, **not in cleverness of speech**, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Cor. 1:17 NASB)

Lastly, women who are bestowed with the gift of teaching may not use this gift in teaching men. Therefore, however gifted they are in knowledge and communication, they may not become elders or pastors in the church, nor may they teach other pastors. I have dealt extensively with this subject in my notes on 1 Timothy 2 and 3, and I will not repeat myself here. However, those readers who are training females for the role of pastor/elder are in violation of the express word of God. If such women are being trained to teach other women or children, well and good; but if they are attending training with the expectation of being ordained as elders or pastors, they must be gently but firmly corrected. If elders must be true to the word of God, it is inconsistent with that requirement that their ministry to the male membership is in violation of that requirement; and if they so flippantly dismiss the word of God in this context, may they also not dismiss many other requirements in Scripture in other contexts? The argument has been made that women may not teach men in the context of public worship, but that all other contexts are permissible. But this is purely arbitrary. One cannot teach the Bible without exercising some spiritual authority over those who are taught, the very reason Paul couches this restriction so carefully: **But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man** (1 Tim. 2: 12b). Moreover, one cannot teach the Bible in any context altogether stripped of worship. To study the Bible is the same as worshipping the one who is the Word of God. (Therefore, it should be understood that I am not speaking about women teaching men mathematics, history, economics, or any number of other subjects.)

### **He who gives, with liberality.**

To whom much is given, much is expected in return. The possession of riches is not required for the gift of giving. We should remember how the Lord Jesus was rich in heaven but for our sake became poor on earth so that we through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8: 9). Becoming rich does not win God's favor, nor is it necessarily a sign of God's favor. Only as we employ those riches for practical use in the kingdom will God reward us. Wealthy Christians must continually question the reason for their wealth. Why did God give wealth to them rather than others? Christians who are **conceited** (1 Tim. 6: 17 below) will conclude that they have become wealthy by their own hard labor, intelligent decisions, or wise management. All of this may be true, but the question remains: Who gave them their diligence, intelligence, educational opportunities, or wisdom to manage well? What good qualities do they possess that are not God-given?

For who regards you as superior? **What do you have that you did not receive?** And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Cor. 4:7 NASB)

It is certainly questionable—to me at least, although not to many Presbyterians in the US—that God gives some Christians extra income so that they may afford to live in extravagant houses and take exotic vacations every year. If they can continue to do this while simultaneously giving generously (sacrificially?) to the kingdom of Christ, then okay. But this is too often not the case. God's "temple" (His kingdom on earth) is often neglected while His people live comfortably in their palaces (Haggai 1).

Instruct those who are **rich in this present world** not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.<sup>18</sup> *Instruct them* to do good, **to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share**, (1 Tim. 6:17-18 NASB)

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful **to engage in good deeds**. These things are good and profitable for men. (Tit. 3:8 NASB)

**Good deeds...are good and profitable** not only for the body of Christ but for unbelievers who are observing these good deeds from the outside. They are essential in proving the truthfulness of our words. When God spoke in the OT, He always supported His words with deeds. Words without deeds are suspicious because they are shallow; deeds without words are ambiguous because no one knows why they are being done.

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn. 3:18 NASB)

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and **glorify your Father who is in heaven**. (Matt. 5:16 NASB)

John is not saying that **word** and **tongue** are not necessary, but that the **deed** is confirmation of the truthfulness of the word of love that is spoken, apart from which the word is mere talk—and mere talk is cheap.

**He who leads [proistemi] with diligence** may refer to the elders/overseers who are responsible for the general oversight and spiritual welfare of the congregation. Elders must one day give an account for the souls of those who have been entrusted to them for safe care.

Obey your leaders [*hegeomai*] and submit to them, **for they keep watch over your souls** as those who **will give an account**. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17 NASB)

With **diligence**, elders must **watch over...the souls** of congregational members. This implies that elders know people well enough to have a fairly good idea of what is going on in their lives, and this is a difficult task. It is difficult, on the one hand, because people are not inclined to be open and honest about personal problems in their lives. We like to hide our vulnerabilities from others to save face and reputation within the congregation. On the other hand, it is difficult because we may not know any of our elders well enough to feel comfortable sharing our problems with them. For this reason, elders must be **hospitable**; their homes must be open for conversation and the development of deep friendships which encourage openness. Their leadership must be in word and **deeds** which give tangible evidence that they really believe what they teach. For this reason, Paul says,

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,<sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. (1 Tim. 3:2-3 NASB)

Since these characteristics are requirements for the office of elder, they must somehow be measurable. That is, the congregation who elects men to this office should be able to observe their lives sufficiently to determine whether they meet the requirements. If they are **pugnacious** (**quarrelsome**; ESV, NIV), heavy drinkers, etc. then they do not qualify. Implicit in the whole list in 1 Timothy and Titus is the assumption that these men are sufficiently known by the members of the congregation. Therefore, not only must elders know the members, but they must be known by the members. Take for instance, the requirement, **free from the love of money**. How does anyone know whether a person is free from the love of money? Do we ask the potential elder, “Mr. So-and-so, are you free from the love of money?”, to which he replies, “Yes, of course.” “Good,” you reply. “Then you qualify for the office of elder.” Obviously, this is a ridiculous conversation, but not more ridiculous than the way most Christians choose elders about whom they know little or nothing. The process of electing elders may be much more straight-forward in small congregations where the nominees are better known—but probably not well-known—but in large congregations, elders may not be well-known at all.

How do we really know that a man is not greedy? If his house covers half a city block, we may well wonder how much house this man needs to shelter his family, but maybe his huge, luxurious house is a symbol of his “success”, defined in worldly terms. Is he generous in giving to missions? Is he concerned for the poor? What is the evidence (**deeds**) which give credibility to his claim to be **free from the love of money**? Far from the ostentatious display of wealth being a suspicious “red flag” against his suitability for leadership, many elders are chosen to this office because of their worldly success and evidence of wealth. Consequently, many churches become spiritually poor. The people have no examples to follow—particularly in their use of money—and no one to challenge the cheap grace which has become so prevalent in the evangelical church.

Remember those who **led** [*hegeomai*] you, who **spoke the word of God to you**; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Heb. 13:7 NASB)

The gift of **mercy**, normally associated with “mercy ministries”, requires great discernment, empathy, and patience. It requires discernment in being able to determine who truly needs and warrants help and who is simply trying to “milk” the system to his advantage. Paul warns those who refuse to work not to expect free handouts from those who do work, possibly even implying at one point that able-bodied people who request assistance are essentially thieves.

He who steals **must steal no longer**; but rather **he must labor**, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. (Eph. 4:28 NASB)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.<sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know **how you ought to follow our example**, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,<sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;<sup>9</sup> not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, **so that you would follow our example**.<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.<sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.<sup>12</sup> Now such persons we

command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. (2 Thess. 3:6-12 NASB)

I hesitate to say this, but many Africans are pursuing the ministry for the sole reason that they do not like manual labor like farming or construction. While pretending to be called to preach, they also do not like the hard labor of studying the Bible and preparing sermons and Bible studies which reflect careful thought and meaningful application for their congregations. In fact, they don't work at much of anything because they are lazy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ministry of the word has fallen into disrespect, and some pastors have a poor reputation in their own communities.

I must also say to all my readers, as I have also said to many of you personally, that if you are not being paid a **living** (1 Cor. 9: 14) by your congregation—and few of you are—you are under no obligation to them to work full-time as a pastor. The apostle Paul frequently worked part-time as a tentmaker to feed himself and others who worked with him. It was not disgraceful for him to work hard manually to support himself, and he did not have the additional responsibility of a wife and children. African pastors are not obligated to live in poverty. If you choose to do so, that is your choice—it is probably not your wife's choice or that of your children. You are obligated to use your spiritual gift of preaching and teaching, but you are not obligated to starve to death while doing so, nor to require your families to go without needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and school fees.

A biblical church has a plurality of elders all of whom should be able to teach to some extent. This implies that the teaching and preaching responsibilities may be shared with others, thus giving all the elders the opportunity to work at other jobs to support their families. “Can't find work” you say? Well, then develop a skill like the apostle Paul. I did. I learned carpentry, house painting, electrical, and plumbing—all before I ever stepped foot in Africa at 51 years old. Why? Because I had a family to feed. Necessity is the mother of invention. You might be surprised how many skills you might learn if you are hungry.

A worker's appetite works for him, For his hunger urges him *on*. (Prov. 16:26 NASB)

Public welfare programs in the US have largely failed due to lack of oversight and accountability. The result is that billions of dollars have been spent “helping” people who have no intention of working for a living. The consequences include generations of adults who have never experienced the dignity of making their own living, drug abuse to counteract the extreme boredom of sitting around all day doing nothing, the prostitution of women whose absentee husbands are derelict in their responsibilities, and millions of illegitimate children. **Mercy** was always meant to be administered with knowledge lest the people we are trying to help are hurt far more by our so-called “mercy”. The end-goal of all mercy is the cultivation of character. That is, the one receiving mercy must be able to look beyond the person distributing mercy and see the face of Christ and His holiness. This will hopefully result in the avoidance of sinful life-style choices—laziness, drug abuse, sexual immorality, etc.—which may have caused financial poverty or poor health.

**Mercy** also requires empathy, not sympathy, toward those who are hurting, remembering that but for God's grace, we would be in the same situation or worse. Millions of men, women, and children in our world—especially women and children—are the victims of war, government mismanagement, famine, domestic abuse from husbands and fathers, and a multitude of other

outside causes for which they were not responsible. They are like sheep with no shepherd. The church should not wait on governmental and international agencies like the United Nations before they lend a helping hand to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless and abused. I have seen first-hand the emaciated bodies of South Sudanese adults and children standing in line for 19,000 Ush (the equivalent of \$5 US) per month for food, not enough to adequately feed a person for one week. This and other extreme conditions continue while many UN officers make over \$100k per year.

When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. (Mk. 6:34 NASB)

Shortly after this statement, Jesus fed the five thousand. His **compassion** resulted in mercy. Mercy does not consist merely in feeling sorry for helpless people; it consists in pity plus action. **Mercy** also requires patience; therefore, Paul says, **he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness**. Working with needy people can be frustrating, especially when your efforts are unappreciated. Needy people can be quite messy since they are often needy due to their own lack of wisdom, thrift, and industry (2 Thess. 3: 6-12 above). The amazing thing about Jesus' compassion is that He could see people's evil hearts and yet still feel compassion for them. Those who have the gift of mercy know people are sinners, but they also know that they are also sinners in need of mercy.

Perhaps this is partly why Paul then says, **Let love [agape] be without hypocrisy [anupokritos]** (v. 9). This statement could be a reference to all the spiritual gifts Paul has mentioned or it could be the beginning of a new section—or both. In the Greek text, love is preceded by the definite article, **the love**. **The love**—i.e., the love for God and others, NOT self-love—must be the motivating factor underlying the exercise of every spiritual gift. In serving, teaching, leading, showing mercy, prophecy, exhortation, giving, etc., **the love** must be predominant without any mixture of pretention. If we don't love, our gifts are meaningless and ineffective.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, **but do not have love**, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, **but do not have love**, I am nothing.<sup>3</sup> And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, **but do not have love**, it profits me nothing...Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. (1 Cor. 13:1-3, 8 NASB)

The question must be continually asked, “Why am I doing this?” Why am I preaching, teaching, giving, serving, et al? If I am not exercising my gift(s) with a sincere love for God and others (*anupokritos*, without hypocrisy), then it would be better to stop doing anything else until I can do it for the right reason. Of course, this statement needs qualification. Our motives for anything we do are never perfectly pure (see Packer's discussion of Gal. 5: 17 above), but they should be sufficiently pure to fit the description given by Paul, **without hypocrisy**. Paul's exhortation, **Let love be without hypocrisy**, would be meaningless if no acceptable degree of genuineness were possible. This rule would apply to all our works and motives—deeds and thoughts. Because we are **in Christ**, God accepts our works and motives even though they are not perfect. Only Christ lived a perfect life. If God only accepted perfect obedience from the believer, then nothing we do or think would be pleasing to Him. However, since God was pleased with everything Christ did or thought, and because we are united to Christ, God patiently forebears with our lack of perfection in deed and motive.

in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in **genuine** [*anupokritos*] love, (2 Cor. 6:6 NASB)

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a **sincere** [*anupokritos*] love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, (1 Pet. 1:22 NASB)

**Prophecy** as continuing revelation has already ceased. **Mercy** will not be needed in the new heavens and earth inhabited by perfect people. Many forms of **service** will no longer be needed. **Knowledge** (1 Cor. 13: 8; cf. 1 Cor. 12: 8) is possibly a reference to the special gift of **teaching** apostolic and prophetic truth not collected in Scripture at the time of Paul's writing (Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, p. 246). **It will be done away** for the same reason as prophecy and tongues, because no longer needed. (It should be clear that knowledge in its general meaning can never cease.) **But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love** (1 Cor. 13:13 NASB).

<sup>9b</sup>Abhor what is evil;  
cling to what is good.

To love God and His people, one must also **abhor** (hate) evil. We must hate the things that God hates and love the things God loves. Evil destroys lives not only outside the church but inside the church. It destroys marriages, families, and friendships. Therefore, God's people must be as equally committed to hating evil as loving **what is good**. The Corinthians did not hate the evil of the man committing incest with his father's wife, and Paul takes them to task for their failure to excommunicate him (1 Cor. 5). The end-goal in Paul's insistence to discipline the man was restoration. Restoring him to spiritual health was the loving thing to do, regardless of how painful the process might be (cf. 2 Cor. 2: 1-11).

The "culture wars" (against abortion, homosexuality, pornography, transgenderism, etc.) in the US have been mostly lost because the church (myself included) has not sufficiently hated evil. For now, *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion throughout the US, has been reversed; but the hearts of people have remained unchanged. As a nation, we have moved on from abortion—still legal in some states—to the legalization of same-sex marriages resulting in the legal adoption of children by homosexuals, the mutilation of young children and teenagers through sex-change operations, and the general psychological and spiritual dissatisfaction with life exhibited by a large percentage of our population, especially adolescents. The second leading cause of death among adolescents is suicide. Many of our problems have arisen through the public education system through which our young people have been indoctrinated with evolutionism and its resulting moral relativism. There can be no moral absolutes or meaning in a universe that has evolved by the chance collision of molecules.

Rather than changing the culture, culture has changed the church. Main-line denominations like the Episcopal Church in the US and the Presbyterian Church US have succumbed to cultural distortion years ago by permitting homosexual membership and now homosexual pastors. Even in evangelical churches, adultery is often overlooked rather than disciplined. Covetousness and greed are rarely mentioned. But before we **abhor what is evil** all around us, we must hate the evil within ourselves. Let each of us take a long and hard look at ourselves and abhor the remaining, besetting sin in our own lives.



**Cling** [*kallao*] **to what is good** uses the same verb as the Greek translation of Gen. 2: 24, a man being **joined** or **cleaving** (KJV) to his wife. Clinging to what is morally good demands the same level of tenacious commitment as a husband clinging to his wife in wholehearted devotion and fidelity, abhorring the very thought of giving his love to another woman.

<sup>10</sup> Be devoted

*to one another*

*in brotherly love;*

give preference

*to one another*

*in honor;*

The church is God's family, consisting of fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters (cf. 1 Tim. 5: 1-2). Every family has squabbles, but if it is at all functional, such squabbles do not lead to total dissolution; family relationships and mutual loyalty keep it together. So it is, or should be, with the family of God. There will be differences of opinion, but those differences should not lead to unsolvable strife and separation. The family should stay together.

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Pet. 4:8 NASB)

**Be devoted to one another** naturally leads to **give preference to one another**. The verb literally means "going before"; therefore, commentators render the command as outdoing one another in showing praise for the other's accomplishments (Moo, p. 778). Considered in the context of v. 3, the verse supports the necessity of humility in not thinking more highly of oneself, or one's gifts, than he ought to think. Rather than "tooting our own horn" we should be showing positive appreciation for the contributions of others who labor in God's kingdom. Such appreciation is not limited to labor which is strictly church related but applies to Christians who strive to express a Christian worldview in every vocation. The kingdom of God is broader than the church. It includes every sphere of activity where God's sovereign rule and will demands expression. This includes the whole earth in which the knowledge of God will one day be pervasive and all-encompassing in every sphere.

"For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14 NASB)

<sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence,  
fervent in spirit,  
serving the Lord;

**Serving the Lord** often involves fatigue and weariness to one's spirit. For this reason, we find other encouragements against weariness in other Pauline letters.

But as for you, brethren, **do not grow weary** of doing good. (2 Thess. 3:13 NASB)

**Let us not lose heart** in doing good, for in due time we will reap **if we do not grow weary**. (Gal. 6:9 NASB)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that **your toil is not *in vain in the Lord***. (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB)

Reassurance in **doing good** is necessary since we are often tempted to believe that what we do in ministry does not make any real difference. I have done a lot of house renovation in my lifetime, and when I finish a project I can see a tangible, noticeable difference that gratifies me and encourages me to continue with other projects—although at 71 I am now running out of steam. This is not generally true in ministry, because you cannot necessarily see any noticeable change in the person’s behavior and no change at all in his heart, although change may have occurred. Jesus warned us about this when He told the parable about the kingdom of God being like leaven in a lump of dough. Running out of steam—also known as “burn-out”—can easily occur when we fail to see results, and we often do. Paul certainly understood this tendency, and he counters it with the simple reminder that that no quitting is permissible for the believer. Life in Christ is a long marathon run requiring endurance and fortitude, and we will not know what we accomplished or failed to accomplish until our works are examined (2 Cor. 5: 10).

Paul then uses a word designed to rekindle the fire under his readers. **Fervent** is a present active participle from *zeo* meaning “to be hot” or “to boil”. Moo translates the verse, “Be set on fire by the Spirit” thus interpreting **spirit** as the Holy Spirit. Rather than “cooling off” through discouragement, we must depend upon the Holy Spirit to stir up the fire of our commitment to His work.

<sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope,  
persevering in tribulation,  
devoted to prayer,

**Rejoicing in hope** is likewise a necessary solution to weariness of spirit. Focusing on the problems of the here and now can be paralyzing to the spirit. We cannot ignore present problems because we are believers who are entrusted with unwanted “opportunities” (also called problems) and the responsibility to solve them to the best of our abilities; but we should not forget that the hope of eternal life set before us is the incomparable antidote to the poison of despair. The joy of doing the Father’s will and of having a people for Himself who were given to Him by the Father (Jn. 6: 37) was the means by which Jesus **endured the cross** and **despised the shame** of being crucified. Christ is the supreme example of one who lived in hope. His hope was not wishful thinking but the steadfast assurance that His death on the cross would definitely accomplish all that the Father had designed for it to accomplish (Jn. 4: 34; 5: 36; 10: 27-29): the justification, sanctification, and glorification of His chosen people and the restoration of the universe to its original purpose (Rom. 8: 28-39).

In the same context, the author of Hebrews then encourages us to look to Jesus as our supreme example of faith and hope so that we too might be able to endure the difficulties of this present life, including the present persecutions that his audience was suffering (Heb. 10: 34).

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of**

**God.** <sup>3</sup> For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>4</sup> You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; (Heb. 12:1-4 NASB)

**Persevering** [*hupomeno*] **in tribulation** [*thlipsis*] recalls Jesus' words in John's and Matthew's gospels.

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have **tribulation** [*thlipsis*], but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33 NASB)

"But the one who **endures** [*hupomeno*; may also translated **perseveres**] to the end, he will be saved. (Matt. 24:13 NASB)

God preserves, but we persevere. Paul has already assured his Roman audience that the chain of salvation cannot be broken (Rom. 8: 29-30). All who are foreknown and predestined are glorified, and nothing natural or supernatural can separate them from the love of God, including **tribulation** [*thlipsis*] (Rom. 8: 35). Nothing can interrupt the inexorable (unstoppable) progression of salvation which God set in motion before the foundation of the world. However, the flip side of this promise is individual perseverance in the midst of tribulation which often includes persecution.

Perseverance requires that we be **devoted to prayer** since prayer is one of the means of grace by which we persevere in suffering and **rejoice in hope**. Individual and corporate prayer, like individual and corporate perseverance, is not a theological formality, as if the believer would be saved apart from endurance and prayer. He will not. He will be saved by means of endurance and prayer along with the proper application of the other means of grace. The same can be said for the missionary expanse of the gospel into all the world. God's kingdom is coming, and nothing can prevail against God's church; but apart from the God-ordained means of evangelism and discipleship, the church will fail. In fact, the church in some parts of the world has already failed and died because of disobedience and apathy. The same Paul who argues cogently that God has chosen some to salvation before they were born also requests the Ephesians to pray that God would give him boldness to preach the gospel (Eph. 6: 19). **And how will they hear without a preacher?** (Rom. 10: 14).

<sup>13</sup> contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

Devotion to one another requires sacrifice. **Give us** [*not me*] **this day our** [*not my*] **daily bread** is a corporate prayer not merely for our own personal, individual needs but for the needs of the entire church. Most people in ancient cultures, including Christians, were poor by today's standards. World-wide poverty began to be eradicated in the West by means of the Industrial Revolution taking shape 18 centuries later in England and spreading to the US and continental Europe. Until then, the vast majority of the world's population was poor. **Needs** must be distinguished from **wants**. People have many more wants than needs, but the obligation of the body of Christ is to provide the needs—food, clothing, shelter—of those who cannot fulfill those needs themselves. All others are required to work.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. (Eph. 4:28 NASB)

Most likely, Paul is using the word, **steal**, in its literal sense; but he could also be implying that those who were not working—but nevertheless, eating—were essentially stealing from those who provided for their needs. Rather than taking from others, able-bodied Christians should be those who were giving to the needs of others.

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. (2 Thess. 3:10 NASB)

"You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. <sup>35</sup> "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:34-35 NASB)

**Hospitality** was extremely important and necessary during this time for believers who were traveling from place to place. Hotels were rare and were often dangerous places harboring thieves and murderers. Believers were called upon to open their homes even to strangers who were professing Christians to forestall the necessity of subjecting themselves and their families to danger.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb. 13:2 NASB)

The writer could be (1) alluding to Abraham who entertained three men, one a theophany (a preincarnate appearance of Christ) and two angels with Him. (2) The writer could be implying that when we show hospitality to strangers, we may be pleasing angels who are observing our hospitable behavior. (3) The writer implies that the strangers to whom we show kindness on any given day could be supernatural heavenly beings sent by God for the testing of His people.

I favor the first interpretation but wonder why the writer would insert the part about angels unless there was a possibility that angels still appeared on earth as human beings to facilitate our sanctification. The author of Hebrews also says,

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to **render service** for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14 NASB)

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you;  
bless and do not curse.

Carrying on in the tradition of Jesus, Paul counsels the opposite of our natural, fleshly reaction to personal mistreatment and revenge.

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, **do good to those who hate you**, <sup>28</sup> **bless those who curse you**, pray for those who mistreat you. (Lk. 6:27-28 NASB)

and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, **He uttered no threats**, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; (1 Pet. 2:23 NASB)

But Jesus was saying, "**Father, forgive them**; for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk. 23:34a NASB)

Paul will take up this subject again just a few verses later in v. 17. I will delay further discussion for then.

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice

with those who rejoice,  
and weep  
with those who weep.

<sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind*

*toward one another;*  
do not be haughty in mind,  
but associate with the lowly.  
Do not be wise in your own estimation.

The primary idea in verses 15-16 is empathy, the ability to think and to feel the same thoughts and emotions as others resulting in our identification with others, both their joys and sorrows. It is the spiritual art of extracting yourself from yourself—from your own personal situation—long enough to realize what other people are going through. Coordinate with empathy is humility. When we consider how many times each day we are thinking only of ourselves, we understand how desperately self-centered and selfish that we are. Whether we are on the North American continent or the African continent, "It's all about me". But it is NOT all about me—or you. It's all about God who, in some sense, made it all about us by sending His Son to die for us. God so identified with His people that His joy and glory would not reach their full measure apart from our joy and glory (2 Thess. 1: 10). In the same way, our joy and sorrow is connected to the whole community of God's people.

**Rejoice with those who rejoice** is the opposite of envy and covetousness. We can feel the elation of those who are blessed in some way, even if their joy is the result of suffering for the sake of Christ (Matt. 5: 10; Phil. 2: 17-18). The older son in Luke 15, on the other hand, could not rejoice when his father threw a party for his reckless younger brother because he was too wrapped up in himself and his self-righteousness. He could not experience the joy of his father, thus hurting not only his father and younger brother, but also himself.

**Weep with those who weep** demands our identification with others to be sacrificial. When they hurt, we hurt. Paul mentions this in a different context in his discussion of spiritual gifts.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Cor. 12:26 NASB)

Like Jesus' suffering, our suffering should be vicarious, empathetic. All of us suffer in this world to one degree or another, but we do not all suffer equally. Some members of the body are in far more pain physically, economically, emotionally, and spiritually than we. Our faith requires us to

lay down our lives for the sake of our brothers (1 Jn. 3: 16) because Christ laid down His life for us. This requires that we voluntarily make their pain our pain. This is what Paul means when he says,

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. <sup>2</sup> **Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.** <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. <sup>5</sup> For each one will bear his own load. (Gal. 6:1-5 NASB)

For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of **equality**—<sup>14</sup> at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be **equality**; (2 Cor. 8:13-14 NASB)

The **equality** Paul speaks of in 2 Cor. 8 is the equality of opportunity in giving, not the equality of property. For now, the Corinthian church had the *supply* (i.e., money) to help the struggling Judean church (1 Cor. 16: 1-4); but this situation could change in the future in which the Judean church would have more **abundance** to serve the needs of the Corinthian church. Implicit in Paul's instructions is a subtle warning against self-assured boasting, as if the Corinthians would never need anyone else. But Paul implies that the tables could one day be turned, and that they would be the ones needing help. Humility is the necessary pre-condition for helping others. We recognize, first, that we needed help ourselves when Christ brought us to repentance and faith; but we also recognize that we would not have any material abundance to share were it not for God's gracious provision to us.

This precondition of humility is also evident in Galatians 6. Bearing one another's burdens is mentioned in the context of bearing one's burden of sin by restoring the fallen brother to spiritual health, looking long and hard at ourselves since we also could fall into the same sin. We should not turn away from him in sinful self-righteousness, thinking of ourselves as **something** when we are **nothing**. Verses 4-5 appear problematic since they seem to reverse Paul's exhortation against boasting and the exhortation of bearing one another's burdens. It is best understood if we interpret his words as "tongue in cheek" sarcasm. In the previous verse he warns us not to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are something when we are nothing; therefore, verse 4 cannot properly be interpreted as an encouragement to boast in our spiritual achievements. Paul's meaning is this: If we examine our own work carefully, we will find that there is nothing at all to boast about. Rather than comparing ourselves with others and thinking ourselves superior, upon serious examination we may not look so good after all. We will also find that we have enough burden of sin ourselves for which we will be held accountable (John Brown, *Galatians*, p. 147).

Verse 16 further supports the main theme.

**do not be haughty in mind** [*phronéō*],  
but associate with the lowly.  
**Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

Genuine community in the body of Christ has its source in humility and empathy spurring us to reach out in friendship to those who, from the world's point of view, have a lowlier status than we do economically and socially. Both Moo (p. 783) and Murray (p. 136) believe that Paul could be referring to **lowly things** (v. 16) as if he is encouraging his readers to devote themselves to humble tasks, although they do not rule out the alternative interpretation, lowly people. Certainly, it is true that believers should be willing to do humble things following the example of Jesus who set aside his outer garments and washed the disciples' feet, a task reserved for the lowliest slave (*doulos*) in Roman society. The apostle himself had intimate knowledge of what it meant to do lowly things. He was a tentmaker, one of the most despised professions of his day associated with the stench of raw animal skins.

But in the immediate context of vv. 10-15, Paul is talking about associations with people, not tasks. For the sake of instruction, Paul assumes the worldly opinion that there are people who have a **lowly** status socially and economically. From God's vantage point, which Paul surely understood, there are no "high and mighty" people.

It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like **grasshoppers**, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.<sup>23</sup> He *it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.* (Isa. 40:22-23 NASB)

All are **lowly** sinners in desperate need of forgiveness and impoverished by their own misconceptions of reality—men like Nebuchadnezzar, who groped around for seven years like a wild animal before he realized that he was not God. Hence, Paul says in v. 16, **Do not be wise in your own estimation.** That is, do not think that your elevated status in this world has been the result of your independent intellect, hard work, and clever management; and do not accept the applause of this world. If you do, you will be tempted to look down your nose at everyone else who does not enjoy this status, and you will forfeit God's applause, the only applause you really need (Matt. 6: 1-6, 16-18). All human effort leading to economic success are God's good gifts, along with the special set of uncontrollable circumstances that allowed intellect, hard work, and management to come to successful fruition. However, equally hard-working, intelligent people have not been so successful. God's mysterious providence is always at work, and at the end of the day, we must admit that whatever success we have is by the grace of God.

For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.<sup>10</sup> **But by the grace of God I am what I am**, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, **yet not I, but the grace of God with me.** (1 Cor. 15:9-10 NASB)

As Paul's statement affirms, humility does not deny personal achievements but recognizes that anything we accomplish is derived from divine investment in us—**yet, not I, but the grace of God with me.**

<sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind [phronéō] toward one another*

is parallel to

<sup>10</sup> *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.*

The phrase **one another** appears ten times in Romans, nine of which refer to fellow believers (12: 10,16; 13: 8; 14: 13,19; 15: 5,7,14; and 16: 16). Thus, the phrase, **but associate with the lowly** has reference primarily, though not exclusively, to fellow believers who have lower socio-economic status. This implies that the Roman church was socially and economically diverse consisting of rich, poor, and everyone in between. Although social stratification is a fact of life outside the church, it has no place inside.

The vice against which the exhortations are directed is a common one and gnaws at the root of that community in the church of Christ on which the apostle lays so much emphasis. There is to be no aristocracy in the church, no cliques of the wealthy as over against the poor, no pedestals of unapproachable dignity for those on the higher social and economic strata or for those who are in office in the church (cf. 1 Pet. 5: 3). How contradictory to all such pretension is the character of the church's head: "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11: 29) (Murray, p. 137, emphasis mine).

We note this diversity in other Pauline letters where he mentions both **slaves** and **masters**, in that order (Eph. 6: 5, 9; Col. 3: 22; 4:1), **divisions** between the rich and poor, those who have plenty to eat and drink and **those who have nothing** (1 Cor. 11: 17-22), and **the contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem** being made by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. 15:26). Not all the saints in Jerusalem were poor, but the poor existed **among** the others. In the troublesome Corinthian church, Paul was forced to admonish those who were wealthier to defer to those who had **nothing** with the honor that belonged to every brother. In fact, some of those who had partaken of the Lord's Supper unworthily—and greedily—were either sick or had already died (11: 27-30; **sleep**, in the context of 1 Cor., a euphemism for the believer's death; 15: 51).

