

Romans Chapter 8



“The Divine Trinity” Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer - 1511

Introduction

"The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of the Christian faith; the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden; the highest peak in a range of mountains - such are some of the metaphors used by interpreters who extol chapter 8 as the passage within what so many consider to be the greatest book in Scripture. While the varied riches of God's Word make such comparisons precarious, Romans 8 deserves to be put in the front rank for its rich and comprehensive portrayal of what it means to be a Christian. (Moo, p. 467)

Verses 1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of Life set me free from the law of sin and death.

“Therefore...” - In the concluding verse of the preceding chapter (7:25) Paul had summarized his condition in this way: **“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”** That which now follows is the result of this reality. This link is indicated by the combination of the Greek particles **“ara oun,”** literally **“therefore now.”** Since the apostle is a servant of God's law in his mind, even though his sinful nature remains a slave to sin, he is **“in Christ Jesus”** and therefore he is not subject to the **“condemnation”** which is the just and inevitable fate of every descendant of Adam. The noun **“condemnation”** (Greek - **“katakrima”**) is forensic, a judicial term which describes the pronouncement of sentence and the declaration of punishment by the judge upon a convicted criminal. Leon Morris notes: **“Condemnation is a forensic term which here includes both the sentence and the execution of the sentence.”** (Boice, p. 790) **“In Christ Jesus”** the believer is delivered from the penalty which sin exacts. The Greek negative **“ouden”** is emphatic. It also occurs out of the usual word order at the beginning of the sentence to stress its importance even more. Paul is not merely saying **“no condemnation,”** but rather **“absolutely no condemnation,”** not a single one of any kind. Joseph Fitzmyer notes:

*“Paul utters a victory cry; through Christ Jesus the Christian has vanquished all the forces of evil, especially the force of the law in human life. **Condemnation** is no longer leveled by the law against those not observing its specific prescriptions; nor is there condemnation resulting from sin, the sin that came from Adam...The law as the judge of human conduct has passed judgement on those who violate its precepts. Such a curse or condemnation was leveled by the Mosaic law itself on those who were subject to it...To be **in Christ** means to live as someone freed from sin, death, self, and the law and consequently from wrath.”* (Fitzmyer, pp.481,482)

On this most fundamental level there are only two categories of people in all the world: those who are **“in Christ Jesus”** and therefore not under the verdict of condemnation and those who are not in Christ Jesus and therefore remain under the verdict of condemnation. The only difference between these two classes of people is that which God has done on our behalf in joining us to Christ. Our salvation does not depend on anything that we have done, not the intensity of our faith nor the level of our sanctification. It is solely and completely the work of God from beginning to

end. "Salvation is from God. It is by God. What the text says is that there is no condemnation for those who have been joined to Jesus Christ by God the Father through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit." (Boice, p.793)



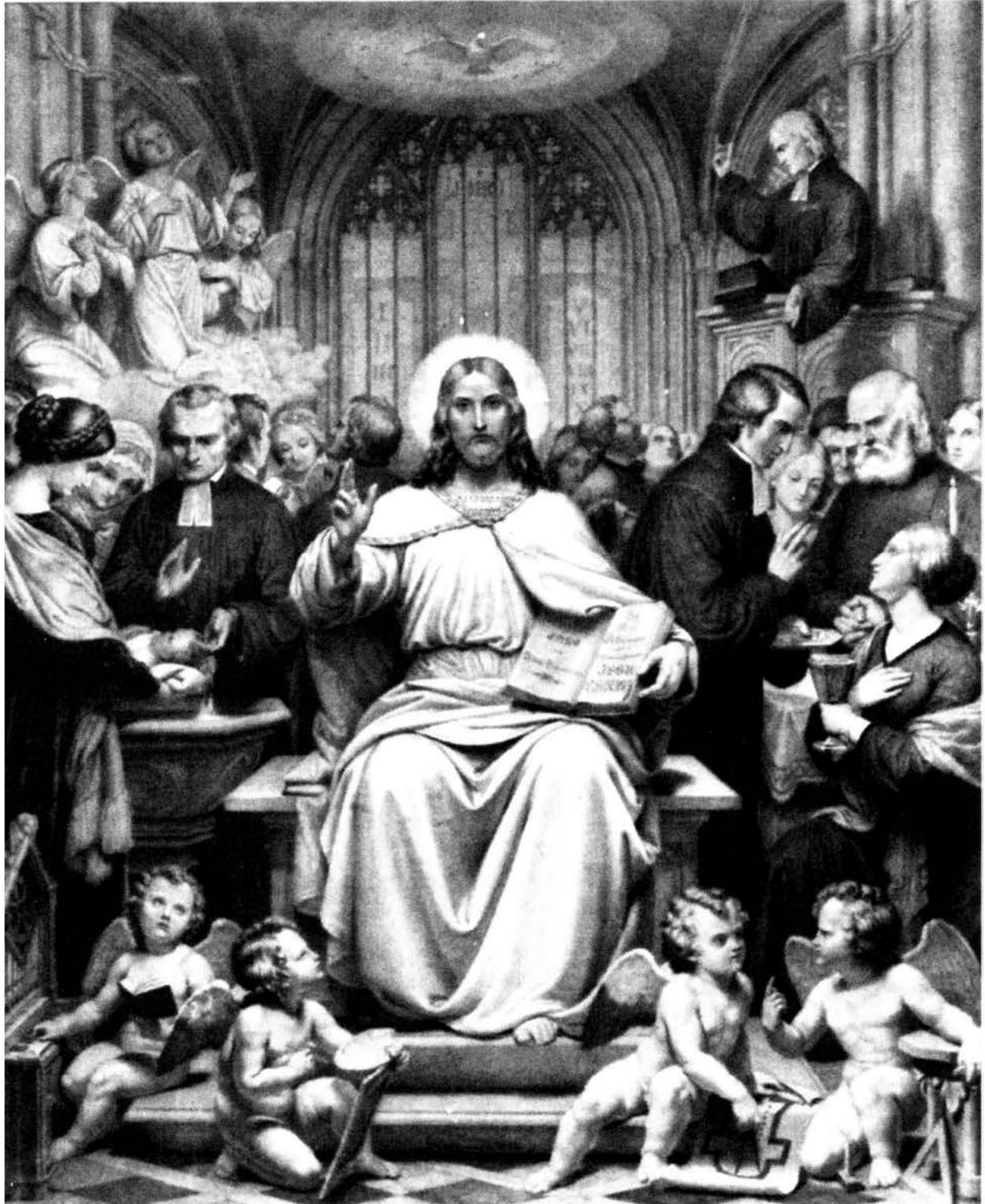
"The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit" by Rudolf Schäfer

"Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit..." - Verse 2 supplies the reason for the assurance provided in Verse 1. The connection is indicated by the conjunction *"because"* (Greek - *"gar"*). Paul rejoices in the fact that *"through Christ Jesus the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."* The liberation described in these words occurs *"through Christ Jesus."* It is in Christ Jesus, and that which He accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection, that the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit is operative. The *"law of the Spirit of life"* is set in contrast to the *"law of sin and death."* The term *"law"* is used once again in a general sense to refer to a governing principle, that which prevails or determines. The *"law of the Spirit of life"* is the new reality, the new governing principle which now

prevails in our lives as the result of Christ's substitutionary atonement. This new order is one of righteousness and life, procured by Christ and provided by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is rightly described as *“the Spirit of life.”* John Murray notes: *“The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life because He is the author of life and also because He is life...It is eminently appropriate that the Holy Spirit should be designated as the Spirit of life because the power He exercises is unto life as distinguished from the power of sin which is unto death.”* (Murray, p. 276) The *“life”* in question here is the life that we live with Christ, which causes us to be truly alive (6:8,10,13). This is the abundant, overflowing, eternal life which Christ came into the world to bring His people (6:22,23; cf. also John 10:10; 11:26; 17:2,3) Note well that the emphasis is once more on what God has done for us, not on what we must do for ourselves. We do not come to the Spirit, He comes to us. We do not earn the Spirit's presence or His gifts, He graciously makes us what we are in Christ. This is a crucial distinction. In his classic *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Frederick Bruner offers this penetrating insight:

“Adherence to the law does not procure the Spirit, rather, and most significantly, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus procures us and in so doing sets us free from the law...If the Spirit does not come to us freely in Christ, then we must go to Him through some kind of spiritual achievement and this means, ultimately, via law...At once place Luther writes: ‘With all Karlstadt's mouthing of the words ‘Spirit! Spirit! Spirit!’ he tears down the bridge, the way, the path, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God, he wants to teach you not how the Spirit comes to you, but how you come to the Spirit.’...A difference separates the two classic religious ways - the ways respectively of law and gospel, to and of the Spirit - and this difference may be discovered by observing the location of the absolutes. The way of the law places the absolutes on men; the way of the Gospel places the absolutes on the Messiah. The necessity of the law's righteous demands being fulfilled is of central concern to the Gospel. But the Gospel removes the burden of absolute fulfillment from the back of the believer to the cross of Christ, and we may say that this is what makes it Gospel.” (Bruner, p. 230-231)

The importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life is often misunderstood. On one extreme are pentecostals who exaggerate the role of the Holy Spirit to the virtual exclusion of the other members of the divine Trinity. On the other extreme, many Christians ignore or minimize the Holy Spirit's role with the result that He becomes “the half-known God,” as one Lutheran author recently described Him. Dr. Martin Franzmann presents this masterful summary of the Biblical view.



*“The Means of Grace in the Evangelical Church”
by Carl Heinrich Koopmann - 1852*

"Our English use of "spirit" and "spiritual" has cast a grey veil over the meaning of "the Spirit of life"; the Spirit of God has become for us a pale and unsubstantial member of the Holy Trinity. We need to recall what a mighty and creative power of the Spirit, in the language of the Bible, is, active in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2), active in the mighty deeds of Israel's judges, those deliverers whom God raised up for His people when all seemed lost (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29); active in Israel's anointed kings (1 Samuel 16:13), in the history of Israel among the nations (Isaiah 31:3), in the Word of God that came to Israel's prophets (e.g. Ezekiel 3:12,14; 11:5; Zechariah 7:12); active in the Messiah destined to restore God's righteous order and peace or paradise on earth (Isaiah 11:2) and in the Servant of the Lord destined to bring God's people back to God and to shed God's redeeming light on all the peoples of the earth (Isaiah 42:1,6); active in the promised recreation of the people of God (Ezekiel 37:14; Isaiah 4:2-4; 44:3; Joel 2:28-32) and of the world (Isaiah 32:15ff.); active in the Christ who came, who was conceived by the Spirit (Matthew 1:18,20; Luke 1:35), endued with the Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 3:16), led and empowered by the Spirit in His victory over Satan (Matthew 4:1-11; 12:28), who performed His mighty deeds in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38), active in the apostolate (Acts 1:8). Everywhere where man's possibilities are at an end and the free and sovereign possibilities of God begin, we find the presence and the working of the Spirit of God. For the writings of Paul we find the first statement in this section concerning the Spirit is characteristic; the Spirit is the author of "new life" (7:6), that new life which breaks into a world under the reign of death and ushers in the new world of God, the world to come. The kingdom of God with its ultimate gifts of righteousness, peace, and joy, is present "in the Holy Spirit" (14:17). The apostles, the messengers of Christ, are Spirit-filled, Spirit-guided, and Spirit-empowered men; their ministry is a ministry of the new covenant, a ministry in the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6,8; cf. Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 2:4,13; 7:40; 2 Corinthians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5). To the Spirit they owe the revelation given them (1 Corinthians 2:10; Ephesians 3:5; 1 Timothy 4:1) and their inspiration (1 Corinthians 2:13; 12:8); their word is a word filled with the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4). Their word calls into being a new people of God "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:16). The characteristic token of this people is that the Spirit dwells in them, in all of them (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14; cf. Galatians 6:1). This Spirit-filled people live upon the threshold of the world to come, they breathe the air of the new world of God. The present working of the Spirit is the firstfruits, the beginning of the greater harvest of the world to come (Romans 8:23), the guarantee to God's people that they shall enter into the promised inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14). With the gift of the Spirit, God has set His seal upon His people, has marked them as His own forever, destined them for new, unending life with Him (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). What Jesus promised for the end of days, that His disciples should be called the sons of God (Matthew 5:9) is a reality already inaugurated in this people by the Spirit (Romans 8:14-16; Galatians 4:6) and therefore sure to be complete and

consummated (Romans 8:23). By the Spirit life belongs to this people, new life, eternal life, the life of God (Romans 8:6,10,11; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Galatians 6:8). The glory of the world to come shines on them now, and day by day they grow more like the Lord of glory, whose they are (2 Corinthians 3:18). By the Spirit they taste the powers of the world to come, and these powers of the Spirit are powers that move



“The Descent of the Holy Spirit Upon the Disciples”

men to obedience and enable them to walk according to the will of God. Men do not "enjoy" the Spirit or luxuriate in Him; they are "led" by Him and walk by Him (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:16,18,25). It is by the Spirit that men learn to call Jesus Lord and learn to serve, to use the Spirit's gift for ministry to all (1 Corinthians 12:3 ff.). The Spirit is the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:17), operative in the Word they hear (Ephesians 6:17), in Baptism and in the Supper of the Lord (Titus 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit guides their prayers (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18) and shapes their worship (Philippians 3:3). The Spirit is the power in their daily lives of hope (Romans 15:13; Ephesians 3:16); He puts upon those lives the impress of meekness (Galatians 6:1), of fidelity to one's trust (2 Timothy 1:14),

and of love (Romans 15:30; Colossians 1:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 13, which comes under the heading, "Concerning Spiritual Gifts," (1 Corinthians 12:1), and He inspires in men the will to unity (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:3,4; Philippians 1:27). The Spirit makes men's lives to be healthy, divinely normal lives; these lives know peace (Romans 8:6; 14:17). This peace is not the grim and quiet piety which sings psalms in a doleful dump and through its nose. Men who through the Spirit know this peace have access to the Father. Their lives are lives of liberty (Romans 8:21; 2 Corinthians 3:17), of sure hope (Romans 5:5), lives that glow (Romans 12:11), lives

of joy (Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6), lives with a high intoxication which breaks into song (Ephesians 5:18). All that the Christ is for His own is present and at work in the Spirit. Paul can even, on occasion, simply equate the Spirit and his Lord (2 Corinthians 3:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:11,17; 15:45). The life of the Spirit is "life in Christ Jesus." (Franzmann, pp. 138-141)



“The law of sin and death” stands in stark contrast to *“the law of the Spirit of life.”* Paul has already explained that the law in itself is not sin but that the just accusations of the law are used by sin to lead men to death. The reference here is to a state of being that is dominated or controlled by the two lethal powers *“sin”* and *“death.”* The tyranny exercised by sin and ending in death has been broken. The penalty has been paid and the damning accusations of the law have been satisfied. We have been set free from the condemnation and the curse. The liberator who has set us from this deadly dominion is rightly called *“the Spirit of life”* who accomplishes His work *“through Christ Jesus.”*

“The Law of Sin and Death” - “Everyone Afterwards”
1502 Woodcut by Master A.F.

Verses 3-4

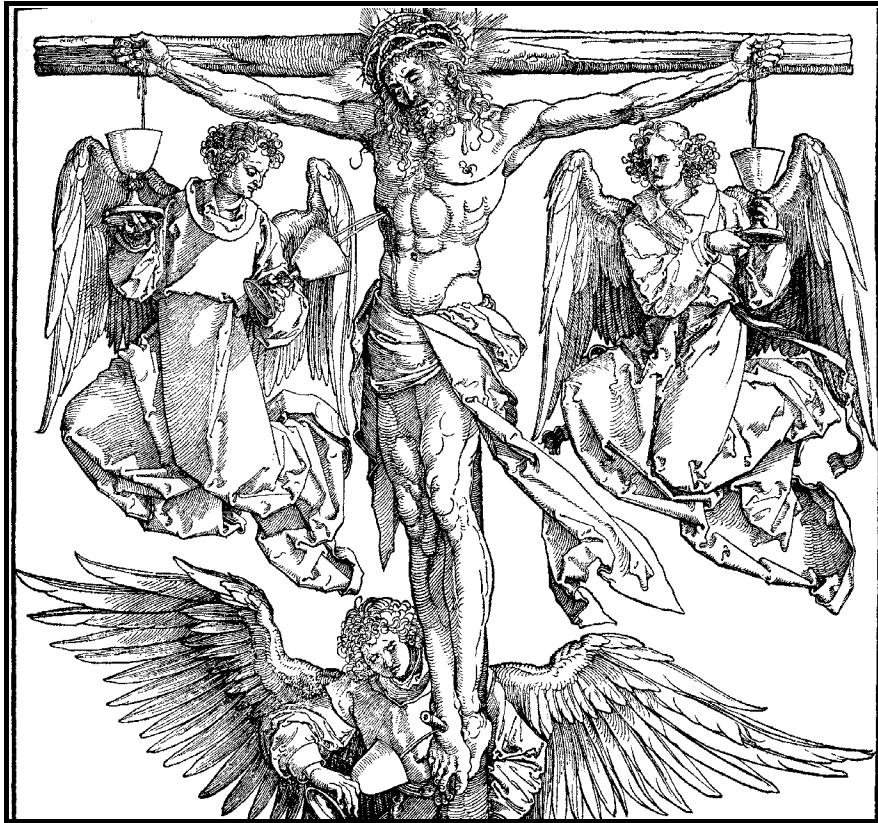
For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

“For what the law was powerless to do...” - The text specifically explains how our liberation from the realm of sin and death was accomplished. The theology of these two sentences is profound indeed. *“The sentence is freighted with meaning, every word in it is exactly right and deeply significant.”* (Lenski, p. 498) It is no exaggeration when John MacArthur contends: *“This verse is perhaps the most definitive and succinct statement of the substitutionary atonement to be found in Scripture.”* (MacArthur, p.405) The Spirit can liberate the believer from sin and death only because in Christ and His cross God has already condemned sin. This **“the law was powerless to do.”** The Greek text literally says - *“that which was impossible for the law.”* The law could not accomplish man's liberation from sin and death because **“it was weakened by the sinful nature.”** The defect here is not in the law itself but in the medium upon which the law must work, namely **“the sinful nature.”** Given the reality of our sinful nature, its obstinate resistance to the will of God, and our inability to rid ourselves of that sinfulness, the law cannot be the means of our liberation. The law commands righteousness but it cannot be our means to righteousness. The law demands perfection but it only serves to reveal our utter imperfection. The legalist, who bases his hope of heaven upon the law, is relying upon the law to do something which it cannot possibly accomplish. Luther uses this apt analogy:

“It is as with a sick man who wants to drink some wine because he foolishly thinks that his health will return if he does so. Now if the doctor, without any criticism of the wine, should say to him, “It is impossible for the wine to cure you, it will only make you sicker.” the doctor is not condemning the wine but only the foolish trust of the sick man in it. For he needs other medicine to get well, so that he then can drink his wine. Thus also our corrupt nature needs another kind of medicine than the Law, by which it can arrive at good health so that it can fulfill the Law.” (Luther, 25, p. 350)

“God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man...” - Therefore God determined another means to do what we could never have done for ourselves. That which God has done operates in a completely different category. It is **“apart from the law”** (3:21; cf. also 4:13-15). God accomplishes His saving purpose for humankind **“by sending His own Son.”** The noun **“Son”** is placed before the participle in the Greek text for special emphasis. It is modified with the emphatic pronoun **“His own.”** This dual emphasis highlights the divine relationship of Jesus to the Father, and the divine origin of the task to be accomplished. Christ is the eternal Son of God, the second member of the Holy Trinity (cf. John 1:1-5; Romans 1:3-4; Philippians 2:5-6; Galatians 4:4). At the same time, the text reminds us of the unique bond of love which unites the Father with **“His own Son”** (cf. Genesis 22:2).

This love becomes the basis for the divine plan of salvation. To describe Jesus as one



*“Christ on the Cross with Three Angels”
Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer - 1523*

who has been "sent" by God the Father is completely consistent with Christ's own view of His ministry. He repeatedly uses similar language (cf. Mark 9:37; 12:6; Matthew 15:24; John 20:21; 1 John 4:10). The concept of Jesus as One who has been sent serves to emphasize His authority as the representative of the Father who sent Him (cf. Galatians 4:4; Romans 10:15). God the Father sent His own Son ***“in the likeness of sinful man”*** (Greek - *“homoiona”*). Lenski identifies these words as *“one of those exact Scripture phrases which admit no change.”* (Lenski, p. 500) The words carefully affirm both the humanity and the sinlessness of Jesus. In Church History, the Docetists denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ. They contended that the Son of God did not truly become a man but that He only took on the appearance of a man (thus the title *“Docetism”* from the Greek *“doceo”* which means *“to seem”* or *“to appear.”*) The Ebionites, on the other hand, denied the sinlessness of Christ, and wrongly insisted that in order to be fully human Christ also took on the sinful

nature of fallen mankind. Paul's meticulous language avoids both errors. The Word of God became flesh (John 1:14), Christ was truly human but He was, nonetheless without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21). This is precisely the meaning of the phrase ***"in the likeness of sinful man"*** - full humanity without the taint of our sinful nature. This is humanity as it was originally meant to be. Christ was human as our father Adam was human before his fall into sin. Only thus could our Lord have undone the deadly damage done by Father Adam. Douglas Moo describes the careful balance maintained in the text:

"Paul is walking a fine line here. On the one hand, he wants to insist that Christ fully entered into the human condition, became "in-fleshed," and, as such, exposed Himself to the power of sin (cf. 6:8-10). On the other hand, he must avoid suggesting that Christ so participated in this realm that He became imprisoned "in the flesh" (cf. the negative use of this phrase in 7:5 and 8:8,9) and became, thus, so subject to sin that He was personally guilty of it. "Homoioioma" rights the balances that the addition of "sinful" to "flesh" might have tipped too far." (Moo, pp.479,480)

"To be a sin-offering." - This phrase expresses the mission upon which the Son of God was sent. He sent Him to expiate sin by His sacrificial death. This is the center and foundation of Paul's Gospel (Romans 3:25). The entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed forward to the once for all sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross. The 17th century orthodox Lutheran theologian David Chyrtaeus offers this helpful description of the role of the Old Testament sacrifices:

*"The sacrificial system was the nerve and sinew of the priesthood or ministry of the Jewish church, and the sinew of the public assemblies in which there occurred a general proclamation and transmittal to posterity of the true doctrine concerning God and His Son, our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who was to be offered as victim for the entire human race...Beyond that the sacrifices were primarily representations or types of the sacrifice and benefits of Christ which are set forth in the New Testament. For the Levitical sacrifices did not merit the forgiveness of sins, nor did they placate the wrath of God; they were only signs to bring to mind the future sacrifice of Christ, which alone was a ransom for the sins of the human race. Colossians 2:17 speaks of this purpose of the sacrificial system when it says that the Mosaic rites were "**shadows of things to come, but the body is of Christ.**" Hebrews 10:1 reads: "**The law had a shadow of the good things of eternity, not the very image of the things.**" Likewise Hebrews 8:4-5: "**The Levitical priests that offer gifts according to the law should serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses received the admonition, See that thou make all things according***

to the archetype showed to thee in the mount." All these statements with regard to Christ's sacrifice are pertinent, and especially so are the New Testament assertions that the blood of Christ has been shed for the remission of our sins. For all these testimonies at the same time constitute and antithesis to the blood of lambs and of other



"Deliverance in the Blood of the Lamb" by Rudolf Schäfer

animals which was shed in the Levitical sacrifices and by which no one was freed from sin or attained to the remission of sins before God - as 1 Peter 1:18,19 proves: "We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish," not by the blood of a lamb in perennial sacrifice, daily poured out; not by the blood of a lamb offered at the Passover, not by Abel's lamb; etc. 1 John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." 1 John 1:7: The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son (not the blood of Mosaic sacrifices)cleanses us from all sin." Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14; "In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Hebrews 10:4,14 (and cf. Hebrews 9): "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins," but Christ "by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Ephesians 5:2;

"Christ hath given Himself for us, and offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor." These pronouncements should be kept before our eyes as a profound interpretative commentary on all the Mosaic sacrifices whenever we read Leviticus, so

that we may have no doubt that each and every sacrifice was a sermon on the sacrifice and benefits of Christ." Chytraeus, pp.59-60)

"And so He condemned sin in sinful man." - The death of Christ on the cross was not only a sacrificial death, it was also a "penal" death, that is to say, a death which paid the penalty of God's righteous judgement upon sin. God "**condemned sin**" as a convicted criminal. The Greek verb is once again the forensic "*katakrinen*," the technical term for both the pronouncement of sentence by the judge and the execution of punishment. God executed His judgement upon the sin of the whole world in the person of His Son. The just condemnation that our sins deserved has been poured out in full upon Christ, our Sin-bearer. Thus, sin's power to damn and condemn us has been broken once and for all. Accordingly, **"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** (vs. 1) A delightful reversal has taken place. The sin which once condemned us is now itself condemned in the sacrificial death of His own beloved Son. The NIV's translation of the conclusion of the phrase, **"in sinful man,"** fails to reflect both the literal meaning and the intent of the Greek text. The original words are "*en ten sarki*," which means "*in the flesh*." The reference is to the physical death of the God/man, Christ, upon the cross. In a wonderfully ironic manner, death, which has always served as sin's faithful ally and the decisive demonstration of sin's victory, is transformed into the very means of sin's defeat and destruction.

"In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be met in us..." - The ultimate purpose and goal of this plan is now defined. The just demands of the law could not be overlooked. The holiness and justice of a righteous God would not allow for permissive indulgence. This is the very reason why God sent His Son. As always, the language of the text is most carefully chosen. Paul does not indicate that we must fulfill the law's demands or that those demands may be fulfilled by us. Such an assertion would deny the Gospel and place the burden of our salvation squarely back upon our own shoulders. Sin was condemned in the flesh **"in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us."** The verb, **"might be fulfilled,"** is passive. Fitzmyer correctly notes:

"The fulfillment spoken of here is in no sense achieved by Christians themselves; it is something which God, the author of all, works in us through the Spirit as a consequence of the Christ event. There is a fulfillment of the moral demand...but this righteousness is entirely the creation of God operating through the Spirit."
(Fitzmyer, p. 487)

The Law, proposed as a basis for the achievement of righteousness, is “*powerless*” (vs.3) because of the total corruption of man's sinful nature. Therefore, the result of all Law religion must be frustration and damnation. But the law remains the expression of God's will and its demands must be met. Now God has condemned the sin which once condemned us in the innocent death of His Son for the sins of humanity “*in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.*” The perfect life and innocent death of our Savior/Substitute are credited to us by God's gracious decree of justification and in this way the law's demands have been met. This is the “*happy exchange*” of which Luther speaks:

"Accordingly, the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were his own, and whatever the soul has, Christ claims as His own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them, and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's." (Luther, AE, 31, p.351)

The law's just demand is fulfilled in Christians not through their own acts of obedience but through their incorporation into Christ. His perfect submission to the will of God becomes ours by faith. He fulfilled the law; and, in Him, believers also fulfill the law - perfectly, so that they may be pronounced righteous and free from condemnation.

Those in whom the just decree of the law has been fulfilled in Christ are characterized as people “*who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*” God has broken sin's mastery of our lives in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is not to say that Christians have become perfect people who no longer sin. The agonizing struggle of the preceding chapter clearly reveals the impossibility of that view. But God in His grace has made possible what was impossible for the law because we no longer “*live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*” This powerful phrase describes the sanctification in life which is the result of our pardon and justification. “*God not only provides in Christ the full completion of the law's demands for the believer, but He also sends the Spirit into the hearts of believers to empower a new obedience to His demands.*” (Moo, p.485) The verb “*live*” is the Greek “*peripateo*” which literally means “*to walk around.*” It refers to the customary, routine, daily activity that comprises the lifestyle of the individual. “*To live according to the sinful nature*” is to have one's life determined and ruled by the old way of sin and death; to live rebellion against God. To live “*according*

to the Spirit," on the other hand, is to live under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit. Believers now strive to live according to God's Word and will not because of the law's coercive demands and the threat of damnation, but in joyful, willing, eager response to what God has done for us in Christ. Dr. Stöckhardt observes:

“That we Christians do not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit shows that the Spirit has really freed us from the law of sin and death. That is the reason why there is no more judgement of condemnation for us. We, with our real ego, serve God's law and walk after the Spirit. The converted, out of the weakness of their corrupt flesh and blood, indeed daily sin much and serve the law of sin, even though unwillingly, because the flesh clings to them all the days of their life. But the flesh does not govern their life and conduct. They walk after the Spirit. The Spirit of God predominates in them and determines their deeds. Their walk thus coincides with God's law, though their fulfillment of the law is not perfect and their deeds fall short of what they desire to do. Because the Spirit rules in them, God does not reckon to them the weakness of their flesh after Christ atoned for all the sins and transgressions of men.” (Stöckhardt, p. 101)



“The Holy Trinity at Work in the Church Through the Means of Grace” by Lucas Cranach the Younger

Verses 5-8

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

"Those who live according to the sinful nature..." - In these verses the apostle defines the radical difference between living according to the sinful nature and living according to the Spirit. The explanation is introduced by the Greek conjunction "gar" ("for") which links that which now follows to the preceding comments. The NIV omits this connection.

The connection between the Spirit and life, on the one hand, and the sinful nature and death, on the other, is absolute and unbreakable. The first great class or category of mankind are ***"Those who live according to the sinful nature."*** James Dunn offers the helpful translation - *"those who exist in terms of the flesh."* These are the unregenerate. They are presented first of all in terms of their orientation or mind set. These are people who define themselves and live out their lives without reference to God and His will. These are people who ***"have their minds set on what that nature desires."*** They have willfully chosen to live for self and this pattern of so choosing has become so well established that the chooser is no longer aware of its selfishness. Lenski explains:

"They consider and concern themselves with the interests, the objects, and the affairs of the unchanged, old fleshly nature, to satisfy the cravings, the desires, the passions, etc., of this nature. This is the occupation of all their thinking; they are unable to rise higher; the higher world is closed to them." (Lenski, p. 504)

"But those who live in accordance with the Spirit..." - The other class or category of humanity is exactly the opposite. Those who belong to God are concerned about godly things as the necessary result of their relationship with God. Because the Spirit lives in Christians they are no longer dominated by the things of the sinful nature. A profound change has taken place within those whom the Spirit has set free. This transformation effects not only their identity but their behavior. Despite their many spiritual failures, their basic orientation and innermost spiritual concerns have to do with ***"what the Spirit desires."***



*"Death Reaping His Harvest and Hunting His Prey"
15th Century Bohemian Woodcut*

"The mind of sinful man is death..." - The contrast continues with a definition of the respective results or consequences of life in each of these two categories. The inevitable result and inescapable consequence of the mind set of sinful man is *"death."* Sinful man is dominated by and obsessed with death. Like the moth drawn to the fatal flame, fallen mankind deals in death and is drawn toward death. In Psalm 49, the psalmist characterizes the death obsession of sinful humanity in this way:

"This is the way of those who are foolish, and of those after them who approve of their words. As sheep they are appointed for Sheol (the place of the dead); Death shall be their shepherd; and the upright shall rule over them in the morning and their form shall be for Sheol to consume." (Psalm 49: 13,14)

Wise King Solomon warns that worldly foolishness can have only one outcome:

"For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life...Many are the victims she has drawn down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death." (Proverbs 2:18,19; 7:26,27)

"Whoever fails to find Me hurts himself; all who hate me love death...There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 8:36; 21:6)

"But the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." - The contrast is complete and absolute. For ***"the mind controlled by the Spirit"*** the certain result is ***"life and peace."*** These words do not denote a subjective state of mind but an objective reality. This is the salvation into which the believer has entered. The death dominance of the old way of sin is replaced by the present reality of abundant life in Christ and the sure promise of life everlasting in heaven. Harmony with God has been restored and thus there is a sense of well-being and security in the knowledge that all is as it should be. As the old Gospel Song rejoices: *"What a blessedness, what a peace is mine: leaning on the everlasting arms!"*

"The sinful mind is hostile to God..." - The third mode of contrast is one's attitude toward God. ***"The sinful mind is hostile to God."*** The adjective ***"hostile"*** (Greek - *"exthra"*) is a forceful term which refers to personal animosity, hatred, dislike, and opposition. The sinful nature rises up in active opposition to that which God desires. This enmity is the precise opposite of the peaceful harmony ascribed to the mind controlled by the Spirit in the preceding phrase. This explains why the mind-set of the flesh must lead to death. There is no indifferent in-between. No neutrality is possible. Without the Spirit's mind-set, found only through union with Christ, people can only order their lives in a way that is hostile to God and to all of His purposes. The inevitable result of this hostility is the experience of God's wrath. The text goes on to explain the nature of this hostility: ***"It does not submit to God's law nor can it do so."*** The sinful mind, hostile to God, also rejects and defies the law as the expression of God's will.