The problem with many of our churches is that there is so little diversity, and so much homogeneity (sameness), that we have little opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ across the full range of social, economic, and tribal differences. We may have great theme-statements for our churches— (e.g., "A redeemed community, reaching out to the intersections of life and culture"). However, our church memberships most often don't reflect such outreach because we don't have any substantial black membership in primarily white American churches, or we may not have much tribal diversity in African churches. In Kisumu, Kenya, for example, one large congregation split in half when the pastor married a wife of the opposing tribe—Luo versus Kikuyu.

<sup>17</sup> Never pay back evil for evil  
to anyone.

**Respect** what is right  
in the sight of all men.

<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you,  
**be at peace**  
with all men.

<sup>19</sup> Never take your own revenge, beloved,  
but leave room for the wrath of God,  
for it is written,  
"VENGEANCE IS MINE,



I WILL REPAY,"  
says the Lord.  
<sup>20</sup> "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY,  
FEED HIM,  
AND IF HE IS THIRSTY,  
GIVE HIM A DRINK;  
FOR IN SO DOING  
YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil,  
but overcome evil with good.

Paul now returns to the subject of personal revenge in v. 14, **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.**

It is clear from Romans 13 that Paul is not speaking here of the right and duty of the civil magistrate to punish guilty offenders. As he will explain later, the civil magistrate **is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.** (Rom. 13:4 NASB) The civil magistrate is not God's agent of grace in the world and must not pervert God's justice by attempting to fulfill that role. The **wrath** of which Paul speaks in 13: 4 is not the wrath of the civil magistrate, but the wrath of God administered through the instrument of the civil magistrate serving God's purpose of administering His temporal wrath to the guilty. Christians are exhorted to **leave room for the wrath of God** (12: 19) (*of God* is not in the Greek text but an interpretive addition by the NASB, ESV, NIV), implying that any insistence on our part to exact our own vengeance may have the opposite effect of mitigating (lessening) God's vengeance.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; <sup>18</sup> Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, **And turn His anger away from him.** (Prov. 24:17-18 NASB)

Vengeance belongs to God who will **repay** every injustice perpetrated upon the earth, either while the perpetrator is living, or in hell, or both.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, <sup>29</sup> and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment. (Jn. 5:27-29 NASB)

Our impatience with God's justice arises from the apparent lack of God's wrath upon evil people during this present life, something which disturbs the Psalmist to the point of despair (Ps. 73: 1-14) until he comes into the sanctuary and contemplates the inevitable wrath of God against the wicked (vv. 15-20). Paul does not admonish the Christian for desiring God's justice upon wrongdoers, and neither does the Lord.

and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "**How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?**" <sup>11</sup> And there was given to each of

them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.* (Rev. 6:10-11 NASB)

While the wrongdoer's punishment should bring no delight to the believer (Ezek. 18: 23; 33: 11), it should bring some sense of satisfaction that God's justice and righteousness is being displayed before men. I do not know any other way to interpret the elation of Moses and the Israelites who sang praises to the Lord when He drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Ex. 15).

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.<sup>2</sup>"The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him.<sup>3</sup>"**The LORD is a warrior**; The LORD is His name.<sup>4</sup>"Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.<sup>5</sup>"The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone.<sup>6</sup>"**Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.** (Exod. 15:1-6 NASB)

God hardened Pharaoh's heart for the very purpose of showing His power and authority over all earthly rulers and false gods to the end that Egypt would know that He is "I AM" (Ex. 7: 3-5; 14: 4, 17-18). This purpose was initiated in the plagues and finalized in the drowning of Pharaoh's armies. For a brief moment, Israel gets the message that **the Lord [*the I AM*] is a warrior** on behalf of His people (15: 3-6), that is, until they came to Marah in the wilderness of Shur.

Lack of zeal against injustice is an indictment against the believer who is obligated to view unrequited (unpunished) sin as a contradiction to God's right to be worshipped and to be vindicated for every violation of His law.

Yet, this is the main point of Paul's exhortation to avoid personal vengeance. Even when we are mistreated for the sake of righteousness, the main violation is always against God, not us; and we must acquiesce (submit) to God's infallible wisdom in dealing with the sin and the sinner in His own way and in His own time. We may also rest in His justice knowing that He will do whatever is appropriate and commensurate with the violation; and we must be filled with a sense of awe and godly fear knowing that were it not for God's mercy toward us, we too would be the objects of His wrath.

**Respect** what is right  
in the sight of all men.

<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you,

**be at peace**  
with all men.

These verses are coordinate with Paul's teaching earlier in chapter 2 that the **work of the Law** is written in the hearts of **all men** (2: 15) and that when believers openly disregard the law of God, the name of God is blasphemed among unbelievers who have an innate sense of right and wrong. (Rom. 2: 21-24). Believers must do the **right thing in the sight of all men**, not just before believers, so that God's name will not be disrespected.

Believers should also be peaceable (v. 18). **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God** (Matt. 5: 9). Peace may not always be **possible**, but to the extent that keeping the peace is within the power and control of the believer, he should seek it rather than exacting his own vengeance. **If possible** also suggests that there are circumstances which would require legal action against someone. There are grievances which may be borne by the believer out of love (**Love covers a multitude of sins**), but there are others which, if overlooked, would cause greater evils (adultery, serious bodily harm, grand theft, etc.; cf. 1 Cor. 5). Every case must be considered on its own merit whether legal action is necessary. There is no situation in Paul's range of consideration here in which the basic requirements of the moral law of God could be compromised or ignored for the sake of peace. Although **all men** in Rom. 12 is a reference to those outside the church, Paul deals with those inside the church elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 5, 6, and 7. In 1 Cor. 6, he condemns the practice of believers going to the secular courts to resolve grievances with other believers, but he upholds the duty of the church to judge these same grievances. In this context, the elders of the church serve the same purpose as the elders in Israelite cities who judged legal cases (cf. 1 Kings 21, a negative example, but one which demonstrates the practice).

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, **dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?**<sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts?<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? **How much more matters of this life?**<sup>4</sup> So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?<sup>5</sup> I say *this* to your shame. **Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,**<sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? (1 Cor. 6:1-6 NASB)

<sup>20</sup> "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY,  
FEED HIM,  
 AND IF HE IS THIRSTY,  
GIVE HIM A DRINK;  
 FOR IN SO DOING  
YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

This verse is a direct quotation from Proverbs.

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;<sup>22</sup> For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you. (Prov. 25:21-22 NASB)

**Respect what is right in the sight of all men and be at peace with all men** would include basic acts of kindness even to one's **enemy**. The **burning coals on his head** should be interpreted as the sense of shame that an enemy might experience if the believer responds to his ill-treatment with kindness rather than hate (Moo, p. 789; so also Murray, p. 143). Moreover, a sense of shame may lead him to repentance. Our motive for kindness is not to shame this person, but to follow Paul's inspired instruction and that of our Lord who said that kindness to one's enemies is a distinctive characteristic of sons of the kingdom (Matt. 5: 43-48). However, both Paul and Solomon (cf. 25: 1) recognized that showing kindness to our enemies may have this effect. This interpretation is confirmed in the last verse.

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil,

but overcome evil with good.

In the decadent and fallen world in which Paul lived, the command, **Do not be overcome by evil** was not hypothetical. Christians were persecuted and ostracized from society for refusing to participate in the trade guild celebrations involving sexual orgies and the worship of the emperor and other false gods. This left many craftsmen unable to support their families. Refusal to worship the emperor could result in death in the gladiatorial arenas or, at the very least, accusations of atheism or antinationalism, leading again to excommunication from the trade guilds and poverty (see my commentary on Revelation). There was sporadic persecution of Christians lasting from Nero in 64 AD to Diocletian in the beginning of the fourth century. Not until Constantine came to power in 306 AD was it officially legal to practice the Christian faith. Nero's persecution (64 AD) consisted of rolling Christians in tar and linen and lighting them on fire while still alive to illumine his gardens for a chariot ride at night. Paul wrote Romans around 57 AD, thus preparing Christians ahead of time to be respectful of civil government despite what would happen later.

Sexual life in the Roman Empire was a cesspool of lusts and oppression—especially for female slaves and children. Free married Roman males could resort to prostitutes and female slaves as an acceptable method of sexual release while not being considered adulterous. This was partially the reason Roman society was monogamous: free males could get sex in a variety of ways without social or legal consequences. Pederasty (sex between older males and young boys) was also common and socially acceptable, as was homosexuality between women (cf. Kevin DeYoung, *The First Sexual Revolution: The Triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, September 9, 2019, [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)).

Sound familiar? Western culture—with its legalization and possible codification of same-sex marriage into law, pornography, and child sex-trafficking—appears to be all the way back to Rome, the “darling” of American academia. African culture is little better with its rampant heterosexual immorality and prostitution. However, as the article above indicates, Christian sexuality eventually triumphed in the Roman Empire. Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire in 323 AD and Christian sexual morality was codified into law by Emperor Justinian.

The Christian sexual revolution became codified in law under the reign of Justinian (527-565). Sex between males was a crime, and pederasty was outlawed. Christian laws under Justinian also vigorously opposed coerced prostitution.

Under the new morality, same-sex love, regardless of age, status, or role was strictly forbidden without any qualifications. Sexual behavior went from the background to the foreground of ethical concern. Sexual deviance went from something with social ramifications, to a sin that was grievous in the sight of God and could have eternal ramifications. Marriage, which was always understood in the Roman world as the union between a man and a woman, became the only appropriate outlet for sexual activity (DeYoung)

So, how do Christians **overcome evil with good** in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In the context, Paul is speaking about kindness to one's enemies. We can, of course, argue over whether homosexuality should be outlawed, and homosexuals given the death penalty or some other much lesser punishment. It received the death penalty in the OT (Lev. 20: 13), but so did incest, bestiality, cursing one's father

or mother, idolatry, kidnapping, murder, rape, and other crimes. Pederasty, in most cases the non-consensual rape of young boys, should be against the law and punishable by death—as should rape involving anyone, adult or child. But in the context, changing the laws of the Roman Empire in the first century was not within Paul’s purview (range of consideration). The question is: What can believers do now to overcome evil with good apart from political activism?

Roe v. Wade (1973) legalizing abortion nationwide in the US has been overturned (2022), but the evil of abortion has been overcome with good by Christian crisis pregnancy centers throughout the US long before this reversal. Women with unwanted pregnancies have been receiving free sonograms, pre-natal care, and adoption assistance for their unwanted children through the tireless labors and generous donations of others. The liberal, pro-abortion media in the US never covers the services of these centers. Volunteer preachers and bible teachers overcome evil with good in the state prisons where incarceration has proven to be a dismal failure in changing behavior and lifestyles. African pastors overcome evil with good by providing training for prostitutes who are trying to stay off the streets to support their fatherless children and for young teen males who make their living from stealing. Throwing prostitutes and young teens in jail for their crimes would accomplish no change of heart, but a little kindness might. Entrepreneurs overcome evil with good by providing employment opportunities for youth and former prison inmates whose criminal history makes it difficult to find employment.

Many Christians would like to solve the world’s problems through forced taxation in the form of welfare checks to the “poor”—many of whom refuse to work—socialized medicine, and public education, to name only three solutions. But we will see from Romans 13 that the role of government is primarily to provide protection from the invasion of property rights, whether from foreign invaders or domestic criminals. By assuming other responsibilities, the government has become the most powerful invading force on the planet.

## Romans 13

<sup>1</sup>Every person  
is to be in subjection  
to the governing authorities.

**For there is no authority**  
except from God,

**and those which exist**  
are established by God.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority  
has opposed the ordinance of God;  
and they who have opposed  
will receive condemnation upon themselves.

The instruction concerning submission to the **governing authorities** flows naturally from Paul’s sanction against seeking one’s own revenge. Justice for anyone without social status was hard to come by in ancient Roman society and especially for Christians who were disagreeable to the national cult religion of Caesar worship. If justice was unavailable, this might influence aggrieved

Christians to seek their own justice. Therefore, it was essential that Paul strengthen his warning against vengeance with another warning against any form of resistance to the civil authority.

The reason for civil obedience was theological: Apart from the existence of God, **authority** does not exist. All authority on earth is derived from God, and He is the precondition for all authority as well as everything else—meaning, morality, truth, purpose. Without God, we are random molecules bouncing around in a meaningless universe; and it is very difficult to establish any authority in a meaningless universe. Moreover, the **governing authorities** were **established by God** for the purpose of being the human agency administering God's justice. Human government is a **minister of God for good** and not for evil, and their ministry was also for the **good** of believers since they restrained evil with the power of the **sword**. Once more, we must keep in mind the historical context of Paul's instructions. He is writing before Nero's severe persecution of believers in Rome, providentially preparing Christians to be in submission to the governing authorities when severe persecution breaks out. Anything less would encourage anarchy and chaos. Better to have a very bad government than no government at all. Anarchy is worse.

Not only does all government find its basis in God's authority, but every individual ruler is also put in place by God, begging the obvious question: Why does God empower some of the worst people in the history of mankind—Nero, Hitler, Mugabe, Amin, Mobutu, and Joe Biden? Although I would not equate Biden with Hitler, he is pro-abortion, pro-homosexuality, pro-transgenderism (which includes the mutilation of perfectly healthy adolescents and children), etc. We have dealt with this before in Romans 9. God raised Pharaoh to power expressly for the purpose of demonstrating His superior power against Pharaoh. Apparently for the same purpose, He also raised up Nebuchadnezzar and then drove him mad until he recognized **that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes** (Dan. 4:25). After seven long years, Nebuchadnezzar returned to sanity, confessing,

"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' (Dan. 4:35 NASB)

God owes us no explanations concerning His political appointments. He has his reasons, but He's not telling us what those reasons are. Most often, we are governed by people that we deserve. I will speak only of my own country, but the majority population of the US does not deserve a godly leader. Even the church does not deserve a godly leader. I can only hope that in 2024 God gives us what we do NOT deserve, a man who fears God.

**Has opposed the ordinance of God** indicates that resistance to human authority ordained by God is resistance to God Himself. Although Paul is speaking specifically of the civil magistrate, the principle established here applies to all human authority. Society cannot exist as a pure democracy with everyone a law unto himself. Children must be subject to their parents whom God has placed in authority over them. Wives must be in submission to their husbands (Eph. 5-6). Members of a congregation must be in submission to elected elders (Heb. 13: 17). Submission has nothing to do with essence or worth. Each person in society is equal to any other in terms of his being in the image of God. Wives are **fellow heirs** with their husbands and therefore must be treated with respect and honor, not as second-class citizens—a radical concept in the first century and afterward (1 Pet. 3: 7). Children must obey their parents, but this does not take away their status as fellow

human beings along with their parents. They must not be provoked but led by example (Eph. 6:4). Yet, equal essence and being does not imply equal social status or function. Those who are in authority must see to it that they do not abuse this authority, and those who are under authority must see to it that they **honor** it irrespective of the flawed characters and unwise decisions of those who wield it.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; (Eph. 6:5 NASB)

And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (Eph. 6:9 NASB)

**Will receive condemnation upon themselves** warns that believers will not go unpunished if they resist the ruling authorities. **Condemnation** could include punishment from the civil magistrate for breaking the law, but it most likely refers to disciplinary action from God. Peter supports the same submission, almost with identical language.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a **king as the one in authority**,<sup>14</sup> or to **governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right**.<sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.<sup>16</sup> **Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil**, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.<sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, **honor the king**.<sup>18</sup> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, **not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable**.<sup>19</sup> For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.<sup>20</sup> **For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?** But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. (1 Pet. 2:13-20 NASB)

<sup>3</sup>FOR RULERS

are not a cause  
of fear

for good behavior,  
but for evil.

Do you want to have  
*no fear*

OF AUTHORITY?

Do what is good  
and you will have  
*praise from the same;*

<sup>4</sup>FOR IT IS A MINISTER OF GOD TO YOU

for good.  
But if you do what is evil,  
*be afraid;*

FOR IT DOES NOT BEAR THE SWORD FOR NOTHING;  
FOR IT IS A MINISTER OF GOD,

**AN AVENGER WHO BRINGS WRATH**  
on the one who practices evil.

Paul is speaking prescriptively rather than descriptively of what the government should be, not necessarily what it was in practice in the first century. Nero came to power in 54 AD at the age of 17, three years before Paul wrote Romans and ten years before Nero persecuted Christians (64 AD). Paul was aware of some of Nero's brutalities and perversion before he wrote his letter. According to Edward Champlin's history of Nero, he kicked his pregnant wife to death, murdered his mother, two stepsisters, stepbrother, and most of his close relatives—all before the age of 30. His sexual perversions are too numerous to mention, including incest with his mother Agrippina (before murdering her), marrying his stepsister (before murdering her), and raping his stepbrother (before murdering him) (see factsanddetails.com). He also had the Apostle Paul beheaded and the Apostle Peter crucified upside down—per Peter's request. To give the Roman senate some credit, Nero was sentenced to death and was on the run before committing suicide.

Knowing who, and what, Nero was, Paul does not on that account rule out the duty of believers to obey the civil magistrate in principle. The government was not perfect, not even close; but since God had put it there, His overall purpose for its existence must be for the general good of society (v. 4, **for good**). Generally, law-abiding citizens do not have to **fear** the governing authorities, only lawbreakers do. It is true that sometimes the government will over-step its boundaries and punish good citizens, but Paul seems to imply that this will not occur to the degree that there must be disobedience to authority for conscience' sake (see below). At least, this is not his main point here, and he does not present a full-orbed theology of civil obedience or disobedience in Rom. 13.

If we **do what is good**, we will not only avoid **fear**, but we may expect **praise from the same** authority. Paul is not so naïve to believe that the governing authorities will pass out gold medals or give positive verbal reinforcement for good behavior, but that the obedient believer will enjoy a good standing as a citizen of the state (Murray, p. 151). The Christian's "reward" is that the state will just ignore him.

**An avenger who brings wrath** is the same as the **governing authorities** who serve as the **minister** [*diakonos*, servant] **of God**. The **wrath** in v. 4b is not the wrath of the governing authorities but God's wrath. The authorities are merely the agents of God's wrath to **the one who practices evil**. To execute their task properly, the **authorities/rulers** must do so with a substantial degree of emotional detachment which is the opposite of wrath, on the one hand, or compassion on the other. It is not the task of the government to show either hatred or mercy for the convicted criminal. Its obligation is to enforce the letter of the law to the utmost of its ability so that God's justice is served—although God's justice may not be the conscious object pursued by the authorities.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection,  
not only because of wrath,  
but also for conscience' sake.

At this point, Paul interjects a second motive for obedience to the ruling authority. Not only must the Christian submit to avoid God's **wrath** and the punishment of the state, but also because of **conscience**. Obeying the law is the right thing to do. Again, Paul is not concerned here to state the



exceptions to this rule, but simply to lay out a simple philosophy of the relationship of Christians to the state. Considering that many of his readers were Jewish (see chapter 2), it was important that Paul deal preemptively (proactively) with the normal Jewish hostility to Roman rule before it erupted into insurrection (Murray, p. 146). He was not aware just how important such instructions would be to the whole Christian community, Jewish and Gentile, after Nero's persecution erupted in 64 AD.

**For conscience' sake** also alerts us the possibility of exceptions. What happens when obedience to the state causes us to violate our moral conscience in submission to the scriptures? In my own personal situation, I cannot think of a single time in my life of 71 years that this has happened. It annoys me to drive 40 miles per hour on a stretch of road that could easily accommodate 50 miles per hour; but obeying the speed limit does not violate my moral conscience. However, because of Paul's instructions, I would violate my conscience by driving 50. We may not always understand the reason behind certain laws; but apart from any obvious violation of our Christian sense of morality, we are obligated to obey. It's the right thing to do.

**For conscience' sake**, wives obey their husbands **as to the Lord** (Eph. 5: 22). This means that their submission to their husbands is not absolute; it is limited by their primary submission to Christ. For example, no Christian wife could submit to her husband's demand to sell her body as a prostitute to make extra income. However, the wife must be sure she is not using her submission to Christ falsely in order to disregard her husband's wishes. The husband, for his part, must not demand absolute submission from his wife or put her under his bondage. To do so would be to hate **his own flesh** or to hate himself (Eph. 5: 29). The same limitation is true of children who must obey their parents **in the Lord**. This phrase does not mean that their obedience depends on whether their parents are Christians, but whether their obedience would not violate their primary obedience to Christ. For example, children would not be obligated to steal for their parents in the marketplace. This principle is true concerning any admonition to submit to higher authorities, because no earthly authority is absolute. The only absolute authority is the God.

<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes,  
**for rulers are servants of God,**  
devoting themselves to this very thing.

<sup>7</sup> Render to all  
**what is due them:**  
tax to whom tax *is due*;  
custom to whom custom;  
fear to whom fear;  
honor to whom honor.

The Christian must give due consideration to the obligations he owes to **rulers**. He should **render to all what is due them** including **tax, custom, fear** in the form of submission, **honor** in the form of due respect for authority. Without any hierarchical structure, life for everyone spirals into anarchy and chaos, and even a government under Nero was better than nothing. God would take care of Nero when He was ready, and it did not take Him long. Nero lasted only four more years after persecuting God's people.

And I will bless those who bless you, **And the one who curses you I will curse.** And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen. 12:3 NASB)

When the question of submission to the government arises, paying taxes usually comes up. This was the primary subject used by the Pharisees and the Herodians in their efforts to have Jesus accused of political sedition against Caesar, thus eliminating Jesus without tarnishing their reputation with the crowds.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. <sup>16</sup> And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. <sup>17</sup> "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" <sup>18</sup> But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> "Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" <sup>21</sup> They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." <sup>22</sup> And hearing *this*, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away. (Matt. 22:15-22 NASB)

Implicit in Paul's instructions, **Render to all what is due them**, is an allusion to what Jesus taught more explicitly on this occasion. Just what, exactly, is **due** the civil government? The reader wonders why Paul could not have restricted his insistence on obeying the laws of the state as Jesus did, but perhaps he had already done so earlier. Paul would have fully agreed with the limitations to obedience found in the gospel accounts which he may have known through direct revelation from the Lord himself. I have quoted some material from my "Synoptic Gospels" relevant to Romans 13.

The tax in question was not the temple tax of Matthew 17: 24, but the poll tax or head tax levied by the Roman government upon all adult males in Judea. Failure to pay the tax was, therefore, a criminal offense against Caesar. It had been a hot political issue since its institution in AD 6 when Judea was made a Roman province directly governed by Roman officials; and many Jews, the Zealots particularly, considered it blasphemous to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus' enemies hypocritically attempt to lure Him into a trap with flattery: "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and **defer to no one**; for You are not partial to any" (Matt. 22: 16; so also Mk. 12: 14; Lk. 20: 21). By "deferring to no one", they meant Caesar himself and hoped Jesus would give them an unqualified "No" to the question of paying taxes. If He said, "No, it is not lawful to pay Caesar the poll tax", it would be interpreted as political resistance against Caesar in which case He could be turned over to the Roman authorities. In fact, the Sanhedrin later accuses Jesus before Pilate on these very terms: that He forbade the payment of taxes to Caesar, an outright lie (Lk. 23:2).

On the other hand, by giving the poll tax, Jesus would be acknowledging that He was subject to the political authority of Caesar. The difficulty with this position was two-fold. First, Roman Caesars claimed the divine rights of gods walking on earth (see below). Thus, if Jesus simply said "Yes, it is lawful to pay Caesar the poll tax, this would be construed (interpreted) by the more radical Zealots as blasphemy against Yahweh, the only true God. Second, He would lose some support of the common people who considered the tax burdensome and distasteful (Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished, p. 200; Carson, p. 459), and He would lose credibility with the people as the Messiah who, they thought, had come to deliver them from the Romans (Geldenhuis, p. 503; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 720). There was no unqualified "yes" or "no" answer available to Jesus, and His enemies knew

it. It was a classic case of being “between a rock and a hard place”, but Jesus breezes through the situation without any difficulty.

From Luke 20: 20, it appears that they were expecting the negative answer, possibly because Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem as a king, accepting the accolades (praises) of all the multitudes. Would He now give this up by accepting submission to Caesar? But Jesus gives neither an unqualified “no” nor an unqualified “yes”. Rather, He draws attention to the face and inscription imprinted on the Roman coin, the denarius, the most common coin in the realm and the particular coin used to pay the tax. On one side of this coin was the face of Tiberius Caesar (who reigned as emperor of Rome from 14-37 AD) along with the words or inscription, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the *Divine* Augustus”—a blatant and blasphemous claim to semi-divinity. On the reverse side of the coin was the face of the emperor’s mother Livia portrayed as the earthly incarnation of the goddess Pax (“peace”) along with another inscription, “High Priest”—a reference to the emperor cult (Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished, p. 201; Hendriksen, p. 803). By asking the spies (Lk.) to produce the denarius themselves, Jesus forces them into an implicit admission that they, too, recognized Caesar’s political authority; for wherever an emperor’s coin was in use, his authority was present (Geldenhuys, p. 504; Lane, p. 424).

In the following statements, however, Jesus clearly distinguishes between lawful submission to Caesar’s political authority and unlawful worship of Caesar as a god. By saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”, Jesus admits that it is proper to pay one’s taxes to the lawful authorities, no matter what kind of authority—good or bad. One does not violate His religious conscience by submitting to political authority, however evil and corrupt it may be. In fact, submission to political authority is actually included in one’s submission to God (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Pet. 2: 13-15 where Paul and Peter follow the Lord’s lead with regard to governing authorities, even ruthless ones like Caesar Nero). However, if Jesus failed to qualify His answer, He would be accused of submitting to Caesar’s claim to divinity and his right to be worshipped. Therefore, He added, “and **to God** the things that are God’s.” Tacitly (without words), He implies that Caesar was the lawful political authority, but this was as far as his authority extended. He could not claim for himself religious prerogatives belonging only to God. Thus, Jesus made it clear that there was an authority which *transcended* (went beyond) Caesar’s, and that this higher authority was the only basis for Caesar’s authority.

There are obligations to the state which do not infringe the rights of God but are grounded in his appointment (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Tim. 2: 1-6; Tit. 3: 1f; 1 Pet. 2: 13-17). By recognizing the relative autonomy of the civil authority in the first part of his response, Jesus showed himself opposed to any belief in an essentially theocratic state [a state ruled directly by God without any earthly rulers] and to any expectation of an imminent eschatological consummation of his own mission. But by distinguishing so sharply between Caesar and God he tacitly [without words] protested against the idolatrous claims advanced on the coins. There is always inherent in civil authority a tendency to reach beyond its appointed function, a tendency which leads to self-transcendence. The temptation to self-glorification which always accompanies power was particularly clear in the extravagances of the imperial cult, with its deification of the state [the state becomes God walking on earth, D.M.] and its civil head. Jesus emphatically rejected this insolent [disrespectful, D.M.] confusion between man and God; divine honors belong to God alone. The second part of his response, seen in the total context of Jesus’ life and teaching, shows that the duties toward God and Caesar, though distinct, are not completely separate, but are united and ruled by the higher principle of accomplishing in all things the will of God. Because men bear the image of God they owe their total allegiance to him (Lane, pp. 424-425, emphasis and words in brackets mine).

As subsequent history would prove, Jesus' teaching on this occasion would be crucial to the survival of the church through several waves of Roman persecution. Implicit in the requirement to be law-abiding citizens of the Roman Empire was the requirement to declare Caesar as Lord, something the faithful could not do. As the alternative, they accepted brutal martyrdom. As Carson has noted, "Paganism customarily insisted even more strongly on the unity of what we distinguish as civil and religious obligations. Indeed, some decades later Christians faced the wrath of Rome because they refused to participate in emperor worship—a refusal the state judged as *treason*" (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 459; emphasis mine).

Writing over half a century ago, Geldenhuys offers a prophetic warning of the increasing infringement upon religious liberty by governing authorities arrogating (seizing improperly) rights which belong only to God.

Modern trends in the world indicate that (as is already the case in many countries) the fiercest and most dangerous attacks by the world against the church of Christ will henceforth be delivered on the political front—the state more and more demands the sole right over the life of its subjects, even with regard to the forming of their characters and their philosophy of life. As happened during the first centuries after the foundation of Christianity, believers will more and more be called upon to choose between absolute loyalty to Christ and loyalty to secular authorities who deny and reject the supreme right of God. The faithful, however, must never be disobedient to Jesus' command to "render unto Caesar" the things which are really due to him (in accordance with the law of God) (*Luke*, pp. 505-506; emphasis mine).

His predictions have proven true, for more Christians have been killed for their faith in Jesus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the centuries combined since the death and resurrection of Christ. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will probably prove to be far bloodier than the previous one. Modeling the proper Christian response shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostle Peter, hauled before the Sanhedrin and warned to be silent about the resurrection of Christ, replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). Submission to the state is acceptable only to the point at which it violates the law of God. When called upon to obey the law of the state or the law of God, the choice is clear—we must obey God even if it means disobeying men. Only a divine Lord may be lord over one's conscience.

Moreover, one of the more dangerous ways Christians bow the knee to statist religion is their insidious (slow and unnoticeable) but progressive dependence upon the state, rather than God, for financial and "social" security. From cradle to grave, citizens are demanding increasing levels of goods and services—particularly health, education, and welfare—from the hands of "almighty" government seemingly unaware of the tremendous price they are paying in higher taxes, diminishing freedoms, and the undermining of religious values in the classroom (cf. 1 Sam. 8, "the procedure of the king", also R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education*). (McNeill, "The Synoptic Gospels", unpublished, pp. 295-296).

As civil governments around the world encroach more and more upon the rights belonging only to God, the question of civil disobedience becomes more relevant. The **false prophet** of Revelation entices **those who dwell on the earth** to worship the **beast**, some form of civil government with the power of the sword. We are seeing early manifestations of this beast in the daily news (see my commentary on Revelation). Moreover, Paul's instructions in Rom. 13 are indirectly relevant to the question of when, and if, it is lawful for the population of any country to rise up in protest,

even armed protest, against their own government. At what point in the life of a nation does obedience to the civil law imply or explicitly deny obedience to God? Lest any reader get the wrong impression, I am NOT advocating armed protest anywhere in Africa. Nevertheless, I live in a free country which is only free because others were willing to lose their lives 250 years ago for the sake of political and economic liberty. I must be honest that I am thankful for the sacrifices patriots made then and that others have made since then. But were these American patriots violating Paul's principle in Rom. 13 about submission to governmental authorities? Is there ever a time when armed protest is legitimate? Were the patriots of my country violating Jesus' rebuke to Peter when he cut off the slave's ear the night Jesus was arrested, and to Pilate?