"Every thought product of the sinful flesh rebels against God's law. God and the law are in its way, and it hates them and wants them removed from its path. Often the very existence of God is denied; new moral codes are invented, or an amorality is set up in order to allow the sinful flesh all the indulgence that it wants." (Lenski, p. 506)

There is no possibility that the sinful mind will transform itself and submit to God and His law. The nature of original sin, and the resultant total depravity of all Adam's naturally born descendants, rules out even the theoretical potential for a self-induced cessation of natural man's hostility toward God. The assertion of the text is absolutely categorical: ***"It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those***

controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Sinful men live not for God but for themselves.

"All people, by nature derived from Adam, are incurably 'bent' toward their own good rather than the good of others or of God. The various sins to which we are attracted - desire for riches, or station in life, or power, or sexual pleasure - are but different symptoms of this same sickness, this idolatrous bent toward self-gratification." (Moo, p. 489)

The sinful man is incapable of and uninterested in pleasing God. John MacArthur points out that the concept of "*pleasing God*" is a consistent theme in Pauline theology.

*"Men were created for the very purpose of pleasing God. At the beginning of the practical section of this epistle Paul says, **"I urge you therefore, 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. And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."** (Romans 12:1-2). In a similar way he admonished the Corinthians, **"whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to God"** (2 Corinthians 5:9; cf. Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 4:18). He exhorted the believers in Thessalonica **"to walk and please God, just as you actually do walk that you may excel still more."** (1 Thessalonians 4:1) (MacArthur, p. 419)*

Verse 9

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature..." - The shift to the other side of the contrast is indicated by the adversative conjunction "***however***" (Greek - "*de*"). The status of the justified Christian is completely different than that of the unregenerate human being. We have moved from one realm to another. There is a new and different dominant and decisive reality. It is not possible to be in both simultaneously. Sin does not disappear, but it is no longer in control. No Christian can be controlled by sin, and every Christian is by definition controlled by the Spirit. Pentecostal pretensions notwithstanding, Paul argues that every Christian is indwelt with the Holy Spirit. The possession of the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand with being a Christian. Christianity without the presence of the Holy Spirit is an impossibility.

"And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

"Paul's language is positional: he is depicting the believer's status in Christ, secured for him or her at conversion...Subject to physical decay and death, prone to sin, tempted to let the flesh take control of us again we may be - but to do justice to Paul we must insist that the believer is "freed from the law of sin and death (8:2; cf. 5:12-21), "dead to sin's power" (6:1-23), and no longer "in the flesh." (Moo, p.490)



"Wherever there is Faith - there is love. Wherever there is Love - there is Peace. Wherever there is Peace - there is God. And wherever God is - there is nothing lacking at all." - Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1927

Paul addresses the Roman Christians directly, ***"You, however, are controlled..."***. That which has been asserted in reference to those who live according to the sinful nature does not apply to the Christians in Rome. Note that the language here is indicative not imperative. Paul is simply stating the facts, not urging or ordering. Note also the inter-changeable language of the verse. The Holy Spirit is described as both ***"the Spirit of God,"*** and ***"the Spirit of Christ."*** This Spirit is equally God's and Christ's within the divine Trinity; thus the language of the Nicene Creed - ***"who proceedeth from the Father and the Son"*** (Latin - ***"filioque"***).

Verses 10-11

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

"But if Christ is in you, your body is dead..." - The physical body of the believer remains subject to mortality. Death is the result of sin. All must die for all have sinned and ***"The wages of sin is death."*** (Romans 6:23) But for the Christian death has been transformed and becomes the passage to eternal life in heaven with Jesus. Even while we exist in these mortal bodies our ***"spirit is alive because of righteousness,"*** that is to say, because of the justification imputed to us in Christ we already experience the abundant life for which man was created and we anticipate the perfection of that life in the eternity prepared for us in the mansions of heaven. The appropriateness of the Spirit's role as the Life-giver flows from the breath of God which brought life to Adam's inanimate clay in the beginning (Genesis 2:7; cf. Ezekial 37:1-14).

"And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead..." - The Holy Spirit also plays an instrumental role in the restoration to be accomplished in the resurrection of all flesh. The Spirit is here identified as ***"the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead."*** The reference is, of course, to God the Father (cf. Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4). The resurrection of Jesus is of crucial significance as the harbinger of the great resurrection to come on the Last Day (cf. Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 15). The same life giving Spirit who restored life to the corpse of the God/man on the third day, will restore life to all on the day of resurrection. The presence of that divine Spirit within us now is the pledge of the eternal life that will one day be ours.

Verses 12-14

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation - but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

"Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation..." - The text now shifts from the indicative to the imperative. Having described the facts of our situation, the apostle proceeds to urge the Christians in Rome to live in a manner consistent with their new

reality in Christ. That shift is indicated by what the grammarians call the "*emphatic inferential*," (English - "*Therefore*;" Greek - "*ara oun*" - literally "*now therefore*"). The use of these conjunctions indicates a compelling conclusion to be drawn from what has just been said. For the fourth time in the epistle, Paul addresses the Romans with the intimate title, "*brothers*," and he is careful to include himself in his own admonition - "*we have an obligation*." "*We have an obligation*" - literally, "*we are people who owe a debt*" (Greek - "*opheiletai*"). This term is unusual in Biblical Greek. It occurs only three other times in the New Testament. It means someone who is legally obligated to pay a debt. Paul asserts that as Christians we are people with a debt to pay, we have an obligation, we are indebted. But that obligation is not "*to the sinful nature*." We owe nothing to the old way of sin and death. We are under no



"Blessed is the Man who Does not Walk in the Counsel of the Wicked"
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1927

obligation "*to live according to it*." The implication is obvious. Our obligation is to the Spirit. Our loyalty and commitment must be to Him and our resolve must be to live according to the will of God. This is the debt owed to Christ Jesus who has graced us with His Spirit.

"We are of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, we are sons, children, heirs, co-heirs with Christ to be glorified with Him. Can we then live as though we were none of these, as though we were still entirely flesh, going forward to nothing but death?"
(Lenski, p. 515)

"For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die..." - Death is the only possible result of a life dominated by the sinful nature. The death in question is not merely the separation of the body and the soul, physical death. No, the stakes here are much higher. This is eternal death in hell, permanent separation from God and His love as the penalty for sin. The fact that this warning is addressed to the Roman Christians serves as a helpful reminder that the *"once saved - always saved"* mentality that afflicts much of Protestant Christendom is false comfort, a highly dangerous delusion. The believer who allows the sinful nature to regain its dominance and control in his life will forfeit salvation. Faith cannot co-exist with a persistent pattern of willful deliberate sin. The Law/Gospel paradox of Scripture is clearly evident in this section. That which God has done for us in Christ is the sole and exclusive basis for our salvation. Our salvation is not dependant upon anything that we do, say, or believe. And yet the Bible urges us ***"to put to death the misdeeds of the body"*** and warns that if sin is allowed to regain its rule within us we will most surely die. How the promise of the Gospel and the warning of the Law are to be reconciled with one another is beyond human comprehension. We simply believe all that which Scripture says even when we cannot comprehend or correlate it. Dr. Siegbert Becker eloquently argues that this willingness to permit the Word of God to be decisive is of the essence of the Christian faith.

"The doctrine of preservation in the faith as it is taught in the Lutheran Church, confronts us with another apparent contradiction. This doctrine too illustrates very clearly how Lutheran theology differs from that of Rome on the one hand, and that of Geneva on the other, in the matter of dealing with seeming contradictions. The very terminology employed is significant. What Calvinism calls the perseverance of the saints, a term which lays the stress on the activity of the believer, Lutheranism calls preservation in the faith, a term which lays emphasis on the work of God. The Scriptures present us with two sets of passages in this doctrine which reason finds difficult to harmonize. There are both statements in Scripture in which God promises to preserve us in the faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13; John 10:28,29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; 1 Corinthians 1:8) and statements which warn us against

falling from the faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:10; Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 1:19; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 6:4-6; Philippians 2:12; Romans 11:20-22). The promises of God are to be believed. Not to believe them would be to call God a liar. The believing child of God reading these promises, should be convinced that he will never fall away, that God will never suffer him to be tempted above that he is able, that no man shall ever pluck him out of his Savior's hand, that no creature shall be able to separate him from the Father's love, that the Spirit of God will complete the



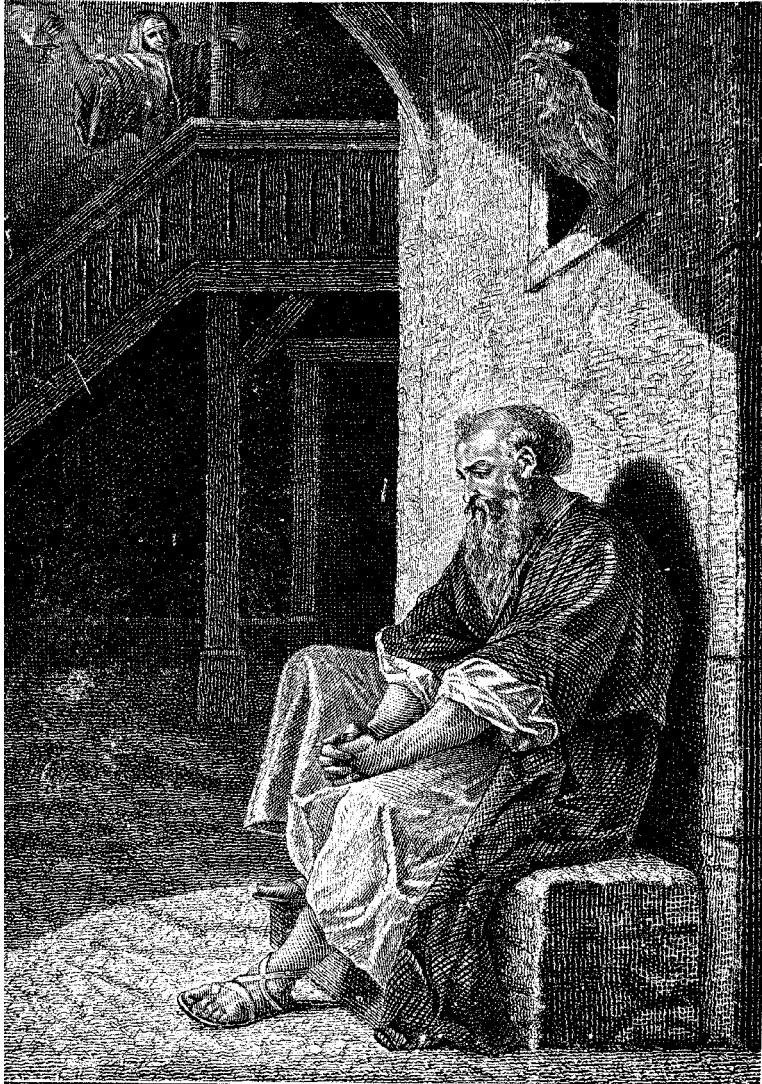
“Peter Betrays Christ”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Carl Zimmermann

work which He has begun in him. On the other hand, all the warnings of God are to be observed with care. God does not jest. His words should be taken at their face value. And the believing child of God who takes these warnings seriously will be sure that he is in constant danger of falling away from the faith, that he may be a castaway, that he may make shipwreck of the faith, for he is not one whit better than Hymenaeus and Alexander, he is not stronger than Peter, he is not less subject to temptation than David, he is no wiser than Solomon, he is no less attracted to the world than Demas, and so he lives in fear and trembling. It is clear that we are here dealing with a rational difficulty. Calvinism looks at the promises and draws from them the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. "Once a believer, always a believer!" says the Calvinist. The warnings are either ignored or made to agree with the axiom "Once converted always converted!" A Lutheran finds difficulty in seeing

one can thus interpret the words of Jesus regarding those who "for a time believe and in time of temptation fall away." But in pursuing its course, it must be said, that Calvinism remains true to the law of contradiction. It holds that as long as there is a real possibility of falling away, there can be no complete and perfect assurance of perseverance. The Roman Church, on the other hand, characterizes all certainty of salvation as proud presumption. When the promises of God are held before them, they respond that some men may have a special revelation from God. Only they can be sure of their salvation. But the ordinary Christian has no such assurance, and he can have no such assurance. "Let him that thinketh he standeth," they say, "take heed lest he fall." We must live in fear and trembling all our lives and hope that we may be able to overcome. Only if we look at the warnings of God will we be able to avoid carelessness and indifference in our Christian living. Romanism holds that if men are not kept in fear, they will be led into carnal security and will fall away. Reason finds it impossible to see how the man who is convinced that he can fall, that he may fall, that he is in great danger of falling away throughout his earthly life, can also be perfectly sure that he will never fall away. One answer that Lutheranism gives is that the contradictory heart of man needs a contradictory doctrine. The heart of man, desperately wicked, still even in the converted Christian, is inclined to become proud. Like Peter it is inclined to say, "Though all should be offended because of you, yet I will never be offended." (Matthew 26:33) Like an immature teenager it responds to expressed concern over its salvation with, "Don't worry mother, I can take care of myself." To convince man that he cannot take care of himself, to make him realize that by himself he is lost, that he should never become careless and indifferent in his faith and life, the Lord has given us these serious and earnest warnings which mean exactly what they say and are not to be changed or modified in any way. But the heart of man is also a timid, quaking heart, which so often needs reassurance. When its feet have slipped into the slough of despondency, there is only one way that it can be helped. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. When I am weak, then I am strong. For when I know that I cannot remain faithful, that I cannot persevere, for I am frail and helpless, then the Lord comes with the blessed assurance that no man shall pluck me out of his hand. And so, every day, the Christian, as long as he remembers and believes the promises, will be sure that he will never fall away. There is no logic that avails here. We must simply hear and believe - believe it when God tells us that we are in danger, believe it when God tells us that we are in no danger...Thus the Christian must learn to live in constant tension between these two. When he begins to lean over to the left, toward pride and presumption and confidence in the strength of his faith, and to trust in his own character, then the warnings against apostasy, the Savior's "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation," pushes him upright once more. But usually man, even the Christian man, whose heart is never fully what it ought to be, begins to lean over to the right - he becomes afraid and begins to doubt that he will ever make it to the gates of the heavenly city. Once again the Savior comes and stands on the other side to support him and push him upright once more with his promise, "Do not fear, for

I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." (Isaiah 41:10) And he knows that when his pilgrimage comes to an end, "all the trumpets" will be blowing "for him on the other side." (Becker, The Foolishness of God, pp.217ff.)



"The Repentance of Peter"
19th Century Bible Illustration

living out the life placed within us by the Spirit who has taken up residence within." (Moo, pp. 495,496)

"But if you live by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body..." - Living by the Spirit necessitates the mortification of ***"the misdeeds of the body."*** There is a beautiful irony in the language of the passage. We are told that there is a living that brings on death and there is a dying that makes alive and keeps alive.

The Holy Spirit remains the basic source of empowerment as we strive to put to death the sinful conduct of our old way of life.

"While the Christian is made responsible for this mortification of sins, he or she accomplishes this only "through the Spirit." Holiness of life, then, is achieved neither by our own unaided effort - the error of moralism or legalism - nor by the Spirit apart from our participation - as some who insist that the key to holy living is "surrender" or "let go and let God" would have it - but by our constant

Human activity is clearly necessary in the process of sanctification, but that activity is always prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The intensity of the conflict here described dare not be underestimated, as the preceding chapter has shown. This combat is a mortal one; we go on living the spiritual life only by killing these vicious

deeds that want to destroy this our life. We keep on doing it as long as we are in this body that is prone to sin in a sinful environment. The battle is waged every day, as in contrition and repentance the Old Adam and his works are put to death within us.

"Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." - The explanation now proceeds one more crucial step. The Spirit not only dwells within us to give new life and put to death the misdeeds of the sinful nature, but He also restores the intimate relationship with God for which mankind was created in the beginning. To be led by the Spirit is to be a child of God. By birth we are children of Adam but by new birth in the Holy Spirit we are children of God. This is a new and different perspective which has not been touched on before in the epistle. Its potential for Christian living is obvious and abundant. In the Old Testament, the Children of Israel are often referred to as the *"sons of God"* (i.e. Deuteronomy 14:1; Isaiah 43:6; Hosea 2:1) to emphasize the close relationship between God and His people. Thus this will not be an unfamiliar idea to the Christians in Rome.

The verb in this phrase ***"are led"*** (Greek - *"agontai"*) is in the durative present tense and the passive voice - thus literally, *"are being led"* indicating continuous ongoing action carried out upon the subject. The active agent is ***"the Spirit of God"*** who continually leads and guides the people of God throughout their earthly lives. The divine Spirit, of course works through the objective means which God has established, namely the written Word of God, lest we fall prey to the leading of our own feelings and fallible fancies. Lenski emphasizes:

"The truth not to be overlooked is the fact that, although the Spirit dwells in us (vs.9), and thus leads us by inward prompting, He does so only by means of His outward, written Word. To be sure, that Word is also in us (it abides in us, John 5:38), and only in this way does the our hearts, none other. We can verify the fact that the Word that is in us is the Spirit's own Word that is leading us, by comparing it with the Spirit lead us by means of it, but it is the written Word that we hold in written Word. Only by means of the written Word do we know that the voice inwardly prompting us is, indeed, the Spirit's own and not some hallucination that is afflicting our mind." (Lenski, p. 520)

Verses 15-17

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba," Father. The Spirit

Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings that we may also share in His glory.



"The Restoration of the Prodigal" 19th Century Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you..." - Having introduced the concept of Christians as the children of God, the apostle now proceeds to explain the implications of this startling idea. Douglas Moo notes: *"Paul's description of the Spirit's work in conferring sonship forms one of the most beautiful pictures of the believer's joy and security anywhere in Scripture."* (Moo, p. 499) Slavery here implies coercion and compulsion. The authority of the master is maintained by fear of punishment and the imposition of physical force. As Paul has already explained (6:16ff.), slavery to God is true liberation - *"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is*

eternal life." (6:22; cf. also 2 Corinthians 3:17 - *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*") Our bondage to the law and the passions of the sinful nature were ended when we became Christians (cf. 7:6). The verb ("*you did not receive*") is in the Greek aorist tense which indicates completed past action, thus recalling for the Romans the moment of their conversion. The Spirit that believers have received does not return them to the state of fearful anxiety which was previously their status, the dread of the unjustified sinner before the righteous judge. Thus Paul's language - "*that makes you a slave again to fear.*" Instead, the presence of this Spirit brings about an entirely new condition.



*"The Counsel of the Trinity"
Woodcarving from the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Oberammergau, Bavaria*

In total contrast to "*a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear*" (literally - "*a slavery spirit*") is the "*spirit of sonship.*" The word

"*sonship*" (Greek - "*huiiothesia*") is a most significant term. It was a technical, legal term in the Greco-Roman world expressing the legal assumption of a person into the status of sonship within a natural family. The individual adopted in this way received thereby all of the legal rights and privileges which would ordinarily accrue to a natural child. In fact, in the eyes of the law, there was no difference in the status of the adopted child and the natural child. John MacArthur notes:

"In the Roman culture of Paul's day, an adopted child, especially an adopted son, sometimes had greater privilege and prestige than the natural children...At the death of the father, the favored adopted son would sometimes inherit the father's title, the

major part of the estate, and would be the primary progenitor of the family name. Because of its obvious great importance, the process of Roman adoption involved several carefully prescribed legal procedures. The first step totally severed the boy's legal and social relationship to his natural family, and the second step placed him permanently into his new family. In addition to that, all of his previous debts and other obligations were eradicated, as if they had never existed. For the transaction to become legally binding, it also required the presence of seven reputable witnesses, who could testify, if necessary, to any challenge of the adoption after the father's death." (MacArthur, p.436)

Paul uses the same concept in Galatians 4 to describe the status of the individual believer in Christ: ***"But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4:4-5) Later in Romans the same term also serves in a corporate sense to summarize God's unique relationship with Israel (9:4). The point of this powerful image is that God has graciously acted on our behalf with the result that we have come to be included in His family. *"In adopting us, God has taken no half measures; we have been made full members of the family and partakers of all of the privileges belonging to members of that family."* (Moo, p. 503) The presence of the Spirit is the result, in a sense the confirmation, of the action of God the Father who has adopted us as His children.

"And by Him we cry, 'Abba , Father.'" - As the adopted children of God we enjoy the comforting conviction that we may approach God with the intimate confidence with which dear children approach their dear Father. The verb ***"we cry"*** (Greek - *"krazein"*) refers to a loud shout or exclamation and carries the connotation of deep emotional intensity. Luther describes this cry as one too powerful for words *"Which exceeds and breaks through the powerful and horrible cries of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. It penetrates the clouds and heaven, and it reaches all the way to the ears of God."* (Luther, 26, p. 381)

The phrase utilizes both the Greek (*"pater"*) and the Aramaic (*"abba"*) words for father. The combination of the two titles felicitously unites a term of tenderness and endearment well-known by the Jews with its Greek equivalent. This combination was carried over into the liturgical usage of the early church in Greek speaking Christian communities. The original Aramaic word is especially important. It is an informal term of dependance and affection, the equivalent of the English words *"Daddy"* or *"Papa."* The use of this particular Aramaic term carries profound significance.



“The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Rudolf Schäfer

Joachim Jeremias, the great German Lutheran New Testament scholar, provides the background and context of the word in the Bible along with a moving commentary as to its significance:

*“Yes, here there is something quite new, absolutely new - the word **“abba.”** From the prayer in Gethsemane, Mark 14:36, we learn that Jesus addressed God with this word and this point is confirmed not only by Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, but also by the striking oscillation of the forms for the vocative “O Father” in the Greek text of the gospels, as oscillation which is to be explained only through the fact that the Aramaic term “abba” lies behind all such passages. With the help of my assistants, I have examined the prayer literature of late Judaism - a large, rich literature, all too little explored. The result of this examination was that in no place in this immense literature is this invocation of God as “Abba” to be found. How is this to be explained? The Church Fathers Chrysostom, Theodor of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus who originated from Antioch (where the populace spoke the west Syrian dialect of Aramaic) and who probably had Aramiac speaking nurses,*

testify unanimously that "**Abba**" was the address of the small child to his father. And the Talmud confirms this when it says, "**When a child experiences the taste of wheat** (i.e. when it is weaned) **it learns to say "abba" and "imma"** ("Daddy" and "Mommy"). "**Abba**" and "**Imma**" are thus the first sounds which the child stammers. But these terms were not limited to small children; grown-up sons and daughters also used them to address their parents. "**Abba**" was an everyday word, a homely, family word, a secular word, the tender, filial address to a father: "**Dear Father.**" No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. Jesus did it always, in all His prayers which are handed down to us, with one single exception, the cry from the cross, "**My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46); here the term of address for God was prescribed by the fact that Jesus was quoting Psalm 22:1. Jesus thus spoke with God as a son would with his father, simply, intimately, securely, filial in manner. But His invocation of God as "**Abba**" is not to be understood merely psychologically, as a step toward growing apprehension of God. Rather, we learn from Matthew 11:27 that Jesus Himself viewed this form of address for God as the heart of that revelation which had been granted Him by the Father. In this term "**Abba**" the ultimate mystery of His mission and His authority is expressed. He to whom the Father had granted full knowledge of God, had the messianic prerogative of addressing him with the familiar address of a Son. This term "**Abba**" is a manner of speaking unique to Jesus and contains in a nutshell His message and His claim to have been sent from the Father. The final point, and the most astonishing of all, however, has yet to be mentioned; in the Lord's Prayer the Lord Jesus authorizes His disciples to repeat the word "**Abba**" after Him. He gives them a share in His Sonship and empowers them, as His disciples, to speak with their heavenly Father in just such a familiar, trusting way as a child would with his father. Yet He goes so far as to say that it is this new childlike relationship which first opens the doors to God's reign: "**Truly, I say to you, unless you become like children again, you will not find entrance into the kingdom of God**" (Matthew 18:3). Children can say "**Abba**"! Only he who, through Jesus, lets himself be given the childlike trust which resides in the word "**abba**" finds his way into the kingdom of God. This the apostle Paul also understood; he says twice that there is no surer sign or guarantee of the possession of the Holy Spirit and of the gift of sonship than this, that a man makes bold to repeat this one word, "**Abba, dear Father**" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Perhaps at this point we get some inkling why the Lord's Prayer was not a commonplace in the early church and why it was spoken with such reverence and awe. "**Make us worthy, O Lord, that we joyously and without presumption may make bold to invoke Thee, the heavenly God, as Father, and to say, Our Father.**" (Jeremias, pp.19-21)

Martin Luther adds his own profoundly reverent insight into the implications of this phrase for our understanding of the nature of our relationship with the God who has adopted us as His own children:

"This is indeed a very short word, but it includes everything. Not the lips, but the feelings are speaking here, as though one were to say, "Even though I am surrounded by anxieties and seem to be deserted and banished from Thy presence, nevertheless, I am a child of God on account of Christ; I am beloved on account of the Beloved." Therefore, the term "Father," when spoken meaningfully in the heart, is an eloquence that Demosthenes, Cicero, and the most eloquent men there have ever been in the world cannot attain. For this is a matter that is expressed, not in words but in sighs, which are not articulated in all the words of all the orators; for they are too deep for words." (Luther, AE 26, p.385)

Verses 16-17

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.

"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit..." - Hebrew law prescribed that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter was to be established (Deuteronomy 17:6; cf. Matthew 18:16; John 5:31-37). Similarly, there are two witnesses to one's salvation; one's own personal experience of the intimate relationship which we enjoy with the God whom we can address as ***"Abba, Father,"*** and the Holy Spirit Himself who confirms the believer's realization that he has indeed been made God's own child through faith in Christ. The witness of the Spirit takes place in and through the Word of God, as the Spirit places the promises of the Word before us and enables to claim those promises as our own through the faith which He Himself has given us. Lenski offers the following pertinent word of caution:

*"Here again we should not think of immediate testimony apart from, outside of, or above the written Word. All such supposed testimony is **Schwaermerei**, the evidence of not only a spiritual but also a mental pathological condition. The Spirit indeed puts the Word into our heart and in this way testifies in us; but we can ever verify that Word and testimony by the Scriptures. This testimony of the Spirit is thus objective, one that reaches us from the outside and from another person...We ourselves need and must have a second witness. The world is full of self-deluded men who think that they are this and that when they are completely mistaken...How do we know that we are not equally or similarly deluded? It is because of the Spirit's testimony in the written Word." (Lenski, p. 254,255)*

Thus, the believer's assurance of salvation rests upon the combined testimony of his intimate access to the "*Abba, Father*" and that of the Holy Spirit Himself as He addresses us in the countless Gospel promises of the written Word which He then enables us to personally appropriate by faith. It is pertinent to note that in both instances we do not seek that assurance of salvation within ourselves, our progress in sanctification or the intensity of our faith. Instead, the apostle urges us to call upon God as our Father and to look away from ourselves to Him who established the relationship. Like young



"Speak Lord, for Thy Servant Heareth"
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1927

Samuel in the tabernacle in the days of the judges we are called to respond to the Word of God with humble receptiveness - "*Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*"

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs..." - Having asserted our membership in the family of God and our identity as His children the apostle now presents the inference to be drawn from the fact of sonship. In Greco-Roman practice, the basic purpose of adoption was to provide for a suitable heir. Central to Jewish self-perception was the understanding the Israel was the Lord's inheritance, the people chosen out of all the nations of the earth to be His own (cf. Deuteronomy 32:9) Israel's special relationship with God has now been extended to all who are in Christ. We who are God's children in Christ have a share in the inheritance that God has prepared for His own. As God's children, we are also His heirs and as such we will **"share in His glory."** (cf. 1 John 3:2) Paul defines this more precisely by declaring that we are also **"co-heirs with Christ."** As the children of God we are brothers and sisters of Christ who is the Son of God. In the preceding verse we were accorded the precious privilege of sharing in Christ's *abba*-relationship with the Father. Now we are specifically designated as His **"co-heirs."** In these words we are reminded that Christians inherit the blessings of God's kingdom only through and in Christ. With

St. Paul we can rejoice:

"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...also we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." (Ephesians 1:3,11)

We are sons of God because we belong to the Son of God. God has appointed His Son to be "***heir of all things.***" (Hebrews 1:2) We share in that glorious inheritance by grace through faith. It is "***an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade - kept in heaven for you.***" (1 Peter 1:4)

Our oneness with Christ, however, does not only pertain to glory. We who "***share in His glory***" are also called upon to "***share in His sufferings.***" Suffering is the ordained path to glory. Thus it was for Christ (1 Peter 1:11), and thus it must also be for us. It must be carefully emphasized that believers do not contribute to the accomplishment of expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. These great works were fully and absolutely accomplished in Christ alone. His suffering, unlike ours, was vicarious, that is, in the place of and on behalf of others. Our suffering has no atoning power, not even for ourselves. Our suffering is both the sign and the result of our identification with Christ and our consequent rejection of sin and its dominance in our lives (cf. John 15:18; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:10; Philippians 3:10,11; 1 Peter 4:12,13; 5:10). Paul confidently and even joyfully declares his own identification with the suffering and death of his Lord:

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh." (2 Corinthians 4:8-11)

Two great hymns of the church express these truths with stunning beauty and power. The first is the Reformation chorale, "***Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus,***" written in 1653. The hymn emphasizes our intimate identification with Christ both in suffering and in glory:

"Let us suffer here with Jesus, to His image e'er conform;

*Heaven's glory soon will please us, sunshine follow on the storm.
Tho' we sow in tears of sorrow, we shall reap in heavenly joy;
And the fears that now annoy shall be laughter on the morrow.
Christ, I suffer here with Thee, there, oh, share Thy joy with me.*

*Let us gladly live with Jesus; since He's risen from the dead,
Death and grave must soon release us, Jesus, Thou art now our Head,
We are truly Thine own members; where Thou livest there live we.
Take and own us constantly, faithful Friend as Thy dear brethren.
Jesus, here I live to Thee, also there eternally."*



*"Haste Then On From Grace to Glory"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

The second is the classic English hymn "*Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken*" written in 1824 by Henry Francis Lyte. Lyte's development of the theme closely parallels the thought of this segment of Romans 8, promising glory after suffering and urging dependance upon the "*Abba-father*".

*"Let the world despise and leave me, they have left my Savior too.
Human hearts and looks deceive me, Thou art not, like them, untrue.
And while Thou shalt smile upon me, God of wisdom, love, and might,
Foes may hate and friends may shun me, show Thy face and all is bright.*

*Go then, earthly fame and treasure! Come, disaster, scorn and pain!
In Thy service pain is pleasure; with Thy favor loss is gain.
I have called Thee Abba, Father! I have stayed my heart on Thee.
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather, all must work for good to me.*

*Haste, then, on from grace to glory, armed by faith and winged by prayer;
Heaven's eternal day before Thee. God's own hand shall guide thee there.
Soon shall close the earthly mission, swift shall pass thy pilgrim days,
Hope soon change to glad fruition, faith to sight and prayer to praise."*

The balance of Romans Chapter 8 (Verses 18-30) comprise what has aptly been called the great "*Consolation Section of Romans.*" These words of comfort and encouragement have always been an abundant resource for the people of God in time of trouble. Modern man views the world as a closed system in which suffering is a harsh, grim reality that can never be explained or justified. The pervasive pain all around us serves only to drive men to bitter cynicism or bleak despair. For the Christian, suffering is placed in a larger context which acknowledges the reality of that pain while at the same time affirming the confident expectation that pain and suffering are not the final word. There is more to this world than meets the eye. "*The present and the visible can be understood only in the light of the future and the invisible.*" (Leenhardt, p. 511) R.C.H. Lenski summarizes the substance of the text in this way:

"It presents a worldview that is at once so lofty and so profound as to leave behind all non-scriptural conceptions. The whole creature world is made to depend on what God does with His children. Going back to the fall of Adam which plunged the creature world into vanity and corruption, the Christian hope is made nothing less than the fulfillment of the expectation of even this creature world. In the midst of a groaning world we pray, but one far greater, the Spirit Himself, makes our prayers what they should be. For above this vast whole, so sadly deranged, is the hand that makes all things work together for good to us according to His eternal purpose, the realization of which is sure. Paul is stirred into asking triumphant, challenging questions, the answer to which is Christ and the love from which no power whatever is or will be able to separate us. With this triumphant assurance Paul closes. Here there are eyes that do see the realities, a mind that penetrates to God's design working in them all, and the faith that moves with sure tread to lead us to God's own

goal with certainty. Revelation expressed in inspiration, and both divine!"
(Lenski, p.528,529)

Verse 18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.



*"The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus"
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer*

"I consider that our present sufferings..." - The Greek text begins with the conjunction "gar" ("for") which serves to indicate that the following is an elaboration and explanation about what has just been said in reference to suffering with Christ so that we may also be glorified with Him. The NIV omits the conjunction and thus obscures the continuity of the text.

Paul offers the sanctified judgment of the believer - *"I consider"* (Greek - "*logizomai*"). This verb literally refers to numerical calculations, thus the KJV

translation "*reckon*." It is typically used in the New Testament to express a settled conclusion which comes from the standpoint of faith. This is a statement of firm conviction.

"Our present sufferings" (Greek - "*pathema*") refers not only to that suffering which must be endured for Christ's sake, but to suffering in general, some of which is the result of our own folly, and some of which is the inevitable result of life in a world that is cursed by sin. The sum total of all the suffering that is experienced in the course of our earthly lives (Greek - "*tou nun kairou*"). Over against *"our present sufferings"* on the other side of the comparison is *"the glory that will be revealed in us."* "*Glory"* (Greek - "*doxa*") refers to the radiance of heaven and the dazzling

brightness and magnificence of the divine presence. The goal of God's saving purpose from the beginning has been to restore fallen man to share once again in the glory of his Creator. (cf. Romans 2:7,10; 5:2; 8:21; 9:23; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:17; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 1:27; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:10; Hebrews 2:10; 1 Peter 1:7; 5:1,4,10; 2 Peter 1:3) This glory is not yet ours but it is on the way; it is not present but future. The Greek text literally says "*the coming glory*" ("*mellousan doxan*").

Paul's language stresses both its certainty and its imminence. It is now hidden from earthly view, but it "***will be revealed.***" When the glory is unveiled we will not merely be spectators but actual participants for this divine glory "***will be revealed in us.***" The comparison is introduced using the language of weights and measures - "***Are not worth comparing.***" The Greek word is "*axios*" from the verb "*ago*" which means *to drive,* "*lead,*" or "*cause to move.*" In this context, it refers to something that is heavy enough to cause motion in a balance, or as we would say, to tip the scales. Lenski captures the concept precisely: "*Place all the sufferings into one pan of the scale and the coming glory into the other pan; the pan with the former flies into the air as if it were holding only a few feathers.*" (Lenski, p. 530) Paul expresses the same thought in 2 Corinthians 4:17, which closely parallels this text. "***For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.***"

Verses 19-21

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The creation waits in eager expectation" - "***Eager expectation***" comes first in the Greek text to give particular emphasis. The Greek word "*apokaradokia*" literally means "*to watch with the head stretched away from,*" hence the image a person craning his or her neck to see what is coming. The term denotes eager, confident expectation. There is no uncertainty here whatsoever, but a yearning for that which is definitely on the way. This sense of eager expectation is predicated of "***the whole creation.***" Everything that the Lord God made was part of the perfect environment for the perfect creature fashioned in His image, man. At the end of the sixth day of

creation the Lord God assessed all that He had made: *"And God saw all that He had made and it was very good."* (Genesis 1:31) All that changed with man's fall into sin. The devastating impact of sin and death was not only experienced by humanity but by the entire physical environment. The natural world of matter, plants, and animals was transformed to reflect the grim consequences of man's rebellion against His Maker. In a typically Old Testament manner (cf. Psalm 65:12-13; Isaiah 24:4; Jeremiah 4:28; 12:4), Paul personifies the subhuman creation in an effort to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of both humanity's fall into sin and believer's restoration to glory. We are not alone in eagerly waiting for the glory to be revealed. That disclosure of divine glory will occur when *"the sons of God"* are revealed. All of creation waits with us, yearning to see the day when all will be set right, and God's



"Cursed is the Ground on Account of You" by Rudolf Schäfer

original plan and purpose for that which He has made will be restored.

"For the creation was subjected to frustration..." - What is the creation's interest in the revelation of the sons of God? Why this eager anticipation on the part of the material universe? The apostle explains that as a result of sin, creation itself is not what it should be. It has been **"subjected to frustration."** In the Genesis account of man's fall into sin God had warned Adam: **"Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field."** (Genesis 3:17,18). This segment of Romans 8 now offers what has aptly been called **"Paul's commentary on Genesis 3:17,18."** (Murray, p. 303) The noun **"frustration"** (Greek - *"mataiotes"*) describes creation's predicament. This is the New Testament equivalent of the **"vanity"** of the Old Testament's book of Ecclesiastes. It means **"emptiness"**, **"futility"**, or **"purposelessness."** It denotes the state of ineffectiveness of something that does not attain its goal or has not become that which it was meant to be. Creation did not bring this sorry state upon itself. It was **"subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it."** The reference here is to God, who alone has the authority to issue the cosmic condemnation as the result of human sin. But from the beginning neither man nor creation were without hope. The first promise of the Gospel, the **"protoevangelium,"** was given in the immediate aftermath of the fall (Genesis 3:15; cf. Romans 16:20)

"That the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay..." - The hope in which creation waits is here defined. The cosmos is currently in **"bondage to decay."** The good creation of God became a slave to material corruption, decay, and death. The term **"decay"** (Greek - *"phthora"*) refers most literally to the putrefaction and decomposition of that which is dead. In this instance the reference is somewhat broader indicating the perishability and powerlessness of the created universe as the deadly consequences of sin are expressed and implemented through it. The creation waits in anticipation of **"liberation."** This is a theme which Paul has sounded before, in regard to liberation from sin (6:18,22) and from the law (7:3; 8:2). Now we are told that the cosmos itself will also be set free. Thus the physical world is not only a spectator of humanity's liberation and triumphant glory but it also has a share of its own in that which is to come, namely, **"the glorious freedom of the children of God."** The reign of dissolution and death will be overthrown and God's original intent for the universe will be restored once again. John Murray notes:

"The creation is to share, therefore, in the glory that will be bestowed upon the children

of God. It can only participate in that glory, however, in a way that is compatible with its nature as non-rational. Yet the glory of the children of God is one that comprises the children also and must not be conceived of apart from the cosmic regeneration."
(Murray, p. 305)



*"The Watchmen on the Heights Are Crying"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

Verses 22-23

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

"We know that the whole creation..." - The phrase *"we know that"* (Greek - *"oidamen gar hoti"*) is used to introduce a familiar and widely accepted idea, a commonly recognized truth which does not need to be demonstrated or proven. All of the cosmos, *"the whole creation,"* is involved in this waiting process. The yearning for

deliverance that characterizes the entire universe is expressed in "**groaning**." The classic Lutheran commentator Philippi has rightly asserted: *"The entire creation, as it were, sets up a grand symphony of sighs."*

The nature of creation's anticipation is aptly expressed in the imagery of labor and birth. Jesus uses the same comparison in John 16:20-22.

"You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

The pain of labor is the result of sin (Genesis 3:16). Yet, the pain is temporary and constantly anticipates the joy to come. These are not the woes of impending death but the pangs of new life. The pain of labor is tempered by the knowledge that when the suffering is over a beautiful child will have been born. So also the travail of creation is directed toward the hope of restoration and regeneration. John Calvin writes:

"As creatures have a hope of being hereafter freed from corruption, it hence follows that they groan like a woman in travail until they shall be delivered. But it is a most suitable similitude; it shows that the groaning of which he speaks will not be in vain and with effect; for it will at length bring forth a joyful and blessed fruit." (Cited in Murray, p. 305)

This text appears to resolve the longstanding debate between so-called annihilationists (including many of the orthodox Lutheran fathers) and restorationists (including, most notably, Martin Luther himself). An annihilationist is one who contends that on the last day the present universe will cease to exist and will be replaced by a new heaven and earth which God will create at that time (cf. Psalm 102:25-27; 2 Peter 3:10-11; Revelation 20:11; Isaiah 34:4; Luke 21:33; Job 14:12). A restorationist is one who argues that the new heaven and earth of eternity will be the restoration and purification of the original creation to the condition in which God fashioned it in the beginning. This passage decisively supports the restorationist view. Lenski summarizes:

"So the creation too, will at last be glorified. What Paul says about it in this section settles the question raised by some other passages as to whether the creature world will finally be annihilated. The "liberty of the glory" cannot have a double meaning: blessed eternal glory for the children of God, annihilation for the creation. To call the latter a liberation is an odd use of language indeed...The teaching of the entire Scripture is to the effect that God's plans are never defeated, that he does not replace, but restore." (Lenski, p. 538)



*John's Vision of the New Heaven and Earth"
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1932*

"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan..." - The creation's "grand symphony of sighing" is now linked to that of the children of God. The same eager hopefulness demonstrated by the expectant creation is predicated of God's people "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit." We have already tasted the bounty of the coming harvest in the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. He is the guarantee of that which is to come; the down payment, so to speak, of the glory yet to be revealed. He is the beginning of God's saving work and the pledge that God's work of salvation will be fulfilled within us.

The verb "groan" (Greek - "stenazo") is characteristically used of the moaning occasioned by pain or oppression as God's people cry out for deliverance. "Groan inwardly" indicates not outward verbal expression, but the inward, nonverbal sighs which indicative of a certain attitude. This groaning is not the result or the expression of uncertainty or anxiety as to whether God will keep His promises but frustration over our current condition and

eagerness for the full realization of God's glory.

That for which we are yearning is *"our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* As previously stated, Christians are adopted into the family of God at the moment of their justification. Yet there is a sense in which this adoption will remain incomplete until we experience the perfection of heaven. St. John clearly affirms this in his first New Testament letter: *"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* (1 John 3:2) This is but another dimension of the already but not yet tension of the Christian life. The end time perspective of this segment is further indicated in the phrase which follows to explain *"our adoption as sons"* as *"the redemption of our bodies."* The *"frustration,"* the *"bondage of decay"* to which the material world has been subjected is nowhere more evident than in our physical bodies and their susceptibility to disease, aging, pain, and death. We long for the day when these bodies will be glorified and the rigors of sin's dominion will be gone forever. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:35-57)

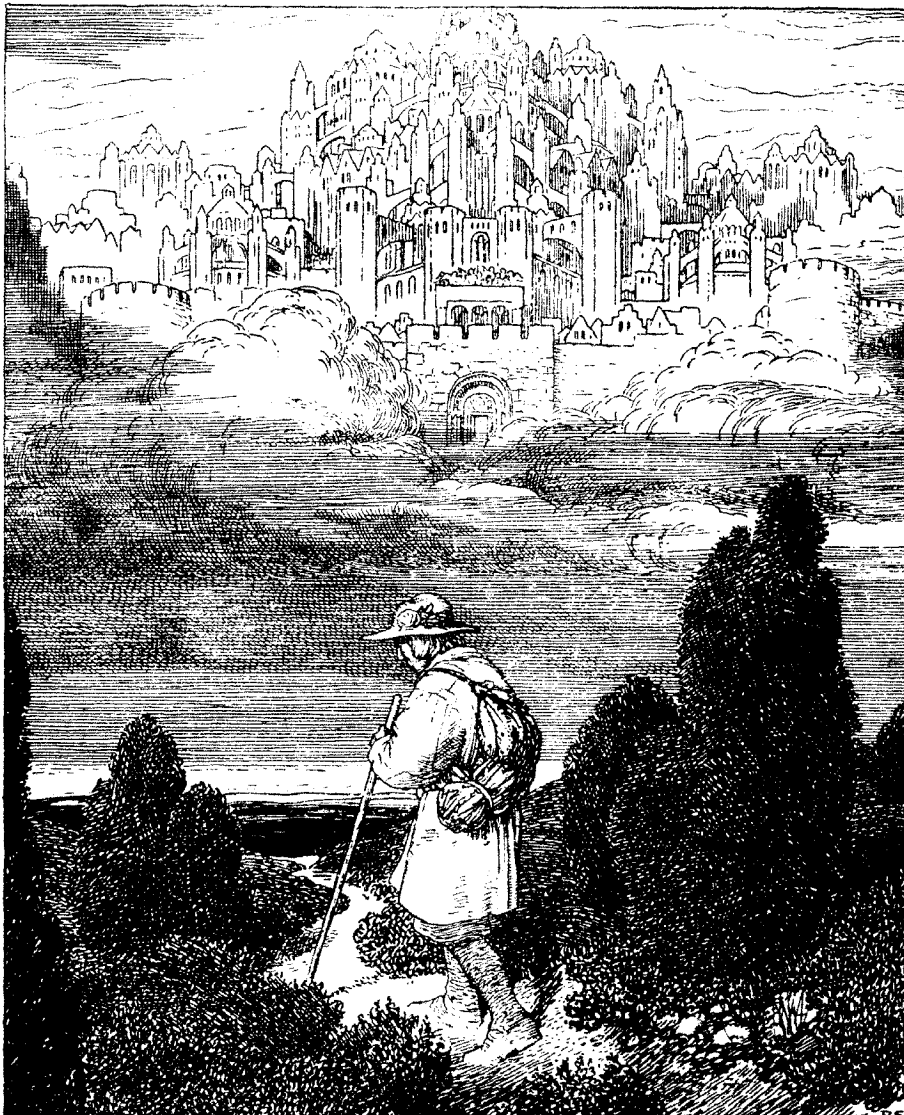
Verses 24-25

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

"In this hope we were saved..." - In Verse 20 we had been told that the entire creation waited *"in hope"* to be liberated from its bondage to decay. In the same way Christians, whose salvation has already been fully accomplished, also look forward to the great day when God's glory will be revealed in us. That which God has done for our salvation in Christ enables us to live *"in hope."* Thus St. Paul urges the Thessalonians not to sorrow *"like the rest of men who have no hope."* (1 Thessalonians 4:13) Without Christ, there is no hope. Without Christ, we have nothing to look forward to. But the Christian, justified by faith and baptized into Christ can live in anticipation of the eternal salvation which God's Son has already achieved. Lenski contends that this phrase is a "dative of advantage" and should more precisely be translated *"for this hope we were saved."* The theologians call this an *"eschatological perspective,"* that is to say, a way of looking at life that focuses not on the present but on the future; not merely on things as they are now but on things as they will be at the end of time when the Lord returns again. The creative tension between already and not yet is of the essence of the Christian experience. D.

Martin Lloyd-Jones expressed this perspective very clearly. Dr. Lloyd-Jones wrote:

“Hope is the measure of true Christianity which is through and through otherworldly. Pseudo-Christianity always looks chiefly at this world. Popular Christianity is entirely this worldly, and is not interested in the other world. But true Christianity has its eye mainly on the world which is to come. It is not primarily concerned even with deliverance from hell and punishment, and all the things that trouble and weary us. That really belongs to the past. True Christianity “sets its affection on things which are above, not on things which are on the earth.” (Quoted in Boice ,2, p.884)



“Living in Hope” by Rudolf Schäfer

“Hope” (Greek – *“elpidi”*) is the term which captures and expresses that concept. This is one of the great words of the New Testament. There is no hint of uncertainty

here. Unlike the hopes of men which are often little more than wishes which we have no power to fulfill, the **“hope”** of the believer is the steadfast confidence of faith based upon the sure promises of the Word of God. It is a **“sure and certain hope.”** Hence the inspired writer to the Hebrews can rightly describe hope as **“an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”** (Hebrews 6:19) The hope of the believer is directed solely toward God and that which He has done for us in Christ. St. Peter writes: **“Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** (1 Peter 1:13) The hymn writer Edward Mote says it well:

*“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”*
(TLH # 370)

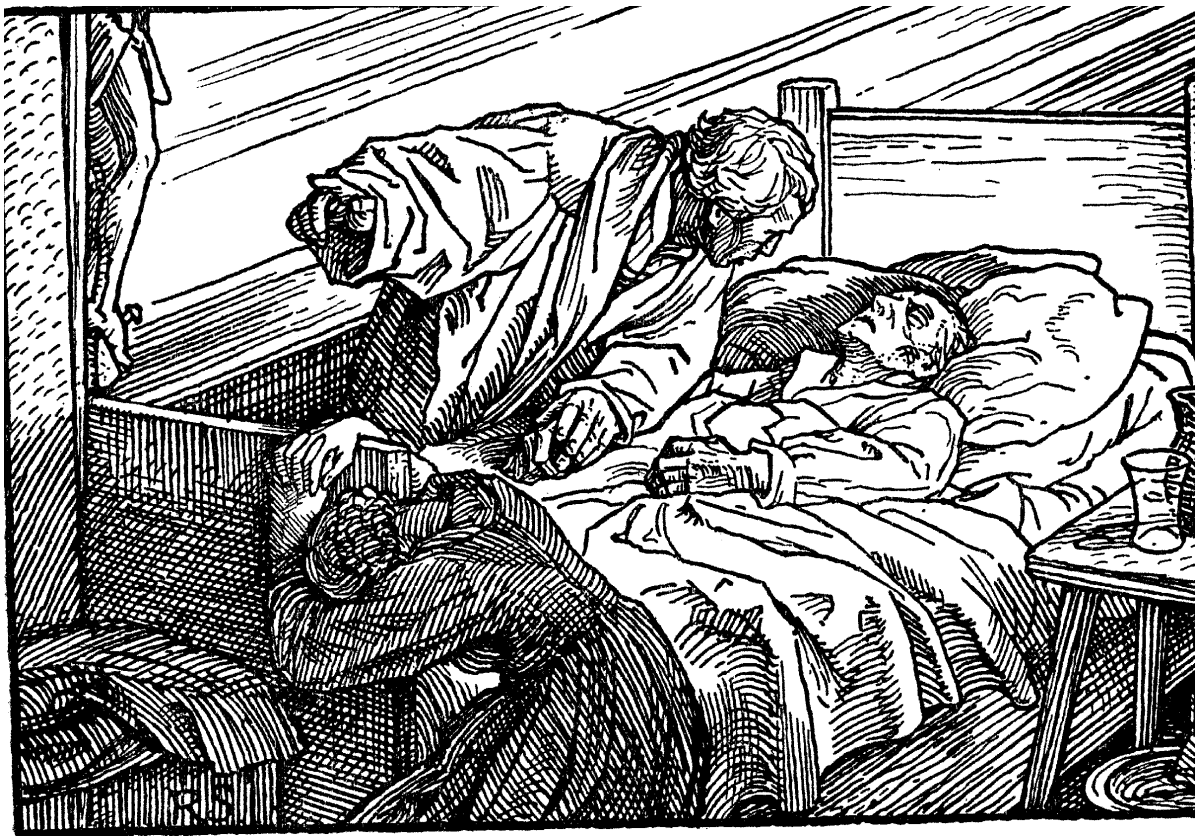
“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?” - The contrast between that which is seen and that which is unseen becomes the basis for this explanation of the nature of hope. Hope obviously anticipates that which is to come. It is the element of expectation which defines hope. The day will come when that for which we now hope will be fully revealed. Then we will walk by sight and not by faith. But until that time, we believe in that which God has promised and eagerly look forward to the perfect fulfillment of all of God’s gracious promises to us. Using the same contrast between the seen and the unseen, the apostle expresses the substance of our hope in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

So also the writer to the Hebrews notes: **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** (Hebrews 11:1)

“But if we hope for what we do not yet see, we wait for it patiently.” - The confident hope of the believer is characterized by an attitude of humble patience and endurance. Calvin comments on this phrase: **“Hope, then, ever draws patience with**

it.” The term “*patiently*” (Greek – “*hupomones*”) suggests the connotation of bearing up under intense pressure. It is an active, not a passive, concept. It expresses itself in vigorous service for Christ, even as we eagerly wait for His appearance. Like the rest of creation we are, as it were, standing on tiptoe craning our necks to catch the first glimpse of His imminent arrival. Patience is an attitude regularly commended to Christians who are called upon to endure severe trials (cf. 5:3-4; James 1:3,4; 5:11; Revelation 13:10; 14:12). The word literally means “*remaining under*” and thus describes the willingness of the believer to submit to the plan and the purpose of God as we wait for His glory to be revealed.



“Hope at the Hour of Death” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verse 26

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” - Sustained by the solid

hope that God has given us, we wait out our time in patient endurance. As we do so, the Holy Spirit Himself, stands by our side and comes to our aid. Paul links his assertion of the Spirit's assistance to that which has gone before with the conjunctive phrase "*in the same way.*" In this way he indicates his progression to the third reason why the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed. To our solidarity with all of creation, and the steadfast hope of the believer is now added the intercession of God the Holy Spirit.

The NIV translation of the verb "*helps*" lacks the force of the original. The Greek "*synantilambanomai*" literally means "*to bear a burden along with.*" It is used in the Old Testament to describe the work of the seventy elders who are chosen to assist Moses in bearing the burden of Israel's leadership (cf. Exodus 18:22; Numbers 11:17). In the New Testament, this is the word Martha uses in her complaint to Jesus about her sister's failure to help with the meal preparation - "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work alone? Tell her to help me!*" (Luke 10:40) In this instance the image is that of the Holy Spirit shouldering a burden which we in our weakness are unable to carry.

The "weakness" of man denotes the totality of the human condition; the corruptibility of the body and the subvertedness of the flesh which are the result of our inherently sinful nature. In this instance, the consequence of that condition is that "*We do not know what we ought to pray.*" The English text here may be somewhat misleading, suggesting nothing more than an inability to formulate or articulate our prayers. The Greek text of this phrase literally says; "*for that which we are to pray for as we should we do not know.*" Sin renders man incapable of either identifying his own most fundamental needs or expressing those needs in prayer. Like our first parents and their pathetic fig leaves (Genesis 3:7) we are unable to recognize our real problems. We deny, pretend, and avoid. We evade responsibility and shift blame. We are chronically self-focused and seek the immediate satisfaction of our own wants and desires (i.e. Paul's repeated prayer for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, 2 Corinthians 12:3-9). Hence, the fact that "*we do not know what we ought to pray*" is not merely a matter of inarticulateness. It's not just that we cannot put it into words. We actually don't know what we ought to be praying for. We cannot express that which we cannot comprehend.

"But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."
- The remedy for our inability to know what we should be praying for is the intercession of God the Holy Spirit on our behalf. Paul's language here is

reminiscent of Christ's description of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the "**Paraclete**." (John 14:15-31; 15:26; 16:13) This Greek title literally means "*one who is called alongside of another to provide aid.*" The term is often translated as "*Comforter*," "*Advocate*" or "*Counselor*." An intercessor is one who pleads the case of another. We do not know what to pray for or how to pray so the Holy Spirit comes to our aid and does for us that which we could not do for ourselves. He "**intercedes for us**," He prays on our behalf to the heavenly Father. This intercession takes the form of "**groans that words cannot express**." This is the third time in Romans 8 that Paul has referred to "**groans**" (Greek – *stenagmois*). In Verse 22 the groaning of all creation signaled its longing for deliverance. In Verse 23, believers were said to groan inwardly as they waited for the redemption of their bodies. Now, in Verse 27, it God the Holy Spirit who intercedes on our behalf with "**groans**." The continuity of the language serves to unify the message of the text. Fitzmyer notes:

"Paul mentioned earlier that Christians groan together with the groaning material creation (8:23); now he affirms that the Spirit too groans with Christians who have hope and long for the glory of the risen life. It is not that the Spirit Himself hopes for such glory, but that He enables Christians by His assistance to formulate the proper prayer of hope. In so doing, the Spirit bears testimony to the status of the Christian life and its destiny." (Fitzmyer, p.517)

The prayer language of the third member of the divine Trinity is "*ineffable*," that is, incapable of being expressed in human language. (The Greek word is "*alaletois*," that is, "*laleo*" the Greek word for intelligible human speech, combined with the negative prefix "*a*." Hence, literally, not in intelligible speech) This clearly rules out the charismatic claim that the prayer language of the Holy Spirit is a form of speaking in tongues. It is rather a form of communication which clearly transcends our capacity to comprehend and express. Dr. Stöckhardt writes:

"The Spirit groans and pleads and intercedes for us before God. The Spirit does this in our hearts. From our hearts, the groanings of the Spirit arise to God. We can feel and experience something of this groaning and longing of the Spirit in our hearts. Because they are the groanings of the Spirit they are thus unspeakable, too sublime and profound for us...With this, His mighty intercession, incomprehensible yet perceptible to us, He, at the same time, supports and sustains our weak groanings and prayers, so that they do not altogether cease but finally attain their goal. Every believing Christian has experienced this help of the Spirit. When the cross presses severely, when we feel ourselves alone and forsaken, when we find no friend, no comforter, no person who really understands our troubles and burdens, when our prayers will not come forth properly, we experience in our hearts an undefinable,

unspeakable lamentation, a powerful groaning and longing, which goes through the very marrow and moves the organs of the body, which tears us out of our miseries and permits us to taste of the powers of the future world. It is as though another, a Stronger One, takes hold of our unsteady heart and raises it up, directs it to God, so that we again look and pray to God more joyfully and trustfully. That is the assistance, the intercession of the Comforter, of the Holy Spirit.” (Stoekhardt, p.110)

The unique effectiveness of the Spirit’s intercession on our behalf that perfect accord exists between God (“**He who searches our hearts**” cf. 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39;



“The Holy Trinity” by Rudolf Schäfer

Psalm 7:9; 17:3) and “**the mind of the Spirit.**” This is what one commentator has aptly described as “*intertrinitarian communication.*” (MacArthur, p.467) God knows us better than we know ourselves. No secrets are hidden from Him. He looks into the depths of our heart and soul, the very place where the Spirit’s ministry of intercession takes place. God not only “*knows the mind of the Spirit,*” but is in full accord with the Spirit’s activity and purpose, and, in fact, that activity and purpose is an expression of His own will – “**because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.**” The beneficiaries of the Spirit’s intercessions are “**the saints**” (Greek – “*hagion*”). This literally means “*the holy ones.*” It is used in the New Testament in

reference to those who have been justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ. They have become holy through the blood of Jesus Christ shed for them upon the cross.

From the perspective of human reason this is a perplexing passage. We are dealing here with the most profound mysteries of the doctrine of the holy Trinity. The human mind which seeks to plumb these infinite depths would do well to remember this word of caution:

“Because the Spirit’s will and the Father’s will are identical, and because God is one, Paul’s statement seems unnecessary. But he is pointing up the truth in order to give encouragement to believers. Because the three persons of the godhead have always been one in essence and will, the very idea of communication among them seems superfluous to us. It is a great mystery to our finite minds, but it is a divine reality that God expects His children to acknowledge by faith. In this passage Paul emphasizes the divine intercession that is necessary for the preservation of believers to their eternal hope. We can no more fathom that marvelous truth than we can fathom any other aspect of God’s plan of redemption. But we know that, were Christ and the Holy Spirit not continually on guard on our behalf, our inheritance in heaven would be reserved for us in vain.” (MacArthur, p.469)

Paul Gerhardt, the great hymnist of Lutheran Orthodoxy, composed his magnificent chorale, *“If God Himself Be For Me”* on the basis of this passage. He catches the sense of the text precisely, and expresses its comforting assurance for the believer with powerful clarity:



“Paul Gerhardt” by Rudolf Schäfer

*“If God Himself be for me, I
may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me my
foes confounded fly.
If Christ, my Head and
Master, befriend me from
above,
What foe or what disaster can
drive me from His love?
His Spirit in me dwelleth, and
o’er my mind He reigns.
All sorrow He dispelleth and
soothes away all pains.
He crowns His work with*

*blessing and helpeth me to cry,
“My Father!” without ceasing, to Him who dwells on high.*

*And when my soul is lying weak, trembling, and opprest,
He pleads with groans and sighing that cannot be exprest;
But God’s quick eye discerns them, although they give no sound,
And into language turns them, e’en in the heart’s deep ground.*

*To mine His Spirit speaketh sweet words of holy cheer,
How God to him that seeketh for rest is always near
And how He hath erected a city fair and new,
Where all that faith expected, we evermore shall view.*

*My merry heart is springing, and knows not how to pine;
‘Tis full of joy and singing, and radiancy divine,
The Sun whose smiles so cheer me is Jesus Christ alone;
To have Him always near me is heav’n itself begun.”*

(TLH # 528)

Verse 28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good...” - Now another mighty word of comfort is added. The whole creation is groaning in eager anticipation. The steadfast hope of believers sustains and strengthens us as we patiently look forward to the revelation of His glory. God the Holy Spirit is Himself interceding on our behalf. Despite all this, in the weakness of our sinful flesh, surrounded by the trials and tribulations of life, with evil apparently triumphant on every side, it is all too easy for God’s people to become discouraged and afraid. And so, in the magnificent, supremely confident text the apostle affirms the almighty power and endless love of our sovereign God. Despite all appearances to the contrary our lives are being governed according to His purpose in a manner consistent with His plan for our salvation.

“We know,” that is, we as believers know. This is an expression of a basic faith conviction. It is not the result of rational deduction, empirical observation, or intellectual investigation. In fact, this confident affirmation is a repudiation of the visible evidence. It is, none the less, the common conviction of all who believe. This point need not be argued or demonstrated. It is a familiar and unchallenged part of the core belief of the Christian community of faith.