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. (Matt. 26:52; cf. Jn. 18: 10, 26).

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (Jn. 18:36 NASB)

However, we must remember that Jesus was speaking to Peter as a representative of the future church (Matt. 16: 18), not as a representative of a nation. The church's fight is primarily a spiritual battle using spiritual weapons (Eph. 6: 10-18) and persuasion as ambassadors of a different kingdom (2 Cor. 5: 20). His words have little direct bearing on the question of the citizenry of a nation waging a just or unjust war against its own government. While the answers to such questions are not clear-cut, it is clear that God's word and law must be obeyed even if such obedience means disobedience to the civil magistrate. With Peter and the apostles, we must answer, **we must obey God rather than man** (Acts 5: 29).

Those who hid Jews from Nazi exterminators during WWII—lying to German soldiers about their presence—feared God rather than men and saved thousands of Jewish lives in the process. Black and white civil rights workers in the US in the 1960's were beaten by white policemen and thrown in jail for their disobedience to unconstitutional laws discriminating against black people in public schools, hospitals, public transportation, restaurants, and even public water fountains.

There are times when Christians must disobey the law in their obedience to God. However, we often disobey God by obeying the law. After the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, it was against the law to trespass upon the property of abortion clinics to persuade pregnant women not to abort their babies. You could talk to these young women—some were teenaged girls—on the public sidewalks adjacent to the clinics (I did so many years ago in Birmingham, AL); but the moment they crossed the sidewalk onto clinic property, you could be arrested for trespassing if you followed them. Many Christians purposely did so and got jailed, but they were relatively few. There were enough Christians from 1973 to 2022 (when Roe v. Wade was declared unconstitutional) to overwhelm the jail facilities of almost any county in the US, but the church (me included) remained passive to the legal, but immoral, Supreme Court decision. Evil triumphed—60 million murdered unborn children, ten times more lethal in the US alone than the Jewish holocaust under the Third Reich in WWII—because there was no organized revolt in the US against abortion. We are now suffering the consequences which will certainly continue into the distant future, maybe until the US is completely destroyed.

**Deliver those who are being taken away to death,** And those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold *them* back. <sup>12</sup> If you say, "**See, we did not know this,**" Does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts? And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? **And will He not render to man according to his work?** (Prov. 24:11-12 NASB)

Paul J. Hill took this text seriously (I assume he was acquainted with it) but applied it unwisely by murdering an abortion doctor, John Britton, and his bodyguard, James Barrett, in 1994. He was a presbyterian minister, graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS—one of my former classmates—a husband and father of three. After spending 10 years in prison, he was finally executed in Florida in 2003. Hill's last words were,

If you believe abortion is a lethal force, you should oppose the force and do what you have to do to stop it. May God help you to protect the unborn as you would want to be protected.

I disapprove of what Hill did because it was a different form of anarchy (lawlessness) used to justify the murder of unborn children. You cannot correct one form of anarchy with another. Hill's method would have resulted in a bloodbath of abortion providers across the nation at the hands of lawless men and women, justifying themselves as public executioners, which would have spread to perpetrators of other crimes—or sins—without due process of law including homosexuals, pornographers, adulterers, sex traffickers, etc., all of whom are guilty of sins against God, or of outright crimes, but must be dealt with by a legal system that upholds the rule of law, however imperfectly. Paul wrote his letters to Christians who were not living in a theocracy under the rule of God's law. He was writing to Christians living in exile—as we all are today (Phil. 3: 20)—who did not have any political power whatsoever in the first century AD and who have little power today in most countries, western or not. However, we should use whatever political power we possess to restrain civil injustice and anarchy. Paul uses his Roman citizenship to protect himself from the Jews.

The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." <sup>28</sup> The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "**But I was actually born a citizen.**" <sup>29</sup> Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. (Acts 22:27-29 NASB)

"If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is *true* of which these men accuse me, **no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.**" (Acts 25:11 NASB)

By rejecting the rule of God and attempting to establish his own rule independent of God, Adam plunged himself and the whole human race into an imperfect system of government under the rule of man. Only through the work of the law of God written in men's hearts through common grace has mankind practiced any semblance of justice and morality. Having made the choice to reject God's rule, we must morally submit ourselves to whatever democratic or tyrannical rule under which God has placed us as part of His curse upon the ground.

Israel's departure from God's rule and law had placed them under Roman rule and law; they owed to Rome the tribute due to Rome. Rome did not serve God, but neither did Israel. Obedience is due to

all authorities under whom we find ourselves (Rom. 13: 1-7). Rome was now their master, and Rome had to be obeyed. Obedience to God requires obedience to all those whom we find ourselves in subjection to. In the temptation in the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus to follow a way of empire; give the people bread and miracles; enable them to walk by sight. Now, through other tempters, the temptation was offered of rejecting all empires, all earthly powers (R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p.722, emphasis mine).

<sup>8</sup> Owe nothing to anyone

Having stated our debt to obey the governing authorities—within the limits of God’s law—Paul broadens the admonition to be debt-free to everyone else. Since he mentions the payment of taxes, we may assume that this command also applies to economic debts to private individuals. It is much better to be debt-free than to be burdened with outstanding loans forcing the borrower to work for the lender until the loan is paid.

The rich rules over the poor, **And the borrower becomes the lender's slave.** (Prov. 22:7 NASB)

"If you lend money to My people, **to the poor among you**, you are not to act as a **creditor** to him; you shall not charge him interest. (Exod. 22:25 NASB)

He who increases his wealth by interest and usury **Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.** (Prov. 28:8 NASB)

The command to **owe nothing** states the ideal but is not an absolute command. (**Except to love one another** is absolute.) According to the case law in Ex. 22: 25, interest-free loans could be made to the poor, implying that it was also legitimate for the poor to accept such loans. However, the debt must be forgiven in the Sabbatical year.

"At the end of *every* seven years you shall grant a **remission of debts.** <sup>2</sup> "This is the manner of remission: **every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother**, because the LORD'S remission has been proclaimed. (Deut. 15: 1-2 NASB)

Exodus 22: 25 and Prov. 28: 8 also imply the legitimacy of lending money at interest to someone who was not poor, for example, in a commercial or business transaction. In the parables of the **talents** and **minas**, the master (representing the Lord) approved of earning interest on his money in a bank (Matt. 25: 27; Lk. 19: 23). Banks can pay interest to their customers only because of outstanding higher interest loans to others. Everyone needs access to money, and absolute laws against no-interest loans would basically leave all property in the hands of the wealthy, something common to a large extent in Africa where loans are made at 25 to 35% interest, rendering them impossibly expensive for poor people. Low-interest or no-interest loans would be manageable, allowing lower income people to capitalize their businesses and purchase homes, thus eliminating the burden of renting from landlords their whole lives. I would not own a house to this day had it not been for the fact that I could afford to borrow money at reasonable rates under 10%, which is now (in 2022) considered very high interest in the US. Although failure to lend to the poor at no interest had no legal punishment that I can discern from Scripture—unless this is found in Ezek.

18 below—it was a moral obligation with the incentive of reward and the threat of God's displeasure and eternal (and temporal?) punishment.

One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, **And He will repay him for his good deed.** (Prov. 19:17 NASB)

**He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker,** But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. (Prov. 14:31 NASB)

"If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, **you shall not harden your heart**, nor close your hand from your poor brother;<sup>8</sup> but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in whatever he lacks.*<sup>9</sup> "Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, '**The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,**' and your eye is hostile toward your **poor brother**, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you. (Deut. 15:7-9 NASB)

<sup>7</sup>if a man does not oppress anyone, but **restores to the debtor his pledge**, does not commit robbery, **but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing**,<sup>8</sup> if he **does not lend money on interest or take increase**, *if he keeps his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between man and man,*<sup>9</sup> *if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—***he is righteous and will surely live,**" declares the Lord GOD.<sup>10</sup> "Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother<sup>11</sup> (though he himself did not do any of these things), that is, he even eats at the mountain *shrines*, and defiles his neighbor's wife,<sup>12</sup> **oppresses the poor and needy**, commits robbery, **does not restore a pledge**, but lifts up his eyes to the idols *and* commits abomination,<sup>13</sup> **he lends money on interest and takes increase; will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head.** (Ezek. 18:7-13 NASB)

The sins in Ezek. 18 appear to be a catalogue of sins—murder, oppression of the poor, idolatrous worship, adultery, usury—rather than single sins, leading me to believe that Ezekiel is describing the pattern of unrighteous life attributed to the man who is **put to death**, which I interpret as eternal punishment rather than temporal punishment by the tribal leaders. It is clear that some of these sins were punishable by death. However, I fail to see any legislation in the Pentateuch requiring death to anyone failing to restore a pledge (cf. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 235, for a contrary opinion.)

As stated, debts to the poor were forgiven every Sabbatical year (every seventh year) to prevent further poverty. The text is ambiguous as to whether the debt was forgiven permanently or whether payment of the debt was suspended on the Sabbatical year of release but resumed the next year (cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*; C.J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, and Peter C. Cragie, *Deuteronomy*; Benny Porat, *Shemitat Kesafim, The Year of Escape from Debt*, The Israel Democracy Institute, Dec. 30, 2014). If debts were forgiven permanently, this law could be exploited by poor debtors who had no intention of repaying a debt which must be forgiven after six years, thus encouraging them to take out multiple loans. Another problem would be that lenders would not be inclined to make the loans in the first place, knowing they would not be repaid. This, in turn, would circle back to harm the poor who would not be getting any loans—a vicious cycle. Hence, the warning from Psalms:



**The wicked**

borrows and does not pay back,

**But the righteous**

is gracious and gives. (Ps. 37:21 NASB)

This is a warning both to the borrower and the lender. The intention to defraud your wealthier brother of his money is a sign of wickedness and the lack of salvation. The law of God does not favor the poor over the rich, for God is partial to neither. It is also a warning to the wealthier lender not to withhold needed funds from the poor brother just because there is a high risk that the loan will not be repaid. **The righteous** man loans his money whereas the unrighteous man hoards it and protects it.

Every fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee (seven sevens plus one), all ancestral property sold to repay indebtedness reverted to the original family owners without payment to prevent permanent separation from one's property, the foundational means of production in an agrarian economy. All the land was essentially owned by Yahweh who apportioned it to the various tribal families. Therefore, if someone purchased the land from a poor family who had come upon hard times, the purchase was essentially a lease for 49 years until the Year of Jubilee, after which it reverted to the original family.

'You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and **each of you shall return to his own property**, and each of you shall return to his family. (Lev. 25:10 NASB)

'The land, moreover, **shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine**; for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me. (Lev. 25:23 NASB)

The legislation in the OT concerning the poor was designed to minimize or eradicate poverty, and since it was the word of God, it would have worked to that end had the Israelites been faithful to keep it.

<sup>4</sup>"**However, there will be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess,** <sup>5</sup>if only you listen obediently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. <sup>6</sup>"For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you, and **you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow**; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. (Deut. 15:4-6 NASB)

Therefore, the economic well-being of Israel was contingent upon obedience to God's law, including the legislation concerning the poor (**if only you listen obediently...to observe carefully all this commandment**). Had they listened—and they didn't—there would have been widespread prosperity, and Israel as a nation would have been a lender rather than a borrower. As it was, the poor were always in abundance in Israel. Thus, a nation's long-term prosperity depends upon its application of legislation minimizing debt and poverty. A nation must be concerned about national and individual debt and about helping the poor work their way out of poverty. As I write this, I am reminded that the national debt of the US is \$33 trillion. Total house-hold debt in the US is \$16.5

trillion. Americans believe we can spend ourselves into prosperity—\$7 million spent by the US government alone every 60 seconds—but our children and grandchildren will learn otherwise. All this debt-produced “prosperity” will one day come tumbling down. We cannot ignore God’s laws of economics any more than we can defy the law of gravity by jumping out of a tall building.

**"For the poor will never cease to be in the land;** therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.' (Deut. 15:11 NASB)

The verse quoted above is prophetic of the future of Israel, whom Moses knew would apostatize from obedience to covenant law, as Moses forthrightly says in his departing words to Israel.

It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, <sup>25</sup> that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, <sup>26</sup> "Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you. <sup>27</sup> **"For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my death?** <sup>28</sup> "Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. <sup>29</sup> **"For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days,** for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands." (Deut. 31:24-29 NASB)

<sup>8</sup> Owe nothing to anyone except to **love one another;**  
for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.  
<sup>9</sup> For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,  
YOU SHALL NOT MURDER,  
YOU SHALL NOT STEAL,  
YOU SHALL NOT COVET,"  
and if there is any other commandment,  
it is summed up in this saying,  
"YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."  
<sup>10</sup> **Love does no wrong to a neighbor;**  
therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The debt of loving one another is a debt which will never be fully paid; therefore, love will always be **owed to one another.** Paul is especially interested in the relationship of believers to each other, but this does not eliminate the obligation to love others outside the Christian community. Jesus said, **“Love your enemies”** (Matt. 5: 44a) which would include those who are not believers. His reasoning is that God also loves His enemies.

so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. (Matt. 5:45 NASB)

However, there is a sense in which our love is owed especially to believers within the family of God.

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and **especially** to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal. 6:10 NASB)

In the context of v. 10, **love** is the fulfillment of the law concerning other people (the emphasis here, considering the commandments quoted) because love is opposed to adultery, murder, theft, coveting, and every other conceivable sin against our fellow man. The command to love fulfills a thousand individual commandments, but Paul does not imply that the love commandment suspends or eliminates the specific commandments describing how love is expressed to others. To the sinful heart, love must be defined; and God is the only one who can give it definition. Love is not identified here as “the law of love”. Rather, “it is the law that love fulfills” (Murray, *Romans*, p. 160). So also Moo, although I note some ambiguity in the following statement:

Christians who love others have satisfied the demands of the law *en toto* [in total, D.M.]; and they need therefore not worry about any other commandment. We must emphasize, however, that such complete and consistent loving of others remains an impossibility, even for the Spirit-filled believer: we will never, short of glory, truly love “the other” as we should. This means that it would be premature to claim that love “replaces” the law for the Christian, as if the only commandment we ever needed to worry about was the command of love. For as long as our love remains incomplete, we may very well require other commandments both to chastise and to guide us (Moo, *Romans*, pp. 814-815, emphasis mine).

If we love others, we do not commit adultery with their wives or husbands or lust after them. Love for our enemies is the opposite of hatred which, left to its conclusion, would lead to murder. Love eliminates theft of another’s possessions or the natural, anti-God disposition of coveting and greed. If we love our enemy, we will surely return to him anything that was lost, even an expensive animal we may be tempted to keep for ourselves (Ex. 23: 4). Therefore, love does not even discontinue the usefulness of the case laws of the OT. If we love those who feed us the word of God, we will not **muzzle the ox while he is threshing** (1 Tim. 5: 18; 1 Cor. 9: 9; Deut. 25: 4). If we love people, we will make sure our garbage pit is covered to prevent anyone falling into it at night and incurring serious injury or death and that our animals are not in the habit of harming people (Ex. 21: 33-36)—like the dogs that commonly attack me while I’m riding my bicycle.

In a perfect world with perfect Christians, we would not need these obscure commandments or any others because the law of the Lord would be so completely written upon our hearts. But being the sinful people that we are, living in a fallen world, we will always need tangible reminders of what it means to love.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; **against such things there is no law**. (Gal. 5:22-23 NASB)

We also learn from verses 8-10 that no commandment is truly fulfilled without love. We therefore return to the three requirements of a truly righteous act: the right standard (the law of God), the right motive (love for God and others), and the right goal (the kingdom of God and the glory of God— **“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”** (Matt. 5:16 NASB)

<sup>11</sup> Do this, knowing **the time**,

that it is already **the hour**  
for you to awaken from sleep;  
for **now**  
salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

<sup>12</sup> The night is almost gone,  
and **the day is near**.

It appears that Paul believed in the imminent return of Christ (cf. Phil. 4: 5; but see discussion below). If so, this would cast no doubt upon the infallibility of his writings. The Holy Spirit inspired him to say that **the time, the hour, and the day** (all three) are **near**. Other apostles spoke likewise, as well as the angel sent to John at the beginning and end of Revelation.

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is near**. (Jas. 5:8 NASB)

**The end of all things is near**; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. (1 Pet. 4:7 NASB)

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; **for the time is near**. (Rev. 1:3 NASB)

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near**. (Rev. 22:10 NASB)

Christ also tells John in Revelation, **I am coming quickly**, four times for emphasis (Rev. 3: 11; 22:7, 12, 20). There are several possible interpretations of these texts as well as those which say, **the Lord is near**. I have borrowed extensively from Vern Poythress, *Revelation*, in the following analysis.

(1) Some of the events of Revelation do come **soon**, including the warfare, famine, disease, and death of Revelation 6 (the four horsemen). However, Christ's "coming" in Revelation 1: 3 and 22: 10 are "bookends" enclosing the entire prophecy of Revelation. Thus, the fulfillment of every part of the book is **near**. In other words, the time is near for the fulfillment of all the words of the whole prophecy of Revelation, not just some of them.

(2) The **coming** of Christ that is **soon** is not the second coming but various "comings" of punishment or reward (e.g., Rev. 2: 5, 16; 3: 11).

'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else **I am coming to you** and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. (Revelation 2:5 NASB)

'Therefore repent; or else **I am coming to you quickly**, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. (Revelation 2:16 NASB)

'**I am coming quickly**; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (Revelation 3:11 NASB)

The quickness of Christ's **coming** in these texts must be understood within the **context** of Christ's words to three specific churches as well as all other churches throughout history until now that imitated either their sin or obedience. He would not wait until the second coming to remove their lampstands, punish their false teaching, or protect them from harm. If the spiritual condition of modern Turkey is any indication, Christ came soon in judgment to Asia Minor long ago. Likewise, Christ also promises the church in Philadelphia, about which he has nothing negative to say, that He is **coming quickly** to deliver them from the hour of extreme testing and persecution (Rev. 3: 10-11). These "comings" in Revelation 2—3 point to an "inaugurated understanding" (Poythress) of His repeated comings in blessing and judgment upon the church throughout the church age, one that is consummated at the final coming. In the same way, Christ inaugurated his kingdom when he began his earthly ministry, declaring, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matt. 3: 2). His ministry was the inauguration or beginning of the kingdom of Christ on earth which would be consummated (completed) upon his return in glory. Thus, all his comings in blessing and judgment are the introduction to his final coming.

However, Poythress observes that these texts have specific contexts which serve to limit the kind of coming in view within each context. That is, some immediate punishment or blessing seems to be implied in each of these texts, but not the final coming. But in 1: 7; 22: 20; and 21: 1—22: 5, the context is not limited to specific contexts, but is clearly the second coming of Christ.

(3) The second coming of Christ is literally **near**—the preterist interpretation. The whole prophecy of Revelation relates to the problems mentioned in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2—3 (cultic prostitution, martyrdom, etc.).

However, every apocalyptic passage in Scripture, however futuristic, has practical applications for its present audience. For example, Daniel 7—12, written to exiled Jews in Babylon, refers to events far into the future beyond his immediate audience, but with great practical value for them and succeeding generations. This is also true of Matthew 24 (the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD) and 1 Thessalonians 4—5. The value of a text for the present audience does not exclude its consummate fulfillment at some date far into the future.

(4) The nearness of the prophecy of Revelation is a "structural nearness" that applies to the entire period of "inaugurated eschatology" from the first advent of Christ to the second coming. Daniel 2: 44-45 supports this interpretation.

"**In the days of those kings** the God of heaven **will set up a kingdom** which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.<sup>45</sup> "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Daniel 2:44-45 NASB)

The stone cut out of the mountain which crushes all competitive kingdoms is a clear reference to the kingdom of Christ, a kingdom inaugurated **in the days of those kings**—namely, the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, the existing kingdom in Jesus' first advent—all of which form the composite of a single statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2). The prophecy in Daniel 2 occurred about 605 BC. Therefore, what was very distant from Daniel's point of view was **near**

from John's point of view almost 700 years later. Christ had come and died for the sins of His people, had risen victoriously from the dead, and had ascended into heaven to reign at the Father's right hand. Jerusalem had already been destroyed—all these events foreseen in Daniel 9: 25-27. As John writes, some of the things prophesied in Daniel had already been realized and others were being realized, e.g., the rise of the Roman Empire predicted in Daniel 7: 7.

Moreover, John sees himself at the **last hour** when many **antichrists** have already arrived on the scene of history as forerunners of the final antichrist (1 Jn. 2: 18). Thus, the church throughout the last 2000 years has lived in times that are "structurally" similar to the final crisis of the one antichrist of Revelation. Daniel's **little horn** (Dan. 7: 8) is already working in principle, waiting for his full manifestation at the end of the age in the **man of lawlessness** (2 Thess. 2: 3). Before the final, climactic crisis, there will be many crises which reflect the same character or structure as the final climax near the second coming.

It is necessary, therefore, to gain this perspective with reference to the New Testament concept of the nearness of the advent. It is the nearness of prophetic perspective ["structural nearness" or "inaugurated eschatology" D.M.] and not that of our chronological calculations. In the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose the next great epochal event, correlative with the death of Christ, his resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is Jesus' advent in glory. This is the event that looms on the horizon of faith. There is nothing of similar character between the present and this epochal redemptive event. In this sense it is nigh [near, D.M.]. And this was as true when the apostle wrote as it is today (Murray, p. 168, emphasis mine).

Murray's analysis is similar to Poythress' emphasis on "structural nearness" and "inaugurated eschatology". Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians about the events surrounding the **man of lawlessness** and **the apostasy** (2 Thess. 2: 1-12) appear to rule out the idea that he believed the coming of Christ was near in a chronological sense. These extraordinary events must come first.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, <sup>2</sup> that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup> Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2 Thess. 2:1-4 NASB)

Moreover, if our interpretation of Romans 11 is correct, Paul argues that Israel's national apostasy will come to an end and its national revival will be a greater blessing to the Gentiles than its apostasy. This revival of Israel had not yet occurred in Paul's day, nor did it seem to be on the near horizon of Israel's future. Until national Israel came to repentance and returned to the Lord, Christ would not return in glory. Likewise, Peter, who believed that **the end of all things is near**, corrected the skeptics in his second letter, who were scoffing at the idea of the coming of Christ, with the reminder that God's timetable is not like ours. He sees the beginning and end of time at a single glance: **with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day** (2 Pet. 3:8), leaving the reader with the implication that the coming of Christ could be far into the distant future. It is from this perspective that we must interpret the word, **near**.

**Awaken from the sleep** (v. 11) reminds us of Paul's words to the Thessalonians concerning this same subject.

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know full well that **the day of the Lord** will come just like a thief in the night.<sup>3</sup> While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.<sup>4</sup> But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;<sup>5</sup> for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;<sup>6</sup> **so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert** [*gregoréō*] **and sober**.<sup>7</sup> For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.<sup>8</sup> But since we are of *the day*, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.<sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or **asleep**, we will live together with Him.<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thess. 5:1-11 NASB)

As always, we must be alert to Paul's fluid use of words which may mean two different things even in the same immediate context. In the text above, **sleep** is used as a metaphor for spiritual inattention, slumber and the sins which are associated with this slumber, including drunken stupor (v. 7). **Asleep** (v.10) is used as a metaphor describing believers who have died but who will still participate in the resurrection (cf. 1 Thess. 4: 15-16). Therefore, the verb **sleep** is used in a negative sense—spiritually asleep and not **alert**—but **asleep** in a positive sense—asleep physically, but not spiritually. The ethical emphasis in 1 Thess. 5 is the same as Romans 13: 11-14.

**For now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed** (v. 11) does not mean that Christ is coming sooner than Paul and the Roman believers previously expected, but that His coming in salvation is, in fact, **nearer** than the day when they were converted. In other words, the clock is ticking, and Christ is nearer to coming than the previous day. Consider what this means for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Christ is now 2000 years nearer to His coming than in Paul's day. And since Christ has not informed us of when, precisely, that day will come, we must always **be on the alert** [*gregoréō*], knowing that this day could come sooner than we think, and we must always be ready. Therefore, in a spiritual sense, we must never **sleep** spiritually; for those who are asleep are not paying attention to their spiritual responsibilities or the subtle ways that Satan is tempting them.

"Therefore **be on the alert** [*gregoréō*], for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matt. 24:42 NASB)

"For this reason you also must be **ready**; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*. (Matt. 24:44 NASB)

The **salvation** mentioned in v. 11b is the "not yet" of the believer's salvation. If we believe in Christ, we are presently saved and adopted into the family of God, the "now" of salvation. But our bodies are still fragile and dying, and we have not yet been saved from physical death and the separation of the spirit from the body. We have not yet been ushered into the new heavens and new earth where righteousness, not unrighteousness, reigns supreme and overcomes all spiritual darkness. Thus, we are saved; we are being saved; and we shall be saved.

**The night is almost gone, and the day is near** (v. 12) refers to the dichotomy (contrast) between **this present evil age** (Gal. 1: 4) and the **age to come** (Lk. 18: 30). **Night** is associated with **darkness** and **day** with **light**; hence, **deeds of darkness** versus **armor of light** (v. 12). Therefore, the **night** of this present age is coming to a close, and the **day** of our full salvation and redemption in Christ is drawing near. Paul's ethical instruction which follows (**therefore let us...**) is grounded upon the indicative, the statement of fact, that the day of Christ's return is near. The ethical behavior of the believer must then be conditioned upon this certainty. If Christ is coming back, what does this imply for the ethical purity of the believer? Are we willing to throw away the security of our faith in Christ for the momentary pleasures of the **night** which will soon pass away? Therefore **let us**

lay aside the **deeds of darkness**  
and put on the **armor of light**.

<sup>13</sup> **Let us**

behave properly as in the day,  
not in carousing and drunkenness,  
not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality,  
not in strife and jealousy.

<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

**Armor [hoplon] of light** (v. 12) is antithetically parallel to **deeds of darkness**. The Christian's **full armor [panoplia]** or display of weapons is listed in Eph. 6: 14-17.

Put on the **full armor [panoplia]** of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but **against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the **full armor [panoplia]** of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, <sup>15</sup> and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; <sup>16</sup> in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. <sup>17</sup> And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:11-17 NASB)

The Greek word in Romans is different from that in Ephesians, but the idea is the same. In Ephesians, as in Romans, Paul is stressing an energetic defense and offense against unbelief and the immoral behavior that invariably accompanies it. In Eph. 5 and 6, Paul has been exhorting husbands, wives, fathers, mothers (implied), children, masters, and slaves to exhibit the behavior which strengthens marriages and families and minimizes dissention between slaves and masters. The basic struggle in every instance—implied from the context—is not merely a problem of human relationships but involves supernatural, demonic forces at work in the **heavenly places** (cf. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*). If Satan's **schemes** can destroy the fundamental institutions of society—marriage, family, and workplace—he can easily weaken the church and hinder its work in the world. Satan has a plan.

In Rom. 13: 13, Paul mentions other forms of sinful behavior: **carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and jealousy**. We should not necessarily assume from the



mention of the first four sins that they were taking place within the church in Rome—although they probably were (cf. Rom. 2: 1-3)—but such behavior was common in Roman society and throughout the Greco-Roman world, necessitating Paul’s repetitive warnings (cf. 1 Thess. 4: 3; 1 Cor. 5: 1; 6: 15). **Strife and jealousy** between Jewish and Gentile factions in the Roman church are also evident from Rom. 11, as well as arrogance and conceit. The **flaming arrows of the evil one** (Eph. 6: 16) include every conceivable method of weakening God’s people, thus rendering them ineffective in their duty to make Christ known in the world. If we are fighting each other, this leaves little time and energy to fight the devil.

The **light** is opposed to the **darkness**, and it exposes the deeds of darkness for what they are—evil. We find a more extensive treatment of this antithesis in Eph. 5 in which the **light** is presented as an offensive weapon against **darkness**.

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;<sup>4</sup> and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.<sup>5</sup> For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.<sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be partakers with them;<sup>8</sup> for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth),<sup>10</sup> trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Do not participate in the unfruitful **deeds of darkness**, but instead even **expose** [*elegchō*] them;<sup>12</sup> for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.<sup>13</sup> **But all things become visible when they are exposed** [*elegchō*] **by the light**, for everything that becomes visible is light. (Eph. 5:3-13 NASB)

Being **formerly darkness** included participation in the **deeds of darkness** (5: 11). Rather than participating in such things—against which God’s wrath will inevitably come (v. 6)—believers must **expose** them through reproof, admonition, and godly behavior—word and deed. The word for **expose** (*elegchō*) may be translated **reprove** (so translated in the KJV and ASV). Therefore, v. 13 could mean that all kinds of sinful behavior **done...in secret** (v. 12), when reprovved or exposed by those who are walking in the light, become corrected by that light (Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, pp. 294-295). Once these evil deeds are held up to the **light** of God’s truth, they are then exposed as evil; but apart from being reprovved by the truth, the deeds of darkness remain hidden (unexposed). Paul expresses this truth in a very strange way—**everything that becomes visible is light**. That is, every evil deed exposed to the light of biblical reproof can be corrected (Hodge). Paul speaks confidently that truth will triumph, although we should not interpret him as guaranteeing success in every reprobable situation. Some sinners will remain sinners, but the church must do its part in exposing all known sin which may lead to apostasy and eternal death.

**But put on** [*endúō*] **the Lord Jesus Christ** (Rom. 13: 13) is parallel to **put on** [*endúō*] **the armor of light**. The exact phrase is found only here in Romans but occurs in different terms elsewhere in Paul.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ **have clothed yourselves with Christ**. (Gal. 3:27 NASB)

Putting on Christ is also equivalent to putting on the new man who is **created in Christ Jesus** (Eph. 2: 10).

and put on [*endúō*] the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:24 NASB)

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,<sup>10</sup> and have put on [*endúō*] the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—(Col. 3:9-10 NASB)

Considered altogether, putting on Christ, the new man, and **the armor of light** are different ways of expressing the same thing. That armor, as we see clearly in Ephesians, includes truth and the knowledge of Christ learned from the Scriptures—**the sword of the Spirit**—the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Apart from the scriptures, the believer is defenseless against the onslaught of evil which surrounds him on all sides.

**Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts** may be translated **make no forethought [*pronoia*] for the flesh**. Regarding our physical needs, we must be thoughtful and plan ahead about how to take care of the human body; but regarding our fleshly, unspiritual desires, we must not make any plans concerning how we might satisfy those desires. Sitting idly in his palace, king David planned ahead (“made **provision**”) how he would seduce Bathsheba into his bed and later how he would cover up his adultery. Our bodies must be provisioned with the proper resources, but we must not purposely put ourselves in those situations and circumstances which may lead to sinful behavior (“**Lead us not into temptation...**”). Therefore, if we are exposing ourselves to situations and circumstances which may lead to sin, we must eliminate those situations as much as possible. We cannot avoid all temptations, but if we know ourselves well, we are aware of those things which push our “sin buttons”, so to speak. In every respect, the believer must be awake, not asleep, concerning the forces of evil which intend to destroy him. Living 2000 years after Paul, salvation is surely **nearer to us** than when Paul wrote his Roman letter.

Sleep, night, darkness, are all co-related in our ordinary experience. The same is true in the moral and religious realm. And what the apostle is pressing home is the incompatibility of moral and religious slumbers with the position which believers now occupy in the great drama of redemption. The basic sanction of love to our neighbor as ourselves applied to the Old Testament as well as to the New (vss. 8-10). But the consideration Paul is now pleading is one that could apply only to the particular “season” contemplated in the present passage and urged as the reason for godly living. The day of Christ, though not yet come, is nevertheless throwing its light backward upon the present. In that light believers must now live; it is the dawning of the day of unprecedented splendor. It is high time to awake to the realization of this fact, to be aroused from spiritual torpor [apathy, D.M.], to throw off the garments of slumber, and to put on the weapons that befit the tasks of such a “season” in redemptive history. Each calendar day brings nearer to us the day of final salvation, and since it is life in the body that is decisive for eternal issues, the event of death points up for each person how short is “the season” prior to Christ’s advent. As “we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5: 10: cf. Rom. 14: 10) and Christ is ready to “judge living and dead” (2 Tim. 4: 1: cf. 1 Pet. 4: 5; James 5:9), indulgence of the works of the flesh is contradiction of the believer’s faith and hope (Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, pp. 69-70, emphasis mine).

## Romans 14

<sup>1</sup>*Now accept*

the one who is weak in faith,

*but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*

<sup>2</sup>One person has faith

that he **may eat all things,**

but he who is weak

**eats vegetables only.**

<sup>3</sup>The one who eats

is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat,

and the one who does not eat

is not to judge the one who eats,

*for God has accepted him.*

Having briefly mentioned the sin of **strife**, Paul now addresses a particular issue within the Rome congregation producing this attitude, a misunderstanding of Christian liberty concerning eating meat, drinking wine, and sabbath-keeping.

According to v. 2, the **weak** brother or sister was one who **eats vegetables only** while the believer who **has faith**—who is later called **strong** (15: 1)—could eat **all things** without violating his conscience. The majority of the church in Rome was most likely Gentile who would have had no previous scruples about eating anything, including meat offered to idols. The question arises about whether the situation in Rome was equivalent to that in Corinth. There are good reasons to believe that the two contexts are different. The following considerations are drawn from Murray (*Romans*, pp. 173-174; see also Leon Morris, *Romans*, p. 479):

1. There is no mention of **idol** worship in Romans 14 nor meat that had been **sacrificed to idols**. If this was a similar development in Rome, we would expect some reference to idolatry, as in 1 Cor. 8 and 10.

However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, **eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol**; and their conscience being weak is defiled.<sup>8</sup> But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.<sup>9</sup> But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.<sup>10</sup> For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened **to eat things sacrificed to idols**?<sup>11</sup> For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.<sup>12</sup> And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Cor. 8:7-13 NASB)

Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?<sup>19</sup> What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?<sup>20</sup> *No*, but *I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.*<sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.<sup>22</sup> Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?<sup>23</sup> All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.

All things are lawful, but not all things edify. <sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. <sup>25</sup> Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; <sup>26</sup> FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. <sup>27</sup> If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. <sup>28</sup> **But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake;** (1 Cor. 10:18-28 NASB)

2. There is no mention of the observance of a special **day** in 1 Corinthians as there is in Romans. Sabbath observance was also practiced in the Galatian church, but Paul does not deal with it as strenuously as he does circumcision. Sabbath observance was also an issue in Rome.

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> **He who observes the day**, observes it for the Lord, and **he who eats**, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. (Rom. 14:5-6 NASB)

3. Abstinance from all meat is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians, only abstinence from meat which had been **sacrificed to idols**. Eating other meat was not in question. But in Rome, there were those who ate **vegetables only**. It should be considered here that the word **only** is not in the Greek text. It is supplied by most translators as a justifiable extrapolation or inference from the context.

We might be inclined to believe that the scruples in Rome were Jewish scruples related to food restrictions in the Mosaic Law. However, there was no prohibition against **wine** in the Law except for Nazarites and priests during the performance of their duties (Num. 6: 2-3; Lev. 10: 9). Yet, the context indicates that Roman Christians who were abstaining from meat were also abstaining from wine.

It is good not to eat meat **or to drink wine**, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. (Rom. 14:21 NASB)

In answer to this objection, it should be noted that Jewish Christians in Rome might abstain from all meat and wine from fear of eating or drinking anything associated with pagan feasts or worship, rendering the situation in Rome analogous to that in Corinth. That Paul does not mention idol worship in Rom. 14 does not necessarily prove that it was not a relevant issue. After all, Rome was the epicenter of the pagan world, and idolatry was rampant there as well as Corinth. This would also explain why the keeping of a special **day** was also considered in the address to the Roman church (cf. Moo, pp. 830-831; also the opinion of Hodge, p. 417).

Whatever the situation was, the gravity of the situation was far from the outright apostasy facing the Galatian church in which the gospel itself was being counterfeited (Gal. 1: 6-9; 5: 4). Instead, the strong majority in the Roman church is instructed to **accept** the **weak** as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ without **passing judgment** on their unwillingness to indulge in privileges which their liberty in Christ allowed. Anything less than full acceptance was essentially **contempt** (v. 3). Reciprocally, the **weak** must also not **judge** the strong for the full use of their liberty. God **has accepted** the strong as well as the weak, thus putting everyone involved in this dispute on notice that to do otherwise is to act contrary to God's will. The weakness of those involved did not

consists in deficient faith in Christ for salvation, but in the application of their faith to things which were “indifferent” or “adiaphora”, things neither forbidden nor commanded.

The question before us is whether the situations in Rome or Corinth have anything to do with the modern church. Do we have any modern churches with sizable Jewish memberships struggling with scruples regarding meat or wine which may have been sacrificed to idols? I seriously doubt it. The only similar situation I can think of is whether African Christians might be exposed to food offered to deceased ancestors. If so, then 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 are very relevant to their situation. If not, and given this contextual difference, one might wonder whether the text has any immediate relevance for the modern church at all.

However, if the Bible is a timeless book applicable to God’s people in all cultures throughout human history until the end of the age—and it is—there must be some application. This would require the reader to apply the text to any culturally or religiously disputed practice not specifically forbidden in Scripture which might divide believers. We know for a fact that drinking alcohol is a disputed issue among many Christians. I have personally tried to educate my African brothers and sisters about this issue (see my notes on 1 Timothy). Recently in Addis Ababa, this “education” cost me another day of teaching at a leadership conference which was cancelled the following day because of my stand on moderate alcohol consumption. But I was simply reading Paul’s mail to Timothy; I was not authorized to change it.

It is clear in 1 Timothy 3: 3, 8; 1Tim. 5: 23; and here in Romans 14 that drinking **wine** (*oinos*, used in Jn. 2: 1-10; Eph. 5: 18; and the derivative in Matt. 11: 19) is not, by itself, sinful. Drunkenness is sinful. (For OT references, see Gen. 9: 21; Deut. 14: 26; and Ps. 104: 15, Prov. 20: 1; 21: 17 for starters, where the word *yayin* is used). You cannot force the words *oinos* or *yayin* to mean anything other than alcoholic wine. “And do not get drunk with grape juice” (?) Why would Jesus produce something inherently sinful, and why would He be accused of being a drunkard for drinking grape juice? Why is wine mentioned in Psalm 104 as a blessing while at the same time it is mentioned as something which may be abused to the point of intoxication and moral deprivation (Proverbs 20: 1; 21: 17; 23: 20, 29-35)? Simply because it can be both, depending on how we use it. In 1 Corinthians and Romans, why does Paul go to great lengths to explain the different contexts in which drinking wine would be forbidden or permitted? Why bother with argumentation about wine offered to idols or drunk in pagan temples (1 Cor. 8, 10) if drinking is sinful in any context?

This brings up the important question of educating believers about cultural taboos which are not sinful in themselves. Without education—including biblical interpretation—Christians are in danger of dividing over the most trivial issues. Some issues are worth division, but most are not. The difference between these two categories seems to be established in Galatians. Some teaching is so contrary to the gospel that, left unchallenged, it would destroy the very gospel itself. We have already dealt with the foundational doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone earlier in our study. I have also included quotations from the Council of Trent which are still in force to highlight the difference between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestantism.

“If anyone says that the justice received is not **preserved** and also not **increased** before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification

obtained, but not the cause of its increase, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA” (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 24).

This kind of teaching, among many others, is the reason why Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others could not remain within the communion of the RCC. It is also why most protestant theologians, R.C. Sproul included, could not sign the document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” in 1994. The Presbyterian Church of America (my denomination) broke off from the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS, now merged into the PCUSA) in 1973 over theological liberalism. The PCUS did not hold firmly to the deity of Jesus Christ or the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, leaving the PCA no option but to break away. Once a church or denomination denies such fundamental truths, it ceases to be Christian and becomes something else, hence Paul’s strong language of Galatians 1. Without the Scriptures to guide us, we have nothing upon which to base our faith and practice except majority vote, cultural norms, or the opinions of experts who invariably differ with one another. None of these have ever established truth.

The PCUSA now ordains practicing lesbians and homosexual men and sanctions abortion. While condemning sexual immorality, the RCC has been known to transfer known pedophiles from one diocese to another. Both homosexuality and murder of the unborn are condemned in Scripture (Lev. 20: 13; Ex. 21: 22), but when the authority of Scripture is denied, anything is permissible if it has cultural sanction; and the church ceases to be a beacon of light to a world lost in a moral and religious vacuum. By definition, the church must be not only theologically orthodox but also morally pure. Of course, it fails to be either perfectly, but there is a line which may not be crossed before it ceases to be the church and becomes something else—a social club or corporation, perhaps. If this is not true, then the first three chapters of Revelation, in which Christ threatens to remove individual churches, is meaningless rhetoric.

Nevertheless, we must not unnecessarily lengthen the list of doctrines which must be believed to establish one as a true Christian. Must a believer refrain from certain foods and alcohol—the subject of Romans 14? Many Christians in Africa would question the sincerity of my faith because I drink alcohol, but I would certainly not question their faith because they consider any alcohol consumption sinful. I believe they are mistaken, but not unregenerate. Must we hold to believer’s baptism, or may we practice infant baptism? Am I not a Christian because I am Presbyterian? Is one a substandard Christian because he is Reformed Baptist? When I was a Reformed Baptist, I was belittled as ignorant, and when I “converted” to Presbyterianism, one acquaintance told me that he was glad that “I finally learned how to read”. Well, I wish that Charles Spurgeon, John Bunyan, or John Gill—all Reformed Baptists—had learned to read or any number of currently well-known Reformed Baptists like John Piper, John MacArthur, or Geoffrey Thomas—all brilliant pastor/theologians.

I sincerely believe that Baptists and Presbyterians, Calvinists and Arminians who believe in salvation through Christ alone, should be able to fellowship together in the same church. Of course, this brings up the thorny issue of who is allowed to be elders, but at least we should agree to welcome believers of different theological persuasions if they believe the foundational doctrines of the faith. While fellowshiping together, we have the opportunity to discuss our differences in

Christian love. Isolated into our different theological “camps”, we seldom have the opportunity for dialog.

What those foundational doctrines are is the question. When it comes down to questions about the Trinity, the virgin birth of Christ, His deity and substitutionary atonement, justification by faith rather than by faith plus works (per Galatians) etc., there is very little room for negotiation because the very heart of the Christian faith is defined by these beliefs. Without them, Christianity ceases to be Christianity and becomes some other works-religion among all other works-religions. It is true that the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated after a long debate in the councils of the church, but much of this formulation was a philosophical attempt to comprehend the complications of the Trinity which most genuine Christians do not understand to this very day—and no theologian completely. They simply believe that three distinct persons, all of them divine, are mentioned in the Bible, but they are equally God, one essence. And this is enough, unless we suppose that little children must grasp such complexities. It is impossible for me to believe that Christians did not have a fundamental grasp of the Trinity until the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in 325 and 381 AD. These councils are important, but they were not the beginning of essential Trinitarian orthodoxy in the church.

<sup>4</sup> Who are you  
to judge the servant of another?

*To his own master*  
he stands or falls;  
and he will stand,  
*for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Using an analogy, Paul asks whether we have the privilege of judging someone who is the house servant (*oiketes*) of another master. Do we poke our noses into the business of other people? It is God’s business as to whether he accepts a person whose behavior is not explicitly unlawful. In the immediate context, Paul is saying that God accepts **the one who eats**; therefore, he is forbidding judgment on both sides of the issue.

<sup>5</sup> One person  
regards one day above another,  
another  
regards every day alike.  
Each person  
must be fully convinced in his own mind.

<sup>6</sup> He who **observes** the day,  
observes it for the Lord,  
and he who **eats**,  
does so for the Lord,  
for he gives thanks to God;  
and he who **eats not**,  
for the Lord he does not eat,

and gives thanks to God.

Another point of dispute in Rome was over the observance of days. The sabbath day of the Jews is not specifically mentioned, but it would be difficult to eliminate it from Paul's consideration here. Many Jewish Christians continued worshipping in the synagogues until late in the first century, and this would have been on the seventh day, not the first. Murray—with whom I do not like to disagree—insists that Paul could not have been talking about the Lord's Day as the NT application of the Sabbath institution since the Sabbath is a creational ordinance beginning on the seventh day of the week of creation (*Romans*, pp. 257-258; so also Hodge, *Romans*, p. 420).

But if Murray is correct, why does Paul leave so much room in the present passage for interpreting the Sabbath commandment as a non-binding ceremonial institution? All Paul had to say to avoid any ambiguity is that the Jewish Sabbath was not required but that the Lord's Day was now a continuation of the Jewish Sabbath with the same authority as the fourth commandment (Ex. 20: 8-11). Yet, we hear nothing to this effect in Pauline literature. (We may also ask why we have no patriarchal practice of Sabbath-keeping recorded throughout the narratives in Genesis.) We find less ambiguity in Col. 2 where the **Sabbath** is explicitly mentioned.

Therefore **no one is to act as your judge** in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a **Sabbath day**—<sup>17</sup> things which are a *mere shadow* of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col. 2:16-17 NASB)

Literally, **Sabbath** is plural. Young's literal translation and the NKJ read accordingly.

Let no one, then, judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or of a new moon, or of **sabbaths**, (Col. 2:16 YLT)

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or **sabbaths**, (Col. 2:16 NKJ)

In this text, as well as the Romans text, some believers were passing judgment upon those who did not observe **Sabbaths** in an acceptable manner—i.e., acceptable to them. Paul explains that the Sabbaths were an OT **shadow** of the person and sacrifice of Christ who is now the Sabbath rest for every believer who is putting his trust in Him. The **substance** of the Sabbath belongs to Christ. This is supported by the author of Hebrews.

Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of **entering His rest**, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup>For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. <sup>3</sup>**For we who have believed enter that rest**, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT **ENTER MY REST**," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup>**For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS";** <sup>5</sup> and again in this *passage*, "**THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.**" <sup>6</sup>Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those **who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience**, <sup>7</sup>He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." <sup>8</sup>For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. <sup>9</sup>



So there remains a **Sabbath rest** for the people of God.<sup>10</sup> **For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.**<sup>11</sup> Therefore let us be diligent to **enter that rest**, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience. (Heb. 4:1-11 NASB)

Notice that the word **enter** is used seven times in conjunction with **rest**. Moreover, **rest** is also used in conjunction with the **Sabbath** and believing the **good news**.

**Shadow** (*skia*) is also used in Hebrews.

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer.<sup>4</sup> Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law;<sup>5</sup> who serve a copy and **shadow** [*skia*] of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE **PATTERN** [*tupos; type*] WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." (Heb. 8:3-5 NASB)

For the Law, since it has *only* a **shadow** [*skia*] of the good things to come *and* not the **very form of things**, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. (Heb. 10:1 NASB)

A shadow of something reflects the genuine outline of the thing itself. For example, the shadow of a person in the path of the sun shows the true contours of the person. Likewise, the Sabbath showed the genuine representation of the salvation rest God had promised His people. They had worked seven days a week under the cruel slavery of the Egyptians. Now, in the wilderness, they were given one day a week to remind them that God would provide for them every day of the week even if they rested one day. Moreover, as we now know, this one day of rest represents an eternity of resting in one's Creator. The **Sabbath** signified resting from one's **works** to save himself and relying, instead, on the work God had done for him. How? By believing in God's constant provisions for salvation, including the provision of manna from heaven providing physical salvation. The **good news** preached took the form of bread, bread that proved that God loved His people and would not forsake them. For the wayward Jews, however, the physical provisions became more important than the spiritual salvation they represented. The **shadows**, including the animal sacrifices, became more important than the **very form of things**.

What the Sabbath prescriptions being pushed by some Colossians were, Paul does not elaborate in Col. 2; but if the Sabbath commandment was still in force in the same way as it was in the Old Covenant, we may ask: Where are these restrictions lifted in the NT epistles?

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."<sup>9</sup> "Six days you shall labor and do all your work,<sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* **you shall not do any work**, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.<sup>11</sup> "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and **rested** on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod. 20:8-11 NASB)

'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. **Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his**

**people.**<sup>15</sup> For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; **whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death.** (Exod. 31:14-15 NASB)

"For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; **whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.**<sup>3</sup> **You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day.**" (Exod. 35:2-3 NASB)

Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day.<sup>33</sup> Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation;<sup>34</sup> and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him.<sup>35</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp."<sup>36</sup> **So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.** (Num. 15:32-36 NASB)

"If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And honor it, **desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word,**<sup>14</sup> Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isa. 58:13-14 NASB)

"But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; **and My sabbaths they greatly profaned.** Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them. (Ezek. 20:13 NASB)

Commenting on Gal. 4: 10, Calvin says,

He [Paul] adduces as an instance one description of "elements," the observance of days...Of what nature, then, was the observation of which Paul reproves? It was that which would bind the conscience, by religious considerations, as if it were necessary to the worship of God, and which, as he expresses it in the Epistle to the Romans, would make a distinction between one day and another. (Rom. 14: 5.)

When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, then days are improperly observed. The Jewish Sabbath, new moons, and other festivals were earnestly pressed by the false apostles because they had been appointed by the law. When we, in the present age, make a distinction of days, we do not represent them as necessary, and thus lay a snare for the conscience; we do not reckon one day to be more holy than another; we do not make days to be the same thing with religion and the worship of God; but merely tend to the preservation of order and harmony. The observance of days among us is a free service, and void of all superstition (*Galatians* p. 124, emphasis mine).

Following up on the quote from Calvin, I will quote from my commentary on Galatians.

The “preservation of order and harmony” [Calvin] may be a reference to the necessity of establishing some day, any day, for public worship. Necessity would dictate that we set aside the same day of the week, or at least a well-published day, to prevent confusion. We are commanded to do so in Hebrews 10: 24-25 which is the closest thing to a Sabbath commandment we will find in the NT. “...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”...Sometimes we allow the formality to take priority over the substance—the most important part. The substance of the command for public worship in vv. 24-25 is the importance of stimulating our fellow believers to love and good deeds and encouraging one another, no matter what day it is. Formal obedience requires only that we “show up” on the prescribed day regardless of whether we encourage anyone or engage in any fellowship. We therefore observe the form of the Sabbath but not the substance. [An additional note: I am speaking of real fellowship, not the trivial chit-chat that some Christians call “fellowship”.]

In Romans 14: 1-12 Paul treats the observance of religious days along with the observance of food laws in the OT. Those who were “weak” would not eat certain meats which were not permitted in the old economy of the law or meats which would have been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8). [Additional note: see Dan. 1: 8]. So fearful of eating the wrong meat, such people would refrain from meat altogether and eat only vegetables (v. 2). They believed that such laws were still binding on the conscience. Those who were more knowledgeable in the faith could eat all kinds of food without hurting their own consciences. They knew that an idol was nothing (1Cor. 8) and that the food laws of the OT were no longer binding on their conscience. Paul advises those who had the liberty of conscience to eat whatever they wished not to “regard with contempt” those who refrained from eating certain foods. As another example of the use of Christian liberty, Paul uses the observance of certain religious days, and he warned those who “regarded every day alike” not to regard with contempt the one who “regards one day above another” (v. 5). Keeping certain days and eating certain foods are no longer required, but if a believer wishes to keep certain laws “for the Lord” (v. 6), he is permitted to do so.

What makes the situation in Romans and Corinthians different from that in Galatia? No one in the church in Rome or Corinth was claiming that eating certain foods or keeping certain days was essential for salvation...But in Galatia, keeping these laws—including certain days—was being presented as a necessity. Thus Paul “fears” (v. 11) for the Galatians who are looking at these observances as essential to salvation, while he permits such observances in Corinth and Rome and even instructs the “non-observers” not to judge the “observers” with contempt and not to cause them to stumble. This is the same logic Paul uses in the circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16: 3) “because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek”. Yet, Paul adamantly refused to have Titus (also a Gentile) circumcised since the issue under debate was not one of Christian liberty but the question of how one can be saved (Gal. 2: 3).

Whatever position we take on this issue, we must account for the fact that very little is said in the gospels, and even less in the epistles, on the methodology of Sabbath/Lord’s Day observance. In Paul’s extensive catalog of sins in 1 Cor. 6: 9-10; Col. 3: 5-6; Gal. 5: 19-21, not once does he mention the violation of any Sabbath. There is no record of excommunication for persistent sabbath violation—a very strange omission if Sabbath violation was singled out as the primary reason for Judah’s exile (2 Chron. 36: 20-21). But there was no need to do so since unbelief is, by definition, the essential violation of the Sabbath command. Men and women who do not believe in Christ, by biblical definition, do not **enter** into the Sabbath **rest** of Christ. They are still under

the law and must earn God's favor through obedience to the law, a method which inevitably leads to failure.

Does this mean, then, that we forget about public worship? Not at all, as this would contradict the command of Heb. 10: 25, which I have noted above, includes much more than just showing up on Sundays as spectators, a habit all too addictive for Christians of large churches, including me. I would also argue that Sunday is a convenient day to worship for most Christians except for those who are living in nations hostile to the Christian faith, in which case they could legitimately—perhaps more wisely—choose another day or night for worship, thus staying off the radar of their persecutors. Christians who own businesses could close their businesses on Sunday allowing Christian employees to attend public worship. Laws could be passed requiring employers to allow Christians the option of receiving Sunday as a day off, or at least the first half of the day; but this would require the messy business of employers' verifying attendance. However, the benefit is not for believers only, but for unbelievers, as well, as a witness to them that the only rest they will ever experience is the rest they have in believing that God has forgiven them of their sins through the sacrifice of Christ. They may rest in the assurance that Christ has paid for their sins, enabling them to rest in God's forgiveness.

But the Sabbath is not an ongoing law prescribing certain performance, the violation of which is punishable by physical death in the OT, yet not excommunication in the NT. We have come a long way from Sabbath commandments and penalties to Lord's Day admonitions. Rather, it is a type of the antitype which is Christ Jesus who came to give us rest from the unreachable goal of being right with God on the basis of our performance. But if we persist in attempting to be right with God on the basis of works, the penalty of eternal death is the antitype of the temporal punishment of physical death upon those who broke the Sabbath in the Old Covenant.

<sup>5b</sup>Each person  
must be fully convinced in his own mind.

Moses could never have made this statement concerning the Sabbath. The man condemned to death by stoning in Num. 15 was perhaps **convinced in his own mind** that gathering wood on the Sabbath was legitimate. In the Old Covenant administration, he was dead wrong, and in the New Covenant administration, we must ask the question about what is and what is not legitimate on Sunday if indeed the Sabbath commandment is still in force. And if the sabbath commandment is in force, why do we not have, as I previously asked, more instructions in the NT as to how Christians in the first century AD, particularly slaves, could keep it properly, rather than texts in Romans, Colossians, and Galatians which clearly teach that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, including its OT regulations, and therefore not obligatory?

If Murray is right, every believer must consult the OT and his elders concerning what modern activities are permissible or impermissible on Sunday, including playing golf, going to the movies, taking a cruise—where several hundred people every Sunday are required to meet your every need—mowing the lawn, taking a walk, or making love to your wife—the equivalent of **seeking your own pleasure on** God's holy day (Isa. 58: 13). Murray, a Scottish Presbyterian, was at least consistent. He would not converse with anyone on Sunday about anything but that which pertained specifically to the gospel or the bible (**speaking your own word**). The Puritans of New England were also consistent, refusing to light fires in their churches on Sundays, resulting in the

communion bread freezing (Gary North, “The Economics of Sabbath-Keeping”, Appendix 4 in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, R.J. Rushdoony, p.834). Such commitment to perceived truth is not laughable (Rom. 14: 3). It should be viewed with considerable respect for those who are following their conscience. Almost all Sabbath-keepers are inconsistent. They drive cars, cook in modern ovens, and wash their clothes in washing machines, and even if they do not do these things on Sunday, they use appliances which are produced with steel. Steel mill furnaces must be kept running 24/7. In terms of energy consumption, they require too much power to start from zero to operational temperature to shut down on Saturday. They must be kept going seven days a week with considerable manpower involved in keeping them going (North, p. 836, footnote). Moreover, very few Sabbatharians in the West, or even in Africa, would be willing to do without their electricity on Sundays—assuming the Africans had a choice. Someone has to keep the lights on—and air conditioners, heating units, etc.).

<sup>6</sup> He who observes the day,  
    observes it for the Lord,  
and he who eats,  
    does so for the Lord,  
    for he gives thanks to God;  
and he who eats not,  
    for the Lord he does not eat,  
    and gives thanks to God.

Both strict Sabbatharians, non-Sabbatharians, meat-eaters, strict vegetarians, drinkers, and non-drinkers, must be given the benefit of the doubt concerning their motives. Paul gives no hint in this context that some Roman believers observed strict diets or kept certain days as a means of being right with God. This appears to be the context in Galatians, less dangerously among Colossians affected by the Gnostic heresy; and it elicits Paul’s fierce opposition. Here, one’s eating, drinking, and observance of days are all a matter of Christian liberty. If Paul could give each party the benefit of the doubt that their practice was out of love for God and gratitude, then everyone else should do the same. And we can do the same today. In my time I have seen how the Sabbatharian issue has sometimes played out in the church with parties on opposing sides of the issue hurling names at each other. The Sabbatharians are accused of being “legalists” while the non-Sabbatharians are accused of being “antinomians” (lawless). Paul assumes everyone on opposing sides to be brothers.

<sup>7</sup> For **not one** of us  
    lives for himself,  
and **not one**  
    dies for himself;  
<sup>8</sup> for **if we live**,  
    we live for the Lord,  
or **if we die**,  
    we die for the Lord;  
therefore  
    whether we live  
    or die,  
**we are the Lord's.**

The explanatory **for** [*gar*] in v. 7 indicates a further explanation of the preceding statement in v. 6 concerning one's motives for eating or not eating, drinking or abstaining, keeping days or not keeping days. Whatever course one takes on these issues or any others should be done with the ultimate, comprehensive goal of pleasing the Lord, whose name is mentioned three times in two verses for emphasis. This is an eloquent way of Paul saying, "It's not about us. It's about the Lord", something he expresses in a different way concerning the similar controversy in Corinth.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.** (1 Cor. 10:31 NASB)

To please the Lord, our thoughts and actions must conform to the proper standard (the law of God), the proper motive (love for God and others), and the proper goal (the glory of God and the kingdom of God) (see John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*). The reason we are alive and breathing air is to bring glory to God, and the reason for our dying is to bring glory to God. Held in custody in Rome, Paul says,

For to me, **to live is Christ and to die is gain.**<sup>22</sup> But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.<sup>23</sup> But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;<sup>24</sup> **yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.**<sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,<sup>26</sup> so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. (Phil. 1:21-26 NASB)

And to the wayward Corinthians,

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;<sup>15</sup> and He died for all, **so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.** (2 Cor. 5:14-15 NASB)

Whether to live or to die made no difference to Paul. He was completely free to embrace either one joyfully, whether more hardship in proclaiming the gospel—he was in prison when he wrote Philippians—or to make his "exodus" from this evil age and see Christ face to face. Christian maturity demands that we share the same attitude. Several months ago, I was told that my liver enzymes were elevated. Elevated enzymes could mean anything from fatty liver disease (not fatal) to cirrhosis of the liver (not good) to liver cancer (generally not survivable). They don't call it a "liver" for nothing. At 71, I think about death often, hopefully not in a morbid way, but as an inevitable reality that cannot be far away for me. Fran's emergency surgery over a year ago and her recent breast cancer had me thinking about it more—and now this. Anyway, the diagnosis was fatty liver disease which needs no medication, only diet and exercise. (Do I look like I need to go on a diet? Don't tell me.) But when it is my time to go, and if I have sufficient time to think about it, I hope it will not make any difference. The only reason we cling to this life is that we don't know exactly what's on the other side. Paul had been given a glimpse (2 Cor. 12), but his biggest advantage was that he walked intimately with his Lord—**having the desire to depart and be with Christ**—an intimacy I can only aspire to (Phil. 3: 7-14).

<sup>9</sup> For to this end

Christ died and lived again,  
**that** [*hina, in order that*] He might be Lord

both of the dead  
and of the living.

**For to this end** implies purpose (*hina*, in order that). What is the purpose for which **Christ died and lived again**; i.e., why did He die on the cross and rise again from the grave? It was for the purpose of purchasing a people for Himself, so that they may be the Lord's possession both in living and dying (**we are the Lord's**, v. 8). Christ did not die merely to take us to heaven, but **in order that** His lordship or mastery over us would be manifested both in the final resurrection of the dead and in the manner in which we live our lives and lose our lives for the kingdom of God, as those who are living and dying for something much bigger than themselves.

The lordship of Christ here dealt with did not belong to Christ by native right as the Son of God; it had to be secured. It is the lordship of redemptive relationship and such did not inhere in the sovereignty that belongs to him in virtue of his creatorhood. It is achieved by mediatorial accomplishment and is the reward of his humiliation (cf. Acts 2: 36; Rom. 8: 34; Phil 2: 9-11)...

Christ is represented as achieving dominion over "both the dead and the living" ...He has achieved this dominion because he himself entered the realm of death, conquered death, and rose triumphant as the Lord of life. He established his supremacy in both domains and therefore in whatever realm believers have their abode they are embraced in his lordly possession as those for whom he died and rose again (Murray, *Romans*, vol. 2, pp. 182-183, emphasis mine).