“In All Things God Works” by Rudolf Schüfer

“That in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...” - There is a bit of textual ambiguity in this well-known verse. The KJV translation – *“all things work together for good to them that love God”* - is supported by the majority of the Greek manuscripts. The NIV has chosen instead to follow the reading of a number of the earliest papyri which insert *“o theos”* (God) as the subject of the sentence. The majority reading is offered as an alternative in the margin of the NIV. Although there is little substantive difference between the two, it would seem best in this instance to follow the majority reading as reflected in the traditional KJV translation. *“All things”* (Greek – *“panta”*) is unrestricted and inclusive in the fullest possible sense. The phrase is utterly comprehensive without limitation or restriction of any

kind. Neither this verse nor its context allows for any exception or condition. Everything in our lives from the best to the worst is included in this incredible phrase. In the verses that follow the apostle will enumerate a few of things that he has in mind: ***“trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or the sword”*** (Verse 35); ***“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all of creation.”*** (Verses 38-39)

“Work together for good” - In the sovereign love and wisdom of God every factor, condition, and event in our lives converges upon and contributes to His gracious purpose for us as His people. The Greek verb (*“synergei”*) literally means to work with, to co-operate, to strive toward a common goal. ***“All things work together”*** - even the diabolical schemes of our Satanic enemy, along with sin and its painfully destructive consequences, are summoned into the service of God’s divine purpose. John Murray marvels: *“Many of the things comprised are evil in themselves and it is the marvel of God’s wisdom and grace that they, when taken in concert with the whole, are made to work for good. Not one detail works ultimately for evil to the people of God; in the end only good will be their lot.”* (Murray, p. 314)

The classic expression of this reality in Scripture is Joseph’s comment to his brothers. They had hated and resented him. They had betrayed him, sold him into slavery, and broken his father’s heart with a false report of his death. Carried away into captivity in a strange and distant land, he had endured bitter imprisonment. And yet, at the end of it all, Joseph, the believer, was able to say to his brothers: ***“You meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good.”*** (Genesis 50:20)

We must be careful to define the ***“good”*** toward which all things work together in God’s terms not ours. As the classic Lutheran chorale *“I Leave All Things to God’s Direction”* hymnist Salomo Frank warns:

*“The will of God must be my pleasure while here on earth is mine abode;
My will is wrong beyond all measure, it doth not will what pleases God.
The Christians motto e’er must be: What pleases God, that pleases me.
(TLH # 529)*

This passage is not a trite promise of earthly happiness, health, or prosperity for every believer, nor is it a divine guarantee that bad things will not happen to good people. God's "*good*" may include a great many things that are "bad" from man's point of



"Strength for the Journey" by Rudolf Schäfer

view. God uses sufferings and trials, the bad things of this life, to strengthen our faith and sharpen and renew our hope of life eternal. Douglas Moo says it well: "*The promise to us is that there is nothing in this world that is not intended by God to assist us on our earthly pilgrimage and to bring us safely and certainly to the glorious destination of that pilgrimage.*" (Moo, p. 530)

The classic Lutheran chorale, "*What God Ordains is Always Good*" ("*Was Gottes Tut, Das Ist Wohl Getan,*") by Samuel Rodigast (1675) has conveyed the comfort and the trusting submission of the believer to God's loving will that are the

essence of this great text to generations of humble Christians. The humble willingness to accept the plan and purpose of the God whose love I have come to know in Christ Jesus is at the heart of that comfort.

*"What God ordains is always good; His will abideth holy.
As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed in every need doth well know how to shield me.
To Him, then, I will yield me.*

*What God ordains is always good; He never will deceive me;
He leads me in His own right way, and never will He leave me.
I take content what He hath sent; His hand that sends me sadness
Will turn my tears to gladness.*

*What God ordains is always good. He is my Friend and Father;
He suffers naught to do me harm, tho' many storms may gather.
Now I may know both joy and woe, some day I shall see clearly*

*That He hath loved me dearly.
 What God ordains is always good. This truth remains unshaken.
 Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
 I fear no harm, for with His arm He shall embrace and shield me;
 So to my God I yield me."*

The text defines those for whom all things work together for good in two subordinate clauses, ***“of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”*** To speak of Christians as those who love God is uncharacteristic of Paul. Usually the apostle focuses on God’s love for us rather than our love for God. But here, in the original Greek, the phrase is placed first for particular emphasis. This is consistent with other Biblical texts which speak of the believer’s love for God in the context of God



“His Will Abideth Holy” by Rudolf Schäfer

gracious gifts to His people (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9; James 1:12; 2:5). Man’s love for God is a response. It does not and cannot originate with us. We are lovers because we are beloved. Man’s love for God is only possible because God first loved us. God is the source of love, as St. John indicates: ***“This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and set His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** (1 John 4:10) John Calvin correctly notes: *“The love of God, which is commanded in Scripture, is nothing less than the response of a man in the totality of his being to the prior love of God. It thus includes the whole of true religion.”* (Quoted in Fitzmyer, p. 522) This phrase defines every Christian. It does not

distinguish between categories of Christians on the basis of the intensity of their love for God. All who belong to Christ love God. The love of the Christian for God does not earn God’s favor but is itself a gracious gift from our heavenly Father. The Greek text uses the verb *“agaposin”* to describe the believer’s love for God. This powerful word describes the highest kind of love, the selfless, giving love that demands nothing in

return. God's love for His people is typically described with forms of this word, and thus again it can be seen that our love for God is the result of His prior love for us. John MacArthur lists the following nine characteristics of true love for God:

“First, godly love longs for personal communication with the Lord...Second, genuine love for God trusts in His power to protect His own...Third, genuine love for God is characterized by peace that only He can impart...Fourth, genuine love for God is sensitive to His will and His honor. When God is blasphemed, repudiated, or in any way dishonored, His faithful children suffer pain on His behalf...Fifth, genuine love for God loves the things that God loves, and we know what He loves through the revelation of His Word...Sixth, genuine love for God loves the people God loves...Seventh, genuine love for God hates what God hates. Godly love cannot tolerate evil...Eighth, genuine love for God longs for Christ's return...Ninth, and finally, the overarching mark of genuine love for God is obedience.” (MacArthur, pp.483-485)

Secondly, Paul describes the recipients of this divine assurance as those **“who have been called according to His purpose.”** The **“called ones”** (Greek – **“kletoi”**) are those whom God has brought into relationship with Himself by grace through faith in Christ. This is the way in which Paul and the other New Testament epistle writers consistently use the term (cf. Romans 1:6; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2:24; Jude 1; Revelation 17:14). The word is used on occasion in the Gospels in a broader sense to describe the gospel invitation which is presented to all but rejected by most as in Matthew 22:14 - **“Many are called but few are chosen.”** (Cf. Matthew 20:16). However, throughout the rest of the New Testament those who are called are Christians, those who have not only received the call but have been won by it. When Paul uses a form of **“kaleo,”** God is always the subject of the verb as He effectively summons people to be His own. God is the calling agent and the Gospel is the divine means and power by which He calls. Man's role in the acceptance of this call from God is purely passive. Christians are called **“not as the recipients of an invitation that was up to them to accept or reject, but as the objects of God's effectual summoning of them to become the recipients of His grace.”** (Moo, p. 530) Dr. Stöckhardt offers the following careful distinction between what he refers to as the **“outward call”** (extended to all who hear the Gospel) and the **“inward call”** of those who receive the Gospel in faith.

“This term, “the called” is always predicated to believing Christians. God who wills that all men should be saved, and who has prepared salvation for all through Christ, calls to Christ through the preaching of the Gospel all who hear this preaching. He sends out His servants, the preachers of the Gospel; and they invite all whom they are able to reach with their voice, to share in salvation in Christ. So all men who have

heard the Gospel are called, in the sense of invited. (Matthew 20:16; 22:14). Most men reject this call and invitation of God and do not obey the Gospel. Those, however, who follow His call, who receive the Gospel in faith, do it not to themselves. God works faith in them. God, through the preaching of the Gospel in which He offers them salvation, also calls them inwardly, takes heart and will, puts the consent into their hearts, calls and brings them to Christ. Those who are called are therefore not only the invited but such as are brought to God through His call. God has called them into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 1:9). God has called them from darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). (Stöckhardt, p. 111)



“I Stand at the Door and Knock” - by Rudolf Schüfer - 1932

God’s desire for the salvation of all men is the same. The call is the same both for those who reject and those whom God enables to accept. The only difference between the two is the wicked obstinate human will which spurns God’s free offer of salvation in those who are damned.

The called ones have been called *“according to His purpose.”* The noun *“purpose”* literally means *“the act of setting something before one’s self.”* This is the eternal counsel of God for the salvation of His elect. This divine purpose and plan was determined before the creation of time and space. In the opening chapter of

Ephesians, St. Paul declares: ***“For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.”*** (Ephesians 1:3-14; 3:11; cf. 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Verses 29-30

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.

“For those God foreknew...” - Introduced by the Greek conjunction *“hoti”* (*“because”*), these verses explain the preceding assertion that all things will work together for good to them that love God. In a magnificent five step process Paul outlines the accomplishment of God’s purpose for the salvation of man from before time began to the glory of eternity. He thus creates what has been aptly called a *“golden chain of salvation,”* linking the concepts together by repeating the preceding main verb in each new relative clause. The precise symmetry of these phrases has led many commentators to conclude that Paul may have been quoting a portion of one of the church’s earliest liturgies. Be that as it may, this passage becomes one of the great *“sedes doctrinae”* (Latin – *“seat of the doctrine,”* a clear Biblical text which serves as the foundation for an article of faith) for the pivotal doctrine of predestination.

The text emphasizes the fact that God, not man, is the initiator and the active agent in each and every step of the process. Salvation is absolutely *“monergistic.”* From beginning to end, it is the work of God alone. R. Kent Hughes rightly observes: *“Whatever else may be said about this, one thing is clear: the entire initiative for our salvation lay with God.”* (Hughes, p 168) It is precisely at this point that the profound comfort of Paul’s words may be found.

“All five of these great terms – foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification – refer to things God does. Why is this?... The answer is obvious. The apostle is dealing with our eternal security, and he is emphasizing God’s work so that we might understand from the beginning that this wonderful plan of salvation cannot fail. It would if it depended on us. Everything we do fails sooner or later, and that would certainly be true of salvation. Our faith would fail. Our ability to persevere would be extinguished. Our hold on God would weaken, and we would let

go and in the end fall into hell. But salvation is not like that. It is not our choice of God that matters, but rather God's choice of us. It is not our faith, but His call. It is not our ability to persevere, but the fact that He has determined beforehand to persevere with us to the very end and even beyond.” (Boice, p.926)

The first link in salvation's golden chain was forged by God before the creation of time and space – ***“For those God foreknew.”*** The basic meaning of foreknowledge (Greek – *“prognosis”*) simply means to possess intellectual knowledge in advance, to know beforehand. However, in Scripture, the word takes on a much more powerful connotation drawn from the Old Testament Hebrew word *“yada”* (*“to know”*) which means *“to enter into relationship with,” “to know intimately,” “to care about,”* or *“to choose in love.”* Thus *“yada”* becomes the euphemism for the act of love, sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Scriptures. (cf. Genesis 4:1; 18:19; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2) The continuance of this usage is evident throughout the New Testament where the Greek verb *“ginosko”* carries the same powerful connotation of its Hebrew counterpart (cf. Acts 2:23; Romans 11:12; 1 Peter 1:2,20).



“You Are Mine - I Have Engraved Your Names Upon My Hands” by Rudolf Schäfer

Accordingly to assert that God foreknew those whom He predestined is to say a great deal more than that He was intellectually aware of certain individuals. Those whom God foreknew are people with whom He entered into relationship and chose as His own in love before time began.

“When it is said in Scripture that God has known and knows us, this means that God has acknowledged, recognized, accepted us as His own, by such knowing has made us His own, adopted us as His own, has placed us into union, into fellowship with Himself, and so, as though bound to Him in unity and kindred with Himself, loves us with His whole heart.” (Stöckhart, **Predestination**, p. 16)

This loving foreknowledge is distinctly individual and personal. It applies to specific individual people. This is pure, precious, personal Gospel. Dr. Stöckhardt describes the wonder of this concept:

“We do not permit the comfort to be taken from us, the comfort that Scripture has opened up to us in and with the “foreknowledge” of God, that God, already in eternity has said to us, to each and every one of us; You are mine: I have engraved your name upon my hands.” (Stöckhart, **Predestination**, p. 25)

There is nothing coincidental or haphazard here. . James Dunn notes: *“Believers rest in the assurance that their part in the people of God is not accidental or random, but part of a divine purpose whose outworking was already clearly envisaged from the beginning.”* (Dunn, p.482)

Stöckhardt offers this carefully detailed explanation of the meaning of God’s foreknowledge:

“Accordingly, the expression in our text means that God in His eternal counsel and purpose fixed His eyes upon each one of us, the very people who are now Christians, and thought of us in gracious love. At that very moment, He fixed His mind upon us, and seized us as His own. Thus beforehand He made us His own and acknowledged us...This foreknowledge is an act of God in eternity before time, a decree, an appointment of God. The persons whom God foreknew were not yet living at the time He foreknew them. At that time, in eternity, we existed only in the eyes, in the decree of God, and in this His eternal will, He adopted and acknowledged us as His own, and ordained that we in time should actually become His own in the manner which had been described.” (Stöckhart, **Roemerbrief**, pp.399, 400)

J.P. Meyer, a leading theologian of the Wisconsin Synod, paraphrases the meaning of God’s foreknowledge in this way:

“But what does it mean when the Scriptures say that God “knows” someone?...Do not worry, he wants to say, in spite of your afflictions and weaknesses, did not God from eternity embrace you as His dear children and clasp you to His bosom? Before

you were born, before you could do good or evil, before you could ever ask Him any favor, He had already claimed you as His own.” (Quoted in Molstad, p.80)



*“I am the Good Shepherd. I Know My Sheep - My Sheep Know Me”
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1932*

There is no suggestion in the text that God’s foreknowledge pertains to any specific quality or conduct in those whom He predestines. This is an act of pure grace. The supposition by some Lutheran theologians that God merely foresees those who will come to faith and predestines them in view of that faith (Latin – *“intuitu fidei”*) is without Biblical support. Faith is the result of God’s foreknowledge and election, not its cause. As John Murray suggests, *“intuitu fidei”* injects an alien element of human participation in this pattern of divine action:

“Foresight of faith would be out of accord with the determinative action which is predicated of God in these other instances and would constitute a weakening of the total emphasis at the point where we would least expect it. Foresight has too little of the active to do justice to the divine monergism upon which so much of the emphasis falls. It is not a foresight that recognizes difference but the foreknowledge that determines existence. It is sovereign distinguishing love.” (Murray, p. 318)

Franz Pieper offers a perceptive analysis of why so many theologians over the centuries have been intrigued by the concept of predestination in view of faith and why those same theologians have, more often than not, ultimately fallen into the error of synergism, that is, suggesting human co-operation in salvation.

*“The teaching of an eternal election **intuitu fidei finalis** finds no support whatever in Scripture. Later Lutheran theologians sought to foist this doctrine on Scripture in place of the doctrine of Luther and the Formula of Concord because, wittingly or unwittingly, they wanted to find an explanation satisfactory to human reason with God’s grace universal and natural depravity alike in all men, still not all are converted and saved; in other words, why election is not universal. But the **intuitu fidei finalis** theory ultimately fails to solve this mystery as long as one adheres to the divine monergism of Scripture in man’s conversion and preservation in the faith or holds that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only with a synergistic basis will this theory furnish the explanation sought. Of course, if one denies that faith and constancy in faith are the gracious work of God and places the decision into the hands of man, making it depend on man’s self-determination, correct conduct, lessor guilt, etc., then one has indeed arrived at an explanation, but an unscriptural one.” (Pieper, III, p.489,490)*

As frustrating as this doctrine may be to the presumptuous mind of man, it plays a key role in the Biblical view of salvation. Peter affirms the crucial role of God’s foreknowledge in the opening of his first epistle: **“To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father though the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkled by His blood.”** (1 Peter 1:1,2)

“For those whom God foreknew, He also predestined...” - Predestination is the next link in the chain. Predestination (Greek – “*proorizo*”) means to decide, determine, or ordain beforehand. It is drawn from the root word “*oros*” which means “*boundary*” or “*fence*.” John Molstad remarks:

“The original Greek word for “predestine” gives us a vivid and wonderful picture. It envisions the erecting of a fence or a boundary around ones property. The erecting of this security line is not done in any haphazard way, but with careful determination. So when we speak of God’s predestining us for life in heaven, we might think of it as his way of putting a fence around us. He has made us His own property! That, of course, means hands off to sin death and the devil, our adversaries who also desire to have us as their own.” (Molstad, p. 21)

In this context, predestination expresses the truth that God has determined a specific destiny for those whom He has chosen in love. It is closely related to but distinct from



*“Then the Lamb’s Book of Life was Opened”
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1932*

foreknowledge. Predestination focuses on the goal which God had in mind when He foreknew in love those whom He had chosen to be His own. Franz Pieper explains the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination in this way:

“We join Luther, the Formula of Concord, and a number of recent theologians in taking “foreknow” as a synonym of “predestinate,” even though conceptually the two terms are not identical...Both serve to define one and the same divine act although they differ conceptually. Whom He did foreknow expresses the loving appropriation, or adoption of the person by God. The conclusion, “them He also foreordained” points toward the aim of the foreknowing, namely, “to be conformed to the image of His Son.” (Pieper, III, p.488,489)

The text defines the destiny which God ordained beforehand as ***“to be conformed in the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*** With this phrase, the apostle returns to the theme of the believer’s personal identification with Christ which has already figured so prominently in the epistle,

most recently in 8:17. We who once belonged to the first, fallen, Adam, and had been born in his image are now destined to bear the image (Greek – “*eikon*”) of the second Adam who has overcome sin and death for us, in our place. The language here closely parallels that of Philippians 3:21 – “*We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies making them conform to His glorious body.*” Thus through faith and baptism the sinner becomes a Christian who bears the shape and form of God’s own Son, that is to say, they are fitted into the pattern of existence that Christ has established and modeled (Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; 3:10). “*Christians are not just adopted children (8:15), but are being continually transformed or metamorphosed into an “eikon,” an image, likeness of the Son of God.*” (Fitzmyer, p.525) The ultimate goal of all this is the glorification of Christ, “*that He might be the firstborn of many brothers.*” The noun “*firstborn*” (Greek – “*prototokos*”) stresses both the uniqueness and preeminence of Christ and His intimate identification with His people.

“*And those He predestined, He also called;*” - The golden chain now resumes to define that which God does in time to effect and implement His eternal counsel and will for the salvation of the elect. That which now follows is the result of that which came before. This is a relationship of cause and effect. God remains the active agent throughout the entire process. He who foreknew and predestined in eternity now calls and justifies in time and will glorify in eternity. It is significant to note that each of the verbs in this series is in the Greek aorist tense (“*called,*” “*justified,*” and “*glorified*”) which denotes action that has been completed. These are certain, concluded, fully accomplished facts. They are not potential; they are actual. The first link in this segment is formed by the verb “*He also called.*” The term is used in the typical New Testament sense to refer to God’s effectual summoning into relationship with Him (cf. notes on Verse 28, p. 320). Dr. Pieper writes:

*“Calling (“vocatio”) is a synonym for conversion. In Matthew 22:14 – “Many are called but few are chosen,” this term is used, indeed to designate the general offer of salvation by the Gospel, the invitation extended to the sinner by the Holy Ghost for the purpose of kindling faith in him. In this sense all men are called who hear or read the Gospel. In most passages of Scripture, however, calling means not merely the offering of grace, but the actual transfer of sinners, of unbelievers, into the Kingdom of Grace or of Faith. The *kletoi*, the called, are those who have not merely heard the Gospel, but have been thereby converted to faith. Thus the word is used in Romans 8:30 – “Whom He called, them He also justified.”; also 1 Corinthians 1:26, 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Timothy 1:9. In the addresses of the epistles Christians receive*

the title “called” (Romans 1:6, 1 Corinthians 1:2).” (Pieper, II, p. 502)

As previously noted (p.320), man’s role in the acceptance of this call from God is purely passive. The human will is by nature in bondage to sin and it is therefore impossible for the natural man of himself to perceive or accept the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). Conversion and faith are the work of God the Holy Spirit alone. Man may reject the gracious calling of the God who would have all men to be saved - and most men, blinded by their own stubborn pride and self-righteousness, do - but he is absolutely incapable of accepting it. The Lutheran Confessions declare:

“The cause of condemnation is that either men do not hear the Word of God at all but willfully despise it, harden their ears and their hearts and thus bar the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit, so that He cannot work in them; or, if they do hear the Word, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it. The fault does not lie in God or His election, but in their own wickedness.” (FCSD, XI, 11)

Those whom the Holy Spirit calls to saving faith in Christ are then **“justified.”** This is what some have called “subjective justification,” the individual reception of all the blessings which Christ won for mankind by His innocent death in our place upon the cross.

“Those He justified, He also glorified.” - The golden chain of salvation comes to its triumphant conclusion in its fifth and final link, the glorification of the saints. Paul here returns to the point at which he began, **“the glory that will be revealed in us.”** (vs. 18). Thus the chain ends where it began in eternity. Lenski affirms: *“Paul sees God’s whole work complete, complete from eternity to eternity, all these from the first saint to the last, from God’s foreknowledge ere time began to the glory of these saints when time shall be no more.”* (Lenski, p. 564)

The Scriptural doctrine of predestination has been the subject of endless debate and consternation within the church. The application of man’s reason to this teaching inevitably results either in a false sense of security or despair. The confessions warn: *“Therefore we should not judge this election of our to eternal life on the basis of reason or of God’s Law. This would either lead us into a reckless, dissolute, Epicurean life, or drive men to despair and waken dangerous thoughts in their hearts.”* (FCSD, XI, 8) Dr. Martin Franzmann sums up the message of the Bible on this most important topic with characteristic eloquence:

“Romans 8:28-30 is one of the classic passages on election or predestination. Heads and hearts have been broken over that doctrine. But it cannot fairly be said that Paul, or anyone else in the New Testament, is responsible for the breakage. When the New Testament speaks of election, it speaks, as Paul does here, in terms of adoration and doxology. The New Testament speaks of it personally and concretely, not in general and theoretically. The New Testament therefore holds absolutely to the revelation of God’s elective will in Christ (vs. 29), the will that took concrete, historical, knowable form when the Father sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. There man can see spelled out the will of Him who tells His children, “I have chosen you.” To speak of election is to confess that God alone is the author of our salvation; to speak of eternal election is simply an intensified expression of that same certainty; He has loved me with an everlasting love. If we stay with the New Testament, the intellectual puzzles and the agonizing uncertainties which so often attend an abstract consideration of election need not arise. Questions like; “What of the others, those not elected?” “Why some and not others?” “How can this particular and personal elective will of God be brought into harmony with the fact that He would have all men to be saved?” “How can I be sure that He has chosen me?” - questions like these are gray and sightless creatures born to live in darkness. They simply cannot live in the light and air of the New Testament. When the New Testament speaks of election, it is speaking a personal and heartening word to the called saints of God about their sainthood. It is not in search of a theory to explain the fact that the Word of God is a fragrance of death to some and a fragrance of life to others.” (Franzmann, p. 155,156)

Verses 31 -32

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?

“What, then, shall we say in response to this?” – Upon reading this statement, the renown Renaissance scholar Erasmus is said to have declared: *“What has Cicero (the greatest orator of classical Rome) ever spoken with such eloquence?”* In response to the great scholar’s question Lenski remarks: *“Poor Cicero never had a subject like this nor a mind so filled with spiritual light. The product of inspiration is the greatest proof for inspiration.”* (Lenski, p.564) Paul’s dramatic series of rhetorical questions, serves to highlight the obvious conclusion that there is no trial or suffering in this

world comparable to that which God has done for us in Christ. Fitzmyer rightly describes the closing paragraph of Romans 8 as “*a jubilant hymn of praise to the love of God in Christ Jesus.*” (Fitzmyer, p. 529), and once again many commentators are convinced that these lofty words were a portion of the church’s earliest liturgy. The



“We Praise Thee, O God” by Rudolf Schäfer - 1905

language of the passage is indeed intense and highly emotional. James Dunn colorfully describes this segment as “*a purple passage of praise*” and “*a victory song of salvation assurance*”, which, he contends, becomes the focal point of the entire epistle. The initial question, “*What, then, shall we say in response to this?*”, sets the stage and serves as the transition to the conclusions which now follow. (cf. similar constructions in 3:1; 4:1; and 9:19) The NEB catches the sense of the Greek well in its translation, “*With all this in mind, what are we to say?*”

“*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” - There is an unmistakable note of exuberance and joyous elation in these words. The preposition which describes God’s relationship to us is the Greek *huper* which

literally means “*on behalf of,*” or “*on our side.*” With the almighty power of the sovereign God working on our behalf all those forces which stand opposed to us and His purpose in us pale into insignificance. The text does not minimize our opponents. It simply places them into the context of God’s incomparable power. St. John Chrysostom remarks:

“Paul was saying: Let me hear no more about the dangers and evils which beset you on all sides. For even if some do not believe in the things to come, still they have not a word to say against the good things which have already taken place, e.g. God’s friendship toward you from the beginning, His justifying work, the glory which He gives, and so on...The world is against us, but in spite of itself it has become the source of endless blessing for us. So, in reality, nobody is against us.” (Bray, p. 229)

Paul’s language carries a forensic flavor, evoking the setting of a law court. In the person of Christ, God Himself stands by our side before the divine judge. With such an advocate, who would dare to accuse us? Fitzmyer notes: “*With God on our side, the forces that are marshaled against us amount to nothing. They cannot prevail; they too can only work for our good.*” (Fitzmyer, p. 530)

In “*Melancthon Haus,*” the museum which now occupies the building where Luther’s colleague and fellow reformer Phillip Melancthon once lived and worked, this verse is displayed on a plaque hanging on the study wall. The verse was Melancthon’s favorite Bible text. He referred to it over and over again in his lectures and correspondence. History tells us that in 1560, as the reformer lay dying, the pastor at his bedside quietly read the text of Romans 8 to the man whom many believed to be the greatest theologian of the Reformation. When he came to Verse 31, Melancthon stopped him, and exclaimed: “*Read those words again!*” The pastor repeated, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” In a satisfied, contented voice, Melancthon murmured, “*That’s it! That’s it! If God is for us who can be against us!*” And then he died. One hundred years later, John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, noted that this text was also a source of profound comfort to him in a time of deep depression. Bunyan wrote: “*I remember, that I was sitting in a neighbor’s home, and was very sad, that word came suddenly to my mind: “What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” That was a help to me.*” (Hughes, p. 171)

“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all...” - God’s action



“The Sacrifice of Isaac”

19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

in giving up that which was most precious to Him in all the universe, His only-begotten Son, is adduced as the decisive demonstration of the depth of God’s commitment to His people (cf. 5:8; 8:3; John 3:16). The language of the text here (“*His own Son*”) intentionally echoes that of Genesis 22 and the heart rending story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. God comes to the patriarch and commands: *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”* (Genesis 22:2) The great 19th century French Bible illustrator

Jacques James Tissot beautifully conveyed the offering of Abraham's only son as an antitype of the sacrifice of Christ in his image of *"The Sacrifice of Isaac."* In Tissot's illustration, Abraham stands before the altar on Moriah with the sacrificial blade poised in his hand. He gazes upward toward heaven with an expression of complete anguish upon his face. The body of young Isaac upon the altar is carefully arranged with his arms outstretched and his legs folded to form the shape of a cross. The Angel of the Lord appears at the last moment to stay the patriarch's hand and forestall the innocent death of his only Son. All this foreshadowed God's willingness to offer His Son, His



"The Sacrifice of Abraham" by S. Solomon

only Son, the Son whom He loved as an innocent sacrifice for the sins of the world. But upon Golgotha, there was no last minute intervention from on high. Jesus died that we might live. The triple repetition of the text in Genesis 22 serves to emphasize the incredible nature of that which God is asking Abraham to do. Later, after the sacrifice has been interrupted, the angel of the Lord explains: *"I swear by myself, says the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky."* (Genesis 22:16). God did not *"spare His own Son."* This is the same verb used in Genesis 22:16 where the NIV translates –*"have not withheld your son."* It literally means to hold back or protect an object of great value. The

contrasting verb is *"but gave Him up."* (Greek – *"paradidomi"*). This term, describing God's action in offering His own Son as the ransom price for man's sin is drawn from the Old Testament and the great prophecy of Isaiah 53 where it is used three times to describe God's action in handing over the Suffering Servant to His enemies. *"Paradidomi"* is a judicial term, indicating the delivery of a prisoner for punishment or execution (cf. Luke 24:20). Note carefully that God Himself is the initiator and the actor here. Nothing that took place in the passion of our Lord happened by chance or

human design. God the Father remained in absolute control of the entire sad process. Each tragic event in that long series of tragedies was an expression of God's love and His compelling desire for the salvation of humanity. As the great Puritan preacher Octavius Winslow notes: *"Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy - but the Father, for love."* (Moo, p. 540) The beneficiaries of God's action in giving up His Son are defined in broadly inclusive language – God *"gave Him up for us all."* These great words reach out to include every believer in every time and place. The early church father Origen writes:

"The Father gave up His Son not only for the holy and the great but also for the least and for all everywhere who are members of the church. Therefore anyone who offends the conscience of even the least and weakest of these is said to be sinning against Christ, because he is scandalizing a soul for whom Christ died." (Bray, p. 238)

"How will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" - God's steadfast love

for us, and the certainty of that which He has promised to us in love, is demonstrated by that which He has already done for us in love. It is not possible that that which He has already begun at so tremendous a cost to Himself could now simply be



"He Gave Him Up For Us All" by Rudolf Schäfer

abandoned. He will surely complete all that He has promised. The British poet Horatius Bonar said it exceedingly well:

*“What will He not bestow?
Who freely gave this mighty gift unbought,
Unmerited, unheeded and unsought,
What will He not bestow?
He spared not His Son!
Tis this that silences each rising fear,
Tis this that bids the hard thought disappear.
He spared not His Son!”*

Verses 33-34

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

“Who will bring any charge...” - Once more, the courtroom context so prominent throughout the epistle comes through very clearly. The language is strongly forensic. It is technical legal terminology. The verb in this phrase *“to bring a charge against”* (Greek – *enkaleo*) occurs six times in the book of Acts (19:38,40;23:29,38;26:2,7) always in reference to the legal trials and tribulations of St. Paul. The word refers to the bringing of an indictment in court, the presentation of formal charges before a judge. The verb is in the future tense, pointing forward to the last judgment. The text does not suggest that no charges will be brought. In fact, it assumes that such charges will be presented, as the following phrases indicate. Rather the passage assures us that no charges will ever be successfully brought against us. The accusations of Satan, our ancient adversary, of the law, and of our own conscience, must all end in failure. Not because there is no intrinsic basis for these accusations – unfortunately our sins provide full and adequate basis to support the charges. Nonetheless, these charges must inevitably fail because we are **“those whom God has chosen.”** The Greek phrase is *“eklektoi theou,”* literally, *“the elect, the called of God”* (cf. 1 Peter 1:1,2). The word means *“to pick someone or something out for one’s self.”* This is the only instance in the Epistle to the Romans where this powerful term is used. The call of God is implemented in His justification of those whom He has called (cf. vs. 30). **“It is God who justifies.”** The forensic language of the text might well be translated *“It is God who acquits or pronounces the verdict of “Not Guilty.”* The charges pending against us are cleared from the docket of the court by divine action. Lenski notes: *“There lies the entire doctrine*

of justification as presented in 3:21, etc. The elect are constantly justified. God does not ignore the sins they still commit, He pardons them for the sake of Christ whom the elect embrace by faith.” (Lenski, p. 569) The accusations of our accusers are vain because Christ has taken our place and by His perfect life and innocent death has removed the basis for those accusations.

Verse 34

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

“***Who is he that condemns?***” - The acquittal of the elect was not simply an exercise of God’s sovereign power which no one would dare to challenge for fear of offending divine majesty. As the following phrases will demonstrate, God’s declaration of acquittal is unchallengeable not merely because it is God who made it, but because it is right and just. God did not simply justify His people by divine fiat; He provided a basis for their justification in the vicarious atonement perfectly accomplished by His Son. Lenski notes: “*What Christ has done not only answers all condemnation, it makes every condemnation on the part of any person impossible.*” (Lenski, p. 570) R. Kent Hughes offers this vivid description of the courtroom scene:



“*If accusations are brought against us, we need not fear, for the charges are silenced by the upraised, pierced hands of our Intercessor. If we are to be condemned it will have to be over Christ’s dead and now resurrected body, which actually is the basis for our salvation. How’s that for confidence?*” (Hughes, p. 170)

“Satan - the Accuser of Mankind” From “The Justification of Adam and Eve” by Jacob Lucius - 1556

“O Lord, the Judge, I raise the accusation against Adam and Eve.”

“Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life...” - Our Intercessor is designated first with His title ***“Christ”*** (Greek - *“Christos”* - *“the Anointed One”*.) This Greek title is the equivalent of the Hebrew title *“Messiah.”* The reversal of the typical sequence serves to highlight Christ’s identity as the Savior chosen and equipped by God to accomplish His plan of salvation. That plan of salvation was accomplished in the death of Christ upon the cross (***“Christ Jesus who died”*** cf. 3:25; 5:6,8-11; 6:4-8). The efficacy of Christ’s death as the once for all ransom for the sins of every human being is conclusively demonstrated by His resurrection (***“more than that, who was raised to life.”***). The NIV translation of the Greek conjunction *“mallon”* (***“more than that”***) is somewhat misleading. In this context the word might better be translated *“rather.”* In any case, the language of the text should not be understood to imply that the death of Christ was not enough. The resurrection does not complete the unfinished work of the crucifixion. Instead, it serves as God’s affirmation of the all-sufficient sacrifice proffered by His Son.

“Is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” - Old Testament anthropomorphic language is used to describe the exaltation of our Lord. The terminology is drawn from Psalm 110:1 - ***“The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*** (Cf. also Isaiah 63:11,12). This great text from the Book of Psalms is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament verses in the New Testament (cf. Matthew 22:24; 26:64; Acts 2:33-34; 5:31; 7:55,56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). The language emphasizes the divine majesty of Jesus as the true Son of God and His enthronement and glorious power. Having previously asserted the intercession of the Holy Spirit on our behalf (vs.26), the apostle now goes on to add the assurance that Christ Himself intercedes as our Advocate with God the Father (cf. 1 John 2:1). The Greek conjunction *“kai”* is, in this instance, ascensive, that is to say, it indicates the addition of the crowning detail. To everything else that Christ has done for us is now added this great ministry of intercession. Fitzmyer correctly translates the word *“and even.”* This concept is amplified in the Letter to the Hebrews which describes the ministry of Christ as our great High Priest (cf. Hebrews 7:25; 9:24). Chrysostom writes:

“Christ did not merely die for us; He now intercedes on our behalf as well...The only reason why Paul mentioned intercession was to show the warmth and vigor of God’s love for us, for the Father is also represented as beseeching us to be reconciled with Him.” (Bray, p. 240)

Verses 35-36

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or the sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."



*"The Lord Is My Refuge and My Fortress"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" - This startling rhetorical question sets the tone for the verses which follow. The *"who"* of this phrase embraces any and every conceivable opponent, whether personal or impersonal. *"The love of Christ"* is the love which Christ has for us (Subjective Genitive), not the love which we have for Christ (Objective Genitive). The apostle is not considering love as a mere feeling or emotion but as God's gracious disposition toward man which is conclusively demonstrated in the sacrifice of His own Son. God's love is action on our behalf - *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16) Thus the question Paul is posing might be paraphrased, "Is there

anything in life that can disrupt our relationship with Christ or lead us to doubt the love of Christ for us?" The answer is unequivocal and absolute - No one! Nothing! Never! Lenski points out that this is a question practical relevance for each and every believer as doubts, temptations, and tribulations daily assail us:

"The world likes to point to our afflictions as proof of the fact that Christ has ceased

to love us, or that his love is imaginary. The Jews mocked Jesus under the cross, "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said, I am the Son of God." So men say to us, so our own hearts say to us when the waves threaten to overwhelm our little bark as they did the boat of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus slept. He seems to have forgotten us, to have ceased caring for us. The afflictions appear like a gulf that separates us from Him, a gulf which He has allowed to remove us far from Him." (Lenski, p. 573)

In 2 Corinthians 11:26-27 and 12:10 Paul lists the tribulations which he has personally experienced in the course of his ministry. That enumeration closely parallels the list of difficulties that follows here. Only the final item, "**sword**," is missing in the Corinthians list. Bengel, the classic Lutheran commentator, suggests that the reference to the sword here points forward to the martyrdom which Paul himself was to experience. Tradition indicates that Paul was beheaded with a sword in Rome. Be that as it may, the list here does seem to follow a natural order of intensification, progressing from difficulties in general all the way through to execution and death itself.

The point is supported by a reference to the Old Testament, Psalm 44:22. John Calvin explains the citation at this point: "*Paul wants to demonstrate that it is no new thing for the Lord to permit His saints to be undeservedly exposed to the cruelty of the ungodly.*" The quotation is based on the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew original. The Psalm laments the trials which Israel must endure because of her faithfulness to God and calls upon the Lord to judge the enemies of the nation. These trials are presented as the natural and expected result of loyalty to God in a sinful and wicked world. In this way the text serves Paul's purpose very well as he argues that affliction does not mean that Christ has ceased to love us, but rather that we, as those loved by Christ, must expect to be persecuted because of that love. The particular verse quoted asserts: "***For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.***" As Israel's suffering for the Lord did not divide the chosen from their God, so also the afflictions of the people of God in Christ will not separate them from Him, nor do they indicate the absence of His love toward them.

Verses 37-39

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither

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

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors...” - The argument now takes a decisive step forward. The difficulties previously cited will not only fail to separate us from God’s love in Christ but will instead become the basis for a glorious victory. The adversative conjunction *“alla”* introduces the thought. In this context the word means *“yet”* or *“but”* and suggests the contrast between that which preceded and that which follows. The English *“more than conquerors”* expresses well the intensity of the Greek verb *“hupernikao”* which literally means *“we are supervictors,”* or *“we continue to achieve the most brilliant victory.”* We not only win the victory, but we do so superlatively, decisively, and absolutely. And yet this great victory is not something which we have accomplished for ourselves. It is, instead, the result of God’s undeserved love for us in Christ - *“through Him who loved us.”* Thus, it becomes possible for us to *“rejoice in our sufferings”* (5:3) and like the apostles of old, celebrate the fact that *“they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”* (Acts 5:41)

“For I am convinced....” - As the chapter moves toward its climax Paul rises to personal confession and testimony. Lenski suggests: *“Paul’s “I” does not obtrude itself, it links*



*“The Apostle Paul”
Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien - 1519*

arms with his fellow believers. *The very soul of Paul reveals itself.*” (Lenski, p. 575)
The verb, **“I am convinced”** is in the passive voice, thus indicating that this is not a conclusion which Paul has reached independently, but that God has brought about and sustained this conviction. This confidence is a matter of firm conviction founded upon the promises of God which has been validated in repeated personal experience. *“The overwhelming act of God in Christ has put into his heart a certitude which all his sufferings in the past have left unshaken and unshakeable.”* (Franzmann, p. 160)

Paul here presents one of the most powerful affirmations in Scripture of the certainty of salvation. Once again the message is pure, sweet, precious gospel directed to humble believers who are struggling to survive in a hostile world. God’s love will not fail. There is no barrier that can divide us from the love of God in Christ.

It should be emphasized that this text does not teach the Calvinist doctrine of the *“amissibility of faith,”* (Or, as it is more popularly known, *“Once Saved - Always Saved”*). According to this misguided notion, if an individual has ever truly believed, it is impossible to fall away from the faith. In direct contradiction to this view, the Bible clearly teaches that a true believer may fall from grace and lose his faith. In His commentary on the parable of the sower Jesus explains that the seed which fell upon the rocky ground are those who **“believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”** (Luke 8:13). Paul refers to Hymenaeus and Alexander as examples of believers who have fallen away and **“so have shipwrecked their faith.”** (1 Timothy 1:19) To Galatian Christians who had attempted to combine legalism with grace Paul warned: **“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace.”** (Galatians 5:4); and to prideful, self-satisfied Corinthian Christian the apostle wrote: **“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.”** (1 Corinthians 10:12) The writer to the Hebrews warns: **“See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God... We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence that we had at first.”** (Hebrews 3:12,14); and again; **“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away to be brought back to repentance.”** (Hebrews 6:4-6) In the same way Peter admonishes: **“Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.”** (2 Peter 2:17) *“Once Saved - Always Saved”* is a misleading delusion which offers false comfort to troubled souls. It ignores the stern warnings of God’s law and directs the Christian to look within himself rather than to

gracious promises of God in Christ for his eternal security. Both the warnings of the law and the promises of the gospel must be allowed to stand. We dare never pit precious gospel promises, like this great text in Romans 8, against the stern warnings of the law, like those cited above, which admonish us to avoid complacency and foolish self-confidence. The dialectic of law and gospel must be accepted on its own terms as it is presented throughout Scripture. The tension between the two cannot be minimized or rationalized by emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other. The proper distinction between law and gospel must be meticulously maintained and each truth rightly applied to the appropriate people. Martin Chemnitz, one of the great theologians of the Reformation era, masterfully defended the Biblical doctrine of perseverance in the faith in reference to this passage, while carefully maintaining the proper distinction between law and gospel.

“It is manifest that many do not persevere but fall from grace. But this is not because God does not will that believers whom He at one time received into grace, should persevere unto the end, but it comes from the fact that many drive out the Holy Spirit and trample their faith underfoot. And looking at the traps of the devil, the evil of the flesh, and the frightful examples of those who have lapsed, we ought to disintegrate with fear and trembling for our salvation. But when we look at the will of God revealed in the Word, and at Christ the Mediator, we can and must declare: “Who shall separate us? I am persuaded that neither things present nor things to come shall be able to separate us,” etc. (Romans 8:35ff.) We have been called to fellowship with Christ. He will then certainly not reject again those whom He has received. But He is our everlasting Savior. We are called to eternal fellowship with Christ. The Father is eternal and the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance on His part. “No one shall snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:28) Therefore, as it pertains to God, the perseverance of the godly is sure; and because it has been revealed in His Word, faith must believe this...But we pray and struggle that the pride of the flesh not stifle the gift of perseverance. This distinction will help in understanding the gift of perseverance.” (Chemnitz, II, p.514)

It should also be noted that Paul’s words in this text focus only on those forces which lie outside the believer himself and thus do not preclude the possibility the an individual through his own stubborn impenitence or unbelief may separate himself from the love of God.

“Neither death nor life,...” - An extended series of contrasts and combinations is

presented to demonstrate that “No natural, cataclysmic, or cosmic power or adversary can rupture the union of Christ and the Christian. No extreme can separate.” (Fitzmyer, p. 535) The first contrast is between death and life. The reference is to physical death with the promise that even the fearsome separation of



*“Neither Life Nor Death Shall Separate Us”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

the body and the soul will not divide the believer from the love of Christ. At the instant of physical death the believer is with the Lord in heaven. There is no interruption of the love bond that unites us with our Savior. With St. Paul we can all confess, **“I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better!”** (Philippians 1:23) There is also the assurance that while we live here in time the allurements, distractions, and temptations of this world will not be able to come between Christ and those whom He has chosen in love.

“Neither angels nor demons,...” - This combination has elicited considerable debate. The Greek text literally refers to “*angels*” and “*rulers*.” The latter term is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to a particular, although undefined, category of angels (cf. Ephesians 6:12;

Colossians 2:15). In Hebrew angelology rulers constituted one of the nine ranks of angels and were associated with the spiritual oversight of the governance of the nations (cf. Daniel 10:12-14). Some argue that the first reference is to fallen angels and the second to human political authorities. Other insist that both references are to fallen angels, while still others apply the former to good angels and the latter to fallen angels. This view is suggested by the NIV translation. Given Paul’s intent in

this section, this would appear to be the preferable interpretation. The point is simply that as there is nothing in the physical world that can separate us from the love of Christ, so also nothing in the realm of spiritual beings can come between us and our Savior.

“Neither the present nor the future...” - Even time itself is powerless against believers. Were it not for the steadfast promises of God, the instability of the present and the uncertainty of the future could certainly conspire to drive us to despair. But although ***“Heaven and earth shall pass away, my Word will never pass away.”*** (Matthew 24:35). The promises of God to His people stand firm and sure for



“A Soul Brought to Heaven” by Adolphe-William Bouguereau - 1878

all time. No matter what trials we are called upon to bear today and no matter what the future may bring, we rest safe and secure in the loving arms of God.

“Nor any powers,” - This is the only item in the list which is not paired with another and that complicates its definition. The reference may well be to yet another category of angels (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21).

“Neither height nor depth,” - Time cannot divide us from God, nor can the vast reaches of space. No distance is so great that God’s love cannot reach out across that gap to come to us. In Psalm 139 David rejoices:

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your right hand will guide me, even your right hand will hold me fast.” (Psalm 139:7-10)

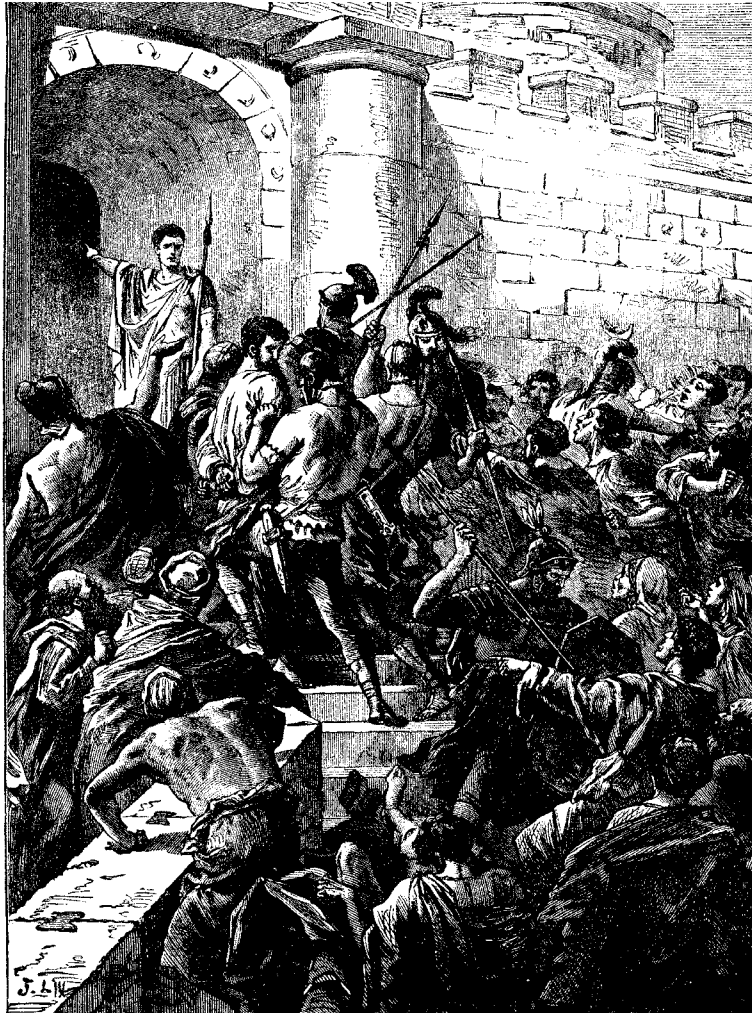
“Nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - This sweeping summary statement concludes and crowns the apostle’s affirmation of the certainty of salvation. The only reality outside of creation is God Himself. He is the only independent existence. All else comes from Him. Everything else is a part of that which He has created. Thus the statement is as comprehensive as it could be. There is no external force or power; no circumstance or situation that can divide the believer from the love of God in Christ.

Lenski’s concluding observation on Romans 8 is no exaggeration:

“The results of justification are thus fully presented. No one has ever set them forth so compactly and so profoundly, in a way that is so stimulating, effective, and uplifting. And all this in a letter to a single congregation! These are indeed words in which every Christian should immerse his soul.” (Lenski, p. 578)

The three-fold repetition serves to emphasize the significance and solemnity of the topic. ***“I speak the truth”*** (Greek - *“aletheian lego”*) - In the Greek text ***“truth”*** precedes the verb for special emphasis; thus literally *“The truth I speak.”* Everything in this sentence is carefully designed the importance of this topic and the fervor of Paul’s conviction in this matter. The truth that is spoken is spoken ***“in***

Christ,” that is to say, in union or in connection with the Savior Himself. John MacArthur notes:



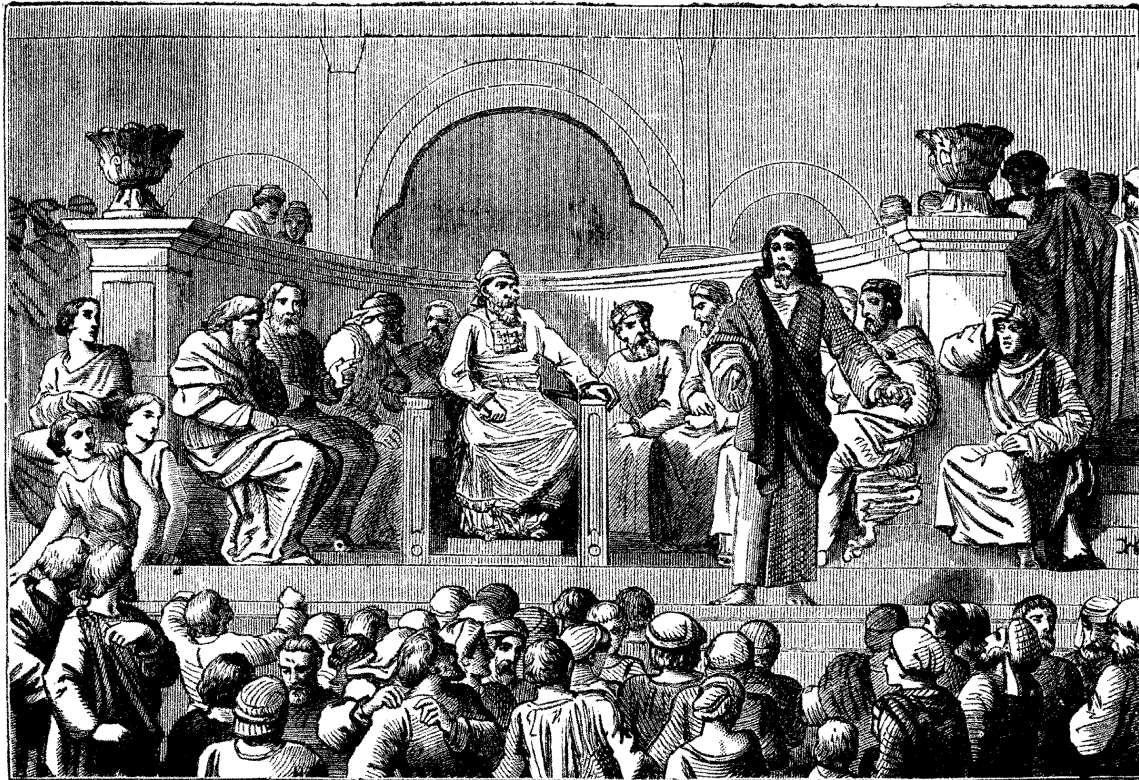
“Paul’s Arrest During the Temple Riot in Jerusalem”

“He called his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as an indisputable witness. He was saying that everything he thought or did or felt was done for and through his Lord. Paul’s union with Christ was the orbit within which his emotions moved and the fountain from which they flowed. In other words, Christ, who was the apostle’s very life and breath, would attest to the truth of what he was about to teach. His omniscient, sovereign, and gracious Lord, who perfectly knew Paul’s heart and motives, would affirm the truthfulness of the apostle’s limitless love for his fellow Jews. In the words of the 19th century Swiss commentator and theologian Frederic Godet, “In the eyes of Paul there is something so holy in Christ, that in the pure and luminous atmosphere of His felt presence no lie, not even an exaggeration, is possible.”

(MacArthur,II,p.9)

The positive affirmation (***“I am telling the truth in Christ.”***) is immediately followed and reinforced by the negative assertion ***“I am not lying.”*** Paul frequently makes this assertion in contexts where he expects his words to be contested (i.e. 2 Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:7). A lie (Greek - *“pseudomai”*) is a deliberate falsehood or inaccuracy told with the intent to deceive. Scripture asserts that truthfulness is a fundamental characteristic of God while lying is of the devil who

was the original liar and the father of lies (Numbers 23:19: John 8:44).



“Paul’s Defense Before the Jews in Jerusalem” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.” - Next, conscience is called upon to witness the apostle’s veracity. Conscience, in and of itself, is not an extremely reliable or convincing witness. Our consciences can and do err. Elsewhere, Paul warns that a man’s conscience can be **“seared as with a hot iron”** (1 Timothy 4:2), that is hardened to the point where it fails to identify and warn against sin. Paul explains the pattern in his letter to Titus: **“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.”** (Titus 1:15; cf. also 1 Corinthians 8:7,10,12) Hence, it is not merely his own conscience which Paul cites, but confirmation by conscience **“in the Holy Spirit.”** The preposition **“in”** (Greek - **“en”**) is instrumental in this context and might more precisely be translated **“by means of”** or **“through.”** His conscience is not acting independently in this matter but is under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, at the critical moment during the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther did not simply appeal to his own conscience, which his opponents could just as well have done. Instead he appealed to conscience as bound by the Word of God - **“My conscience is captive to the Word of God!”** He further

indicated that if he could be

shown from Scripture that he was wrong, his conscience would defer to the authority



of the written Word. This, his opponents could not do.

“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...” - We now arrive at the truth which Paul is so anxious to affirm, namely the intensity of his personal remorse over Israel’s rejection of her long awaited Messiah. Paul is well known as the apostle to the Gentiles. Some might have expected, given his outreach into the Gentile world, and the bitter opposition which he consistently encountered in those efforts from the Jews, that he would have given up on his own people and had in fact become “anti-Jewish.” Nothing could have been further from the truth. He is not a renegade, and apostate who has turned his back on his own. Instead, he is profoundly troubled by Israel’s rejection of the Gospel. The language of the text continues to be most emphatic. He is afflicted with ***“great sorrow and***

unceasing anguish” in the very core of his being. This is not a momentary affliction but an ongoing, continuous crushing burden of grief. The apostle’s words are reminiscent of the laments of the Old Testament prophets over the unfaithfulness and sin of God’s chosen (cf. Jeremiah 4:19-21; 14:17-22; Daniel 9:1-19)

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off...” - The intensity of the

apostle's feelings in this matter are further indicated by his willingness to give up his own salvation, if such a thing were possible (which, of course, it is not - cf. Psalm 49:7), for the salvation of his kinsmen. Like Moses on Mt. Sinai in the aftermath of the golden calf (Exodus 32:32), Paul offers his own life for that of the people. But more than his physical life, he offers to give up his eternal life, his very salvation itself for the sake of his people. "**Accursed**" is the fearful Greek word "*anathema*" which has come into the English language to describe someone who is formally cut off from the church and excommunicated. The term is drawn from the Old Testament where it is used that which is set apart for destruction as an offering to God (cf. Joshua 6:17,18; 7:1,11-13; 22:20; 1 Chronicles 2:7). "*Anathema*" is used by St. Paul in three other New Testament passages (1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22; Galatians 1:8,9) in each instance in reference to the most serious curse or pronouncement of damnation. The word designates eschatological judgement, one who is damned eternally and separated from the presence of Christ. That point is further stressed by the phrase "**and cut off from Christ.**" Those for whom Paul grieves are tenderly identified as "**My brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.**" Although he is indeed the Apostle to the Gentiles, yet in terms of nationality and ethnic heritage, he remains a Jew, deeply concerned about the welfare of his people. Note the use of the covenant title for the nation. Instead of the ordinary ethnic or political title "*Jews.*" They are "**the people of Israel,**" - the descendants of Jacob whose name was changed after he wrestled with God and obtained the promise. The Hebrew name "*Israel*" means "Contender with God." (Genesis 32:22-32)

Verses 4-5

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Paul now enumerates a list of seven divine privileges and prerogatives accorded to Israel by God in the course of the Old Testament era. A similar listing was begun in 3:2 but never completed. His approach signals that the concern here is not merely human sympathy for the majority of his own people who seemed doomed to hell because of their rejection of the Messiah. The more basic issue here is a vindication of God and the integrity of His promises. God has not failed Israel. The promises of God to His people have not been broken. (cf. Romans 3:1-8)

"Theirs is the adoption as sons..." - The first blessing is the gift of sonship. The Old

Testament teaches that God adopted the Israelite nation as His son (cf. Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 14:1-2; Isaiah 46:3-4; 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 1:6; 2:10). God lavished the love of a father upon His chosen people. He protected, guided, and guarded them. He delivered them from bondage, struck down their enemies, and chastened them with fatherly discipline when necessary. He expected filial devotion and obedience from those whom He had adopted, although most often that filial response was not forthcoming. The nation received the blessing of sonship so that through them all the nations of the earth might be blessed.

“Theirs the divine glory...” - The second blessing is that of the splendor of the divine presence. God chose to dwell in the midst of His chosen people. During the years of the wilderness wandering the pillars of cloud and fire led the nation toward the land of promise. First in the tabernacle and later in the temple the glory of the Lord, the *“shekinah,”* rested over the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. (cf. Exodus 16:7,10; 24:16; 40:34-35; Leviticus 9:6,23; Numbers 14:10,21; 16:19,42; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezekiel 1:28)



“The Shekinah” by Rudolf Schäfer

“The covenants,” - A *“covenant”* (Greek - *“diathekai”*) is an arrangement between two or more parties involving mutual obligations. The Hebrew idiom for the establishment of a covenant relationship is literally *“to cut a covenant”* (*“kerit berith”*) referring to the ritual of animal sacrifice which often accompanied a covenant agreement (cf. Genesis 15:9f.; Jeremiah 34:18). In the Old Testament the term is used with particular reference to the relationship which God established with His chosen people; first through

Abraham and the patriarchs, then renewed through Moses at Sinai, and later through the royal house of David and Solomon. The establishment of this covenant arrangement is cited as the third blessing which God has bestowed upon His chosen nation.

“The receiving of the law,” - Given the negative comments Paul has already made about the inadequacy of the law as a means of achieving salvation, the inclusion of ***“the receiving of the law”*** as the fourth in this list of divine blessings upon Israel may come as something of a surprise. But Paul has always been careful to point out that the problem of legalism is not caused by the law itself, but by a misuse and misunderstanding of the law’s purpose. In and of itself the law is indeed a great blessing as the revelation of God’s holy will for His people. At Mount Sinai, God gave His law, the *“Torah,”* to the children of Israel. Later, Moses reminded the people:

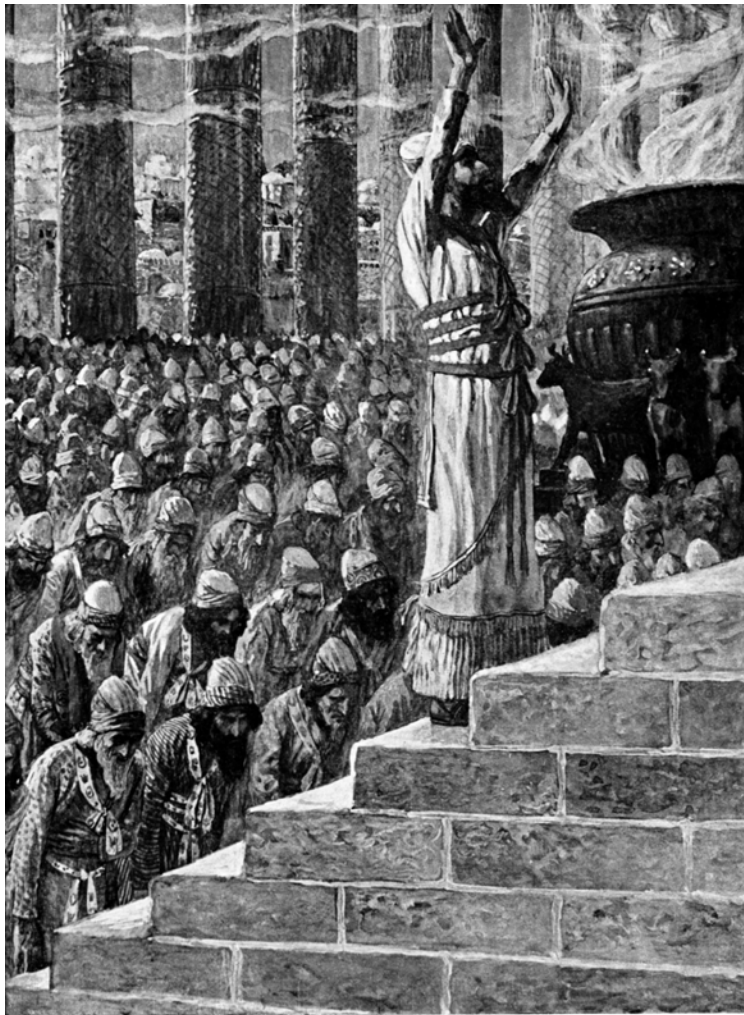
“See, I have taught you the statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say; ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

“The temple worship and the promises.” - The ***“temple worship”*** (Greek - *“latría”*) refers to the entire ceremonial system that God revealed through Moses - the sacrifices, offerings, festivals, cleansings, and other means of worship administered by the levitical priesthood. This entire impressive and elaborate structure was designed to point forward to the coming Messiah and His redemptive sacrifice of Himself for the sins of humanity. It foreshadowed that which was to come in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). In this divine service God promised His gracious presence:

“I will meet there (at the Tent of Meeting) with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. And I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister to me as priests. And I will dwell among the sons of Israel”

and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29:43-46)

“Promises” are the great promises of the coming Messiah which permeate and pervade the entire Old Testament. As Paul had earlier declared to the Jews in Galatia: *“We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers; that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus.”* (Acts 2:39). The children of Israel were blessed to serve as the custodians of the Messianic hope; to keep alive the promise of salvation by preserving and passing down the inspired prophecies which God proclaimed to them through His spokesmen.



“The Dedication of the Temple” by J. James Tissot

“Theirs are the patriarchs” - The honor of physical descent from the founding fathers of the nation - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the seventh and final blessing cited in Paul enumeration. Through these remarkable men the nation came into being and to them the promises of God first were made (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12).

“And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” - The list is crowned and concluded. This final and greatest blessing, in addition to the seven already mentioned, is introduced by a different grammatical construction.

Rather than belonging to the Israelites, like all of the other blessings, the Christ, the Messiah is *“from them.”* He does not belong to them. That saving relationship may

not be established by blood, but only by faith. And yet, the crowning glory of the Israelite nation is the historical fact that the Savior of humanity was born among them as one of them. The Greek phrase is “*kata sarka*,” literally, “*according to the flesh*.” But there is, of course, more to the Savior than mere humanity. His human nature is only part of the picture. He is both true God and true man at the same time. Thus the apostle immediately continues: “***Who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.***” The most magnificent of the great host of blessings that God bestowed upon this richly blessed nation is that the eternal God caused His own Son to come from Israel according to His human nature. Note that this passage emphatically and unequivocally expresses the divinity of Jesus Christ. He is without qualification “***God over all!***” This brief, but powerful doxology does not interrupt but intensifies the natural progression of the text. Paul concludes his thought with a forceful “***Amen.***”

Verses 6-7

It is not as though God’s word has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Not because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring shall be reckoned.”