<sup>10</sup> But you,  
    why do you judge your brother?  
Or you again,  
    why do you regard your brother with contempt?

Paul now returns to the original subject, but nothing written thus far has been ink spilled in vain and not relevant to the subject at hand. Our attitude toward other brothers and sisters is grounded in the lordship of Christ over our lives. Both they and we will be judged by none other than the Lord Himself. Paul reminded the **masters** in Ephesus that they must beware of a high-minded attitude toward their **slaves**, considering that they, too, have a **Master** in heaven who is not **partial** to anyone (Eph. 6: 9). Therefore, if we persist in judging one another for behavior contrary to ours—even when the behavior is not forbidden—we will one day give an account to God for our impertinence (disrespect). This leads Paul to the next statement.

*For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*

<sup>11</sup> For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD,  
    EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,  
    AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."

<sup>12</sup> *So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.*

In the explanatory statement of v. 10b, Paul reminds his audience that every believer (**we and each one of us**) will stand before God's **judgment seat**. Thus, rather than being quick to judge the indifferent behavior of those who do not practice their faith exactly like us, we must be mindful that there will be only one judge at the end of the age to whom everyone must give an account.

Paul has warned his readers previously of this judgement (Rom. 2: 5-11). In that text, the judgment of both believer and unbeliever is in view. A believer is one who perseveres **in doing good** (2: 7) while the unbeliever is one who is **selfishly ambitious** and does not **obey the truth** (v. 8). Romans 14: 10b-12 is also a reference to the general judgment of everyone on earth, although Paul particularizes it for believers. His quotation is from Isaiah.

"Turn to Me and be saved, **all the ends of the earth**; For I am God, and there is no other. <sup>23</sup> "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me **every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance**. (Isa. 45:22-23 NASB)

As the context of v. 22 indicates, God is summoning all the inhabitants of the earth to turn to Him for salvation. The effect of this summons, at first glance, appears universalistic, as if every inhabitant will eventually bow down to the Lord in voluntary obedience and faith. However, the analogy of faith will not support this interpretation. At the end of the age, **those who dwell on the earth** (used six times in Revelation for unbelievers), **whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb**, will worship the **beast** instead of Christ (Rev. 13: 8). Some have persecuted God's people and will be those who beg to be hidden from God's judgment.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; <sup>10</sup> and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood **on those who dwell on the earth**?" (Rev. 6:9-10 NASB)

Then the **kings of the earth** and the **great men** and the **commanders** and **the rich and the strong and every slave and free man** hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup> and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "**Fall on us and hide us** from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17 NASB)

The apostle also uses the same citation in Philippians.

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that **at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that **every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11 NASB)

The confession in Phil. 2: 11 is consistent with the context of Isaiah and Revelation. It includes both the voluntary confession of believers but also the involuntary confession of unbelievers who, at the coming of Christ, must finally yield to the overwhelming and undeniable and empirical evidence that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, for they will **see Him** in the clouds and will mourn over their lost opportunity of salvation and their imminent judgment.

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and **every eye will see Him**, even those who pierced Him; and **all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him**. So it is to be. Amen. (Rev. 1:7 NASB)



"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then **all the tribes of the earth will mourn**, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. (Matt. 24:30 NASB)

If texts like these fill even believers with awe and fear, it is because this is their purpose. In the modern age of evangelical "sinner-friendly" theology, there is little use for the idea that even believers will **appear** (or, **will be revealed**, *phanerōō*; 2 Cor. 5: 10) before God's judgement; and even if they do, they are there—it is falsely believed—only for acquittal because of the atoning work of Christ. But while it is true—a precious truth—that **there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (8:1), it does not follow that there will be no final judgment for their deeds.

For we must all appear [*phanerōō*] before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be **recompensed** [*komizō*] for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, **whether good or bad**. (2 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

**Recompensed** [*komizō*] means to be repaid (paid back).

For he who does wrong will **receive** [*komizō*] the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Col. 3:25 NASB)

With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will **receive back** [*komizō*] from the Lord, whether slave or free. (Eph. 6:7-8 NASB)

As in 2 Cor. 5, Paul is speaking to believers in Colossae and Ephesus. As I have said before (somewhere), the trouble with these texts, especially 2 Cor. 5: 10, is that we cannot envision the scene on Judgment Day where believers are being repaid for **bad deeds**. **Good deeds?** Yes. **Bad deeds?** No. But Paul includes **bad deeds**, and we might as well put this in our evening tea and drink it. Barnett also feels the tension.

Clearly, the two positions—God-given salvation (see, e.g., Rom 3: 21-31; 5: 1-11; Gal 5: 4) and the judgment of each according to his works (see, e.g., Rom 2: 6-11; 14: 10; 1 Cor 14: 13; Eph 6: 8; Col 3: 25; Cf. Matt 16: 27; 1 Pet 1: 17; Rev 2:23; 20:12; 22: 12)—were reconcilable to Paul [Please note the references. D.M.]

One resolution that is to be rejected [that of E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright; footnoted in Barnett. D.M.] is that believers are saved through Christ at the time of their incorporation into him but are kept "in" that salvation by their works. Logically this means that they will be excluded at the judgment if they do not fulfill the law well enough. But this would be to suggest that believers enjoy the justification of God only at the point of initial faith in Christ, and which they must, by their own efforts, secure salvation, an outcome that must therefore remain uncertain until the judgment. [This is nothing more than warmed-over Roman Catholicism served up as if freshly cooked. See my notes on the Council of Trent after Chapter 6; D.M.] This view is at odds with the main lines of Paul's thought (see e.g., Rom 8:1; Gal 3:1-5; 5:3; 6: 13; Eph 2:8-9), not least in the next passage, where the apostle writes so conclusively about God's reconciliation of "all" / "the world" to himself through the one who died for all to enable believers to become the righteousness of God in him (5:14-21).

A more consistent explanation would be that believers do not face condemnation at Christ's tribunal (see Rom 5:16,18; 8:1) but rather evaluation with a view to the Master's commendation given or withheld (1 Cor 3:10-15; 4:5; cf. Luke 12: 42-48). Perhaps, too, they will receive back within themselves elements of what they had practiced in the body (so 5:10), as eternal reminders that they had been saved through God's mercy, and not by their own efforts. Those "outside Christ" face the sinner's judgment; on the other hand, those "in Christ" face his judgment bench as saints.

...Our "confidence" that we will be "with the Lord" (v. 8) is to be held in tension with the "fear of the Lord" (v. 11), from which we serve him. Confidence, while real, does not empty service of sobriety... (Paul Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 276-277, italics emphasis his, underlined emphasis mine).

Commenting on 2 Cor. 5: 10, Hodge says,

God will not be mocked and cannot be deceived; the character of every man will be clearly revealed. (1.) In the sight of God. (2.) In the sight of the man himself. All self-deception will be banished. Every man will see himself as he appears in the sight of God. His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts and thoughts and feelings. His conscience will be so enlightened as to recognize the justice of the sentence which the righteous judge shall pronounce upon him. All whom Christ condemns will be self-condemned. (3.) There will be such a revelation of the character of every man to all around him, or to all who know him, as shall render the justice of the sentence of condemnation or acquittal apparent. Beyond this the representations of Scripture do not require us to go (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, p. 849, emphasis mine).

If, as Hodge says, in the final judgment "every man will see himself as he appears in the sight of God" and if "His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts and thoughts and feelings", then our recognition of past sins and our sorrow over those sins will surely be part of the "pay-back" believers receive at the final judgment. Moreover, as I have also said elsewhere (somewhere), we (believers) will experience the pain of looking back at the opportunities for doing good that we did not use, **revealed** at judgment; and we will experience the pain—for the first time—of seeing ourselves comprehensively as the wretched, unworthy sinners that we really are. Then, and only then, will we fully comprehend what a great salvation we have in Jesus Christ.

Finally, there is the matter of 1 Cor. 3: 10-15 which, admittedly, is not directed to believers in general but to teachers and leaders in the church.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder **I laid a foundation**, and **another is building** on it. But each man must be careful **how he builds on it.** <sup>11</sup>For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ.** <sup>12</sup>Now if any man builds on the **foundation** with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup>**each man's work will become evident**; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with **fire**, and the fire itself will **test** the quality of **each man's work.** <sup>14</sup>If **any man's work** which he has **built** on it remains, he will receive a **reward.** <sup>15</sup>If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; **but he himself will be saved**, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:10-15 NASB)

Paul warns those who were leaders and teachers to beware how they were **building** on the **foundation** of Christ expressed in the gospel which he and other apostles laid (vv. 10,14; cf. Eph.

2: 20). Any teaching consistent or inconsistent with this one infallible foundation, laid once and for all in Christ through the apostolic tradition, will be subjected to the **fire** of God's judgment. Teaching consistent with this foundation will endure the fire, and that which is inconsistent will be destroyed. Moreover, although the predominantly inconsistent teacher/leader himself may be trusting Christ and be saved, he will be saved as a man being rescued from a fire. The analogy implies total loss. Those who are rescued **through fire** do not take anything with them, barely making it out the door with their clothes on. Therefore, all the work one has done which is inconsistent with the foundational teaching of the apostolic tradition will go up in smoke.

Thus, he will lose whatever **reward** (v. 14) he might have gained had he not innovated with some new so-called **wisdom** [*sophia*] (cf. Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 143). The words **wisdom** and **wise** [*sophos*] are used 20 times in 1 Cor. 1 and 2 in reference to man's **wisdom** in contrast to God's **foolishness** [*moría* or *moros*, used 6 times in 1 Cor. 1—3] found in the gospel which is **wiser** [*sophos*] than man's wisdom (1: 25). Paul is clearly extending this contrast (and sarcasm?) into chapter 3 to show that these "clever" innovative teachers cannot improve on God's wisdom. If they try, they might find themselves smelling like smoke on judgment day and seeing all their cleverness go up in flames. So much for originality. Better for one to stick to the traditions without attempting to be so clever.

An alternative possibility is that Paul is not presenting the entire picture here, as if teachers will be either rewarded for their teaching or will experience the pain of seeing everything they have done in the ministry go up in smoke. Could there be some middle ground when describing true believers (**but he himself will be saved**) who shepherd the flock and teach the bible? Who among us as teachers and pastors can claim a 100% score card? (I cannot.) We all are sinners; therefore, some of our teaching and pastoring will be approved and receive a reward while some of it will fail the test. Paul is presenting a bleak, all-or-nothing scenario to produce a sobering effect among the readers who are creating leadership factions within the church (1 Cor. 1: 11-17). It should have a sobering effect upon us modern teachers as well. If the predominant quality of our ministry is **gold, silver, and precious stones**, we will receive a reward for our labors. If the predominant quality of our ministry is **wood, hay, and straw**, we will forfeit our reward for those substandard labors. I will hasten to add that the scenario Paul lays out in 1 Cor. 3 will not lend itself very well to this alternative interpretation. The reward/forfeiture picture seems to be all or nothing.

The text brings up almost as many questions as answers. Paul does not attempt to reconcile the text with Jesus' assurance that "**My sheep hear my voice...and they follow me.**" How can a Christian pastor/teacher get so far astray in his teaching that he barely makes it into the kingdom of heaven? Yet, this seems to be what Paul is saying.

I am also not quite sure how far we may apply this passage to the non-leadership portion of the church, but there must be at least some applicability. The NT is abounding with references to the believer's **works** and **deeds**.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way **that they may see your good works**, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16 NASB)

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN **ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS**. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand **so that we would walk in them.** (Eph. 2:10 NASB)

Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments,<sup>10</sup> **but rather by means of good works**, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. (1 Tim. 2:9-10 NASB)

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man,<sup>10</sup> **having a reputation for good works**; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself **to every good work.** (1 Tim. 5:9-10 NASB)

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.<sup>18</sup> *Instruct them* to do good, **to be rich in good works**, to be generous and ready to share, (1 Tim. 6:17-18 NASB)

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but **he has no works**? Can that faith save him?<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?<sup>17</sup> Even so faith, **if it has no works, is dead, being** by itself.<sup>18</sup> But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; **show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**"<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.<sup>20</sup> But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that **faith without works is useless?** (Jas. 2:14-20 NASB)

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in **good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.** (Tit. 3:8 NASB)

Our people must also learn **to engage in good deeds** to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. (Tit. 3:14 NASB)

and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love **and good deeds**, (Heb. 10:24 NASB)

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may **because of your good deeds**, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:12 NASB)

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but **in deed** and truth. (1 Jn. 3:18 NASB)

**'I know your deeds** and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; (Rev. 2:2 NASB)

I commend to you our **sister** Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;<sup>2</sup> that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for **she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.** (Rom. 16:1-2 NASB)

Moreover, both Paul and Peter liken each believer, not just pastors and elders, to **living stones** contributing to the spiritual architecture of the church resulting in a **holy temple in the Lord**.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,<sup>20</sup> **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a **holy temple in the Lord**, (Eph. 2:19-21 NASB)

you also, **as living stones**, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, **to offer up spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5 NASB)

I could continue with numerous other examples, but these are sufficient to prove that the **work** of the gospel is not the monopoly interest of a few leaders in the church—or men only. There must be words (teaching) but not words only. There must also be the **works** of the whole community of God's people giving the words credibility (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12: 7; the gifts of the Spirit **for the common good**). Therefore, I am willing to believe that the warnings of 1 Cor. 3 apply in a restricted sense to every member of the church, restricted only because teaching, preaching, and shepherding—and all elders are shepherds (Acts 20: 17, 28)—are **works** more readily lending themselves to innovation and error. Teachers are consciously afraid of boring their audience with old truth, and they sometimes make the mistake of coming up with something “original” which has little resemblance to apostolic teaching and the church's understanding of this tradition handed down for two thousand years.

But taking a diaconal function like mercy ministry to the poor as an example, if this **work** is performed with the motive of drawing attention to oneself or building a personal reputation for spirituality, this person—man or woman—may also look back on judgment day and see his work being burned. Or if a wealthy believer is stingy in his giving after the Lord has given him so much success in business, he may look back and see all his accumulated wealth go up in flames when it could have been used to **store up treasures in heaven** (Matt. 6: 20) by funding ministry and helping the poor (cf. Lk. 16: 1-13). Therefore, the text in 1 Cor. 3 must be taken to heart by any believer attempting to do God's work.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us not judge one another anymore,  
but rather determine this—  
not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

<sup>14</sup> I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus  
that **nothing**  
is unclean in itself;  
but to him who thinks  
**anything**  
to be unclean,  
to him  
**it**  
is unclean.

Paul now concludes the section on **judging** our fellow brothers and sisters and moves on to the proper application of Christian liberty. **Walking according to love** (v. 15) includes more than simply having the proper attitude concerning your brother's practices. It includes the removal of any practice on our part which may encourage him to violate his own conscience. **Obstacle** is *proskomma* which can mean, "occasion of stumbling", and **stumbling block** is *skandalon* which may also mean "snare" or "trap". Note the following uses.

<sup>32</sup>Why? Because *they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works*. They stumbled over the stumbling stone [*proskomma*], <sup>33</sup> just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION **A STONE OF STUMBLING** [*proskomma*] **AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE** [*skandalon*], AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (Rom. 9:32-33 NASB)

Do not **tear down** [*katalúō*] the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives **offense** [*proskomma*]. (Rom. 14:20 NASB)

But take care **that this liberty of yours** does not somehow become a **stumbling block** [*proskomma*] to the weak. (1 Cor. 8:9 NASB)

This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," <sup>8</sup> and, "**A STONE OF STUMBLING** [*proskomma*] **AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE** [*skandalon*] "; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. (1 Pet. 2:7-8 NASB)

'You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a **stumbling block** [*mikshol*] before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:14 NASB)

"Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to **stumble over** [*mikshol*], *And* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Isa. 8:14 NASB)

Christ, whom God the Father laid in Zion to be the cornerstone of salvation, became for the Jews an occasion for stumbling [*proskomma*] and a *skandalon*, a **rock of offense** for spiritually blind Jews to stumble over, like a physically blind man who stumbles over a well-placed stone by someone who desires his harm. Paul's use of both terms in Rom. 14 is to explain how the **strong** Christian's use of his **liberty** in eating and drinking can become a **stumbling block** or an occasion for the weaker brother to stumble into the sin doing something he believes is sinful. Although the harm done to the weaker brother may not be intentional or malicious like that of the malicious man who puts a stumbling block in front of a blind man, it nevertheless may have the same effect of **destroying** the weaker brother (see below).

**Nothing is unclean in itself** does not mean that all behavior is permissible. This would discount Paul's ethical instruction in the NT concerning sexual behavior, drunkenness, carousing, greed, etc. He is speaking of God-given things which are meant to be properly used within the boundaries provided in scripture. Sex, money, food, wine, and everything else have their proper uses—loving one's spouse and giving him or her pleasure, maintaining the body with food, clothing, and shelter, enjoying wine moderately as God's gift. They are "in themselves" neutral commodities. The problem arises when we step outside the legitimate boundaries of their use and use them sinfully

and selfishly—fornication, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, greed, the use of money to enhance selfish power and influence, drunkenness, gluttony, etc.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;<sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim. 4:4-5 NASB)

However, if a person believes that eating meat or drinking wine is sinful, then his own conscience must dictate his abstinence from meat and wine. It is never safe to act against one's conscience. Even if what we avoid is legitimate **in itself**, it is not legitimate for us because we cannot partake of it in **gratitude** (1 Tim. 4: 4) and **faith** (Rom. 14: 23).

<sup>15</sup> For if because of food

**your brother is hurt,**

you are no longer walking according to love.

Do not destroy [*appólumi*] with your food

**him for whom Christ died.**

**Destroy** is synonymously parallel with **tear down** (v. 20) and antithetically parallel with **building up** [*oikodome*] in v. 19. The behavior of every believer is designed to **build up** one another, not to **destroy** the faith of other believers (cf. 15: 1-2 below). **Destroy** [*appólumi*] is a strong word and may be translated “destroy utterly” (*BibleWorks*).

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to **destroy** [*appólumi*] both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28 NASB)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish [*appólumi*], but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:16 NASB)

For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish [*appólumi*] without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; (Rom. 2:12 NASB)

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish [*appólumi*] but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9 NASB)

How then does Paul use the word in v. 15? Does he imply that the careless use of liberty can be the occasion of the weaker brother falling into ultimate apostasy and damnation? Although the situation in Rome may not be not identical to that in Corinth (see above)—where eating meat sacrificed to idols complicated the situation even more—the language Paul uses in 1 Corinthians is so similar to that in Romans that we would be negligent to ignore it.

For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened [*oikodoméō*] to eat things sacrificed to idols?<sup>11</sup> For through your knowledge he who is weak is **ruined** [*appólumi*], the brother for whose sake Christ died.<sup>12</sup> And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. (1 Cor. 8:10-12 NASB)

Notice that the same word, *appólumi*, is used in v. 11 and translated **ruined**. In the Corinthian context, Paul speaks of the **weak** brother's **conscience** being **strengthened** (*oikodoméō*) **to eat**

**things sacrificed to idols** (v. 10). Ironically, the same word (*oikodoméō*) is used in v. 19 for **building up** one another's faith. Thus, the careless use of Christian liberty can have the exact opposite effect from fortifying another's conscience to obey God. Rather, our careless use of liberty may, instead, fortify one's conscience to disobey God by doing something he thinks is sinful. Returning to the question posed above, are we to suppose that the **conscience** of the weak might be **strengthened** (1 Cor. 8: 10) to ultimately reject the Christian faith altogether? Murray says that ultimate apostasy is not in Paul's consideration.

The strength of the word "destroy" underlines the serious nature of the stumbling that overtakes the weak brother. Are we to suppose that he is viewed as finally perishing? However grave the sin he commits it would be beyond all warrant to regard it as amounting to apostasy...Furthermore, the destruction contemplated as befalling the weak should not be construed as eternal perdition. All sin is destructive and the sin of the weak in this instance is a serious breach of fidelity which, if not repaired, would lead to perdition. It is upon the character of the sin and its consequence that the emphasis is placed in order to impress upon the strong the gravity of his offense in becoming the occasion of stumbling. It would load the exhortation with implications beyond this intent to suppose that the weak believer by his sin is an heir of eternal destruction (*Romans*, vol. 2, 192, emphasis mine).

However, Moo is not so sure that ultimate apostasy is outside the range of Paul's consideration.

This command [in v. 15] raises the stakes in two ways. First, instead of speaking generally about "the spiritual harm" (v. 13b) and "pain" (v. 15a) that the "strong" might cause the "weak," Paul stresses that their actions can "destroy" them. "Destroy" might refer to the spiritual grief and self-condemnation that the "weak" incur by following the practices of the "strong" against their consciences. But Pauline usage suggests rather that Paul is warning the "strong" that their behavior has the potential to bring the "weak" to ultimate spiritual ruin—failure to attain final salvation. If Paul is not simply exaggerating for effect, perhaps he thinks that the "weak" in faith might be led by the scorn of the "strong" to turn away entirely from the faith (*Romans*, p. 855, emphasis mine).

I see little practical difference between Murray and Moo. Murray qualifies his opinion that Paul is not speaking of the sin of immediate (?) apostasy but allows the possibility that the sin of persistent violation of one's conscience could eventually lead in that direction. At least, this is my interpretation of the following statement.

All sin is destructive and the sin of the weak in this instance is a serious breach of fidelity which, if not repaired, would lead to perdition.

Hodge may be interpreted likewise.

Believers (the elect) are constantly spoken of as in danger of perdition. They are saved only if they continue steadfast unto the end. If they apostatize, they perish. If the Scriptures tell the people of God what is the tendency of their sins, as to themselves, they may tell them what is the tendency of such sins as to others. Saints are preserved, not in despite of apostacy, but from apostacy (*Romans*, p. 424).

Reinforcing this viewpoint, Hodge says of 1 Cor. 8: 11,



The language of Paul in this verse seems to assume that those may perish for whom Christ died. It belongs, therefore, to the same category as those numerous passages which make the same assumption with regard to the elect. If the latter are consistent with the certainty of the salvation of all the elect, then this passage is consistent with the certainty of the salvation of those for whom Christ specifically died. It was absolutely certain that none of Paul's companions in shipwreck was on that occasion to lose his life, because the salvation of the whole company had been predicted and promised; and yet the apostle said that if the sailors were allowed to take away the boats, those left on board could not be saved. This appeal secured the accomplishment of the promise [see Acts 27; D.M.]. So God's telling the elect that if they apostatize they shall perish, prevents their apostasy. And in like manner, the Bible teaching that those for whom Christ died shall perish if they violate their conscience prevents their transgressing, or brings them to repentance. God's purposes embrace the means as well as the end. If the means fail, the end will fail. He secures the end by securing the means. It is just as certain that those for whom Christ died shall be saved, as that the elect shall be saved. Yet in both cases the event is spoken of as conditional. There is not only a possibility, but an absolute certainty of their perishing if they fall away. But this is precisely what God has promised to prevent. This passage, therefore, is perfectly consistent with those numerous passages which teach that Christ's death secures the salvation of all those who were given to him in the covenant of redemption (Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, p. 149, emphasis mine).

If I may risk an example here, consider a believer who was formerly addicted to alcohol as an unbeliever. Due to the devastation alcohol has brought into his life, he has come to the steadfast conclusion that all alcohol consumption is sinful. Now, suppose he knows another believer, whom he respects, who has a different opinion about alcohol not known to the weaker brother. He discloses his scruples to the **strong** believer who has been previously unaware of the **weak** brother's conviction or his former addiction. What should be the response of the **strong** believer? **Walking according to love** (v. 15) for his weaker brother should dictate that he avoids drinking in the **weak** brother's presence. However, if he does so purposely and carelessly, the weak brother may be encouraged to break his abstinence and partake once more of what he has craved for many years, the taste and effects of alcohol. His respect for the **strong** brother causes him to question his own conscience and finally to sin against it. Perhaps the stronger brother has even pressured him to drink alcohol against his conscience; therefore, when he drinks, he is consciously sinning against God (cf. John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pp. 170-175). Moreover, unlike the stronger brother, the weaker one cannot control his drinking and drifts back into his former life of addiction. This sets in motion another sequence of events in which the weaker brother drifts away from the church and finally away from his faith in Christ.

Considering a different scenario, suppose that the weaker brother begins to question his own conscience in other areas as well. If he was wrong about alcohol, maybe he is also wrong about his conviction against pornography. After all, he is not physically engaging in fornication or adultery, and the Bible says nothing explicitly about pornography. (Well, of course not, since photography and the internet had not yet been invented when it was written. This is not very good hermeneutics or application of the biblical prohibition against **lust** in Matt. 5: 48; but, let's face it, sin makes people stupid, including believers.) Other aspects of the weaker brother's conscience may also fall prey to the desire to live a life carefree from moral restrictions. If he has consciously sinned against God by violating his convictions against drinking, then one more violation, and then another, does not upset the nerve endings of his conscience like it once did. Slowly (mpora, mpora)

he drifts further and further away from the Christian faith. The ultimate result could be that the weaker “brother” turns out not to be a brother at all.

We could multiply examples, but I would only get myself in trouble with my readers. I will point out that a sudden plummet into sin and apostasy is most often not like falling off a cliff. It is more like a frog being boiled alive in a heated pot. I have never tried this experiment, but I have been told that a frog in a pot of water will not immediately jump out of the water if it is being gradually heated. It will just sit there, adjusting to the “new normal” temperature of the water until it dies. I have shared the story of a young pastor in my denomination who became a pimp selling the sexual favors of a young woman in his town. He didn’t plummet immediately from being a pastor into sex trafficking. I don’t know his story, but I would imagine that his drift was very gradual. If I may speculate, perhaps he began by gazing upon other women in his congregation, a problem which he acknowledged to himself as wrong but did nothing to stop. Maybe he continued his habit by purchasing the swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated* featuring women who are barely clothed in what some fashion designers mistakenly call “swimsuits”. (I saw this edition once but convinced myself that I could not look at it again with any moral integrity.) These habits may have continued for many months, even years, before he was captivated by photographs of totally nude women on the internet and then live pornography of men and women engaged in sex on videos. Then came the actual solicitation of prostitutes and then selling them. It is difficult to assess at what point the pot was already boiling; but considering that David committed conspiracy to murder after his adultery and then repented a year later, we may believe that the young pastor, by God’s grace, could have jumped from the pot at any stage. But the warmer it got, the more comfortable he got in his sin.

We don’t need to test our agility against temptation by walking close to the edge of a cliff. We need to stay as far away as possible. Temptations are inevitable, but we must **flee** [*pheugō*] them when we can (1 Cor. 6: 18; 1 Tim. 6: 11; 2 Tim. 2: 22; Lk. 21: 20-21), like Jewish Christians fleeing from Roman armies. Moreover, we must never cause our brother to stumble by encouraging him to engage in something he believes is sinful. We should never encourage him to go against his conscience. Our conscience is similar to our sense of physical pain. When we experience physical pain—touching a hot stove or lifting an object too heavy for us—our body is warning us to avoid this activity. When our conscience experiences pain—we are warned that we are doing something that should be avoided. To continue this activity, thus denying our conscience, is an invitation to spiritual harm.

No doubt, this brings up, again, the question of educating the weaker brother about what is sinful and what it isn’t. I don’t know why Paul did not include instruction about education in Rom. 14 or 1 Cor. 8, but we should assume that his ethical instruction to all the churches was sufficiently extensive for this purpose.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let  
what is for you  
**a good thing**  
be spoken of  
**as evil;**

<sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God  
is not

eating  
and drinking,  
but  
righteousness  
and peace  
and joy in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> For he who in this way serves Christ  
*is acceptable to God  
and approved by men.*

Christian liberty to partake of food and wine, **a good thing**, can become **evil** when it is enjoyed indiscriminately and without any concern for the **weak** who are damaged by one's careless exercise of Christian liberty. Christian love demands that we sacrifice ourselves for others which may include the sacrifice of liberties in certain contexts. **The kingdom of God** does not consist primarily of the enjoyment of our liberty but servicing Christ who gave up His liberties and privileges as God by becoming a man and dying on a cross (v. 18; cf. Phil. 2: 5-8).

**The kingdom of God** is not primarily concerned with behavior which is not inherently or explicitly evil—things like drinking wine, eating meat, going to movies, modest (not vulgar) dancing, or any host of other issues. It is about **righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit**. It is about true **righteousness** because there are, indeed, standards of moral conduct which must be obeyed. Some things are explicitly condemned in Scripture and commanded in Scripture. Let us, then, major on the majors and not the minors, so to speak. We must major on the express commandments of scripture and what may be forbidden by good and necessary inference from those commandments—like vulgar, “dirty” dancing or viewing pornography.

We would do well to take our cue from the OT case laws which are given for the express purpose of applying individual commandments from the Ten Commandments. God did not leave it to his people to figure everything out for themselves. **You shall not murder** means that you cannot take the life of another unlawfully. It does not mean that you cannot protect your home from invasion (Ex. 22: 2-3) or, by extension, yourself or another person from violent attack—as one missionary in Africa tried to convince me (unsuccessfully). It also does not imply that a nation cannot protect itself from foreign invasion or that capital punishment by the state is, by definition, murder (cf. Ex. 21: 12; Acts 25: 11) or that murder is the same thing as accidental homicide (Deut. 19: 5-6; Prov. 16: 11). Yet, modern Christians seem to be confused about such things simply because they don't read the OT.

Jesus applied the sixth commandment to the sin of anger and the seventh commandment to lust. We can see from these examples that He was instituting new case laws for a “new covenant” that would require more obedience from the new covenant people, not less. **You shall not steal** does not limit stealing to the invasion of another's home and outright robbery. It also includes moving another's boundary markers (Deut. 19: 14) and purchasing items with one set of weights and selling them with a different set of weights (Deut. 25: 13-16). Today, government theft involves debasing currency through inflation (printing money unbacked by gold, making it “weightless”), something governments do to their citizens all the time, thus legally stealing from them. When Fran and I first arrived in Uganda, the US dollar was worth 2,000 Uganda shillings. Twenty years

later, it is worth 3,700 shillings. Thus, the Uganda shilling is worth only half of what it was 20 years ago against the dollar. The Kenya shilling has suffered similarly, all because of currency unbacked by gold and created out of thin air by governments with printing presses. This is happening all over the world, including the US who taught everyone else how to do it.

But **righteousness** is not limited to things forbidden but things commanded. It involves generosity to the poor (Ex. 22: 25; Lev. 25: 23-27, 39-40; Prov. 19: 17; Gal. 2: 9-10; James 2: 1-12; 1 Tim. 6: 17-19), protection of the weak (Prov. 24: 11-12; Rom. 14: 1; 1 Cor. 9: 22; 1 Thess. 5: 14); concern for biblical justice (Isa. 1: 17; 5: 7-8; Jer. 5: 1; 22: 3, 13; Amos 5: 15); loving wives, respecting husbands, rearing children, earning an honest wage, treating employees with dignity and respect (Eph. 5: 22—6: 9; Col. 3: 18—4: 1; Eph. 4: 28), and edifying others with our speech (Eph. 4: 29).

Rather than splitting hairs about whether we may mow the lawn or play tennis on Sunday, perhaps we should be more concerned about the sins of omission. We may be missing something really important.

The kingdom is also about **peace** which is derived from loving others and seeking their best interests (Phil. 2: 1-8; 4: 2-3; Gal. 5: 15). It is not about **pleasing ourselves** (Rom. 15: 1) but serving others. Self-centeredness always brings misery because the human appetite for self-gratification can never be satisfied. It always demands more. To be at peace, we must look away from ourselves by serving others. This is the great paradox of **the kingdom of God**—craving to be served brings misery and dissension while serving others brings joy and cooperation. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, wished to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus when His kingdom was consummated. We may only gather from this that they—along with all the other disciples quarreling about who was greatest (Lk. 9: 46; 22: 24)—had warmed up to the idea of living as kings. Jesus shatters their dreams of worldly greatness and opens their eyes to true greatness.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them.<sup>26</sup> "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,<sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;<sup>28</sup> **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:25-28 NASB)

Self-centeredness in the enjoyment of spiritual liberties degenerates into self-gratification and strife within the body of Christ and the detriment of the weaker brothers. The kingdom is about **joy in the Holy Spirit** who produces the fruit of the Spirit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** (Gal. 5:22-23). Every one of these individual traits make up the combined **fruit of the Spirit**, and if they are being cultivated within the body, **peace** should prevail between the members of the body so that we do not **bite, devour, and consume** one another with **enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions** (Gal. 5: 15, 20)—and we will if we are not careful.

When we are majoring on the majors—pursuing **righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit**—we will be **acceptable to God and approved by men** (v. 18). The first characteristic, **acceptable to God**, leads to the second: If God accepts our behavior, then others will **approve** it—generally. There are exceptions, of course, because our behavior often attracts persecution; but

generally, a man who attempts to please God in everything he does will not attract criticism from others because such a man is thinking about others, not himself.

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and **in favor with God and men**. (Lk. 2:52 NASB)

If Jesus had limited His ministry to helping the sick and poor and teaching from the Law, He would not have aroused the hatred of the scribes and Pharisees. No one could accuse Him of any wrongdoing (Jn. 8: 46). However, it was necessary to Jesus' purpose to oppose the false righteousness of the religious establishment in order to draw the common people away from works-righteousness to forgiveness and grace. The Christian life is a dance between treating sin too severely and too leniently. Only Jesus ever accomplished the perfect balance all the time (e.g., Jn. 4: 7-26); all the rest of us are tilted in one direction or another, either too lenient or too harsh in varying degrees along a continuum. Sometimes we are too lenient, and at other times we are too severe. Too much leniency is the majority position in the modern church, perhaps the church throughout history. Like everyone else, Christians enjoy being popular and well-liked, and they have little or no tolerance for conflict even when serious issues are at stake—like blatant immorality and false doctrine (1 Cor. 5; Rev. 2: 2, 20; 2 Jn. 1: 10).

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.<sup>2</sup> You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. (1 Cor. 5:1-2 NASB)

'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and **that you cannot tolerate evil men**, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; (Rev. 2:2 NASB)

**'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. (Rev. 2:20 NASB)

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, **do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting;** (2 Jn. 1:10 NASB)

Severe? “Where is the love?” people often say of Christians who are serious about doctrine and immorality. Ironically, the same denominations which are indulging sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, transgenderism, adultery, and abortion are also vehemently intolerant of conservative denominations which do not sanction such behavior and exercise church discipline for such things. So, where is the love?

Others are too harsh, hastily picking the **speck** out of their brother's eye while overlooking the **log** from their own eye (Matt. 7: 3). Or they may be those who see all ethical issues primarily in black and white rather than shades of gray. Situational contexts are important in determining ethical issues—for example, a prostitute who happens to be a married woman fleeing from her abusive husband. Sin makes life complicated. People are subjected to all kinds of horrible situations rendering them vulnerable to sinful behavior. The pendulum between leniency and harshness

swings in both directions, and it is impossible to achieve balance with regularity. But we must still try.

I am inclined to think Paul is speaking not just with respect to the internal dynamic of church life but also the witness that the church presents to the world outside. **Approved by men** may have reference to the disposition of unbelievers who cannot help but notice the peace and tranquility of the church. This is as it should be, and it will be this way—generally—when Christians are not picking each other apart for matters of indifference (*adiaphora*). On the other hand, when there are internal quarrels in the church about spiritual liberties or anything else, there is always a “leak” to the outside press. Satan delights in anything by which the church can be discredited.

<sup>19</sup> So then we pursue  
the things  
which make for peace  
and **the building up of one another**.

<sup>20</sup> Do not **tear down**  
the work of God  
for the sake of food.

All things indeed are clean,  
but they are evil  
for the man who eats and gives offense [*proskomma*].

<sup>21</sup> It is good  
not to eat meat  
or to drink wine,  
or *to do anything*  
by which your brother stumbles.

<sup>22</sup> The faith which you have,  
have as your own conviction before God.

Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

<sup>23</sup> But he who doubts is condemned if he eats,  
because *his eating is* not from faith;  
and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Paul has not said anything thus far about educating the **weak** about what is sinful and what isn't. **So then we pursue...the building up [*oikodome*] of one another** (v. 19) implicitly covers this idea. Edification implies education. Again, we must ask the question I posed earlier: Are present day scruples about drinking wine equivalent to those in Rome or Corinth where the situation was complicated by idol worship and the marketing of food and wine which had been sacrificed to the gods? (I know of no scruples in the modern church about food.) I don't think they are equivalent. However, repeating what I said earlier, the texts in Romans and 1 Corinthians apply to any culturally or religiously disputed practice not specifically forbidden in Scripture which might divide believers. Drinking alcohol is definitely one of those disputed practices only because Christians remain biblically uninformed on the subject (see comments above and scripture texts on wine).

If my brother is a former alcoholic, or if he has scruples about alcohol because of his family history, etc., I should not drink in his presence because doing so might encourage him to drink, thus

violating his own conscience. As I stated earlier, it is not safe to violate your conscience since this is the beginning of spiritual pain that will prevent further spiritual harm. If we act against our conscience in one activity, it will be easier to violate it with other activities which may not be indifferent but actually sinful. Therefore, the strong must not **tear down the work of God** (v. 20; i.e., our weaker brother; cf. Eph. 2: 10, **His workmanship**) for the trivial purpose of providing themselves momentary pleasure. **All things indeed are clean but they are evil** (v. 20b) for the weak brother who partakes of them without the support of his conscience. The weak brother **gives offense** [*proskomma*] to God by sinning against his own conscience, and the strong brother's reckless use of liberty has been the occasion of the weak brother's offense. The **strong** should be warned.

but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble [*skandalizō*], **it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**<sup>7</sup> "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks [*skandalon*]! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks [*skandalon*] come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block [*skandalon*] comes! (Matt. 18:6-7 NASB)

The weak brother will not go to hell for one occasion of violating his conscience, but repetitive violation may lead to a downward spiral into apostasy (see my illustration above). Moreover, the one who repetitively throws stumbling blocks before his brother demonstrates a crass contempt of Christ's **little ones**, thus calling the sincerity of his faith seriously into question.

Having said this, I will not allow my brother's scruples to dictate my use of Christian liberty in different contexts. I will continue drinking in moderation privately or with those who do not share his scruples; and, if possible, I will have an extended discussion with him about why he is wrong to have such scruples, although education will be less awkward in a corporate setting where believers should be getting—but often aren't—instruction concerning these matters.

But how do we account for Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians?

Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, **I will never eat meat again**, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Cor. 8:13 NASB)

Does Paul mean that he will **never eat meat again** in any social or cultural context whatever? Rather, he is speaking of the particular social context of a Christian brother who has scruples about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul **will never eat meat again** (1 Cor.) or do **anything** else (Rom. 14: 21b) in the wrong social context **by which** his brother would be placed in spiritual jeopardy. The brother is more important than Paul's spiritual liberty. But not all eating and drinking is going to pose this threat.

**Or to do anything** [*implied*] **by which your brother stumbles** (v. 21b) indicates that eating and drinking do not exhaust all the activities which may be included in adiaphora (things indifferent). (The words, **to do anything**, are absent from the text but assumed by translators.) Imbibing or smoking some form of marijuana will most certainly become another disputed practice in the future, at least in the west where people can afford it. God created all things good (1 Tim. 4: 4), so there must be some God-given use for marijuana. Recreational use may not be one of them. I don't know enough about the relevant medical studies to come to a firm conclusion, but there is good

evidence that marijuana can be used to relieve some forms of pain better than pharmaceutical drugs. Just because something is illegal doesn't make it evil in itself, although we should be obedient to the laws of the land even if we disagree with them. And just because something is legal doesn't make it good for you, as opioid-related deaths in the US and fatal car accidents involving drunk drivers world-wide has proven. The church will always need continuing education on what is permissible in a particular culture and what isn't. Our increasing knowledge of creation will inform our understanding of biblical ethics.

Addressing the strong, Paul says, **the faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God** (v. 22a), an admonition not to “parade and protest their rights and liberties to the detriment of the weak and with the evil consequences delineated in the preceding verses” (Murray, p. 195). No believer is allowed to boast about his liberties to the detriment of the weak (Moo, p. 862). On the other hand, **happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves** commends the strong believer in taking hold of the **freedom** he has in Christ to enjoy all created things **with gratitude** (1 Tim. 4: 4) but within the boundaries God has intended and with loving consideration of those who do not have the same knowledge of this freedom. As Paul says to the Galatians and Colossians,

It was for **freedom** that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and **do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery**. (Gal. 5:1 NASB)

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, <sup>21</sup> **"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"** <sup>22</sup> (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—**in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?** (Col. 2:20-22 NASB)

Speaking to the weak, Paul warns that if anyone has any doubt about the legitimacy of his actions, he should refrain from the activity because he is not acting **from faith**. **But he who doubts is condemned if he eats** (v. 23a). It is here that we must qualify the term “adiaphora” or “things indifferent”. The activities that Paul has mentioned are indifferent as to the standards of God's law because there is nothing in the moral law of God that condemns the action. However, it is clear from the protracted explanation in Rom. 14 and elsewhere that God is not indifferent to the complexion of motives and goals involved in the activities mentioned. The standard of one's action is only part of the equation. One must also act with the right motive which is love for God and others, and he must act with the right goal which is the glory of God.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God**. (1 Cor. 10:31 NASB)

**And without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb. 11:6 NASB)

Our **love** for God and others and our concern for His **glory** are produced by **faith** without which **it is impossible to please Him** (Heb. 11: 6). Therefore, if I do something without love for God and without concern for His glory, I have sinned. The person who **doubts** the legitimacy of his action cannot be acting out of love for God or be acting for his glory. This would also apply to the strong believer who may be enjoying his liberty without love for God and for the weak. He is therefore sinning even while enjoying his liberty.



***His eating is not from faith*** does not mean that the weak brother does not have a viable faith in Christ but that his faith convinces him of the wrongness of such activities, forcing him to abandon his faith-convictions if he chooses to eat or drink—or to watch something questionable on the internet or TV. Therefore, he must deny his faith in Christ in the act of eating or drinking, and this becomes a very serious offense **condemned** by God. It is not a sin of ignorance since he is convinced that drinking, eating meat, or watching a certain movie is sinful. It is a deliberate, rather than unintentional, sin. This is a very important principle in Christian ethics, for we tend to be quite heedless of our personal motives and goals in what we do. If we are not breaking any obvious commandments, we are okay. But Romans 14: 23, as well as 1 Cor. 10: 31 and Heb. 11: 6 above, put a new layer of obligation upon everything we do. All of life is worship going back as far as Adam’s cultivation of the ground and as far forward as playing a violin in a modern symphony orchestra or painting one’s house. The more sophisticated activity of playing the violin reflects one’s appreciation for classical music while painting the house reflects one’s respect for property maintenance and beauty. Either person could be doing something less productive like watching a movie or messaging his or her friends for hours on Facebook, and there are millions of people in all cultures who are using their time as unproductively as possible, depending on others to maintain their unproductive life-styles.

“Culture is religion externalized”, meaning that our individual cultures reflect the practiced religion—not necessarily the professed religion—of our individual cultures (Henry Van Til, quoted from Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 858). Christians should be those who are acting **from faith** and with faith believing that their activity has meaning in life, and in combination with the activities of billions of other people, will serve a small part of God’s purpose in bringing His kingdom and His preceptive will **on earth as it is in heaven** (Matt. 6: 10). Anything less is to live life as a practical atheist or agnostic.

## Romans 15

<sup>1</sup>Now **we who are strong**  
ought to bear the weaknesses  
of **those without strength**  
and not just please ourselves.

<sup>2</sup>Each of us  
is to please his neighbor  
for his good,  
to his edification.

The word, **bear**, is *bastázō*, the same word found in Galatians 6: 2 and Jn.19: 17.

**Bear** one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2 NASB)

They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, **bearing** His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. (Jn. 19:17 NASB)

As Christ bore our weaknesses on the cross, we are called upon to bear the weaknesses of fellow believers, including the weakness of sin, the context of Galatians 6: 2 (see v. 1). In the context of

Romans 15, the specific weakness is believing that eating meat or drinking wine are sinful when in fact they are permitted in moderation. Rather than condemning the weaker brother, the stronger brother must **bear** with the weaker brother patiently, not flaunting his Christian liberties so as to occasion his stumbling (14: 21). This does not imply that the stronger brother—in cooperation with the Christian community—should make no effort to educate the weaker brother concerning “things indifferent” at an opportune time. We do not glorify God by forbidding what He allows; otherwise, we will soon allow what He forbids. Our goal in life is not to **please ourselves**, but to please God by loving our **neighbor** as we love ourselves. This requires that we **please our neighbor** in such a way that our actions are **for his good, to his edification** (v. 2). This phrase qualifies the verb, **please**. Paul is not suggesting that we become “men-pleasers” (Eph. 6: 6), for the moment we make courting the favor of men our ambition, we cease to serve Christ (Gal. 1:10). Winning the favor of others at the expense of truth is not honoring to Christ and, in the end, does not serve the purpose of edification and doing good to others. For this reason, those who are strong may not indefinitely deny themselves the Christian liberties Christ died for (Gal. 5: 1), nor may they allow their weaker brother to linger in error by believing that moderate alcohol and meat consumption is sinful. This simply isn’t true, and we should not propagate error in the name of Christian love. At the same time, Paul is repeating the principle he taught in Galatians,

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal. 5:13 NASB)

<sup>3</sup> For even **Christ**

did not please Himself;

*but as it is written,*

"THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."

<sup>4</sup> *For whatever was written*

in earlier times

*was written*

for our instruction,

so that through perseverance

and the encouragement of the Scriptures

we might have hope.

This is yet another example how Paul uses the example of Christ to establish an ethical principle. In this case, the principle is **pleasing our neighbor for his good and to his edification**, or, said another way, living and dying for Christ rather than for ourselves (Rom. 14: 7-8). The Christian is not asked to do anything that Christ has not done either literally or in principle. He lived for us and died for us, **as it was written** long ago in the OT scriptures and was fulfilled in the NT. The fulfillment of the messianic predictions gives us the **encouragement** and **hope** that our sacrifices for the sake of others are worth it. Our labor is not in vain in the Lord because Christ rose from the grave according to the Scriptures (Mk. 12: 26-27; Ps. 16: 10).

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58 NASB)

Through **the encouragement of the Scriptures** the believer develops **perseverance** in doing good, knowing that he will reap the rewards that God promises to those who do good. These promises are based on the immutability of God's unchanging essence and purpose demonstrated in the person and work of Christ **who for the joy set before Him endured the cross** (Heb. 2: 2). Christ believed His sacrifice would earn salvation for the people God had given Him from the foundation of the earth. Likewise, our **hope** of reward is not wishful thinking, but a sure conviction that God's word is true and trustworthy.

who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:<sup>7</sup> to those who by **perseverance in doing good** seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; (Rom. 2:6-7 NASB)

Let us not lose heart in doing good, **for in due time we will reap** if we do not grow weary. (Gal. 6:9 NASB)

<sup>5</sup> Now may the God  
who gives  
perseverance and encouragement  
grant you  
to be of the same mind  
with one another  
according to Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> so that  
with one accord  
you may  
with one voice  
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice Paul's emphasis on the unity of believers: **the same mind, one another, one accord, one voice**. A divided community is no community. At the same time, we should not conclude that Paul encourages unity at all costs. This would require a rather incoherent interpretation of all the doctrinal truth that Paul has espoused throughout his letter to the Romans. Foundational truth may not be compromised without changing the gospel into a false gospel and the church into a false church. Unity must have a firm foundation based upon what the Bible says, and we are not at liberty to modify this standard.

At the same time, while there are fundamental truths that must be believed (Gal. 1), there are other teachings of the Bible about which Christians have differed for two millennia. Christians have differed over the proper subjects of baptism, the proper interpretation of the Lord's Supper, God's foreknowledge and election, the Great Tribulation, the millennial reign of Christ, etc. Are we at liberty to divide into thousands of different denominations over issues which are not fundamental to the gospel of Christ; and by doing so, do we not bring dishonor to Christ who prayed that His people would be one?

<sup>18</sup>"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, **that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth**. <sup>20</sup>"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup>**that they may all be one**; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You

sent Me. <sup>22</sup> "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one**, just as We are one; <sup>23</sup> I in them and You in Me, **that they may be perfected in unity**, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (Jn. 17:18-23 NASB)

Christ is not so naïve to believe that Christians from thousands of different cultures, speaking different languages, and living in different periods of history would be able to agree on every minute point of theology. Yet, He says that He wishes them to be **sanctified in truth...that** (or "so that"; *hina*; purpose) **they may be one**. Formalized or institutional unity alone is not genuine unity. The World Council of Churches, organized in 1948, has as its stated goal the unification of the church; but wishing it so does not make it so. Historically, the WCC has championed the LGBT agenda and other liberal issues. For example,

At a "Re-Imagining" Conference in Minneapolis in 1993, the deputy general secretary of the WCC, Mercy Oduyoye, taught that we all have "spirit mothers" who avenge us and that the spirits of the dead surround us "in the rustling of trees, in the groaning woods, in the crying grass, in the moaning rocks." The same conference also featured Kwok Pui-Lan, a WCC member who defined salvation as "bringing out what is within you" and quoted the Gnostic gospels. Pui-Lan justified her use of Gnostic texts by stating that, since it was *men* who decided the [canon of the Bible](#), she was not obliged to accept it ("What is the World Council of Churches [WCC], gotquestions.org).

As I have mentioned before, the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) broke off from the Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUS) over differences concerning the inspiration of Scripture. The PCUS (now merged with the PCUSA) maintained that some of the Bible is the word of God and some is merely the word of men. The following text would not be considered the word of God by the PCUSA which ordains lesbians and homosexuals:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, **nor homosexuals**,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, **will inherit the kingdom of God**. (1 Cor. 6:9-10 NASB)

Supposedly, the "experts" should be consulted concerning what part is and what part is not the word of God, making the experts the final authority. But we either have the word of God or the word of men to guide us. We cannot have both as the final authority. Given, all Scripture must be interpreted; and our interpretations are influenced by our religious, historical and cultural traditions. Yet, Jesus—aware of all future historical events, including the frailty of His church—said that He would **sanctify His church in the truth** and that this truth would unite His church. In spite of all the divisions in the church, He has not failed in His mission. (Can Christ fail at anything?) Although quite splintered, those who are the true sheep still hear the voice of the shepherd and follow Him in repentance, faith, renewed life, and an unswerving commitment to the Scriptures as the infallible word of God—all of it. To the best of our ability, we should attempt to find common ground with true believers of all persuasions—Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, including Roman Catholics who believe the bible in spite of RCC dogma (see my comments about the Council of Trent). There is no reason why we cannot work together as long as we believe the fundamentals of the faith which may not be compromised. As John Frame says, denominationalism is a "curse...that defames our Lord and so often enfeebles our witness" (*Evangelical Reunion*, p. 4). Christians should be working for the elimination of denominations.

I am myself a Presbyterian. Most likely, I believe, the church was originally organized in a way analogous to the organization of Israel in Ex. 18:17-26, with leaders over tens, hundreds, thousands, etc. The pattern applied also to Israel's religious life, organized according to families and synagogues, with the Sanhedrin as the highest court. The early Christians naturally adopted this model with little change. The "tens" were the house churches: essentially single families with, perhaps, others worshipping with them. The "thousands" would be the city churches, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Philippi, etc., whose leaders Paul addresses as a body in Phil. 1:17. The highest level was the whole church; and indeed at one point in Acts a body is convened which has power over the whole church to deal with a matter that could not be resolved at the local level (Acts 15). As such the government of the church is composed of various levels of courts, the broader ones dealing with issues that cannot be resolved by the narrower ones.

This structure, like the Congregationalist and Episcopal alternatives, requires organizational church unity. For if the church is divided into denominations, then (a) There is no highest court by which controversies can be ultimately decided; there are, instead, rival courts. (b) Leaders will be available to help resolve problems only within their own denominations. Denomination B will lack the gifts of the leaders in denomination A, and vice versa. That will be a great disadvantage for both denominations. The resources of each will be less than what God has promised to his people.

Biblical Presbyterianism, then, requires the abolition of denominationalism. In a biblically Presbyterian church, all the area Christians in good standing would vote to elect the elders and deacons. Those officers would rule all those Christians, not merely those of one denominational faction. All the gifts God has given his people in the area would be available for the ministry. We can see that biblical Presbyterianism is rather different from Presbyterianism as it now exists; so different that the latter's biblical warrant is questionable.

So all three of the major views of church government among Christians require for their best implementation the organizational unity of the church and the elimination of denominations (*Evangelical Reunion*, pp. 17-18, emphasis mine).

One of the purposes of our unity, according to Jesus' words in John 17, is **so that the world may know that You sent Me**. Unity is an evangelistic witness in a shattered world of unbelief and epistemological uncertainty. Epistemology is the science of knowing. Apart from God's intention to make Himself and the creation known, we can't know anything for sure. Evangelical unity can at least demonstrate to the world that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the same essence as the Father, sent by the Father to die for sinners, indwells every believer through the Holy Spirit who also shares the same essence, and that there is no salvation in anyone else or by means of any other achievement other than that of Christ's perfect life and sacrifice.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore,

accept one another,  
just as Christ also  
accepted us  
to the glory of God.

**Accept one another** refers not only to the differences concerning eating meat and drinking wine, but concerning any non-fundamental issue which may potentially divide the church. At the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, Martin Luther refused to acknowledge Ulrich Zwingli as a brother in Christ because he differed from Luther over the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper,

resulting in a serious split between the two theological camps that has remained until this very day. Millions of Lutherans will claim that this bodily presence is clear in the Scriptures, but millions of other bible-believing evangelicals will say otherwise, me included. Yet, division has remained for hundreds of years over something which cannot be clearly substantiated from Scripture.

But accepting one another cannot imply the sanctioning of any sinful behavior which itself may threaten the welfare of the church. Many untaught Christians believe that homosexuals should be welcomed into the church in the name of love. Christ loves homosexuals, they say, and so should we. Very well. Christ does love homosexuals and died for many of them so that they could be delivered from homosexuality. He did not intend for practicing homosexuals—or known adulterers, thieves, murderers, etc.—to be welcomed into or sheltered by the community of His people, but rather, excluded (1 Cor. 5). Nor did He intend theological heretics to be included in this communion. Unity must come from truth, not only the truth of practical holiness but theological truth.

<sup>6</sup>And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. <sup>7</sup>For many deceivers have gone out into the world, **those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. <sup>9</sup>**Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God**; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting;** <sup>11</sup>**for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.** (2 Jn. 1:6-11 NASB)

**Just as Christ also accepted us** is the reason for accepting others. Had Christ waited to save us until all our theological views and practical holiness were completed, we would never be saved. We need to remember to be patient with those who have different views which are not inherently dangerous to themselves or the church.

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup>**with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,** <sup>26</sup>and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26 NASB)

The situation Paul describes is different from the one John describes in 2 John (above). In that situation, a teacher **brings** a heretical doctrine and attempts to promote it in the church. The two contexts seem to be different, although the second situation could escalate into a 2 John scenario in which the person who insists on his aberrant teaching must be asked to either desist from promoting it or leave the church. I am also a presbyterian, but I am willing to co-exist with believers who differ with me over baptism, the Lord's Supper, methods of evangelism, the gifts of the Spirit, and a host of other issues. If Christ accepts me and them with all our flaws in thinking and practice, who am I not to accept others within the same church? Accepting others implies co-existence in the same community. If we have to divide, the division itself implies non-acceptance of one another—the only logical conclusion available to an unbelieving, watching world.

The question will inevitably emerge: Who is qualified to be an elder or overseer in a church with differing theological views? Good question. But are we to suppose that ordination questions

concerning baptism or election and predestination (for only two examples) are more important than questions concerning one's use of money? Revisiting 1 Cor. 6: 10, **the covetous** will not inherit the kingdom of God. I have made the argument for years that Paul does not present qualifications for elders that cannot be measured: **free from the love of money** (1 Tim. 3: 3). If this unbiblical affection for money cannot in any sense be measured, then what is the point of making it a qualification for elders? I argue that one's affection for money may be measured by his lifestyle. Is he known best for his consumption of material things (land, houses, cars, clothes, accumulation of wealth) or is he best known for his generosity and contentment with life's simple pleasures (1 Tim. 6: 17-19)? Are the elders in your church known for their affluence and financial success or for their generosity to others who have little? I know of no one in my denomination who has been censured by the church for **greed**, although Paul mentions it on numerous occasions.

But immorality or any impurity or **greed** must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; (Eph. 5:3 NASB)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed**, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:5 NASB)

So, I ask again, is it more important to have an elder who is thoroughly versed in election and predestination or one who is known for his giving and concern for the destitute? We need not choose between the two options. We need elders who are both theologically conversant and generous. Both are qualifications for elder, but we do not live in a perfect church with perfect elders. The church must be nurtured by people with differing strengths and weaknesses. This is another reason why denominationalism robs the church of the differing gifts of the Spirit. Evangelistic zeal seems to be on the side of modern-day Pentecostals while theological precision is on the side of Presbyterians. It would be nice to get these two together and let them rub off on each other. Who knows, if they co-existed in the same church they may be able resolve their differences in half a century or so.

<sup>8</sup> For I say

that Christ has become a servant

**to the circumcision**

on behalf of the truth of God

to confirm the promises given to the fathers,

<sup>9</sup> and **for the Gentiles**

to glorify God for His mercy;

**For I say** indicates another logical connection to **accept one another**. In v. 7, **just as Christ has accepted us** is a reason why we must accept one another. Paul now explains this further. Christ **has become a servant** to the Jewish people to prove the trustworthiness of God's promises to the Jewish people concerning a Messiah who would deliver them from their sins. **The fathers** refer to the patriarchs of the nation of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The person and work of Christ proves that God is true to His word and that He will fulfill His word.

Christ has also become a servant **for the Gentiles** to prove that God's mercy has been extended to those who were not the direct recipients of the original promises of salvation. The promises were made to Abraham that he would become a great nation, not to the Gentiles; but within this specific

promise to Abraham and his descendants was the general promise that the Gentiles would be blessed through Abraham.

And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. **And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**" (Gen. 12:3 NASB)

It is not clear why God's **mercy** is more grammatically connected to the extension of this mercy to the Gentiles rather than the Jews. Certainly, God's promises to Abraham were not based upon works but mercy, and Abraham's justification by faith became the paradigm for justification to the Gentiles (Rom. 4). However, God's embryonic (undeveloped but developing) mercy to the Gentiles—hidden away for centuries—seems to be Paul's concern in many contexts. The gospel is good news **to the Jew first and also to the Greek** (Rom. 1: 16).

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands—<sup>12</sup> *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.** <sup>13</sup> **But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** (Eph. 2:11-13 NASB)

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, <sup>5</sup> whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 9:3-5 NASB)

For a very long time, God's mercy to the Gentiles were only **crumbs**, by comparison, distributed to those who had some connection to the covenant nation, something Jesus acknowledged in His cryptic response to the Canaanite mother pleading for her demon-possessed daughter.

But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" <sup>26</sup> And He answered and said, "**It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" <sup>27</sup> But she said, "**Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.**" <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once. (Matt. 15:24-28 NASB)

In Mark's version of this story, the very next miracle is the feeding of the 7,000, mostly in the region of Decapolis, highly populated with Gentiles. The crumbs given to this Gentile woman had now become a feast continuing with the missionary expanse of the gospel through Paul's witness. God's intent all along was to glorify Himself by building a church consisting of both Jew and Gentile. This, of course, is documented in the OT: Ps. 18: 49; Deut. 32: 43; Ps. 117: 1; Isa. 11: 10.

as it is written,

"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,  
AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."

<sup>10</sup> Again he says,

"REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."



<sup>11</sup> And again,  
"PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES,  
AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM."

<sup>12</sup> Again Isaiah says,  
"THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE,  
AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES,  
IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."

Having united both Jew and Gentile into the same church by removing the hostilities which separated them, it would now be unspeakable for God's people to be separated from one another on the basis of behavior which is neither commanded nor forbidden—eating meat, drinking wine, or certain practices on given days. God wants a united people, inflexible in the fundamentals of the gospel but flexible on other matters. It is impossible for people to grow in their faith if their views are immediately silenced rather than respectfully examined. Rather, the goal must be to build up the body of Christ until everyone reaches maturity; for the church is no stronger than the weakest among us.

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;<sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.<sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;<sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,<sup>16</sup> **from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.** (Eph. 4:11-16 NASB)

According to this text, the church needs every member doing his or her part. But Paul is not limiting his application to local congregations; he is speaking of the whole church. Recall Frame's remarks to the effect that denominationalism hurts the whole church because it deprives the church of a variety of leadership gifts.

Denomination B will lack the gifts of the leaders in denomination A, and vice versa. That will be a great disadvantage for both denominations. The resources of each will be less than what God has promised to his people.

Denominations are strong in some areas, while weak in others. While not attempting to determine which denomination has which strengths (although I have expressed my opinion), evangelical denominations could work together and flourish with the benefit of the other's gifts.