“It is not as though God’s promise has failed.” - The dilemma posed by ethnic Israel’s rejection of her Messiah is now confronted directly. Paul begins with an unequivocal affirmation of the faithfulness of God and the reliability of His Word. “***God’s promise***” (Greek - “*ho logos tou theou*” - literally “*the word of God*”) has not and can never fail (Isaiah 55:11). The verb used here is “*ekpiptein*” which is used in reference to the blossom of a flower falling to the ground (James 1:11; 1 Peter 1:24), chains falling off the hands of a prisoner (Acts 12:7), and the drifting away of a boat that has been cut loose or cast off (Acts 27:32). Thus the term means to fail, to wither, or to come to nothing. Have the promises God made to Israel failed to achieve their purpose? Does Israel’s rejection mean that the Word of God failed? Absolutely not! The problem here is not the reliability of God’s promise but a willful misunderstanding of that promise. The apostle demonstrates this to be the case by carefully defining the nature of the Old Testament covenant and the identity of the Israel of God. The Fourth century commentator Constantius describes the balance which the apostle maintains between deep personal concern and theological integrity in this way:

“Although the apostle grieves that the Jews have failed to obtain the grace of the promise, he nevertheless shows that the Word of God was not in vain and that the things that were promised were owed not to them who were born of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel according to the flesh but to those who keep the faith of the patriarchs and are therefore reckoned to be of their seed.” (Bray, p. 248)

“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” - Membership in the Israel of God has never been a matter of ethnic identity or blood descent. This is the consistent teaching of both Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist sternly warned the self-righteous Jews of his day: **“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”** (Matthew 3:9) In the same way, Jesus denounced the complacency of those who depended on their national heritage as a guarantee of God’s favor: **“If you were Abraham’s children, said Jesus, you would do the things Abraham did.”** (John 8:39) The language of this text is equally forthright and unambiguous: **For not all those who are descended from Israel are Israel.** The Greek text literally says: *“Not all those from Israel are Israel.”* The term **“Israel”** is used in two different ways within the phrase. In the first instance, **“all who are descended from Israel”** refers to an ethnic group, the physical nation which is genetically linked to a single individual - Israel (Jacob). However, in the second instance, a decisive shift occurs and **“Israel”** now refers to the Israel of God (cf. Galatians 6:16), which is constituted by faith and not by blood, and includes all believers, both Jew and Gentile. The promises of God were never addressed to ethnic or national Israel,



“John the Baptist” by Rudolf Schäfer

those of a particular bloodline or racial category, but to the Israel of faith. If that had been the case, then the nation's apostasy would indicate the failure of the promise. But that is not the case. Phillip Melancthon points out:

“This is the chief proposition in which he answers the objection concerning which is the true people of God. The Jews contended that they were the people of God and that the promises belonged to them alone. Paul responds that the elect are the people of God, and he distinguishes the true people from those who have the title...Paul states the proposition clearly: the sons of God are not made by fleshly propagation, not by natural gifts or merits, but by the election of God.”
(Melancthon, p. 189)

“Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children.” - The Jewish nation originates with Abraham, the first Jew and father of the Hebrew people. To Abraham God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 15:5; 22:17). Throughout their long history, the Jews’ proudest boast was that they were descended from Father Abraham. (cf. Romans 4:1-25) The importance of that claim is demonstrated in a confrontation between Jesus and His opponents recorded in John 8. The Lord infuriated his enemies, provoking them to the point of attempted murder, by challenging their link to the great patriarch. At the same time, Jesus insisted, as does St. Paul in this text, that descent from Abraham is a matter of faith, not bloodline.

“They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can You say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied...”I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill Me because you have no room for My Word. I am telling you what I have seen in My Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.” “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is you are determined to kill a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does...You belong to your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is not truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”
(John 8:33-44)

The text distinguishes between the “*descendants*” (Greek - “*sperma*”) and the “*children*” (Greek - “*tekna*”) of Abraham. Unfortunately the NIV (along with most other English translations) jumbles the text, making “*children*” refer to the Israel of God and “*descendants*” refer to ethnic Israel. Given the language of the phrases which follow (where “*sperma*” consistently refers to Abraham’s spiritual descendants rather than his physical offspring) it would appear to be preferable to reverse the sequence and translating this phrase: “*nor as if all his children are Abraham’s seed.*” In either case, the central point remains the same - ethnic Israel and the Israel of God cannot simply be equated with one another. “*To be a child of Abraham in a physical sense, Paul is saying, is not necessarily to be his descendant in a spiritual sense. Salvation is not a Jewish birthright.*” (Moo, p.575)



*“The Banishing of Hagar and Ishmael”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

“On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” - Paul reinforces his argument with an appeal to historical precedent. The line of the covenant promise was never merely the line of physical descent. Genesis 21:12 is quoted as a reminder that even in the first generation after Abraham the firstborn son was not the child of the promise (cf. Hebrews 11:18). God originally spoke these words to Abraham as Hagar and her son Ishmael are about to be banished from the encampment. Isaac, not Ishmael, was designated by God as the son to and thru whom the blessings of the covenant would be conveyed. Ishmael too would be the father of many nations, but he was not to be the child of the promise. The Greek text uses a verb with particular theological significance - “*klethesetai*” from “*kaleo*” which means “*to call.*” Thus the phrase should literally be translated: “*in Isaac your seed shall*

be called.” In Romans 4:17 the same word is used to describe God’s creative act in the birth of Isaac, the miracle child of Sarah and Abraham’s old age - **“The God who...calls things that are not as though they were.”** The calling of God is the powerful, effective summons of the sovereign Creator to spiritual blessing (cf. 8:28,29; 9:12,24-26). Thus, when Abraham’s **“offspring”** (Greek - *“sperma”*) are *“called”* thru Isaac, it is God Himself who is at work accomplishing His plan of salvation. Martin Franzmann summarizes the theological significance of all this as follows:

“If physical descent from Abraham makes man a true son of Abraham and an inheritor of the promise given to Abraham, then Ishmael, the child of the flesh, was Abraham’s son and heir, and the future of God’s people hung on him. But the Word of God fixed on Isaac and made him son and heir. In fact, the Word of God, God’s promise, called Isaac into being. The Word of God, then, creates the people of God and defines the people of God.” (Franzmann, p. 171-172)

Verses 8-9

In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

“In other words...” - Paul now explains and expands his quotation from Genesis and applies it to the point at issue. This is a characteristic Pauline formula to introduce a brief explanatory note (cf. 7:18; 10:6,8; Philemon 12) The theme is restated once again. Those who are Abraham’s **“natural children”** (Greek - *“kata sarka,”* - literally, *“according to the flesh”*) are not his genuine **“offspring”** (Greek - *“sperma”* - literally, *“seed”*). Once again, the text utilizes a theologically loaded verb, in this case the Greek *“logizetai”* (*“to be reckoned”* or *“regarded”*). In chapter 4, Paul quotes this term from Genesis 15:6 as the crucial indicator of Abraham’s justification by grace through faith (cf. 4:1-24). Now it occurs again to describe the *“reckoning”* of the **“children of the promise”** as **“God’s children,”** the true **“offspring of Abraham.”** In both instances the word describes God’s gracious initiative for the salvation of His own. This is the work of God, not man. The Apocryphal Book of Jubilees affirms the unique role of Isaac among the numerous sons of Abraham using virtually the same language:

“All his other sons would be gentiles and would be reckoned with gentiles, although one of Isaac’s sons would become a holy offspring, not to be reckoned with Gentiles; he would become the portion of the Most High, and all his descendants would be settled in that land which belongs to God, so as to be the Lord’s special acquisition.”
(16:17)

The contrast is clearly drawn. On one side are Abraham’s physical descendants, his *“children according to the flesh.”* On the other are Abraham’s true offspring, *“the children of the promise,” “God’s children.”*



“Abraham Greets His Visitors” by S. Solomon

“For this is how the promise was stated...” - The promise is now defined with an reference to Genesis 18:10,14. Isaac was not born under natural circumstances, but long after both of his parents were past the normal age of childbearing. God visited the camp of Abraham, accompanied by two angels. In the course of their visit the Lord promised to return in one year (18:10) by which time the aged Sarah would have given birth to a son (18:14). The promise of God, as always, was completely fulfilled. Before twelve months had passed, the child Isaac was born. St. John Chrysostom notes the parallel between the miraculous birth of Isaac and the miraculous birth of every believer in the water of holy baptism:

“It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but rather even in nature regeneration through baptism from above was sketched out beforehand...For Sarah’s womb was colder than any water owing to barrenness and old age...And just as in her case it happened when her age was past hope, so in this case also it was when



“Jacob” by J. James Tissot

the old age of sins had come upon us that Isaac suddenly sprang up in youth, and we all became the children of God and the seed of Abraham.” (Bray, p. 249)

Verses 10-13

Not only that, but Rebecca’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls - she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

“Not only that...” - The distinction between an ethnic and a spiritual Israel is even more clearly revealed in the next patriarchal generation. Ishmael was firstborn, but only from an Egyptian chambermaid. Hence it might be argued that even by human standards Isaac was the more appropriate choice. Paul moves to close that potential loophole. In the next generation the choice is made between two twin sons from the same parents, namely Isaac and Rebecca. Esau, the firstborn, was in fact his

father’s favorite, a man’s man. Nonetheless, God chooses whom He will and Jacob, the younger twin, becomes the child through whom the promise will be continued. The point is emphasized by a series of three subordinate clauses.

“Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad...” - God’s action in choosing Jacob was absolutely by grace. It was not the result of any moral or ethical superiority on his part. In regard to sinfulness the twins were identical. Luther asserts: *“Both of them were evil because of the disease of original sin...but by*

their own merit they were the same and equal and belonged to the same mass of perdition.” (Luther, AE 25, p. 386) Neither of the boys deserved the favor of God in any way. The wording of the text underscores the truth that God’s promise to bless Jacob preceded and was not based upon any good works that he may have performed and in the same way Esau’s exclusion was not based upon his evil works or inferior character. God chooses whom He will. He uses us despite all of our imperfections to accomplish His purpose.

“In order that God’s purpose in election might stand:” - The promise was spoken before the twins were born so that it would be unmistakably clear that nothing within the persons of Jacob or Esau, neither in their character nor their behavior, could have been the basis for God’s choice of one of them over the other. Paul may have deliberately intended to contradict the self-gratifying tendency in Judaism to attribute God’s selection of Jacob to the patriarch’s moral superiority over his brother. Inherent in this tendency is the reassuring assumption that the Jews, as God’s chosen people, must also be morally superior to the Gentiles who were not chosen. This tendency is clearly expressed in the Book of Jubilees where Isaac is quoted saying: *“Now I love Jacob more than Esau because he has increasingly made his deeds evil. And he has no righteousness because all of his ways are injustice and violence.”* (35:13) This view is in strong contrast to the Book of Genesis itself which seems to go out of its way to emphasize Jacob’s imperfections and character flaws. The selection of Jacob was completely by grace, just as that of Isaac, and Abraham before him had been. It what may be a specific attempt to undercut Paul’s argument here, the Fourth Century AD rabbinical Commentary *“Genesis Raba,”* the Hebrew sages go so far as to try to read that struggle between good and evil back into Rebecca’s womb:

“When Rebecca passed by houses of idol worship, Esau would squirm about, trying to get out, as it says, “The wicked turn astray from the womb.” (Psalm 58:4); when she would pass synagogues or study houses, Jacob would squirm to get out, as it says, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” (Jeremiah 1:5).” (Genesis Raba 63:6)

The pattern is consistent throughout - **“in order that God’s purpose in election might stand.”** Two important theological terms are presented in this phrase. The first is **“purpose”** (Greek - *“prothesis”*). In Romans 8:28 it denotes the plan or design according to which God calls His people unto Him, the eternal predestination of the elect to salvation. The term is used in a slightly different manner in this verse to denote the predetermined plan within human history through which God planned and designed

to bring covenant blessing to the whole world through the patriarchs and their descendants. *“From the God of knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before they existed, He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change.”* (Moo, p. 581) The second theological term is **“election”** (Greek - *“eklogen”*). The word means *“to select”* or *“to choose.”* In this context, the term does not refer to an election to salvation, but to the historical selection of Jacob and his descendants over Esau and his. Martin Franzmann explains:



“Jacob’s Deception of Isaac” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Paul speaks of God’s “purpose of election” here, but he is speaking of that purpose as it works in the history of men. He is not speaking here, as he spoke in 8:28-30, of the eternal predestination of God’s elect to righteousness and glory; he is not now uttering the doxology of the redeemed. Rather, he is showing how God freely chose Isaac and Jacob for the furthering of His purpose, to bless all the families of the earth, in order to make clear that all depends on Him and on His Word alone. His choice of Isaac does not, of itself, doom Ishmael to perdition; Ishmael too received a blessing from God (Genesis 17:20; 21:13), and Ishmael too comes under the blessing

promised to all the families of the earth in Abraham’s seed. God’s purpose of election does not mean that all Ishmaelites and Edomites were to be damned, no more than it means that all descendants of Isaac and Jacob should be saved.” (Franzmann, pp.172,173)

The accomplishment of the plan is certain precisely because it rests not upon man but upon God. The verb **“stand”** (Greek - *“mena”*) is the opposite of the verb in Verse 6 **“failed.”** (*“It is not as though God’s Word has failed.”*) If the purpose of God rested upon sinful human beings it would surely have failed and fallen. But it does not. God’s plan and purpose is fulfilled because it is **“not by works but by Him who**

calls.” He Himself graciously carries out that purpose.

“Not by works but by Him who calls -“ - The point is repeated for the third and final time. In this phrase, the contrast is between **“works”** (Greek - *“ek ergon”*) and **“Him who calls”** (Greek - *“ek tou kalountos”*) as the basis for the selection of Jacob over Esau. Nothing in man or done by man provides the basis for this selection. It is God Himself, **“Him who calls,”** upon whom the selection of one over the other depends. Lenski properly notes:

“It was utterly hopeless to try to fill any of these three patriarchal places “ek ergon,” to award them as dues for works. In a competition of this sort all competitors had to fail for even if one of them had a few more works than all the rest, these could not possibly suffice as a merit that would deserve the position. The only way open was “ek tou kalountos”...the positions had to be awarded solely by a call or an appointment that came from God. In making it He would have to disregard all works and depend only on Himself, He in grace making an “ekloge,” a choice.”
(Lenski, p. 602)

“She was told, “The older will serve the younger.” - The reference is to Genesis 25:23, God’s response to Rebekah’s inquiry as to the alarming struggle taking place within her womb: **“The Lord said to her: “Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”** It is significant to note once again that the focus of God’s revelation to Rebekah is not the eternal destiny of her children, but their temporal role in relation to one another. Despite the fact that Jacob is the younger and the weaker of the two, he is God’s choice to be the patriarch through whom the promise shall be conveyed to mankind. The distinction between the historical selection of one of the patriarch’s children over another and the divine determination of eternal destiny must be carefully maintained lest this text be abused to teach a double divine predestination to either salvation or damnation. This point is of crucial theological significance. George Stöckhardt is exactly right when he asserts: **“There is not the slightest hint of a predestination to damnation in this text.”** Dr. Stöckhardt offers these helpful observations:

“The historical calling of Jacob and his seed was the content of God’s Word to Rebekah, the aim and object of Jacob’s election and call, and does not deal with the final lot of Rebekah’s two sons and their descendants, not with salvation and damnation. We believe, as did Luther, that Ishmael and Esau were both finally saved. Both had taken from their father’s homes the right knowledge of God and

also knew the promise, which Isaac and Jacob received. The story of Esau's reconciliation with Jacob gives the impression that Esau finally took the right attitude toward God and bowed to His will, which gave to Jacob the blessing of the firstborn. We also believe that very many descendants of Ishmael and Esau were saved by God's grace. The apostle wishes to refer this second Biblical example, as the first, to the question under discussion. That Esau was excluded from the lineage of promise points to the fact that not all Israelites, descended from Abraham according to the flesh, are true Israelites. Jacob, as Isaac, is a type of the true children of Abraham and God. This is the lesson from the example of Jacob: all those of the true Israel, who are now chosen and called to adoption and salvation in Christ, are chosen and called in exactly the same way as Jacob was according to God's free purpose, regardless of birth and origin, of works and conduct. They are the real seed of Abraham; they are God's children who finally receive eternal salvation." (Stöckhardt, p.124)



***“Esau Trades his Birthright for Jacob’s Porridge” 19th Century Bible Illustration
by J. James Tissot***

“Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” - The apostle confirms and explains his point with one final citation brought forward with the standard introductory formula, ***“Just as it is written.”*** In this instance, the text cited is Malachi 1:2-3.

“An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, “How have you loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the Lord says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackels.”

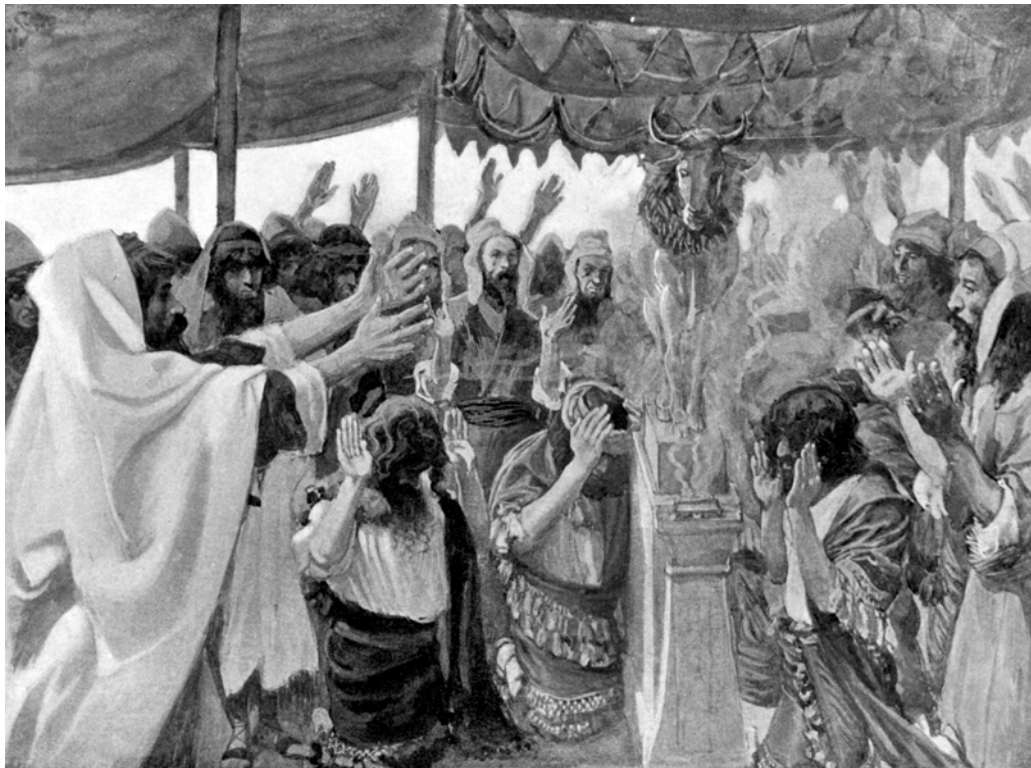
It is evident in the Malachi text that the primary reference is not to Jacob and Esau as specific individuals, but as the personification of the respective nations, Israel and Edom, which come from them. Nor is the thrust of the passage eternity, but history. *“Malachi is speaking of the fate of Jacob and Esau as nations, not of their eternal weal or woe.”* (Franzmann, p. 173) In Biblical usage, however, this does not exclude consideration of the individuals, and that is apparently the apostle’s intent in the quotation as a specific phrase from Malachi is brought forward to corroborate the quotation from Genesis. In the Old Testament passage these words form a part of God’s response to Israel’s challenge ***“How have you loved us?”*** God’s gracious selection of Jacob over his own brother Esau is presented as the proof of the Lord’s undeserved love for His people.

The love - hate contrast in this text, ***“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*** is a Hebraism, that is a specific linguistic usage of the Hebrew language. In this context, hate does not carry its ordinary English connotation of strong dislike for or antipathy toward someone. It simply means to love less, the opposite of to prefer or to choose. Thus when the Hebrew text of Genesis 29:31 literally says, ***“Leah was hated...”*** it is simply restated the thought of the preceding verse ***“He loved Rachel more than Leah.”*** (29:30; cf. also Deuteronomy 21:15) Our Lord uses similar language in Luke 14:26 when he says: ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple.”*** (Cf. also Matthew 6:24; 10:37,38; John 12:25) This comparative usage of the word hate is common in the Semitic languages of the ancient Near East. Understood in this way, the phrase simply restates that point already made, namely that God graciously chose Jacob over Esau, thus demonstrating that blood descent is not the criterion for membership in the Israel of God.

Verses 14-16

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

“What then shall we say?” - If there is no basis for God’s election in man is God’s action then merely arbitrary and unfair? Paul anticipates the human tendency to challenge the justice of God. As John Calvin pointed out long ago: *“The flesh cannot hear the wisdom of God without being at once disturbed by perplexing questions, and it struggles by some means to call God to account.”* (Boice, p. 1067) At the outset, the apostle rejects even the possibility of divine injustice as an impossible blasphemy. The Greek text is most emphatic! It literally reads: *“There is no unrighteousness with God, is there? Perish the thought!* To accuse God of “unrighteousness” (Greek - “*adikia*”) is the height of presumption and human arrogance. Righteousness is the essence of God’s nature. If God does it, it is righteous by definition, whether I understand or recognize its righteousness or not.



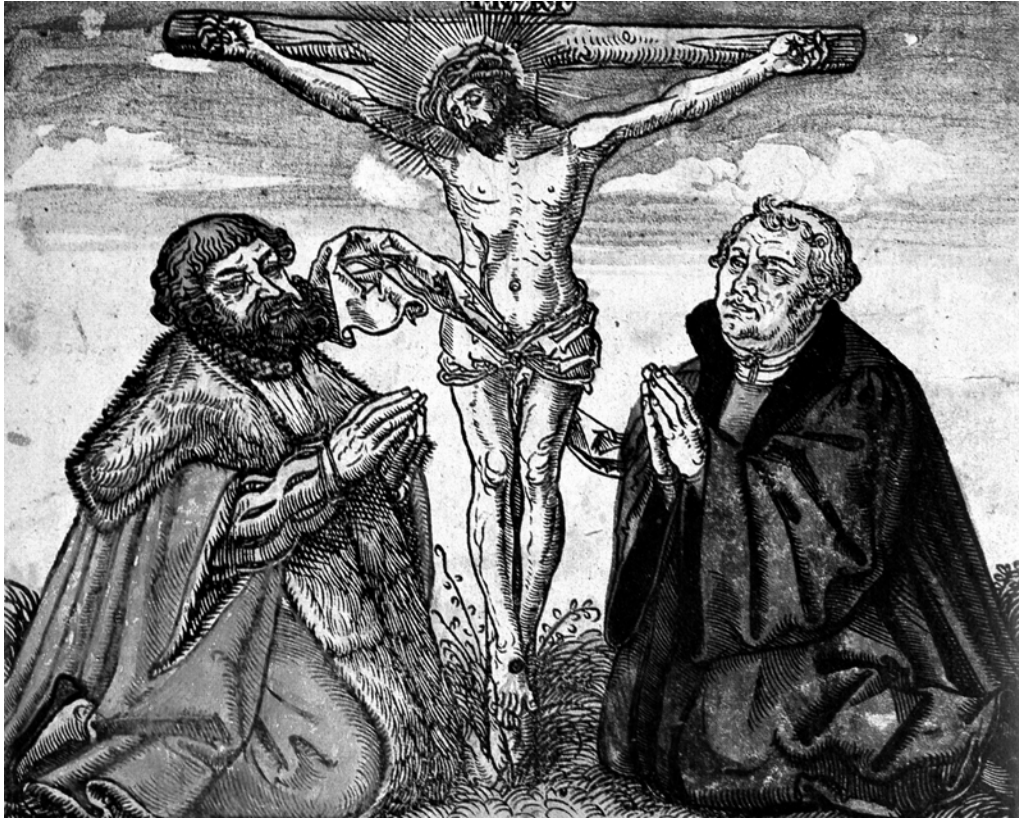
“Israel Worships the Golden Calf” by J. James Tissot

“For He says to Moses: “I will have mercy...” - The words of Exodus 33:19 are now cited as the first of three demonstrations of the consistent righteousness of God. In the aftermath of Israel’s apostasy with the golden calf, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and prays that he may be allowed to glimpse the glory of God as the assurance that God will not withdraw His presence from the nation that has failed Him so miserably. In the words that precede Paul’s quotation, God answers Moses’ request: ***“I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my Name, the Lord, in your presence.”*** As you read these words, keep in mind the profound significance of names in the Bible. When God declares ***“I will proclaim My Name, the Lord,”*** He promises the disclosure of that which determines His being. That disclosure now follows in the words cited by St. Paul: ***“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”*** By declaring His goodness and affirming His sovereign freedom to show mercy as He chooses, the Lord proclaims His Name - that is to say, He uncovers His essential nature, the essence of that which He is as God. James Dunn is correct when he describes this as *“an exceptional unveiling of God, of His glory and His Name.”* Dunn goes so far as to assert that the Exodus 33 text is *“God in His fullest self-disclosure prior to Christ, God in the fullest extent to which He could be known by man, His glory and His name is God as merciful and compassionate.”* (Dunn, p.552) The Lord is not bound by human expectations or standards. If He were, He could not be God. The actions of God cannot be contingent upon the actions of men. If they were He could not be God. No human being has any claim upon Him because He alone is God. No human being deserves or may dare to demand His mercy. By the bestowal of His mercy upon the unworthy nation of Israel, or upon unworthy Isaac, or upon unworthy Jacob, God reveals Himself as free, gracious love.

“It does not, therefore, depend on man desire or effort...” - This is the summary principle to be drawn from the examples and texts cited. The connection is indicated by the Greek conjunction *“ara oun,”* *“therefore, then.”* The Greek literally reads, *“It is not a matter of the person who wills or the person who runs but of the God who shows mercy.”* The two verbs ***“wills”*** and ***“runs”*** sum up the totality of man’s capacity, both that which we propose or desire to do and that which is actually done. Human participation as a basis for divine mercy is categorically and completely eliminated by this powerful phrase.

Luther warns that these verses express *“the most excellent theology”* which may prove to be too profound for the spiritually immature. This is *“very strong wine, and*

the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect.” He urges the prudent pastoral counsel that anyone who find himself troubled by the Biblical assertion of predestination “purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Christ Jesus.”



***“Martin Luther and Elector John Frederick Under the Cross”
From the Cover Page of the 1546 Edition of the German New Testament***

“Yet here I am issuing the warning that no man whose mind has not yet been purged, should rush into these speculations, lest he fall into the abyss of horror and hopelessness; but first let him purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. For I myself would not even read these things if the order of the lection and necessity did not compel me to do so. For this is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most excellent theology, of which the apostle says: “Among the mature, we do impart wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:6). But I am a baby who needs milk, not solid food (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Let him who is a child like me do the same. The wounds of Jesus Christ, “the clefts of the rock,” are sufficiently safe for us.” (Luther, AE 25, pp. 389- 390)

The decisive factor in these matters rests not with man but with God. Human works and attitudes are completely excluded and all that remains as the basis for salvation is “**God’s mercy.**” Nor is this a debate about justice. Mercy and justice have nothing whatsoever to do with one another. They are mutually exclusive categories. Justice presupposes rightful claims. Mercy can only operate where there are no claims. No natural descendant of Adam could ever be in a position to make such claims upon God. God is merciful solely because it is His nature to show mercy.

It must be kept in mind that this phrase (“***I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.***”) is not designed to justify the damnation of the majority, although it is often misunderstood in that way. In fact, the opposite is true. Rather, these words are an assertion of God’s prerogative to extend His mercy as He chooses, unrestricted by the expectations or standards of men.

This is clear in the Exodus context of the quotation as previously discussed. It was neither fair nor just for God to show mercy to apostate Israel after their flagrant disobedience with the golden calf. They deserved nothing but death and damnation. Their incredible ingratitude and faithlessness cried out for that judgment. God chose to have mercy upon them nonetheless. This is the setting from which Paul’s quotation is taken. Those who use this text in support of a theory of double predestination have it backwards. The text is not asserting God’s right to condemn the damned, but His right to justify the saved. The theory of double predestination is the unfortunate result of an over emphasis on God’s sovereignty at the expense of His mercy. The result is a tragic caricature of divine sovereignty which, in fact, denies His mercy. As Lenski points out, those who indulge in such nonsense fail to take into account the reality that mercy and compassion are the essence of God’s nature.

“All that is listed in verses 4-5 was pure mercy to the Israelites; all that the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, now have is the same pure mercy. “Pity” makes all of this still stronger. How could pity ever demand works? Mercy, and still more, pity are called out by the wretched condition of those who have lost everything and are plunged into woe. In God both qualities are perfect. This is another important point. Calvinism disregards this. It has God extend mercy and pity only to a few of the wretched and lost. For the great mass of the wretched God has no mercy, no pity, but only judgment and damnation. Mercilessly, pitilessly, He lets them perish in their wretchedness, yea, decrees that they shall so perish. In the mercy and the pity a peculiar sovereignty is substituted for the blessed quality that makes each what it really is in God, the response of His nature to man’s wretchedness and not at all an answer

to man's works. This is done by laying a peculiar limiting stress on the relative clauses: "on whomever I will have mercy - whomever I will pity." These clauses mean that God will not allow anyone to restrict Him in exercising His mercy and His pity, restrict Him to men and their works which they suppose they have, or their claims and rights (such as physical birth) which they imagine are theirs. They are taken to mean that God intended to show mercy and pity only to a few who were chosen by Him in an absolute way. The fact that such a sovereignty in God would be the very embodiment of unrighteousness and injustice is brushed away by simple Calvinistic denial and by such pleas as that God owes nothing to the non-elect. The true sovereignty in connection with God's mercy and pity is that He extends it to whomever He will, unhampered, unrestricted by limits that men may set up, undisturbed by charges of injustice that men's foolish reasoning may prefer. In this blessed sovereignty, He shapes what He will do so that the sweet purpose of mercy and pity will be attained to the utmost among men...There is no sovereignty that restricts mercy and pity in God, no sovereignty that places mercilessness and pitilessness for all the rest beside mercy and pity for a few. There is only the sovereignty that overthrows restrictions such as men think should be set up by works, etc., of theirs or by secret eternal decrees of God." (Lenski, pp. 608-609)

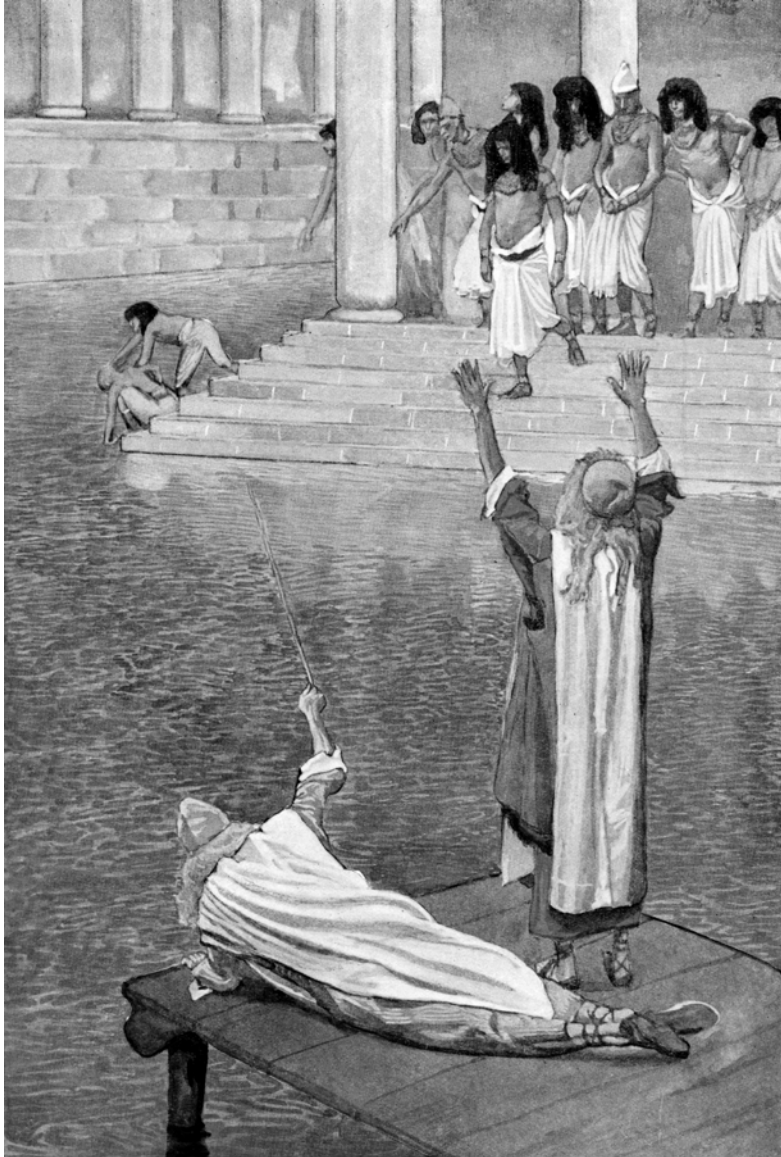
Verses 17-18

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My Name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore, God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.