<sup>13</sup> Now may the God of **hope**  
fill you  
with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that  
you will abound in **hope**  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Picking up on the last word of v. 12, **hope** (*elpízo*), Paul expresses once more the substance of the word. While “hope” in the English world has the idea of wishful thinking—forgive me for not knowing the connotation in African contexts—the Scriptural idea connotes the certainty or confident expectation of future, as yet unseen, blessings (see Moo’s remarks on 4: 18).

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, **the conviction of things not seen**. (Heb. 11:1 NASB)

and hope **does not disappoint**, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom. 5:5 NASB)

The farmer sows his seed in **hope** (*elpís*, 1 Cor. 9: 10), that is, with the confident expectation that he will receive a crop. His hope is not blind faith, for he has grown accustomed to God’s providential provision to those who faithfully sow their seed. But contrary to farming, which occasionally does prove fruitless, the hope of the believer is based upon the absolute promise of God (cf. Rom. 4: 18 and notes). For this reason, God fills the believer with **joy and peace in believing** through the power of the Holy Spirit operating within him (Rom. 5: 5 above). Joy and peace would not be possible if the promises of God in saving us—and keeping us saved (Phil. 2: 12-13; Rom. 8: 28-39)—were tentative or based on personal performance or circumstances. The Holy Spirit is mightily operative within the believer producing **the obedience of faith** (Rom. 1: 5; 16: 26). Joyless Christianity can be the result of unrepented sin (Ps. 32: 3-4), but it may also be caused by one’s uncertainty of God’s faithfulness. Circumstantial difficulties may lead us to believe that somehow God has abandoned us or is displeased with us. One of the greatest believers in the history of redemption (Job) came to this conclusion at times throughout his discourses—even cursing the day he was born (Job 3: 3) but fundamentally he believed that he would see God (Job 19: 26).

Joyless Christianity may also result from occasional distortions in the object of our hope. What is the bedrock of our joy and peace? If we are at peace because of material success, we have a false peace which may be easily shaken by changing circumstances. Years ago, my investments in the stock market were blooming. Stupidly, I used to take a few minutes every day or so to see how much money we had made—until 2020, when I lost a considerable portion of those investments.

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration *of it*.<sup>5</sup> When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings Like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens. (Prov. 23:4-5 NASB)

I had to decide what it was that really gave me **joy** in life. Was my joy wrapped up in financial security, or even in the hope of being generous with my money; or was it wrapped up in God’s infallible word and the promise of being with Him and being like Him in moral character? The first can be easily lost, but the second is secure in the infallibility of God’s word. The same can be said for basing your joy on Christian ministry. This is easy to do when we believe we are making a difference and that God is blessing our labor; but even then, the basis of our joy should be elsewhere.

The seventy returned **with joy**, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."<sup>18</sup> And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. (Lk. 10:17-18 NASB)

"Nevertheless **do not rejoice in this**, that the spirits are subject to you, but **rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.**" (Lk. 10:20 NASB)

I can only imagine that casting out demons would be a very euphoric experience (I wouldn't know, having never done it.) setting the exorcist on an emotional high for weeks on end, but Jesus says that this experience should be nothing in comparison to knowing that God has recorded your name in the book of life (cf. Rev. 13: 8; 21: 27).

But what happens if our ministry seems to be fruitless? (Keeping in mind that our perceptions of what is really happening could be inaccurate.) What if you are seeing—from your own limited perspective—very little fruit from your labor? Was Jesus' joy based on the steady improvement in His disciples' understanding of His mission? On the night He was betrayed, none of them wished to wash the others' feet, and they were arguing about who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Was Jeremiah's joy based on his success in convincing Judah to accept God's judgment and yield to Babylon (Jer. 27)? The Bible records no such success. Instead, Jerusalem is destroyed, Judah is taken into Babylonian exile, and Jeremiah is forced to go to Egypt with the remaining stragglers of Judah rather than remaining in the land, as Nebuchadnezzar had allowed (Jer. 43). Had he lived in our day, no one would be writing his autobiography, but he was faithful.

O LORD, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. **I have become a laughingstock all day long**; Everyone mocks me.<sup>8</sup> For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, **Because for me the word of the LORD has resulted in reproach and derision all day long.** (Jer. 20:7-8 NASB)

To his amanuensis, Baruch, who wrote down Jeremiah's words, he said,

'But you, **are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them**; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,' declares the LORD, 'but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.'" (Jer. 45:5 NASB)

And so it should be with all the Lord's servants. Are you seeking reputation, honor, and material reward for our ministry? Seek them not. Your reward will be your life.

<sup>14</sup> And concerning you, my brethren,

I myself also am convinced

that you yourselves

are full of goodness,

filled with all knowledge

and able also to admonish one another.

Paul has addressed many problems in the congregation at Rome: factions between Jew and Gentile, legalism and its flip-side, antinomianism, disputes over things indifferent, etc. Despite these problems, he is convinced that the Holy Spirit is doing His work in the church and perfecting it according to His sovereign will. Since Paul had never visited Rome, he must have had some inside information concerning its spiritual welfare, information that probably came from Aquila and Prisca (or Priscilla; Acts 18: 2) who had been co-laborers with Paul (16: 3; Moo, p. 887). Believers in Rome are **full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.**

Like all local congregations, the church is messy; but it is not all bad, either. To say so would be to deny the fulfillment of Christ's prayer for the sanctification of His people.

"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.<sup>16</sup> "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.<sup>17</sup> **"Sanctify them in the truth;** Your word is truth.<sup>18</sup> "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.<sup>19</sup> **"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.** (Jn. 17:15-19 NASB)

Conversion does not produce automatons or robots who are instantaneously sanctified the moment they are born again. In one sense Christians are immediately (definitively) sanctified. They are set apart by the Spirit to be God's people; thus beginning an irrevocable (irreversible) course of progressive sanctification by which they are morally improved throughout their lives. But they (we) are still messy. We still sin. This did not prevent Paul from confessing that they were full of goodness. Thus, they were not as messy as they used to be.

**Filled with all knowledge** does not mean that the Roman Christians were astute theologians or that they did not need the intense theological instruction Paul gives them in this letter. Two thousand years later, the church still needs the epistle to the Romans as much as it ever did; and we may say with Peter that some of the teachings of Paul are still hard to understand (2 Pet. 3: 15-16). Paul simply means that everything he has written concerning what they should believe and practice has its roots in the faith which he and they possessed together (Moo, p. 889).

Our knowledge of God's word informs us of everything else in the universe. Since God created everything, then everything is connected. The Bible is not a textbook on science, yet the Bible provides a framework or blueprint on how science is possible (Ps. 19: 1). It also establishes the limitations of science to answer metaphysical ("beyond the physical") questions of the origin of life, the beginning of human life, or morality. Science cannot answer such questions; only God can. The Bible is not a book on political science, but it does give us guidelines on legitimate human authority and the proper response to this authority (Rom. 13). Therefore, **knowledge**, true knowledge, is a gift from God; and Paul is convinced that despite the Roman's deficiency in knowledge, they are still progressing in their understanding of the implications of the gospel for all of life.

They are also **able to admonish one another**. Admonish does not mean to berate or criticize but to instruct in proper belief or behavior. It has the positive sense of instruction but is also used less frequently in the negative sense of correcting wrong thinking or behavior.

We proclaim Him, **admonishing** [*nouthetéó*] every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. (Col. 1:28 NASB)

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and **admonishing** [*nouthetéó*] one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16 NASB)

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and **give you instruction** [*nouthetéó*], (1 Thess. 5:12 NASB)

We urge you, brethren, **admonish** [*nouthetéó*] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. (1 Thess. 5:14 NASB)

Moreover, admonition was not the sole responsibility of elders or teachers in the church of Rome. Paul does not mention either in this verse but, rather, addresses the whole congregation—as he also does in 1 Cor. 5. Elders are not omniscient, and they cannot possibly know what is going on in the lives of every member of the congregation or even a small segment at a given time. Christians are responsible for one another (Matt. 18: 15-20), and if someone is involved in harmful behavior—harmful to himself and/or others—he should be admonished or corrected. This is most effectively done by some significant person in the individual’s life, not a casual acquaintance. Preferably, this significant person must have previously shown genuine interest in and love for this erring individual, the reason that the church should function as a family or community of people who care about each other. Moreover, this significant person must be sufficiently knowledgeable of the Christian faith and its ethical implications to properly admonish the erring member. Bad advice is not helpful, and this is an argument for continuing education in the church which is organized and comprehensive, not a slapdash course here and there with little aim or purpose in bringing the whole congregation to maturity (Eph. 4: 13-14). Everyone should be aiming at maturity so that we may all admonish one another if necessary. When examined carefully, Paul’s words should seem foreign and strange to the average church member who probably has never experienced any admonition his entire life as a Christian. It is rarely applied in the negative sense, and the church is weaker for it.

<sup>15</sup> But I have written very boldly to you on some points  
so as to remind you again,  
    because of the grace that was given me from God,  
    <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus  
        to the Gentiles,  
    ministering as a priest  
        the gospel of God,  
so that  
    my offering of the Gentiles  
    may become acceptable,  
    sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Having never visited the church in Rome, what right did Paul have to speak so **boldly** concerning Christian doctrine and practice? This right is established in this section. He was not a common Christian but one who had been given the **grace** of being a chosen apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, a calling he mentions at the outset of his letter (1: 1). His calling as an apostle is not mentioned here, but his calling as a **minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles**. This verse implies the predominantly Gentile consistency of the church in Rome. Paul was an apostle primarily to the Gentiles (Gal. 2: 8-9). The analogy presented here is that of the priestly function of offering holy and unblemished sacrifices to God. He has already exhorted the Romans to present their own **bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God** (12: 1). Yet, in a special sense, Paul was **ministering as a priest** by facilitating the transformation of life lived to the glory of God. In no sense does he take credit where it is not due. Paul is merely the instrument used by the Holy Spirit as an important means of sanctifying His people. He makes this even more clear in the next verses, but one important point should be made. Paul does not presume the authority to instruct the

Romans. He knows full well that the Lord had commissioned him as an apostle on the road to Damascus; therefore, there was no ambiguity about his ministry. However, this cannot be said for the thousands of so-called apostles preaching here and there throughout the world. Who gave them their authority? Can we prove the ongoing existence of apostolic authority from Scripture? Here in Romans 15, we note how Paul diplomatically establishes the reason for his letter and its **bold** teaching. He is a minister who has been given the responsibility of presenting the Gentiles as an **offering** to the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore in Christ Jesus

I have found reason for boasting  
in things pertaining to God.

<sup>18</sup> For I will not presume to speak of anything  
except what Christ has accomplished  
through me,

resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles  
by word and deed,  
<sup>19</sup> in the power of signs and wonders,  
in the power of the Spirit;

Paul will boast, but only in what God has accomplished through him (cf. Gal. 6: 14). He is merely the instrument of God's sovereign grace. Pastors and teachers must be reminded that the axe must never **boast itself over the one who chops with it** (Isa. 10:15 NASB). At our very best, we are not much; and we would be nothing at all apart from the work of the Spirit using our feeble efforts to instruct God's people. Unlike Paul, the ministry of pastors and teachers is not **in the power of signs and wonders**, uniquely characteristic of the first century apostles for the purpose of authenticating their ministries as the ongoing ministry of Christ Himself.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. (2 Cor. 12:12 NASB)

After 2000 years, the church no longer needs such signs and wonders to authenticate a gospel that has literally transformed the whole world into a better place. Evil is still present in great magnitude, but we disparage the work of the Spirit in His church to claim that the world is just as bad, or worse, today than it has been in the past. Such a view demonstrates ignorance of world history. Many in the West are attempting to rewrite history to prove otherwise, but in the end, God will be found true and every man a liar (Rom. 3: 4). The signs and wonders of the gospel today are demonstrated in widespread respect for human life, law and order, and the rights and privileges afforded citizens, especially women and children, in countries which have been deeply influenced by the Christian faith. Those which lack this influence—Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, China, North Korea, et al—have fewer freedoms, governmental tyranny, and oppression. It is true that legalized abortion, euthanasia, and antisemitism are challenges to the basic liberties which have been won in countries heavily influenced by Christianity; but the very fact that these things are being resisted (such as the recent reversal of Roe v. Wade in the US) is testimony to Christianity's influence, without which there would be no resistance at all.

so that  
from Jerusalem

and round about  
as far as Illyricum  
I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.  
<sup>20</sup> And thus I aspired to preach the gospel,  
not where Christ was *already* named,  
so that I would not build on another man's foundation;  
<sup>21</sup> but as it is written,  
"THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM  
SHALL SEE,  
AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD  
SHALL UNDERSTAND."

Illyricum was a Roman province east of Italy across the Adriatic Sea. The area corresponded to what is known today as Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia (Wikipedia). Paul saw himself as a pioneer missionary taking the gospel where it had not been preached—which was practically everywhere. This does not mean that he never revisited the places where he had planted churches, as the book of Acts clearly proves. There are still those who are fearlessly taking the gospel to primitive people groups who have had very limited contact with the rest of the world. Most missionaries today stand on the shoulders of those who risked their lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> century taking the gospel where it had never been heard before. Those who went to Africa during that century had a lifespan of one and a half years on the continent. Knowing the probability of an early death, missionaries packed their belongings in wooden coffins which could serve the additional use of burying them when they died. They were committed to their task, and they paid dearly for this commitment. They did not die because they lacked faith in the power of God to heal them; they died because they had faith in the power of God to spread the gospel even in the event of their short life in Africa.

My wife and I did not have to face such odds against our survival. We arrived in Entebbe on British Airways in October 2003, well-fed with reasonably good food as airlines go. We worked with African pastors who had studied at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS, the same seminary I attended. We lived in nice homes, not mud huts; and we had electricity and hot showers. The only thing we had in common with the first missionaries was that we had a calling to work in Africa. Why? Although we were a century too late to be pioneer missionaries, Paul's reasoning applies somewhat to our situation. As he did not want to minister in places where the church was already established, I found it a bit too domesticated for another seminary graduate to teach in a country where educated pastors abound in practically every city. While most are not reformed, I believe that at least there is enough bible truth being taught that someone can come to a true knowledge of Christ listening to them. I am not saying that educated pastors are not necessary in the US, especially the reformed variety. Just read the US news: Some people, even some of the main-line liberal denominations, even refuse to believe that God distinguished between male and female. All I am saying is that the evangelical church must recognize the huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, not merely with regard to income, but to opportunity. Most of the theological bible colleges and seminaries in the world exist in the west. No surprise there because this is where the money is to support such institutions. Those existing in Africa are hanging on by a thin thread, continually dependent upon western support since the African church has not "bought" into the importance of educating pastors. Many of them are dwindling in enrollment or closing their doors. Moreover, the model of theological education exported to Africa—complete

with paid faculties, dormitories, libraries, etc. is not sustainable (the reason many are closing) which means that we have exported the wrong model, a western one. Anyway, I digress. African leaders still need educational opportunities, and it is up to church leaders and educators on many continents to figure out a way to do it. In this sense, theological education in Africa is still a “pioneer” ministry.

<sup>22</sup> For this reason

I have often been prevented from coming to you;

<sup>23</sup> but now, with no further place for me in these regions,

and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you

<sup>24</sup> whenever I go to Spain—

for I hope to see you in passing,

and to be helped on my way there by you,

when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—

Because of his many travels, Paul had been unable to visit Rome. Now that he had fulfilled his mission in taking the gospel to places where it had not been preached, he felt the liberty to visit Rome on his way to Spain, another unreached mission field (vv. 24 and 28), something he had planned for **many years**. Once more, the evidence (**a longing to come to you**) indicates more than a casual familiarity with the church in Rome (see chap. 16). Moreover, Paul has the liberty to ask for **help** from the Roman church for his journey to Spain. This casual statement (v. 24b) establishes an important principle: Missionaries are not required to send themselves to the mission field; the Christian church is required to send them. While Paul never demands such help—and neither should missionaries do so—the biblical principle stands. Missionaries are often seen as beggars pestering individuals and congregations for their hard-earned money so that they can go to the mission field for a protracted vacation. This is an abominable misunderstanding. If anything, churches should be begging qualified missionaries for the privilege of supporting them, as the Macedonians begged Paul for the privilege of donating to the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8: 4). Some missionaries, to be sure, fail to earn their keep; but if they do their job, and I assume that most do, they earn their living. While Paul was able to provide for himself through making tents (Acts 18: 1-5; 20: 34), he did not make tent-making a moral requirement for all pastor/teachers or missionaries (1 Cor. 9: 1-14; 1 Tim. 5: 17-18). He also did not make it a moral requirement for pastors or missionaries to accept pay for their work in the Lord’s service; he himself did not accept it from the Corinthians to prevent any hindrance to his work (1 Cor. 9: 15-19). The decision to receive monetary support or not is purely voluntary from the perspective of the missionary. It is not voluntary from the perspective of believers who choose to stay home. While none should be forced to give to missions, they are morally required, to put it John Piper’s terms, “to send others or to get out of the way.” And I am afraid that many believers are just in the way. Many, including elders, can think of myriads of ways that God’s money can be spent that have nothing to do with making disciples of all nations. They continue to believe that more real estate (buildings and property) or random programs will make disciples. It doesn’t, and the dwindling church attendance in the US proves it. Commenting on this very point, Jerry Bridges says,

Not only are we giving less to our churches, but it seems that more of what we do give is spent on ourselves. In 1920, the percentage of giving to missions from total offerings was just over 10 percent. But by 2003, that figure had declined to just under 3 percent. That means we spend 97 cents of every dollar on our own local programs and ministries while sending 3 cents overseas.



So, in summary, it appears that evangelical households are keeping more of their income for themselves and giving less to their churches. And churches are keeping more of what they do receive for their own ministries and programs and sending less of it to missions working overseas. Yet we are the richest nation in history (*Respectable Sins—Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*, p. 167, *emphasis mine*).

If my fellow brothers and sisters in Africa think you need prayer, you are correct. But if you do not believe the well-fed evangelical church in the US needs prayer, you are mistaken. Our priorities need to be shaken up; we need to put our money where our mouth is. I do not wish to minimize what many believers are doing for missions, and Fran and I are very grateful for the generous support we have received for our mission in Africa for 20 years. I am just saying that the evangelical church could do more—even as missionaries could do more—to accomplish what Christ commissioned us to do. (And we must do it more wisely than in the past.) Overseas missions are not some added agenda to the church’s busy schedule. It is fundamental to the purpose given to us by the risen Lord. We are one church, and we must act upon this conviction which is demonstrated by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia (see below).

The following verses set the temporal context for the Roman letter. Paul is going to Jerusalem with a contribution from believers in **Macedonia and Achaia**.

<sup>25</sup> but now,  
    I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.  
<sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia  
    have been pleased to make a contribution  
        for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.  
<sup>27</sup> Yes, they were pleased *to do so*,  
and they are indebted to them.  
For if the Gentiles  
    have shared  
        in their spiritual things,  
they are indebted  
    to minister to them  
        also in material things.  
<sup>28</sup> Therefore,  
    when I have finished this,  
    and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs,  
    I will go on by way of you to Spain.  
<sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you,  
    I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Paul makes mention of the **contribution** in both 1 and 2 Corinthians and in his speech before Felix in Acts 24: 17.

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the **collection for the saints**, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.  
<sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. <sup>3</sup> When I arrive, whomever you may approve, **I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;** (1 Cor. 16:1-3 NASB)

Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us with much urging for the favor of **participation in the support of the saints**, (2 Cor. 8:1-4 NASB)

"Now after several years I **came to bring alms to my nation** and to present offerings; <sup>18</sup> **in which they found me *occupied in the temple***, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* some Jews from Asia—(Acts 24:17-18 NASB)

Following the example of Jesus, concern for the poor had always been an important part of Paul's ministry as well as that of Peter, James, and John.

and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> **They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.** (Gal. 2:9-10 NASB)

Generosity from the predominantly Gentile church in Achaia and Macedonia was calculated to glue these churches together in the bond of fellowship as a visible demonstration of the unity between Jew and Gentile Christians—an issue not completely resolved by this time. Paul makes clear, however, that the Jewish church has been first on the giving end. The spiritual blessings of the gospel to the Gentiles had come to them through the Jewish church. Paul himself was a Jew who had done more to propagate the gospel among the Gentiles than any other human being. This is not the first time that Paul has used the relationship between **spiritual things** and **material things** as a means of balancing the books, so to speak, between those who supply the former and those who are obligated for the latter. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, he makes it plain that those who preach the gospel are sowing **spiritual things** among those who hear it, thus obligating the hearers to supply them with the **material things** they need. This is not a matter of preaching the gospel for **sordid gain** (Tit. 1: 7), but merely an acknowledgement that the one who sows spiritual things cannot eat spiritual things. He must eat material things like corn and chicken like everyone else. God takes care of ministers through the sacrifices of his people, not miraculously through angels or ravens (1 Kings 17: 4-6).

If we sowed **spiritual things** in you, is it too much if we reap **material things** from you? (1 Cor. 9:11 NASB)

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services **eat the *food of the temple***, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? <sup>14</sup> **So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.** (1 Cor. 9:13-14 NASB)

Aside from giving to pastors, voluntary giving to the poor has the same potential today, cementing relationships between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. Material giving has great spiritual value, and the sovereign God—who distributes wealth as He pleases—uses the differential between those who have more and those who have less to glorify Himself through the voluntary sacrifices of the “haves”—not involuntary taxation, for which the government receives the credit rather than God.

The obligation to give today is not because of a prior debt as in the case here between Jews and Gentiles. The obligation to give is a moral obligation based upon the example of Christ and preoccupation with eternal, rather than temporal, life. Paul uses this appeal in his letters to Corinth and Timothy.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.** (2 Cor. 8:9 NASB)

<sup>17</sup>Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup>*Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup>**storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.** (1 Tim. 6:17-19 NASB)

God requires giving from all His people, rich and poor. Far from criticizing the poor widow for giving all she had, Jesus praised her (Mk. 12: 43-44), and to an audience consisting primarily of poor people, Jesus said,

"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." (Lk. 6:38 NASB)

Giving is for our own good and, most importantly, it brings glory to God.

Since Paul mentions the need for financial support in his mission to Spain (15: 24), v. 27 is a reminder to the Roman congregation that they are morally obligated to help him on his missionary journey. We don't know for sure whether Paul made it to Spain or not. Luke concludes the book of Acts with Paul in rented quarters under the custody of Rome but in relative freedom (Acts 28: 30-31). Writing to the Philippians from Rome, Paul is confident that he will be released and will see them again.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, <sup>13</sup>so that **my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,** (Phil. 1:12-13 NASB)

But if ***I am to live on in the flesh***, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. <sup>23</sup>But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; <sup>24</sup>**yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.** <sup>25</sup>**Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,** (Phil. 1:22-25 NASB)

The praetorian guard was an elite unit of the Roman army specially commissioned to guard the emperor of Rome. Therefore, Paul is writing Philippians (and Colossians; cf. 4: 18) from rented quarters in Rome. Rented by whom? Paul didn't have any money. Ironically, Caesar could be subsidizing Paul's evangelization of the Roman praetorian guard and even members of his own household (Phil. 4: 22).

The situation described in the first Roman imprisonment is quite different from the second Roman imprisonment described by Paul in his final communication with Timothy, his last letter.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and **the time of my departure has come.** <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; (2 Tim. 4:6-7 NASB)

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, **and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom;** to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Tim. 4:16-18 NASB)

Christian tradition holds that Peter and Paul were caught up in the chaos of Nero's deliberate burning of Rome in 64 AD to make room for new architecture. The fire was blamed on Christians, whom Nero burned alive as torches in his palace gardens. Peter was crucified upside down, per his request; and Paul was beheaded. We have no record of their executions in the Bible. Some scholars believe that Paul went to Spain after his first Roman imprisonment from 60-62 AD. Quotations from Clement (Phil. 4: 3), Cyril, Chrysostom, and Jerome indicate this possibility. Clement was the earliest proponent of this theory.

In Clement's letter *1 Clement* 5:5-7 (c. 70's just c. 40 years after the Resurrection and c. 20 years after Paul wrote Romans) Bishop Clement writes:

"Because of jealousy and strife, Paul, by his example, pointed out the way to the prize for patient endurance. After he had been seven times in chains, had been driven into exile, had been stoned and had preached in the East and in the West, he won the genuine glory for his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world and having reached the farthest limits of the West. (*'to terma tes duseos'*) Finally, when he had given his testimony before the rulers, he thus departed from the world and went to the holy place, having become an outstanding example of patient endurance." The "farthest limits of the West" at that time would have been Spain (Latin *Hispania*) on the Atlantic Ocean. (earlychurchhistory.org)

<sup>30</sup> Now I urge you, brethren,  
by our Lord Jesus Christ  
and by the love of the Spirit,  
to strive together with me  
in your prayers to God for me,  
<sup>31</sup> **that I may be rescued**  
**from those**  
**who are disobedient in Judea,**  
and *that* my service for Jerusalem  
may prove acceptable to the saints;

Verse 31 helps set the temporal context for the Roman letter. On his way back from his third missionary journey, Paul told the Ephesian elders, whom he knew would never see him again (Acts 20: 25):

"And now, behold, bound in spirit, **I am on my way to Jerusalem**, not knowing what will happen to me there,<sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, **saying that bonds and afflictions await me.** (Acts 20:22-23 NASB)

The Holy Spirit had informed him ahead of time of the future persecution by the Jewish hierarchy. This prophetic premonition is further confirmed by the prophet **Agabus**—who earlier predicted a widespread famine; Acts 11: 28)—who will soon prophesy that Paul will be apprehended by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles (Acts 21: 10-11)—a prophecy that comes true. In v. 31, **those who are disobedient in Judea** is a reference to the Jewish hierarchy, not the Romans. Therefore, Paul's remarks to the Roman church, probably written from Corinth in Achaia, refer to the imminent persecution he was facing in Jerusalem while distributing the contribution from the churches in Achaia and Macedonia to the church in Jerusalem. The phrase, **and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints**, indicates that the rift between the Judaizers—still confused about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, as well as law and gospel (cf. Galatians)—may not be happy with Paul's distribution (see below). In Romans 15: 28, **when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain** refers to the ministry of mercy in Jerusalem after Paul leaves Corinth, travels back through Macedonia to avoid a plot to kill him, says farewell to the Ephesian elders who meet him in Miletus, and is warned by Agabus in Caesaria. For Paul, it was all routine.

<sup>32</sup> so that I may come to you in joy  
by the will of God  
and find *refreshing* rest in your company.  
<sup>33</sup> Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

**So that I may come to you in joy** refers to Paul's wish that the contribution from Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia (predominantly Gentile churches) would be well-received by Jewish believers in Judea, something that was not a foregone conclusion. If it was accepted, he could then turn his attention to Spain, going by Rome on his way with **joy**, rather than disappointment, because of the successful mission of mercy. We learn from Acts 21 that this gift was, indeed, well-received, but that Agabus' prophecy was also correct.

After we arrived in Jerusalem, **the brethren received us gladly.**<sup>18</sup> And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.<sup>19</sup> After he had greeted them, **he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.**<sup>20</sup> **And when they heard it they began glorifying God** (Acts 21:17-20a NASB)

So far, so good, but Paul is immediately warned about Jewish believers who are zealous for the Law of Moses and who have misinterpreted his ministry to the Gentiles as an abandonment of Jewish traditions.

and they said to him, "You see, brother, **how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law**; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching **all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses**, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. (Acts 21:21 NASB)

This text, and the events which follow, require a long explanation which I will attempt to summarize. While Paul vehemently denied the necessity for circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses for salvation, he never said that Jews should not circumcise their male infants or keep traditional Jewish customs. Several texts will point this out.

Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also...**But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.** <sup>4</sup> But *it was* because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. <sup>5</sup> **But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.** (Gal. 2:1,3-5 NASB)

**To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews;** to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. (1 Cor. 9:20-21 NASB)

Paul wanted this man [*Timothy; DM*] to go with him; **and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts**, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:3 NASB)

For in Christ Jesus **neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything**, but faith working through love. (Gal. 5:6 NASB)

For **neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.** (Gal. 6:15 NASB)

Thus, for Paul, circumcision was a matter of indifference UNLESS it was being promoted as a necessary condition of salvation—the primary motive for the epistle to the Galatians. **Timothy** was circumcised to remove all unnecessary obstacles to his ministry alongside Paul among the Jews, but Paul flatly refused to circumcise **Titus** as a test-case with other apostolic leaders (Peter, James, and John) that circumcision was now one of the non-essentials of being right with God. What mattered was a **new creation** in Christ through the inward work of the Holy Spirit. But saying that circumcision didn't matter is not the same thing as saying that circumcision was immoral or that the practice must be abandoned altogether—the misinformed interpretation of some Jewish believers in Judea who were **zealous for the Law**.

The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) had already occurred by the time Paul arrived in Jerusalem from Achaia (Acts 21). The decisions of this council are mentioned in Acts 21: 25, and these had already been agreed upon by the apostolic leadership and elders of the Jerusalem church. However, apparently not every Jewish Christian was fully informed or in agreement with the decisions of the Council; and the problem between Jewish and Gentile Christianity remained for some time. It was only after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Roman armies in 70 AD that Jewish Christians were banished from the Jewish community as heretics (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, p. 450; Polhill provides an excellent historical background for Paul's predicament in Jerusalem in Acts 21).

To make a long story short, zealous unbelieving Jews from **Asia** (Acts 21: 27: cf. 24: 18; they are not called Jewish believers), possibly from Ephesus, stirred up the Jewish crowd in the temple. This resulted in Paul's being beaten outside the temple, rescued by Roman soldiers, appearing

before Felix, left in prison for two years, and finally making his way to Rome courtesy of the Roman government. Paul had already decided to visit Rome (Rom. 15: 23-24; Acts 19: 21), but he did not know at the time of this decision what circumstances would bring him there. **The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps** (Prov. 16: 9). He did **find refreshing rest** (v. 32) in the company of the Roman church, but this occurred during his first imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 1: 14). Paul had asked believers in Rome to pray for him to be **rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea** (15: 31). Those prayers were answered, for the Jews in Judea would surely have put him to death, as they did Stephen, had they been given the opportunity. Moreover, by appearing before Felix, then Festus, and finally Caesar, the predictions of Jesus concerning His disciples were confirmed.

"But beware of men, for **they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;**  
<sup>18</sup>**and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake,** as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. (Matt. 10:17-18 NASB)

**Now the God of peace be with you all,** or a similar statement containing the word, **peace,** is a characteristic closing of Paul's letters.

Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and **the God of love and peace will be with you.** (2 Cor. 13:11 NASB)

And those who will walk by this rule, **peace and mercy be upon them,** and upon the Israel of God. (Gal. 6:16 NASB)

**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely;** and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 5:23 NASB)

If Romans is written in the late 50's, the church after 64 AD would remember the closing benediction of **peace.** Emperor Nero of Rome would have much of Rome torched and then blame the fiery inferno on Christians, persecuting and killing many of them.