"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh:..." - The introduction formula for this Old Testament citation parallels that of Verse 14 - ***"For He says to Moses."*** For the apostle, "God says" and "Scripture says" are interchangeable phrases. In both cases, it is God who speaks. This usage is a strong affirmation of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. The great Presbyterian defender of the faith Benjamin Warfield writes:

"It was not the not yet existent Scripture that made this announcement to Pharaoh, but God Himself through the mouth of His prophet Moses. These acts could be attributed to Scripture only as the result of such a habitual identification, in the mind of the writer, of the text of Scripture with God as speaking, that it became natural to use the term "Scripture says" when what was really intended was "God, as recorded in Scripture, said." ...These passages thus show an absolute identification, in the minds of these writers of Scripture with the speaking God." (Warfield, p.299)

God's word of grace and mercy to Moses is now balanced by a word of judgement spoken to Pharaoh, Moses' great opponent. The quotation comes from Exodus 9:16. God addressed the Egyptian king through Moses in the aftermath of the sixth plague, the plague of boils. In the words that precede the quotation, God reminds the defiant



*“The First Plague - the Nile Turned to Blood”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

monarch that He could have destroyed him and his kingdom at any point in this process. ***“For by now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth.”*** (Verse 15) But God has chosen not to do so for His own reasons. The ten plagues which God brought upon the land of Egypt were designed to demonstrate the impotence of the idols of that ancient nation before the power of the true God. (Cf. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* by John J. Davis) The plagues began with the Nile River as the water was turned to blood. The Egyptians worshiped the Nile in the form of the god Hapi. The plagues proceeded through the pantheon of ancient Egypt until the tenth and final plague culminates with an assault upon Egypt's living god, the personification of the god Horus, in the

person of Pharaoh himself with the death of the first born. The practical result of this demonstration was to humble Pharaoh and force him to allow the release of the Israelite slaves. But as the quotation reveals there is more at stake here than a mere

Israelite exit strategy. ***“I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”*** The verb that Paul uses, ***“I raised you up,”*** is used in the Greek Old Testament in the sense of raising up a person on the scene of history for a particular purpose in the plan of salvation (cf. Numbers 24:19; 2 Samuel 12:11; Job 5:11; Habakkuk 1:6; Zechariah 11:16). Within the providence of God this particular man was chosen to be the king of mighty Egypt at this moment in her long history so that he might play the role that God intended in Israel’s redemption from bondage. His stubborn opposition in the face of ten devastating plagues became the occasion for God to display His power and to glorify His name throughout the earth. ***“Pharaoh’s obduracy served as the foil to set off God’s redemptive power, the darker melody in a minor key which played counterpoint to the major key of God’s powerful call of Israel.”*** (Dunn, p. 563) Martin Franzmann offers the following helpful paraphrase of God’s word to the proud Egyptian king:

“In your rebellion you did not once escape the hand of God; your history of obdurate refusal was the free disposing of the will of the Lord and had to serve the revelation of His power and grace; you made His name to be proclaimed in all the earth. God held you fast in your resistance and locked you up in the sin that was your will.”
(Franzmann, pp. 176-177)

Pharaoh himself - (***“that I might demonstrate through you my power”***) - becomes the means through which God’s power is to be shown and God’s ***“name proclaimed in all the earth.”*** This could not have occurred had the king yielded after the first plague. But he did not. He opposed and resisted. He delayed and denied. And finally, even after giving in, he changed his mind again and led his army to destruction in the Red Sea. Thus, according to God’s purpose and plan all the world came to know of His power and the glory of His mighty Name (cf. Exodus 15:13-16; Joshua 2:9-10; 9:9; Psalm 78:12-13; 105:26-38; 106:9-11; 136:10-15).

“Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.” - This summary statement follows the Old Testament citation in the same way that Verse 16 (***“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”***) applied and explained the previous citation from Exodus 33. Both phrases begin with the same Greek conjunction ***“ara oun”*** - ***“therefore then.”*** Once again, it is not Paul’s intent to prove the righteousness of God in these matters by measuring them against some human standard. As Stöckhardt ironically notes: ***“That would be a curious theodicy indeed, if one were***

to attempt to justify God before the bar of human justice.” (Stöckhardt, p. 434) Rather, the apostle is simply illustrating the righteousness of God by his actions in the past and asserting His absolute freedom both in granting and withholding mercy. Luther argues that any attempt to measure the justice of God by any outside standard in effect causes God to cease to be God:



“Pharaoh and his Dead Son” by J. James Tissot

“He is God, and for His will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because He is or is obliged so to will that what His will is right, but on the contrary, because He Himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right. Cause and reason can be assigned for a creature’s will, but not for the will of the Creator, unless you set up over Him another creator.” (Luther, AE 33, p. 181)

The reformer is unconcerned about prideful man’s reaction to all this. God’s people must be willing to allow God to be God:

“It is not our business to ask these questions but to adore these mysteries. And if flesh and blood is offended here and murmurs, by all means let it murmur; but it will achieve nothing; God will not change on that account. And if the ungodly are scandalized and depart in great numbers, yet the elect will remain.” (Luther, AE 33, p.180)

In the case of Pharaoh, we see the manner in which God uses even His most determined and powerful enemies to accomplish His purposes. He chooses and uses whom He will. Fitzmyer explains the point in this way:

“When human beings react against God, they think that they are acting on their own and believe that they are thus limiting God’s power or thwarting His plans; but actually He is in that reaction, making them obdurate against Him, as He did the Pharaoh. God’s freedom and sovereignty in the choice of instruments to achieve His ends are made manifest. Thus Pharaoh became an instrument whereby God’s power was revealed and His name proclaimed.” (Fitzmyer, p. 568)

The term **“harden”** (Greek - *“skleryno”*) is typically used in a medical context in secular Greek, as is its English derivative *“sclerosis.”* In Scripture, the term takes on the spiritual connotation of insensitivity to God and His Word as the first step in a process which can ultimately lead to final wrath and condemnation. The hardening of the heart by God in Scripture is always a judicial act carried out by God the judge in response to the stubborn opposition of the sinner who has first hardened himself. (Cf. Notes on 1:24-25, pp.47-48) Stöckhardt emphasizes this truth over against the Calvinist assertion of predestination to damnation. The great Lutheran Bible scholar delineates three stages in God’s action: 1. Permission; 2. Abandonment; and, 3. Being Given Over. He goes on to present a careful definition of the role of the sinner himself in this process:

“Hardening of the heart on God’s part appears as the divine reaction against human conduct, as the adequate punishment for self-obduracy. It is contrary to Scripture and blasphemous to deduce obduracy from an absolute decree of reprobation, which already previously excludes the rejected from the love of God, the redemption of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Ghost...With regard to those who finally harden themselves and as punishment are hardened by God, God left nothing undone in order to convert them...Herein the self-obduracy of the sinner consists: He despises God’s earnestness and goodness, stifles all impressions of the divine Word, and opposes the Holy Ghost, who testifies in his heart and conscience and earnestly desires to convert him. In the long run, however, the great God, who is absolutely earnest in His commands as in His saving grace, will not put up with man’s

opposition to His Word and to His good and gracious will. With the perverse, He is perverse, and He hardens those who have hardened themselves. This does not mean that He effects and nourishes the perverse disposition in them. God never does evil. God's hardening of the incorrigible sinner is first of all permissive. He gives them room and freedom, so that their malice operates fully and unhindered unto the last bitter fruit. Along with this are included together a second and third dimension. God's hardening is abandonment ("egkataleiptikos") and being given over ("paradotikos"). God ceases to work in man, withdraws His Spirit (Luther), and thus the possibility of conversion, and gives man over to his perverse, obdurate disposition and will and into the power of the devil, so that the latter can effect his work in him undisturbed. "God abandons the impious to the devil" (Luther)" (Stöckhardt, p. 439)

Lutheran theologians insist that a careful distinction must be maintained between the responsibility for salvation and for damnation. Stöckhardt articulates the Scriptural view in this way:

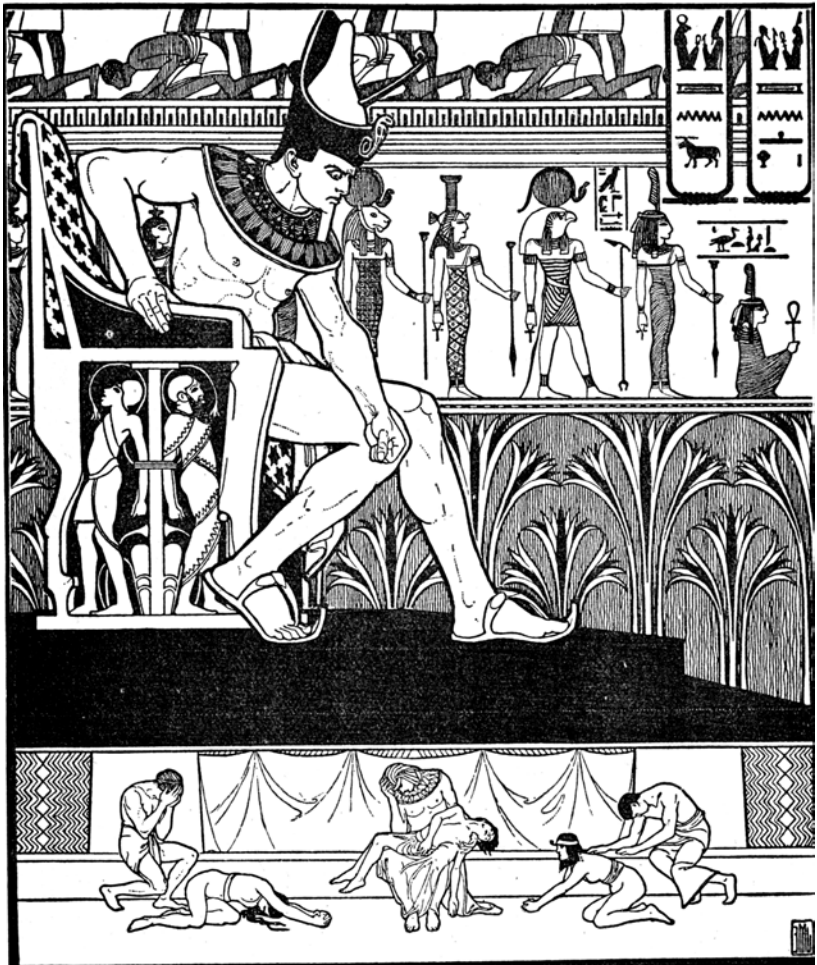
"Therefore, with regard to the motive there is a difference between divine mercy and obduracy that God inflicts. If God has mercy on someone, calls and converts a sinner and in this way saves him, that in no way depends upon man's effort, desire, and conduct, but rests alone in God, in His grace and mercy, already in His eternal grace. That Scriptures declare. God is gracious because He is gracious. And God is just in His doings, though they do not correspond to the weak human conception of righteousness. If God, on the other hand, hardens and finally damns someone, the cause lies alone in man, in his conduct and self-obduracy. Obduracy, which results in eternal destruction, is well deserved, righteous, judgement of God, whose righteousness is also evident to the godless. This twofold matter we must maintain according to Scriptures." (Stöckhardt, p. 440)

The example of Pharaoh is the classic Biblical illustration of the hardening of the heart. The term is used fourteen times in the narrative of Exodus 7-14 which describes Moses confrontation with the king of Egypt. at times in reference to Pharaoh's own actions (7:13,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34,35), and at times in reference to God's action upon Pharaoh (9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). It is significant to note that the text refers to Pharaoh hardening his own heart five times before the first reference comes to God hardening Pharaoh's heart. Thus the hardening that God inflicted upon him was the result of his own sin. Joseph Fitzmyer correctly observes that the hardening of the heart by God is the "*divine reaction to persistent human obstinacy against Him, the sealing of a situation arising not from God but from a creature that rejects divine invitation.*" (Fitzmyer, p. 568) Thus the earlier emphasis of Romans 1 is maintained

as God responds to the defiant sinfulness of man by giving him over to that which he has already chosen for himself (cf. Romans 1:18-25) It is important to keep in mind that

“God’s hardening is an act directed against human beings who are already in rebellion against God’s righteous rule. God’s hardening does not then cause spiritual insensitivity to the things of God; it maintains people in the state of sin that already characterizes them.” (Moo, p. 599)

The Lutheran Confessions declare that God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart *“was a punishment of his antecedent sin and horrible tyranny, which in many and manifold ways he practiced inhumanly and against the accusations of his heart towards the children of Israel.”* (FCSD, XI,85) Nonetheless, one might well argue that everything which has been said of Pharaoh could be said of every sinful human being, all of whom by nature stubbornly deny and defy God. Those who are saved are no less sinful than those who are damned. Stöckhardt frankly admits:



“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart” by E.M. Lilien

“If we compare the objects of mercy and the objects of hardening, we cannot understand why of the two who are both by nature sinful and corrupt, God has mercy on one and hardens the other; why He gives the one into hardening, brought about by his own fault, and converts the other, who is no better; why God lets the one continue in his opposition to the very extreme and takes it away from the other before he comes to self-hardening and then to hardening.” (Stöckhardt, p.442)

The apostle does not attempt to resolve this difficulty, for to do so would be to place God before the bar of human justice. Paul's purpose here is clearly to affirm the absolute freedom of God to act according to His divine will in both granting and withholding mercy. "***God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wants to harden.***" Lurking behind the figure of heart hardened Pharaoh in this quotation is the parallel with contemporary Israel. Later, in Chapter 11, Paul will argue that unbelieving Israel has likewise been hardened so that the Name of God may be glorified throughout the world. (Cf. 11:5-7, 25)

The contrast between God's action in the election of the saints to salvation and His reaction in the hardening of the condemned is essentially an expression of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. The subordination of the Law to the Gospel and a meticulously careful emphasis on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel are the defining characteristics of Lutheran theology. In the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, based on Scripture, the Gospel, the message of the sinner's justification, the promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, must always come first. The Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, in criticizing the "*onesidedness*" of that theology, accurately described the Lutheran view when he said: "*The Law has a place before and after the Gospel - before it in order to terrify the unbelieving sinner, after it in order to guide the believing sinner - but hence it is only for the sake of understanding the Gospel that the Law has any place at all in revelation.*" (Barth, I, p. 326) To place the Law on the same footing as the Gospel in the manner of the Reformed is to subtly but fundamentally transform the nature of the Gospel itself. That transformation effects every doctrine but nowhere is it more clearly revealed than in the doctrine of predestination.

In a 1912 article entitled "*The Teaching of Scripture Regarding Hardening,*" Lutheran theologian John Phillip Koehler applies the Law/Gospel dialectic in the context of Romans Chapter 9:

*"The doctrine of hardening is the exponent of the law as the doctrine of election is the exponent of the gospel, that is, both doctrines deeply drive home a chief thought of the law or of the gospel; in these doctrines the thought is expressed most strongly. Through the law God reveals Himself as the almighty Lord and Judge of the world, who is accountable to no one. God is sovereign in His judgment. That is what is meant by the words, "**He hardens whom He wants to.**" In the same way God reveals Himself sovereign in His grace. That is expressed by the doctrine of election. That much the doctrines have in common, that they are exponents of the area of*

doctrine they represent. To the extent that both areas of doctrine are different, these doctrines are also fundamentally different. To the extent that God is sovereign in the law, the expression means that He is accountable to no one, as Paul explains in Romans 9:21. That is a matter of right and of authority. The words about hardening, as the words of the law in general, have this characteristic. It is authoritative speech. It is meant that way and its effect is the same. It knocks man down. The sovereignty of the gospel of grace is completely different. It is not defined by right and authority, but by the freedom of love, that is, in God's activity of love, that He has already guaranteed the salvation of individual man who is saved through his eternal election. God is not defined by anything at all outside of Himself, not by something in the man, but only by what is in God, namely by His love in Christ Jesus. Because these two actions are so different, one may not draw conclusions from one to the other. One may not conclude from the sovereign hardening of the one that from that action results the election of the another; one may not conclude from the free choosing of some that thereby others have been predestined to damnation. Our reason, according to its experience, would gladly do that. But Scripture prevents that by its careful distinction between the two statements. Whoever does that anyway, mixes law and gospel." (Koehler, pp.224-225)

Calvinist confusion in this area is the inevitable result and expression of their more fundamental confusion about the relationship between Law and Gospel. In Calvin's theology, double predestination, as the decisive expression of God's absolute sovereignty, becomes the light in which all other doctrines, including the doctrine of justification, are to be viewed. The corollary concepts of limited atonement, irresistible grace, and inamissable faith, are then spun from that basic governing idea and Scripture is compelled to yield to perceived logic. The essential difference between Calvin and Luther in this most basic perspective affects virtually every area of Christian doctrine and practice.

Verses 19-21

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

"One of you will say to me..." - Paul immediately anticipates the objection that will arise from the unresolved logical difficulty. How can man be held responsible if God

is in control? The apostle's unequivocal assertion of divine sovereignty would appear



*“Where Were You When I Laid the Earth’s Foundation?”
Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer*

to have logically absolved man from blame for his own actions. How can God condemn human beings for doing what He causes them to do? After all, who can resist the will of the almighty God. These questions are as old as mankind and to the man whose conscience is not captive to the Word of God they remain every bit as troubling today as they were 2,000 years ago. But the question itself is fallacious, based upon a misrepresentation of the Biblical evidence. The Scriptures clearly and emphatically teach that every human being is indeed responsible for his own unbelief and sin. At the same time, with equal clarity and emphasis, the Bible asserts the determinate control of God over every facet of His creation. How these apparently contradictory assertions are to be reconciled is beyond the capacity of human reason.

Here we approach a boundary line which dare not be crossed lest we become guilty of infringing upon the sovereign majesty of God. Stöckhardt warns that there is a

profoundly important lesson to be learned here for every believing Christian and particularly for every Biblical theologian:

“This is also a solemn warning for theologians who would step beyond the boundary line and cast light upon and clarify every mystery in heaven and on earth with the dim little lights of their own reason and then impudently and insolently deny away everything that does not fit within their tight little categories. But at the same time, the Truth which Paul affirms in Verses 14-21, also includes a direction for the believing Christian and particularly for the Bible believing theologian. They too ought to carefully take note of this boundary line, the point at which divine revelation ends and the mysteries of God begin. It is clearly and definitely revealed in Scripture that the only source of conversion and salvation is the grace and mercy of God and that the only source of hardening and damnation is the evil will of man. This twofold Truth one must extol and inculcate with all diligence. This serves the cause of salvation and the piety of souls. Scripture goes on to say, as in our present text, Romans 9:14-21, and also in the parallel passage in Romans 11:33-36 that there is an unsearchable will of God and that there are inscrutable mysteries of God, which God has reserved in His own wisdom, and that the “discretio personarum” (differentiation between people), the “causa discriminis” (reason for discrimination) is one such mystery. At this point Christian doctrine and theology has arrived at its limit. At this point it must halt. These questions will also arise again and again within the hearts and flesh of believing Christians and theologians. Why? Why does God will and do this or that? Why not the opposite? But we must nip these questions in the bud, for the answers are not found in God’s Word and revelation and they do not serve the salvation of souls which is the only goal of Christian doctrine and theology. He who seeks to solve the insoluble inevitably falls into disputation and wrangling the mighty and majestic God. It is enough for us to know, as Luther noted in the citation quoted above, that there is an unsearchable will in God. That is as far as revelation goes. But it is not fitting for us to inquire and to want to know why and how far His will reaches because God has hidden that from us. The fact, the Truth which at the same time forms the keystone of revealed Truth, that there are unsolved and insoluble questions and secrets, which go far beyond our horizon and which God in His wisdom has kept hidden from us should keep us in the fear of God and in humility, and guard us against idle and dangerous speculation. It should also preserve us in that which is our duty, that we contemplate and proclaim the revealed counsel of God, particularly the entire counsel of God in regard to our salvation, nothing more and nothing less.” (Stöckhardt, pp.455-456)

For Luther, this was the dividing line between the “hidden God” (*Deus absconditus*) and the “revealed God” (*Deus revelatus*). We, as creatures, dare not presume to fully comprehend the mystery and majesty of the eternal Creator. God is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in revelation. It ought to be expected that for us His majesty

is incomprehensible and unfathomable. It should come as no surprise that to the extent that the Creator deigns to disclose Himself and His sovereign will in Scripture, that disclosure would appear to us to be contradictory or paradoxical. How could it have been otherwise? In his classic work *“The Structure of Lutheranism,”* Werner Elert provides a grim description fallen man’s predicament before the terrible reality of the *“hidden God.”*

“He is standing before an inscrutable mystery. He feels the guilt that was bound up with his human nature from the very beginning because of the “Thou shalt!” But he does not know why. As he asks these questions, the darkness becomes impenetrable. There is no answer. This God, who holds us responsible for demands which we cannot fulfill, who asks us questions we cannot answer, who created us for that which is good, and in spite of this leaves us no choice but to do that which is evil - this is the “hidden God” (Deus absconditus). It is the God of absolute predestination. It is the God who hardens the heart of Pharaoh and hates Esau before Esau was born, the potter who forms vessels that fill one with loathing - and in spite of all this, thunders in pitiless sovereignty at these unhappy creatures, “Thine is the guilt!” (“Tua Culpa!”). Here morals and reason really come to an end.” (Elert, p. 22)

In the depths of his despair, Luther fled in absolute terror from all consuming wrath of God. He felt himself *“sinking into the depths of hell.”* He understood only too well *“the utter unfathomableness of divine majesty and the sovereign will of God.”* (Sasse, p. 139) Lutheran theology is fully aware of the of the deep chasm which separates the finite from the infinite and the sinful creature from the holy Creator. It does not seek to minimize or rationalize the mystery of the divine will and predestination. But for Martin Luther and the Church which bears his name there is an even more awesome and incredible reality than the majestic paradox of the hidden God. Herman Sasse writes:

“They know something even more tremendous, something which grips the human heart even more profoundly, something which goes even further in surpassing human thought. This is the fact that this hidden God has revealed Himself. He has stepped out of the profound darkness behind which, to our eyes, the brightness was concealed so that no one could draw near. He has come to us across the boundless distance which separates the Creator from His fallen creature, and has told us His Name. “Ask ye, who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there’s none other God.” And He comes to us not as a Stranger but as a Brother. This is the miracle of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God which Luther celebrates in the greatest of Christendom’s Christmas hymns:

*“The eternal Father’s only Son,
For a manger leaves His throne;
Disguised in our poor flesh and blood,
Is now the everlasting Good.
Lord, have mercy!*

*He whom the world could not enclose
Doth in Mary’s lap repose,
He is become an infant small
Who by His might upholdeth all.
Lord, have mercy!”*



“The Word Became Flesh” by Rudolf Schäfer

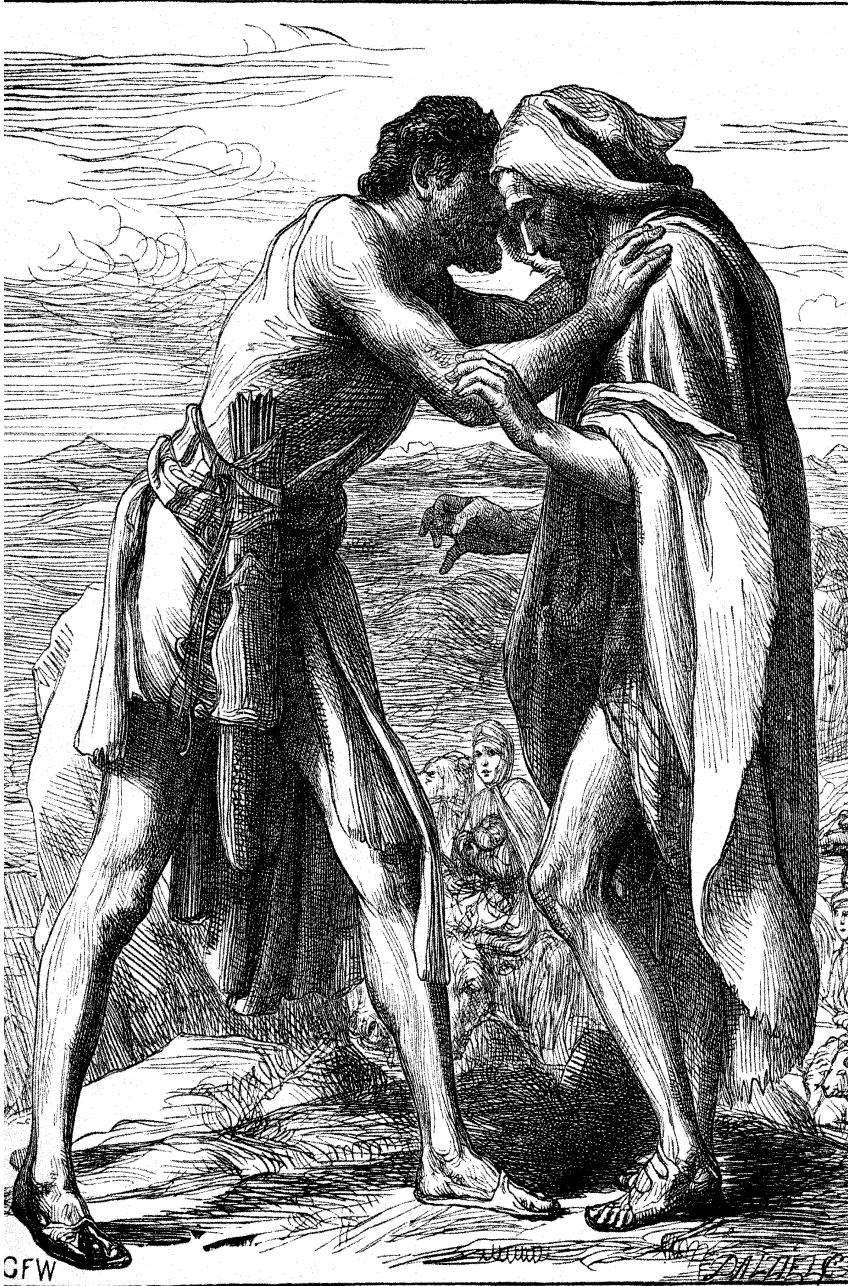
It is from the standpoint of this miracle that the Lutheran faith must be comprehended...We should say, in reply to Calvin, that it is not our task to reconcile these Scripture passages in such a way as to resolve the contradiction between the God of wrath and the God of mercy, between the Judge and the Savior of the world, into a logical and consistent idea of God. We must, rather, acknowledge that the reality of God has two sides. We dare not gloss over the words of judgment and wrath, nor may we take the greatness and the glory away from the words of grace and mercy. Moreover, as the Formula of Concord notes, "with special care the distinction must be observed between that which has been revealed concerning this in God's Word and what is not revealed. For in addition to that hitherto mentioned which has been revealed in Christ concerning this, God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it alone for His wisdom and knowledge. Concerning this we should not investigate, nor indulge our thoughts, nor reach our conclusions, not inquire curiously, but should adhere to the revealed Word of God." (Sasse, pp.138-141)

"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?..." - Paul does not deign to answer the presumptuous questions of foolish men. He offers neither excuse nor explanation. To pose such questions is to accuse God. To dare to raise such questions is to exalt one's self to the level of God. *"A Christian would be frightened by the very thought of doing such a thing. Suppose we did not see through God's counsels, shall we, with our poor, erring creature minds take the infinite mind and perfect will of God to task?"* (Lenski, p. 619) The horrified exclamation of Verse 14, ***"Perish the thought!"*** is the only appropriate response. John Murray rightly describes Paul's words as *"the appeal to the reverential silence which the majesty of God demands of us."* (Murray, II, p. 31) The dramatic language of the text summons the creature to recall his identity (***"Who are you, O man"***) in the presence of the eternal Creator.

"Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it..." - The inherently subordinate position of the creature over against his Creator is asserted with a quotation from Isaiah 29:16. ***"You turning things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"?"*** (Cf. also Isaiah 45:9; 64:8) The image of God as the potter who forms the clay according to his own artistry and will is a common one in the ancient Near East. It is ultimately drawn from the language of Genesis 2:7 - ***"And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."*** The same image serves the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 18:3-6).

For the creature to demand an account from God is as foolish and nonsensical as to imagine that a lump of clay might challenge the will of the potter who forms it. The Old Testament references come in the context of Israel's grumbling and complaints.

The prophets use the imagery of the potter and the clay to reveal the ridiculous presumption of such complaints. That is also the apostle's message.



"Jacob and Esau" by G. F. Watts

"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay..." -

While no longer quoting in this Verse, the apostle's language closely parallels that of the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 15:7 -

"For when the potter kneads the soft clay and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, he fashions out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses and those for contrary uses, making all in like manner; but which shall be the use of each one of these the worker in clay decides."

The irony of the allusion would not have been lost on Paul's original audience. In the Wisdom of Solomon text the Jews are the worthy vessels while Gentile idol worshipers are described as unworthy. Now the point of the imagery has been reversed and unbelieving Israel is the unworthy vessel in contrast to true children of

Abraham by faith. In both instances, the point of comparison in this image is the sovereign right of God the Creator to do as He chooses with that which He has created.

“Paul’s imagery is clear; one bowl may be highly decorated and grace a king’s palace; another, made from the same clay, may serve as a chamber pot in a lowly household...The only sensible course for each one, whether menial pot or treasured bowl, is to submit in creaturely humility before the divine potter.” (Dunn, p. 565)

Verses 22-24

What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath - prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory - even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

“What if God, choosing to show His wrath...” - The NIV translates the participle ***“choosing”*** (Greek - *“thelon”*) as causal, so that God’s desire to demonstrate His wrath and power becomes the reason for His great patience with the objects of His wrath. While this translation is linguistically possible it tends to obscure the sense of the text. The participle ***“choosing”*** would be better translated as concessive, expressing what God wanted to do, based on His holiness and justice, but did not actually do because of His great love and mercy.

“So immense is the mercy of God, so intense His purpose to make known its riches to men by living examples in order to draw them to His mercy, that He puts off His wrath and His power and the destruction which these must visit on the obdurate...When men are ripe for judgment, God has the will to strike them down in judgment: yet He delays this in the interests of His grace. Foolish men may think that His threats of judgment are not serious; God is willing to run that risk. Displaying His grace is supreme to Him.” (Lenski, p. 622)

Using the participle in this way, the text would then read: ***“But what if God, although His will was to manifest His wrath and make known His power....”*** Even the ***“wrath”*** and the ***“power”*** of God ultimately serve the cause of His love. The very judgment that falls upon the stubborn sinner may be seen by other sinners as a warning that will turn them from the path of destruction (cf. v.17). God demonstrates

His judgment so that all may know that it is truly **“a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:31) God is astonishingly patient with sinners. The Greek text uses the powerful word *“makrothumia”* which literally means *“great suffering.”* *“God should have destroyed them long ago but delayed and delayed. Although they are intolerable to Him, He tolerated them, and this required great longsuffering indeed! God exercised this longsuffering because of His immense purpose of mercy.”* (Lenski, p. 623) The purpose of God’s longsuffering is always the repentance and forgiveness of the sinner. As the apostle Peter explains: **“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient (“longsuffering”) with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”** (2 Peter 3:9)

Stubborn impenitent sinners are designated as the **“objects of God’s wrath.”** The text literally says *“vessels”* or *“vases of God’s wrath”* (Greek - *“skeue orges”*) carrying out the potter imagery from the preceding verses. These vessels are said to have been **“prepared for destruction.”** This is a perfect passive participle without a designated subject, thus removing God as the active agent in this matter. This is in sharp contrast to the next verse where, in speaking of the vessels of His mercy, an active participle is used and God is designated as the subject. In addition, the Greek prefix *“pro”* (**“in advance”**) is added to verb in the second phrase, indicating God’s independent action long before the promised glory was actually received. Careful attention to these distinctions within the language of the text is of crucial theological significance. The Lutheran Confessions devote a significant amount of time to a careful exegesis of the language of these verses in order that we might clearly understand what the Bible says about the distinction between the basis for salvation and the basis for damnation.