But the parting benediction strikes to the heart of us all who live today in uncertain times—as if there has ever been any time in the history of the world that was certain. What is certain is that God reigns in heaven and on earth through His Son, Jesus Christ. **All authority** has been given to Him in heaven and on earth; and, based on this fact, He has commissioned His sometimes-timid followers (that's us) to **make disciples of all nations,** even Muslim nations.

As I write this, the **peace of Jerusalem** (Ps. 22: 6) still eludes the Jews, and the unrest in this tiny little country still affects the entire world living under a threat much different from that of Rome. Recent events in Israel have caused eschatology buffs to heat up their keyboards describing the renewed holocaust of Israeli citizens as a sign of the end-times. Doubtless October 7, 2023, was an unusually horrible event claiming—at last count—the lives of 1500 Israelis and some Americans living in or visiting Israel. The aftermath of this murderous attack has been far worse upon Palestinians living in Gaza who are governed by Hamas and are helpless to affect any change in their declared purpose to extinguish the nation of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants.

Those who study the history of God's people know that October 7 is a continuation of the ancient hatred of Ishmael for Isaac. While there was a temporary truce between Esau's clan and Jacob's (Gen. 33), there was never any explicit truce between Isaac—a quiet and timid man—and Ishmael (although Gen. 25: 9 may indicate some cessation of hostilities at Abraham's burial). **The angel of Yahweh** ("a visible manifestation of Yahweh...essentially indistinguishable from Yahweh himself"; Hamilton, *Genesis*, Vol. 1, p. 451) describes Ishmael's future.

"He will be a wild donkey of a man, **His hand will be against everyone**, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers." (Gen. 16:12 NASB)

These are the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.<sup>18</sup> They settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; **he settled in defiance of all his relatives.** (Gen. 25:17-18 NASB)

Never accepting God's choice of Isaac rather than Ishmael (Gen. 17: 18-21; Rom. 9: 7-9), Muslims since the beginning have claimed that the OT and NT were corrupted by Jews and later by Christians. The true non-trinitarian god, Allah, favored the Arabs—descendants of Ishmael—and chose Muhammed as his prophet superior to Jesus. When Muhammed was rejected and exiled from Mecca by the Jewish leaders, his mode of operation was jihad against the Jewish communities, one being Medina where he had the men of the city beaten and beheaded in the public square, thus establishing Islam's long-running militaristic methodology of world domination from the very beginning. In the Quran, he says,

O, true believers, take not the Jews and Christians for your friends. They cannot be trusted. They are defiled—filth (5: 51) (Quoted by George Grant, *The Blood of the Moon*, p. 48).

One English translation of the Quran (clearquran.com) reads as follows:

51. O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies; some of them are allies of one another. Whoever of you allies himself with them is one of them. Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.

"They are defiled—filth" is omitted, possibly for the sake of western readers who might be put off by such statements; or it could be a variation of the Quranic text. It is not likely a difference in the English translations of the Arabic, none of which are accepted by orthodox Muslims, anyway (N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power—Part Two: The Middle Ages*, p. 20). Here are two other variations from Sura 47.

4. When you encounter those who disbelieve, **strike at their necks**. Then, when you have routed them, bind them firmly. Then, either release them by grace, or by ransom, until war lays down its burdens. Had Allah willed, He could have defeated them Himself, but He thus tests some of you by means of others. As for those who are killed in the way of Allah, He will not let their deeds go to waste (clearquran.com; emphasis mine).

When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, **strike off their heads** and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly (noblequran.com; emphasis mine)



Practicing what he preached, after the failure of the siege of Medina by Meccan forces, Muhammed attacked the third and last Jewish tribe in Medina whom he had suspected of plotting with the forces of Mecca.

“Then they surrendered, and the apostle confined them in Medina... Then the apostle went out to the market of Medina...and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and **struck off their heads** in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches... There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900” (William J. Federer, quoting Ibn Ishaq in *What Every American Needs to Know About the Qur’an—A History of Islam and the United States*, pp. 49-50, emphasis mine).

Alterations and hermeneutical twisting aside, orthodox Muslims world-wide have proven in the last century and the present one that both Jews and Christians are anathema. The Jihadists are the most honest while the leadership of those who claim to be moderate is completely silent concerning the death and destruction caused by Muslim “extremists”. “Extremist” is part of the false narrative. By definition, those who follow the Quran are all extreme. The fundamental rules of interpretation must include the attempt to discover the original intent of an author’s statement at the time he wrote it. With the Quran, discovering authorship and time is not difficult, and given Muhammed’s militaristic methodology of converting the world to Islam from the beginning of his leadership, what are we to make of the violent Sura’s of the Quran? Some moderate Muslim scholars have attempted to spiritualize jihad as a spiritual battle against sin, but millions of Muslims world-wide do not seem to be adopting this interpretation, and there is little or no outcry against jihadist terrorism. Have the violent Sura’s been abrogated by more peaceful Sura’s of Muhammed’s newer revelations? To the contrary, the more peaceful Sura’s are chronologically earlier than the violent ones.

The Quran contains early and later revelations of the prophet. It is generally acknowledged that the Quran is not arranged chronologically from the earliest revelations to the later revelations. Rather, the Sura’s (chapters) are arranged from the longest Sura’s to the shortest. The Meccan Sura’s are generally the shortest and earliest revelations of Muhammed while the Medinan Sura’s are the longest and latest. Compare the following verses from the Quran (quoted in Geisler, p. 202, or from noblequran.com):

2:106. Whatever a Verse (revelation) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?

2:256. There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path.

The Islamic rulings (*fatawa*) of Saudi Sheikh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid are widely read in the Islamic world. Commenting on the peaceful statement of Sura 2: 256, Saalih quotes the intolerant Sura’s 9: 29 and 8: 39. He also quotes 9: 5, saying, “This verse is known as Ayat al-Sayf (the Verse of the Sword). These and similar verses abrogate those saying that there is no compulsion to become a Muslim” (quoted by Robert Spencer, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)*, p. 27). From noblequran.com. (Note: English translations posted in noblequran.com have changed since these were cited in May 2016.)

9:5. Then when the Sacred Months (the 1st, 7th, 11th, and 12th months of the Islamic calendar) have passed, then kill the *Mushrikun* (see V.2:105) [the disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah, idolaters, polytheists, pagans, etc.] wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and prepare for them each and every ambush. But if they repent and perform *As-Salat* (*Iqamat-as-Salat*), and give *Zakat*, then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

8:39. And fight them until there is no more *Fitnah* (disbelief and polytheism: i.e. worshipping others besides Allah) and the religion (worship) will all be for Allah Alone [in the whole of the world]. But if they cease (worshipping others besides Allah), then certainly, Allah is All-Seer of what they do.

9:29. Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the Last Day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the *Jizyah* [tax levied against unbelievers in Muslim lands; DM] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

Some Islamic scholars admit that that the Verse of the Sword (9:5) abrogates 124 verses of the Quran which are tolerant to unbelievers. Historically, the less tolerant verses of the Medinan Sura's—the later ones—correspond to the time in Muhammed's life during which he was engaged in military struggle against other religious groups. "In fact, most Muslim authorities agree that the ninth Sura was the very last section of the Qur'an to be revealed." One well-known Qur'an commentator, Ibn Kathir, says that Sura 9: 5 "abrogated every agreement of peace between the Prophet and any idolater, every treaty, and every term...No idolater had any more treaty or promise of safety ever since Surah Bara'ah [the ninth Sura] was revealed." Another Quran commentator, Ibn Juzayy, concurs with this interpretation saying that the purpose of Sura 9:5 is "abrogating every peace treaty in the Qur'an" (Spencer, p. 25, words in brackets his).

But back to the current middle-east crisis,

...for centuries now, the Middle East, North Africa, and Persia (Iran) have been regarded as the heart of the Islamic world. **Did this transformation take place through preaching and the conversion of hearts and minds? Not at all: The sword spread Islam.** Under Islamic rule, the non-Muslim majorities of those regions were gradually whittled down to the tiny minorities they are today, through repression, discrimination [*dhimmitude*], and harassment that made conversion to Islam the only path to a better life (*The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* p. 107, emphasis mine).

Damascus fell to the Muslims in 635 AD, Jerusalem in 637, Antioch, Caesarea and 17 other cities along the Syrian coast in 638, Alexandria, Egypt in 641 (Needham, p. 23). Thousands of Jews and Byzantine Christians were slaughtered, and "Palestine was emptied of its indigenous population [the Jews, DM] once again" (George Grant, *The Blood of the Moon—The Roots of the Middle East Crisis*, p. 50). The Muslim conquest spread from the Middle East into Egypt and westward throughout Christian North Africa and northward into Spain. Had it not been for Charles Martel "The Hammer" at the Battle of Tours in France, all of Europe would have been subjugated to Muslim rule. Spain remained under Muslim rule for 700 years until the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain in 1492 (Needham, p. 24).

Thus, present-day posturing by pro-Islamic writers about Arab claims to Israel's land is historical amnesia. The descendants of Abraham had it first by God's covenant promise. They forfeited the land through disobedience and suffered exile (2 Kings), were allowed to return by their Persian

conquerors (Ezra), forfeited it again by rejecting their Messiah (the gospel accounts; the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the Jewish Wars of 66-70 AD, predicted by Jesus in Matt. 24) but were gradually restored to the land after the Balfour Declaration of 1917. After three decades of frustrating unrest, Britain and the United Nations partitioned one-fourth of Palestine as Jewish Palestine and three-fourths as Arab Palestine: two self-governing, autonomous states. Only one day after Israel became an official nation (May 14, 1948), it was attacked by the armies of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and some forces from Saudi Arabia. Arab leaders had no stomach for any **peace** with Israel. One Arab *mufti* (scholar) who served the Nazis in WWII declared,

The entire Jewish population in Palestine must be destroyed or be driven into the sea. Allah has bestowed upon us the rare privilege of finishing what Hitler only began. Let the Ji'had begin. Murder the Jews. Murder them all. (quoted in Grant, p. 53).

Another, the *mufti* of Jerusalem in 1991, parroted his sentiments,

The Jews are destined to be persecuted, humiliated, and tortured forever, and it is a Moslem duty to see to it that they reap their due. No petty arguments must be allowed to divide us. Where Hitler failed we must succeed. (quoted in Grant, p. 55, emphasis mine).

Precisely the intent of the Hamas attack on Saturday, October 7, 2023, murdering 1400 unarmed Jews, many of them attending a music festival.

Let there be no illusions. There will be no political solutions to the spiritual war in Palestine. **Peace** can only come from submission (the meaning of “Islam”) to Christ, not Allah. The wars of devotion in the OT were ordained by God and were necessary for the preservation of His people as a distinctive religious nation. Assimilation into Canaanite culture would have meant the dissolution of Israel and the covenant promise to Abraham. Many questions remain about God’s use of this method, but one thing is certain: all cultures are not equal. To preserve a people for Himself, God ordained the annihilation of godless Canaanite nations threatening to destroy them. The Canaanites were not good people; they were evil idolaters practicing infant sacrifice and a whole host of sexual immorality. Likewise, Palestinian Arabs subscribing to the necessity to annihilate Israel—along with the western sympathizers cheering them on—are not good people. They are evil, and God will deal with them in His own good time.

Meanwhile, the Old Covenant has been fulfilled and superseded by the NT revelation of Jesus Christ and the gospel (Hebrews). Christians are armed with spiritual armor and spiritual weapons designed to persuade, not kill (Eph. 6). Christianity, not Islam, is the religion of **peace** declaring to all men everywhere and from every culture to lay down their physical and spiritual weapons and surrender to the Lordship of Christ (2 Cor. 5: 20). Aided by the Holy Spirit, the honest reader can clearly see the difference in the mode of warfare between the Old and New Covenants. Peter was ordered to put away his sword (Matt. 26: 52), and the church has continued its mission of non-violent warfare against unbelief ever since. The Crusades of the Western Catholic church spanning 1096 to 1204 AD were not “Christian” crusades and were never sanctioned by the Holy Spirit, so it may not be claimed by Muslims that the Christian church as a whole has used the same jihadist methodology as Islam. Likewise, Israel is not the church. It is a nation; and, as a nation, it has the right to defend itself.

So what does all this have to do with Paul's statement, **Now the God of peace be with you all?** Simply this: As Ishmael has always hated Isaac, unbelievers will always, in some form or another, hate true believers.

But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, **so it is now also.** (Gal. 4:29 NASB)

If Muslims—or some members of the US congress or the academic elite—were allowed to conquer the world, both Jews and Christians would either be exterminated or reduced to secondary citizenship with limited freedom (dhimmitude). The hatred of Christians by some members of the political and educated elite is so intense that they would welcome the complete silencing of the Christian voice in America. This is not an overstatement. Therefore, what is going on now in the Middle East with Israel is not some irrelevant, isolated political struggle. It is the struggle of both Jews and Christians to exist in the modern world.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**"<sup>35</sup>  
"For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW;<sup>36</sup> and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (Matt. 10:34-36 NASB)

This hostility will not be resolved **on the earth**—this present earth—until Christ returns and banishes all His and our enemies from the face of the earth.

## Romans 16

<sup>1</sup>I commend to you our sister **Phoebe,**

who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

<sup>2</sup>that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,  
and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you;

*for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself  
as well.*

<sup>3</sup>Greet **Prisca and Aquila,**

my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

<sup>4</sup>*who for my life risked their own necks,  
to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches  
of the Gentiles;*

<sup>5</sup>also greet the church that is in their house.

Greet **Epaenetus,**

my beloved,

*who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.*

<sup>6</sup>Greet **Mary,**

*who has worked hard for you.*

<sup>7</sup> Greet **Andronicus and Junias**,  
my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners,  
*who are outstanding among the apostles,*  
*who also were in Christ before me.*

<sup>8</sup> Greet **Ampliatius**,  
my beloved in the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> Greet **Urbanus**,  
our fellow worker in Christ,

and **Stachys**  
my beloved.

<sup>10</sup> Greet **Apelles**,  
the approved in Christ.

Greet **those who are of the household of Aristobulus.**

<sup>11</sup> Greet **Herodion**,  
my kinsman.

Greet **those of the household of Narcissus**,  
who are in the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Greet **Tryphaena and Tryphosa**,  
workers in the Lord.

Greet **Persis**  
the beloved,  
*who has worked hard in the Lord.*

<sup>13</sup> Greet **Rufus**,  
a choice man in the Lord,

also **his mother and mine.**

<sup>14</sup> Greet **Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.**

<sup>15</sup> Greet **Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.**

<sup>16</sup> Greet **one another** with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ greet you.

Never the loner, Paul associated himself with hundreds of Christian workers. He now sends his greetings to those living in Rome. Only Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila are well-known to us. Paul met this couple in Corinth on his second missionary journey, and they became traveling companions from Corinth to Ephesus where they explained the gospel more accurately to Apollos (Acts 18) and later established a house church (v. 5; cf. 1 Cor. 16: 19). They evidently returned to Rome, their city of origin, after Claudius died in 54 AD. Luke gives us no specific information in Acts about how Priscilla and Aquila **risked their own necks** for Paul's sake, but the riot in Ephesus was probably the occasion (Acts 19).

**Andronicus** and **Junias** (possibly a husband-and-wife team like Aquila and Prisca) are singled out as **kinsmen** (Rom. 9: 3) or fellow Jews, leading to the conclusion that most of the 26 people greeted are Gentiles. We know no details of their imprisonment or whether they were at one time imprisoned along with Paul. The statement of greatest interest is **who are outstanding among the apostles**. If Junias was a woman, something many modern commentators as well as thousands of so-called African “apostles” believe, then it would prove that women not only served in this capacity but that there should be no church offices barred to women today. Other translations infer that Andronicus and Junias had a reputation among the apostles.

They are well known to the apostles (ESV)

who are of note among the apostles, (NKJ)

who are of note among the apostles (YLT)

The word **apostle** (*apostolos*) also has the sense of **messenger** and is used in this way in 2 Cor. 8: 23 and Phil. 2: 25.

As for Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, *they are* **messengers** [*apostolos*] of the churches, a glory to Christ. (2 Cor. 8:23 NASB)

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your **messenger** [*apostolos*] and minister to my need; (Phil. 2:25 NASB)

Moo believes that Paul's use here is that of “traveling missionary” (p. 924) in which case all of my readers may call me “Apostle Don”. (But I'm only joking. Call me anything else, but not Apostle. “Baldhead” will do, but say it with a smile.) Timothy, Paul's **true child in the faith** and personal disciple (1 Tim. 1: 2), is never called an apostle; and this would be a strange omission if Andronicus and Junias, of whom we know so little, were apostles of the same order and authority as Paul. The more likely interpretation is that of Murray who finds the explanation in the phrase **who also were in Christ before me**. This implies that they were converted Jews who became associated with the original apostles in Judea (Murray, vol. 2, p. 230; see my comments below). Jesus did not call any women as apostles, although it could be argued that such a selection would have been self-defeating in the male-dominated first century Jewish culture. Nevertheless, neither was Matthew's selection (a hated tax-collector) calculated to win Jesus any friends, either. Jesus also did not give any instructions to the remaining eleven disciples to select a female replacement for Judas, although women were given the honor of being the first witnesses to His resurrection. According to the honor Paul gives women in many of his closings—Phoebe being the first person mentioned

in this list of 26—it is clear that it is not the office of elder that renders someone useful and noteworthy in Paul’s eyes. Rather, it is the service they have rendered to the kingdom of God. So then, let us seek to be servants first, not officers.

**Rufus** could be the person mentioned in Mark 15: 21, the son of Simon of Cyrene who bore Jesus’ cross. **His mother and mine** does not imply that Rufus was Paul’s sibling but simply that Rufus’ mother had treated Paul as a son. All the other names appear only here in Rom. 16, other than **Mary** whose name was common among Jews and Gentiles. The important thing about this list is that it demonstrates Paul’s appreciation for other believers. Moreover, if these people are important to Paul, they are also important to God. It is not significant how many people in this world know your name, but who knows your name.

**All the churches of Christ greet you** indicates that the Roman congregation, though probably very large, was divided into several smaller congregations within the city. Although we cannot be certain, most likely there was an elder serving as shepherd and pastor of each of these small churches, most likely house churches. Therefore, leadership development occurred within the context of small groups of believers united for worship and fellowship. There were no seminaries or bible colleges available for training; instead, training took place in the context of community with opportunities provided for believers to discover their spiritual gifts.

<sup>17</sup> Now I urge you, brethren,  
keep your eye  
on **those** who cause dissensions and hindrances  
contrary to the teaching which you learned,  
and turn away from them.

<sup>18</sup> For **such men** are slaves,  
not of our Lord Christ  
but of their own appetites;  
and by their smooth and flattering speech  
they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

In this warning, Paul could be referring to the antinomian and/or Judaizing heresies refuted earlier in the book, or he could be referring to teachers who had not yet come to Rome (the opinion of both Moo and Murray). **Slaves...of their own appetites** seems to refer to the antinomian tendencies mentioned in chapter 6, **Are we to continue in sin that grace may increase?** and Paul’s response, **How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** Whoever they were, their teaching was to be rejected if it strayed from the apostolic traditions the Roman church had already learned from their teachers, as Paul’s churches had learned from him.

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Cor. 11:2 NASB)

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thess. 2:15 NASB)

This begs the question about the identity of these orthodox teachers in the Roman church. It is not likely that Peter had laid the apostolic traditions himself; otherwise, Paul would not have written

the Romans a long treatise covering the fundamentals of the Christian faith. He had just stated that he did not wish to **build on another man's foundation** (15: 20). Moreover, church traditions outside the scriptures and Roman Catholic tradition do not associate Peter with Rome. The fourth-century church father Ambrosiaster believed that the church in Rome was established in the Jewish synagogues without the normal benefit of apostolic “signs and wonders” (2 Cor. 12: 2) or personal contact with the apostles (Moo, p. 4), but this is only true of the majority of the church in Rome, not the founding members. **Visitors from Rome** are mentioned as participants on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Andronicus and Junias could possibly have been among them, for we recall that they **were in Christ before [Paul]** (16: 7). We do not know how long these converts extended their stay in Jerusalem after Pentecost, but we do know that while they were there, they witnessed the miracle of tongues—the gospel being preached in their own language—and were in direct contact with the apostles’ teaching and the signs and wonders performed by them.

They were continually devoting themselves **to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.<sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and **many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.** (Acts 2:42-43 NASB)

Therefore, these converted Jews transported their faith back to their respective synagogues in Rome, carrying with them the apostles’ teaching and stories of miraculous events. During the time that the Jews were being banished from Rome, Aquila and Priscilla included (Acts 18: 2), Gentile Christians would have become the dominant membership in the church moving it away from its Jewish origins in the synagogues.

The decentralized nature of the Jewish community from which the Christian community sprang would also make it likely that the Christians in Rome were grouped into several house churches. Confirmation that this was the case comes from Rom. 16 where Paul seems to greet several different house churches (Moo, p. 5).

Full-blown presbyteries, large auditoriums, celebrity preachers, and **smooth, flattering speech** (v. 18; cf. 1 Thess. 2: 5) were not required for the spread of the gospel in Rome or any other city in the first century. All that was needed was the apostolic traditions and Christians whose hearts were burning with the conviction of its truth. So let there be house churches! They may look messy at first, but the organization can be cleaned up later. As I said earlier, house churches provide the best laboratory for building indigenous leadership within the body. Elders will be chosen later by people who really know them and can confirm their willingness and ability (both are necessary) to shepherd the flock. This is unlike the situation in many (most?) churches in the US today in which elders are chosen on the basis of occupational success or education, not on the basis of proven pastoral skills and biblical knowledge and wisdom.

<sup>19</sup> For the report of your obedience has reached to all;  
therefore I am rejoicing over you,  
but I want you to be wise  
    in what is good  
and innocent  
    in what is evil.

<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.



The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Although warning the Roman believers about teachers with **smooth and flattering speech** who are skilled at deceiving **unsuspecting** believers, Paul reaffirms his confidence in them. At the beginning of the letter, he says, ...**your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world** (1: 8). He finishes the letter with another vote of confidence: **the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you**. Notwithstanding their present obedience and reputation, Paul did not wish the church to be blind-sighted by deceptive teachers. Even mature believers can fall prey to false doctrine when espoused by those with superlative skills in communication or who possess name recognition. But it does not matter how well a doctrine is communicated or the celebrity status of the one teaching it. What matters is whether or not it is true. Paul wishes his audience to be **wise in what is good** in the sense of being able to apply biblical doctrine to everyday life. This would include being able to spot a rotten apple (a false doctrine) when they see one. Some evangelical Christians don't believe doctrine is all that important, but it is clear that their thinking is not in line with Paul's. A well-known reformed Baptist preacher, Al Martin, has said that our lives are an extension in practice of what we believe. Quite true. Bad doctrine produces bad practice, and many of society's perversions are simply the logical conclusions of bad theology.

**Innocent in what is evil** is translated **simple concerning evil** in the NKJ with the connotation of "pure" or "unmixed". Paul alludes to Genesis 3 in v. 20, and perhaps he is doing so here. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were "innocent" with regard to evil. They knew that evil was opposed to what God had said without having to experience evil. Their lives were unmixed and pure—simple. We know that adultery is evil without ever having to experience the complex pain and devastation of adultery. Faithful marriage partners enjoy the simplicity of marriage fidelity. As much as possible, Christians should live "simply" and "innocently" with regard to evil without being engulfed in the multiple complications which evil produces. Sin makes life complicated. However, to be innocent of evil requires being proactive and alert (**wise**) in what is good. Adam was given dominion over all the animals; yet he was not wise enough to apply his dominion to the serpent's deceptions by expelling the serpent from the garden. Many Christians are innocent (not perfectly so) with regard to a great variety of evils, but they may be easily deceived by what they perceive as persuasive arguments of someone with better educational credentials or by the cultural consensus of their time. Many unknowledgeable Christians who would never consider practicing homosexuality have been convinced that this lifestyle is acceptable for some. They are therefore **innocent**, but not **wise**. The same can be said for some Christians who recoil at the transgender movement spreading across North America, but who cannot present a cogent, biblical refutation of why the transgender movement is a direct revolt against God, a denial of man's image, and a revolt against the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply.

Verse 20 is an allusion (subtle reference) to Gen. 3: 15. The **seed of the woman** will bruise the serpent on the **head** while the **serpent** will bruise the seed of the woman (Christ) on the **heel**. The bruise to the head is a fatal wound from which Satan will not recover. The bruise to the heel is temporary and non-fatal. Christ's death on the cross, from which He recovered, set in motion the final defeat and destruction of Satan which is not yet complete. Paul extends the promise to include the church. God will **crush** Satan through the agency of His church making disciples throughout the earth. God is the primary actor in this sentence; the church's role is the secondary means. The final act of Satan's destruction is God's alone. The so-called "Battle of Armageddon" is no real

battle at all. According to John's symbolic vision, Christ shows up at the end of the age riding a white horse with a sword coming out of His mouth with which He slays the nations in rebellion against Him. The battle is over before it begins (Rev. 19). The very word of God which now offers forgiveness and grace will be the same word of retribution condemning unbelievers.

Meanwhile, the church's task is to make disciples through teaching in word and deed. Ironically, the end-goal of Christianity and Islam is the same—world conquest. Islam plans to accomplish this through terror and forced assimilation of the nations—the methodology established by Muhammed from the beginning when people refused to follow his teaching. Christ, on the other hand, continues sending His disciples to the ends of the earth as ambassadors of peace pleading with people to lay down their spiritual weapons—and physical weapons—and surrender to His lordship, symbolically portrayed by Christ as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey offering peace to the Jewish people, an offer they refused. Many of Christ's ambassadors have been put to death; many more have been hated. Imitating the method of their Savior, Christ's ambassadors have been willing to lay down their lives in self-sacrifice in the propagation of their message.

"But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death,<sup>17</sup> and you will be hated by all because of My name. (Lk. 21:16-17 NASB)

The Crusades of the Western Catholic Church spanned only 108 years, from 1096 to 1204, producing very little positive result and much damage. By way of contrast, the missionary expanse of the church has endured for 2000 years and, without wielding the sword or firing a shot, has virtually reached the entire world with the true knowledge of God, bringing with it vast improvements in government, rule of law, economic advancement, care for the poor, and human rights for all, even women and children. Satan and his devastating, dehumanizing work is being crushed already. His lies are being exposed, as Paul says,

*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (2 Cor. 10:5 NASB)

But, as always, there must be just retribution (payback) for sins against God and His people. Satan is now being crushed, yet he will be utterly crushed. Romans 16: 20 sounds self-contradictory—**the God of peace will soon crush**—but for those who understand the division between the line of Seth and Cain (God's people and Satan's people) at the beginning of human history, it makes perfect sense. Ultimate **peace** comes only at the expense of Satan's utter annihilation and the annihilation of all Satan's accomplices. Everything will be restored in Christ (Acts 3: 21; Rom. 8: 15-25), and in the restored creation good and evil cannot coexist. According to God's eternally wise counsel, not everyone will surrender to His rule, even if given a thousand years to do so. As God drove the Canaanites from the land of Israel, God will also banish unbelievers from the earth at the end of the age and give it to those to whom it is promised.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy

my fellow worker

greet you,

and *so do* Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

<sup>22</sup> I, Tertius, who write this letter,

greet you in the Lord.

<sup>23</sup> Gaius,  
    host to me and to the whole church,  
        greet you.  
Erastus, the city treasurer  
        greet you,  
and Quartus, the brother.

<sup>24</sup> *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen .*

<sup>25</sup> **Now to Him** who is able to establish you  
    according to my gospel  
    and the preaching of Jesus Christ,  
    according to the revelation of the mystery  
        which has been kept secret for long ages past,  
        <sup>26</sup> but now is manifested,  
    and by the Scriptures of the prophets,  
    according to the commandment of the eternal God,  
        has been made known to all the nations,  
        *leading* to obedience of faith;

<sup>27</sup> **to the only wise God**, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Paul concludes with final greetings from those who are with him during his three-month stay in Corinth on the third missionary journey as well as a doxology. In his doxology, Paul continues to emphasize the major theme of his letter, the **revelation of the mystery** of the **gospel** (cf. 1: 16-17). He mentions four basic things concerning this gospel.

First, it is **my gospel**, i.e. Paul's gospel which he received directly from the Lord rather than through the agency of man (Gal. 1: 1, 12). It is only this gospel, and not another, which confirms or **establishes** the believer in his relationship with God.

Second, this gospel consists of the **preaching of Jesus Christ** and all its implications for holy living. Any Christ-less religion is powerless to change the heart, for only the Holy Spirit of Christ can accomplish this momentous transformation of thinking, feeling, and acting. God must do for man what he is powerless to do for himself.

Third, this gospel was a **mystery** which was, in relative terms, **kept secret** until the full manifestation of Christ. This does not imply that God provided no clues to this secret. After all, the **good news** was preached to the nation of Israel, but they failed to enter God's **rest** because of unbelief (Heb. 4: 2). Rather, **kept secret** means that it pleased God to reveal the plan of salvation gradually upon the stage of human history. As I mentioned earlier in Romans 1, God proved empirically for 4000 years that man could not save himself either by law-keeping or through philosophical speculation and logical reasoning. The outcome of these methods is always failure. It was through the foolishness of the gospel that God proved Himself wiser than men. Boasting in the flesh was forever eliminated by God's plan to save sinners by grace, a plan now fully manifested in the gospel. God revealed the plan of salvation partially, yet clearly, **by the Scriptures and the prophets** of the OT who, Peter says, "were seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and

the glories to follow” (1 Pet. 1:11 NASB). Included in **prophets** is the greatest OT prophet, Moses, who wrote details of the sacrificial system depicting the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

**Fourth**, while Israel was given the gospel in types and shadows, the Gentiles were left in almost total darkness. Although the light of creation should have led them to God (Rom. 1), they did not honor Him or give thanks but became futile in their speculations, worshipping everything else except God. The OT Scriptures were relatively unavailable to the masses of humanity until the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek by 72 Jewish scholars in the third century BC, but this translation did not help the millions who did not speak the Greek language. The final remedy was the Word incarnate invading the scene of human history, thus making this secret **known to all the nations** through his earthly ministry and the missionary enterprise of the church which He commissioned. Until that time, the Gentile nations of the earth are described as **having no hope and without God in the world** (Eph. 2: 12).

All of this was **according to the commandment of the eternal God** whose infinite wisdom and desire to maximize His glory eliminated any other means of revealing the way of salvation to the nations. In view of God’s omnipotence, we may think that there could have been other options at His disposal; but since whatever God does is perfect, any other way would have been imperfect.