“But the reason why not all who hear it (the Word of God) believe, and some are therefore condemned the more deeply is not because God has begrudged them their salvation; but it is their own fault, as they have heard the Word in such a manner as not to learn, but only to despise, blaspheme, and disgrace it, and have resisted the Holy Ghost, who through the Word wished to work in them, as was the case in the time of Christ with the Pharisees and their adherents. Hence the apostle distinguishes the work of God with special care, who alone makes vessels of honor, and the work of the devil and of man, who by the instigation of the devil and not of God has made himself a vessel of dishonor. For thus it is written (Romans 9:22-23 is cited). Hence the apostle clearly says that God endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, but does not say that He made them vessels of wrath; for if this had been His will, He would not have required any great longsuffering for it. The

*fault, however, that they are fitted for destruction belongs to the devil and to men themselves and not to God. For all preparation for condemnation is by the devil and man, through sin, and in no respect by God, who does not wish that any man be damned. How then should He Himself prepare any man for condemnation? For as God is not a cause of sins, so, too, He is no cause of punishment, of damnation; but the only cause of damnation is sin; for **the wages of sin is death.**" (Romans 6:23). And as God does not will sin, and has no pleasure in sin, so He does not wish the death of the sinner, either. (Ezekiel 33:11), nor has He pleasure in his condemnation. For He is not willing **that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance** (2 Peter 3:9). So too, it is written in Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11 - "**As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.**" And St. Paul testifies in clear words that from the vessels of dishonor, vessels of honor may be made by God's power and working when he writes thus, 2 Timothy 2:21; "**If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.**" For he who is to purge himself must first have been unclean, and hence a vessel of dishonor. But concerning the vessels of mercy, He says clearly that the Lord Himself has prepared them for glory, which He does not say concerning the damned, who themselves, and not God, have prepared themselves as vessels of damnation." (FCSD, XI, 79-83)*

The dreadful Calvinist doctrine of reprobation, that God predestined the overwhelming majority of his creatures to fall and be damned is based upon a misunderstanding of this text. Dr. Stöckhardt concludes: "*It is well to note that the apostle neither here nor elsewhere mentions anything concerning a preparation or predestination of the vessels of wrath to damnation. If there were such a thing, it would surely be mentioned in this connection.*" (Stöckhardt, p. 459)

"What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy..." - The final purpose of God's patient forbearance in the face of egregious sin is here presented. Gracious love, mercy,



"John Calvin"

is God's defining attribute (cf. 1 John 4:8), and all that God does ultimately serves the cause of His love. So also His willingness to defer punishment for sin and to allow the process of hardening to run its full course, not only serves to provide the greatest possible opportunity for repentance on the part of the sinner, but also enables believers to observe the full impact of God's righteous wrath upon the sinner.

“Who would have known about God's mercy toward Israel if God had struck down Pharaoh on that first day when Moses demanded Israel's release? Who would have known about God's mercy toward the church that was made up of Jews and Gentiles if God had destroyed the Jewish nation when Herod killed the Baptist or when the Sanhedrin first plotted Jesus' death?” (Lenski, p. 624)

Only in the context of that grim message of the Law can the amazing sweetness of the message of the Gospel be fully appreciated.

“When the vessels of mercy perceive the fearsome wrath of God upon the disobedient and reflect on the fact that they deserve the same, then they appreciate in a deeper way the riches of God's glory and the grace lavished upon them. The mercy of God is set forth in clarity against the backdrop of His wrath...The mercy of God would not be impressed on the consciousness of human beings apart from the exercise of God's wrath, just as one delights more richly in the warmth, beauty, and tenderness of spring after one has experienced the cold blast of winter.” (Schreiner, p. 523)

The description of the redeemed in this Verse parallels the description of the damned in the preceding Verse - **“objects of His wrath”** in contrast to **“objects of His mercy.”** However, in this case, as previously noted, the participle is active, and the subject is clearly identified - **“whom He prepared in advance for glory.”** Those for whom glory has been prepared are the handiwork of God, and Him alone.

A final relative clause is added to remove any possible ambiguity as to the identity of the vessels of His mercy - **“even us whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.”** With these words the apostle re-emphasizes the basic thrust of his argument. Membership in the household of God is a matter of faith, not blood. The true children of Abraham are not his blood descendants, but those who like Father Abraham trust and believe in the promises of God. Blood Israel's stubborn rejection of Jesus as the Messiah does not mean that the promise of God has failed. On the contrary, Israel's rejection of her Savior serves that which was God's plan from the beginning, namely the salvation of mankind, and the creation of a church made up not of one nation, but of every nation.

Excursus: The Calvinist Doctrine of Reprobation

The doctrine of “reprobation” is one of the distinctive features of Calvinist theology. In his *“Institutes of the Christian Religion”* John Calvin insists that *“those whom God passes over, He condemns; and this He does for no other reason than that He wills to exclude them from the inheritance which He predestines for His own children.”* (Calvin, p. 497) Calvin goes on to assert that reprobation is the



“The Opening of the Synod of Dort - 1618”

inescapable counterpart to the Scriptural doctrine of predestination to salvation and that *“election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation.”* The Geneva reformer scorns Lutheran theology which resists or rejects this doctrine as ignorant and childish (Calvin, p. 497). The official teaching of Calvinism was formalized and codified by Canons of the Reformed Synod of Dort in 1619 which declared the following:

Article VI

“That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree. For known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts 15:18; Ephesians 1:11) According to which decree He

Article XV

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in an eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in His just judgment to follow in their own way; at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger.”

The Synod describes God’s action as “*passing by*” from the Latin “*praeter*” (*by*) and “*ire*” (*to go*) which comes into Reformed theological terminology in the English word “*preterition*.” Dr. Harry Boer, a theologian of the Christian Reformed Church offers this comprehensive definition of the Calvinist position in his 1983 book “*The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church*.” Boer is most careful to emphasize that reprobation is neither passive nor permissive. It is, rather, a specific deliberate act of God’s sovereign will which determines to condemn the damned for all eternity.

“What is meant by God’s leaving the reprobate to their wickedness, or, as Dort calls it, His “passing by” of the reprobate? In other words, what concretely does “passing by” mean?...This is the core, the heart, the irreducible center and substance of the decree of reprobation. It states clearly what the “passing by” of the non-elect in fact entails. It reveals that non-election is not a side effect, a by-product, or an attendant circumstance of election. Reprobation consists of three distinct decretal actions of God, deliberate, purposeful, and terribly determinative and final. The reprobate are left in a common fate of living death; they are denied the gift of faith and the grace of conversion; and they are condemned and punished forever. This does not happen simply because God elects others and in the process simply has a neutral attitude to those whom He “passes by.” He specifically decreed that the reprobate should be reprobate, in the same sense in which He decreed that the elect should be elect. This is the meaning of the fateful words in Article 6, “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree.” The several parts of the decree of reprobation are therefore not due to a non-action, an omission, a disregard or inadvertence, or inattention on God’s part. Rather, they are the result of an explicit and purposeful decision as deliberate and intended as the decree of election. The not believing and the not

being converted of the reprobate may involve all manner of time-conditioned personal circumstances, attitudes, backgrounds, and influences. The fact is that behind them and prior to them stands an immutable decree of God as unbreakable as that of election itself, determining that these circumstances, attitudes, backgrounds and influences would never be overcome or undone by the sufficiency and power of the gospel. Before birth, from eternity, the reprobate are destined never to come to faith, are destined never to be converted, are destined to remain in the death into which their primal father Adam cast them, and are destined to be punished forever. But this is not all. The irrevocable certainty of the fate of the damned lies in the same place, in the identical might and driving power within God that guarantees the salvation of the elect - that is, God's sovereign good pleasure. This is the cornerstone of God's predestinating decree, whether for election or reprobation. Not only are both achieved by the same two sided decree, but both have their origin in the same mystery shrouded sovereign will of God. To grasp this absolutely essential fact is to hold in hand the key to the Dortian doctrine of predestination." (Boer, p. 9 ff.)

Calvin was well aware that many would regard this doctrine as "horrible" (Reid, p. 937) but he nonetheless maintained that it was not only necessary but should be prominently preached and taught to the people of God. In Calvin's view, Romans 9 was among the preeminent texts which supported the concept of divine reprobation of the damned. Edwin Palmer articulates the classic Calvinist understanding in this way:

"Reprobation as preterition is unconditional, and as condemnation it is conditional. God in passing some by was not conditioned by their unbelief. God did not foresee which ones by their own will would not accept Christ and on that basis reject them. Just as election is unconditional so also preterition is unconditional. The only reason given for the election Jacob and the passing by of Esau is: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13). The reason was in God and not in the foreknowledge of the good or bad that either one would do. ("Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who called - she was told, "The older will serve the younger.") As Calvin said: "As Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated." The most powerful evidence that preterition is unconditional and that unbelief is ordained by God is found in the hypothetical questions that Paul raises in response to this strong assertion of God's sovereignty both in election and reprobation. He asks hypothetically, as if a doubter were questioning God's wisdom: "What then shall we say? Is God unjust?" The question presupposes that double predestination (election and reprobation) is unconditional, that it is not based on God's foreknowledge of who would believe or not, who would be good or evil. For if predestination were based on what God foresaw man would believe or do, then predestination would seem to be completely

fair. Man would then get what he deserves and there would be no need for Paul to raise these questions. So the very question about God's unfairness ("Is God unjust?") necessarily presupposes that election and reprobation are not based on what man does but on God's decree. As a matter of fact, Paul immediately goes on to say just that. "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." (Romans 9:15-16) Paul follows up by reasserting that "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." (Romans 9:18) Again he asks a question: "One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" Again these very questions can be understood only if preterition and unbelief are grounded in God...Thus Romans 9 is clear in asserting that both election and preterition are unconditional. Their ultimate foundation is in God: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Reprobation as condemnation is conditional in the sense that once someone is passed by, then he is condemned by God for his sins and unbelief. Although all things, unbelief and sin included, proceed from God's eternal decree, man is still to blame for his sins. He is guilty. It is his fault and not God's. (Palmer, pp. 104-105)



"John Calvin and his Colleagues in Geneva" by Ferdinand Hodler - 1884

Lutherans have rejected Calvin's assertion that reprobation is the unavoidable logical consequence of predestination to salvation as a contradiction of Scripture and a violation of the fundamental principle that the Bible alone, not mere logical deduction, can be the basis for Christian doctrine. Professor Theodore Engelder summarizes the Scriptural foundation for the Lutheran view in his *"Popular Symbolics"*:

"There is no election of wrath, no predestination of men to damnation as Calvinism teaches. Scripture nowhere teaches that God was pleased to pass by and to ordain to dishonor and wrath a part of mankind. On the contrary, it teaches a) that the grace of God is universal, not particular, affirming that God will have all men to be saved, 1 Timothy 2:4, and that He brings His efficacious grace to bear also upon such as are ultimately lost, Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51, and b) that those who are lost perish solely because of their rejection of the saving grace of God, Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51; 13:46. The argument that the dogma of the election of wrath is the necessary corollary of the doctrine of the election of grace ("since there could be no election without its opposite reprobation" Calvin, Institutes, III, 23,1) could carry weight only if reason were permitted to construct doctrines by means of logical deductions. Besides, Scripture distinctly repudiates this deduction. While it teaches that the Christians owe their salvation to the sovereign grace of God in Christ, it teaches that men are lost, not in consequence of any action or decree of God or any lack of action, but solely on account of their wickedness Acts 13:48,46; Romans 9:23 ("vessels of mercy which He has afore prepared unto glory") and 22 ("endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction"). FCSD, XI, 79,80. As to John 12:40; Romans 9:17f., 11:8-10; 1 Peter 2:8: God hardens and casts men away not because of any eternal decree of reprobation to that effect, but solely because men harden themselves against, and cast away, the Gospel of grace, Romans 11:9 ("recompense"); 1 Peter 2:8 ("stumble at the Word"); John 12:40 is preceded by verses 35-37; Matthew 11:25 by verse 20f." (Engelder, p.)

Verses 25-29

As He says in Hosea: "I will call them 'My people' who are not My people; and I will call her 'My loved one' who is not My loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place that it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out His sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

“As He says in Hosea...” - The point is now documented and affirmed by the prophetic witness of Old Testament Scripture. If God had promised salvation to every individual Jew and then failed to save all the Jews one might rightly be able to argue that the promise of God had failed. But that was never the case, as this series of four passages from the Old Testament will demonstrate.

We turn first to the 8th Century prophet Hosea. Hosea was God’s inspired spokesman to the northern kingdom of Israel on the eve of that nation’s destruction by the hordes of Assyria in 722 B.C. The prophet was commanded to marry a harlot, a woman who would not be faithful to him, to symbolize the spiritual adultery of the ten northern tribes in their unfaithfulness to God. (Cf. Hosea 1:1-2:9) Hosea married a prostitute named Gomer. Each of the children whom Gomer conceived is given a symbolic name. Their first born was a son named *“Jezreel”*, a Hebrew word which means *“Scattered in the Wind.”* This strange name was a warning that the time was approaching when God would scatter the northern tribes among the Gentile nations as punishment for their sins. The second child was a daughter whom God named *“Lo-Ruhamah”*. The name is a combination of two Hebrew words which mean *“Not Loved”* because once His judgment came upon them and they were scattered among the nations, God would love the ten lost tribes no more. Another son was born and named *“Lo-Ammi,”* which means *“Not My People,”* foretelling a time when Israel would be the people of God no longer.

Paul paraphrases from Hosea 2:23 and Hosea 1:10 which refer to the names of all three of the prophet’s children. The original texts read: ***“I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will show My love to one I called ‘Not My Loved One.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My People’; ‘You are My people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”*** ***“In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”*** The prophecy promises that God will act to undo the disruption caused by His people’s unfaithfulness. The call of Israel had never been a matter of race or conduct. Israel was not chosen because God had rejected the nations, but because of God’s plan for the salvation of the whole world. Thus, as is so often the case in the New Testament’s application of Old Testament prophecy, the promises of a renewed Israel find their fulfillment in the church. Hans LaRondelle summarizes the New Testament perspective in this way:

“Israel’s calling by Yahweh is therefore, for Paul, fulfilled in the apostolic church. He joins Peter (1 Peter 2:10) in citing Hosea’s prophecy of Israel’s restoration, in order to affirm its fulfillment in the universal church of Christ (Romans 9:24-26). Thus Peter and Paul stand together in declaring that Israel’s remnant prophecies have found an ecclesiological fulfillment. This universal application to the Church community is not an abstract spiritualization, but denotes the true, literal

fulfillment.” (LaRondelle, p.108)

The prophet foresees a time when those who were not God’s people will become His people by God’s gracious act. The privilege of sonship has been extended to all who respond in faith to God’s call through the gospel of salvation. Theodore Laetsch explains the Hosea text in this way:

“As the three children of Gomer whose name symbolized God’s judgment were reaccepted by the Lord, so the three names are mentioned here in a manner indicating that God’s curse is lifted. God will sow “her,” the Church, God’s Spouse, “in the earth”; not Canaan only, for in the New Testament God’s people are not restricted to Canaan. Throughout the world God will plant the seed of His Church, so that her branches will extend over all lands (Matthew 13:31,32,36-43; Romans 10:18; also Isaiah 6:3b,11). In New Testament times there shall again be a great people of Israel, sown by God, having obtained mercy from Him, acknowledged by Him as His people, while they rejoice in Him who is indeed their God. Peace shall reign on earth again; for God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, magnifying His holy Name, the Lord Jehovah of mercy and truth.” (Laetsch, p. 36)



**“The Prophet Hosea”
19th Century Bible Illustration
by J. James Tissot**

Paul alters and expands the wording to the original text to emphasize his point. He adds the concept of God’s **“call”** as the crucial element in the reformation of the people. He also emphasizes that this will occur **“in the very place”** of the earlier rejection, that is to say, in the land of exile, the dispersion, from among the Gentiles, God will call out a people for Himself.

“Isaiah cries out concerning Israel...” - The Isaiah prophecies speak directly of the

Israelite nation and warn that only a small remnant of the nation will be saved. The verb “*cries out*” (Greek - “*krazei*”) is a word that connotes intensity and urgency. This is a desperate cry of warning spoken to a complacent and indifferent people. The citation comes from Isaiah 10:22-23: “*Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the Lord Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.*” The remnant theology of the Old Testament, that only a small minority of the total population would remain faithful and thus be preserved by God, clearly demonstrates that a saving relationship with God has never been the result of blood or national origin. This was never God’s intent, but a faulty conclusion based upon human presumption and pride. The prophet recalls the words of God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17; 32:17) but warns that even in the face of the Abrahamic covenant only a remnant will be saved from among the



*“The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Deportation of its Citizens to Babylon”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

great mass of the patriarch's descendants. *“For Paul, the remnant doctrine clearly confirms his word of judgment to Israel: it is ‘not all who are of Israel who are truly Israel.’”* (Moo, p.615) And yet, despite the apostasy of the majority God will mercifully preserve His faithful remnant. The wondrous mercy of God is all the more clearly revealed by the fact that while ***“the Lord will carry out His sentence on the earth with speed and finality,”*** nonetheless, God will still preserve His own. From amidst the great mass of vessels of wrath and small number of vessels of mercy will be saved.

“It is just as Isaiah said previously: ‘Unless the Lord Almighty...’ - Paul now develops the Gospel side of remnant theology as he reminds us that despite the widespread disobedience of the nation God will still preserve His own. *“God’s promise to preserve a remnant signals His continuing faithfulness to His people, however faithless they may have been.”* (Moo, p.616) Israel was no better than Sodom and Gomorrah and deserved the same fate that befell those doomed cities. But God in His mercy ***“left us descendants.”*** (Greek - *“enkatelipen sperma”*). Thus the continuity of the text is maintained as the earlier theme of the *“sperma”* as the true descendants of Abraham (9:6-9) is brought forward once more. The preservation of the seed is solely the work of God’s mercy. Left to itself and its own just deserts Israel would have completely disappeared within the same hellish firestorm that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, but God intervened to save those whom He had chosen. Lenski summarizes:

“Paul shows from Isaiah’s prophecy that ‘seed’ was left for Israel, that the Word and promise did not fall by the way (vs.6). In His longsuffering God so dealt with the vessels of wrath already long fitted for complete destruction that He did not utterly consume these vessels, that He bore with them and thus managed to secure vessels of mercy (vss. 22-23). If God had made His final reckoning with the Jews in Isaiah’s time or even prior to this, no godly remnant would have been obtained from them at any future time, certainly not at Paul’s time. Judaism would have become a second Sodom, would have been made like Gomorrah, not a soul would have been left after the cataclysm of punishment...The torrent of wrath swept over the Jews but always abandoned some, and from these God’s mercy won the seed, the remnant, the leftover, and made this seed vessels of mercy.” (Lenski, p. 632)



“Behold I Lay a Stone in Zion” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 30-33

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.

“What shall we then say?” - This phrase is used repeatedly in Romans (6:1; 7:7; 9:14) to advance the argument to a new level and introduce the implication of his teaching in the preceding segment. Fitzmyer labels it *“a diatribe-like rhetorical question.”* (Fitzmyer, p. 577) Having clearly demonstrated that the failure of Israel to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah does not mean that the Word and promise of God have failed, the apostle will now proceed to demonstrate that the cause for Israel’s failure is not to be found in God, but in Israel itself.

“That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it...” - There is a tragic sense of irony in these words. The Gentiles have unexpectedly stumbled upon that which the Jews had sought all along. The verbs *“pursue”* and *“obtained”*

are matched. We find the same pair combined in Philippians 3:12-14 in the context of a runner straining toward the finish line of the race. The key word **“righteousness”** is used in its proper forensic sense before God rather than mere moral uprightness which was, in fact, the goal of many pagan philosophies and religions. This genuine **“righteousness”** is obtained **“by faith.”** Since faith is itself a gift of God’s pure grace, this is in precise conformity with Paul’s previous assertion in Verse 16 that **“it is not a matter of the person who wills or runs, but of the God who shows mercy.”**



“The Scribes and Pharisees” by J. James Tissot

“But Israel who has pursued a law of righteousness has not obtained it.” - The race imagery continues as Paul delineates the failure of the Jews to achieve their goal. But the language has undergone an important shift. The **“righteousness”** that is obtained by faith in the preceding phrase is here replaced with **“a law of righteousness.”** The law in question is, according to the typical Pauline usage, the law of Moses, in this instance, abused as a means of attaining righteousness. But law demands and never gives. The law as a means to righteousness demands perfect obedience which cannot be achieved. Thus the law’s demands exceed our ability to meet them. Accordingly, Israel’s attempt to obtain righteousness through the law ended in inevitable failure. Douglas Moo offers this helpful paraphrase:

“Israel, pursuing a law that promised righteousness, did not attain that law. For what reason did Israel not attain the law that promises righteousness? Because Israel pursued that law that promises righteousness not on the

basis of faith but as if it could have been attained on the basis of works.” (Moo, p. 626)

The failure was not the result of the law itself. Rather the failure resulted from the abuse of the law as a means to earn or work righteousness. Lenski defines the essential incompatibility of faith and works:

“The fearful difference between faith and works is that “faith,” being trust, relies in complete dependence on another, on God, on Christ, on the promise and the mercy, while “works” repudiate such dependence and rely on man’s own ability and attainment. Faith permits God to put it wholly and completely under obligation to Himself; works not only repudiate this obligation to God but insist on putting God under obligation to the man who does the works, and the Jews tried to obligate God by means of even false works.” (Lenski, p. 637)

“They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” - Paul uses the language of the Old Testament to clarify his thought. The Greek text is considerably stronger than its English counterpart. This is not a reference to a mere pebble in the road that causes one to trip and then recover himself. The Greek text literally says *‘they smashed against the stone of smashing against.’* The serious intent of the image is reinforced by Paul’s use of the ominous term *“skandalon”* in Verse 33. This word originally referred to the trigger that springs the trap and carries a definite connotation of deadliness. The trap that springs shut is a death trap. It kills its victim. This is an image of total destruction, not momentary imbalance. This imagery comes from two passages in Isaiah which the apostle now conflates together in a single quotation. Peter quotes the same two texts together in 1 Peter 2:6-8 which has led some scholars to conclude that the combined use of the texts was common in the early Christian community, perhaps as part of proof text collection of Old Testament prophecies which find their fulfillment in Christ. The two passages read as follows.

“So this is what the sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts in Him will never be dismayed.’ (Isaiah 28:16)

“And He will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem He will be a trap and a snare.” (Isaiah 8:14)

The prophet's words were written in a time of national crisis as the nation of Judah was threatened by the might of Assyria. Isaiah urges the people to have faith in God and not in their own diplomatic and political maneuvers. In the second text, he warns that because they have failed to do so, God will bring about the downfall of the nation. James Dunn summarizes the application of the prophecy to Paul's argument in this way:

"Israel's failure to heed Isaiah foreshadows Israel's failure to heed the gospel; the trust which Isaiah called for is the same confidence in that which God has done which Paul calls for. Most of Israel had found Isaiah's call for faith to be an offense; it is the same reliance on human contrivance that causes his own kinsmen to stumble at Paul's gospel. Just as Isaiah had to think in terms of only a remnant who would believe, so Paul finds some comfort for his sorrow that so few of his own people have come to faith in their Messiah, and as the remnant of Isaiah's could be assured that their trust would not be disappointed, so too, the Jews who had come to faith in Christ could be confident, that even though they were a minority, God would not fail them. If only Israel would heed the promises and warnings of their own Scriptures!" (Dunn, p. 594)



"The Destruction of the Host of Assyria Before Jerusalem"
by Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 10



*“The Young Jesus in the Temple with the Scribes and Teachers of the Law”
by William Holman Hunt*

Verses 1-2

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer...” - The chapter opens with the characteristic fraternal address *“Brothers”* through which Paul identifies with his audience and signals a new turn of thought (cf. 1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:17) Implicit in this renewed emphasis is the warning that the predominantly Gentile congregation in Rome dare take no pleasure in the condemnation of Israel. The apostle reasserts his profound personal desire for the salvation of the Israelite people (cf. 9:1-3). There is no joy or personal satisfaction in the judgment here pronounced. Instead, Paul *“once more speaks his compassion for the people whose unbelief it is his duty to expose.”* (Franzmann, p. 186) The depth and intensity of his

individual feeling in this matter is indicated by the terms *“my heart’s desire and prayer.”* Paul’s commitment rests in the desire or will of his innermost being, the heart. That desire is expressed in his *“prayer to God.”* The Greek word *“deesis”* conveys the idea of persistent pleading and entreaty. This is not an isolated, casual prayer, but an ongoing, urgent plea. The object of his petition is *“that they may be saved.”*

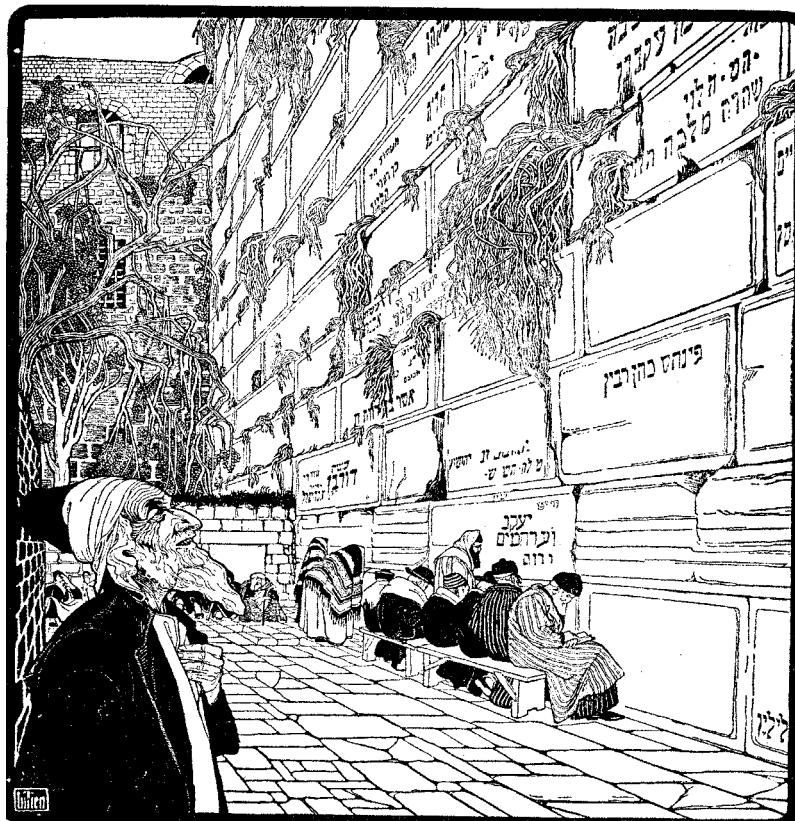


“Jesus Teaching in the Temple Treasury” by J. James Tissot

“For I can testify about them that they are zealous...” - Paul knew well from personal experience of the Israelite zeal for God. He had himself excelled in that zeal. He testified to the Galatians:

“For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” (Galatians 1:13-14; cf. also Philippians 3:5-6; Acts 22:3)

The word “*zealous*” (Greek - “*zelon*”) in itself is neither good nor bad. It can be used negatively to denote fanaticism or positively to indicate overwhelming concern or consuming desire. Zeal for God, demonstrated in a compelling desire to carefully observe and obey His Law was considered the characteristic of the faithful Jew at this time. This was a highly commendable attitude among the Hebrews and Paul appears to use the concept in that positive light. During the intertestamental revolt of the Maccabees, Mattathias triggered Jewish resistance with the cry: “*Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me.*” (1 Maccabees 2:27) In the New Testament era, those who advocated armed rebellion against the Romans styled themselves the “*Zealots.*”

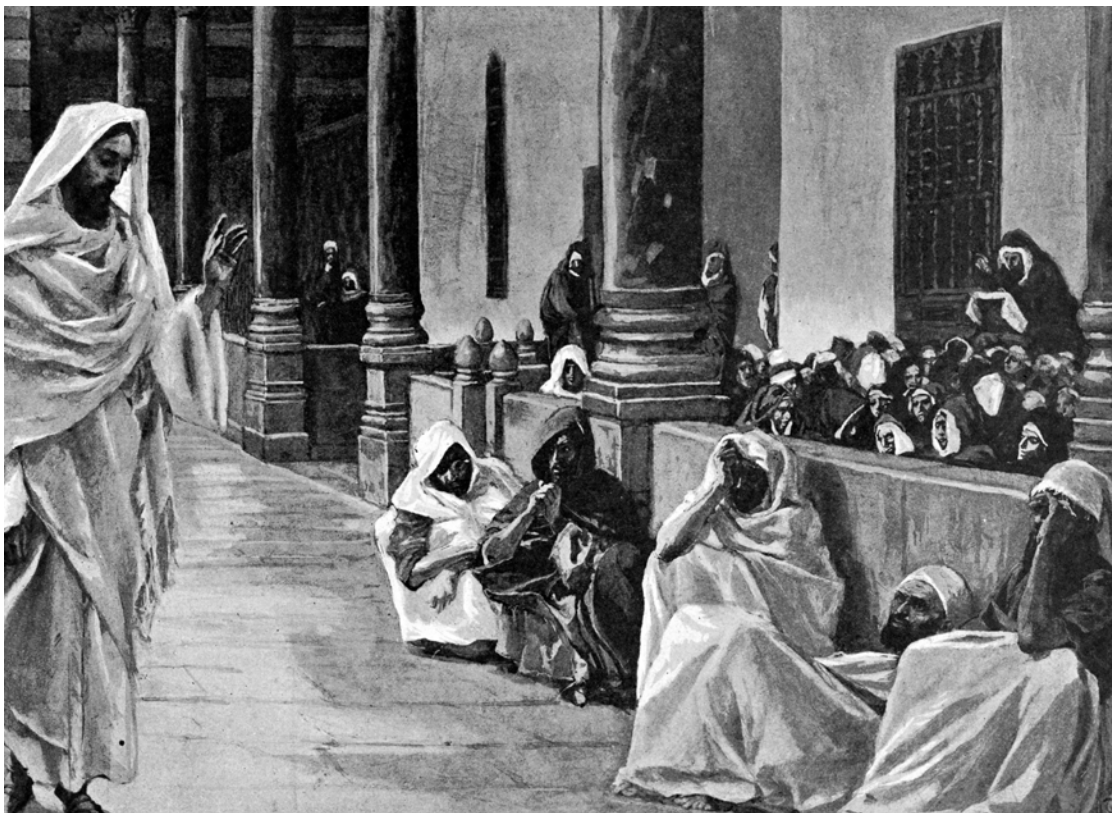


“*Modern Jews Praying at the Wailing Wall*” by E.M.Lilien

But this Jewish zeal was misguided and destructive because it is not “*based on knowledge.*” The text does not use the ordinary term for intellectual information, “*gnosis,*” but a more intense, powerful word, “*epignosis,*” that is, the profound spiritual insight that comes from a saving relationship with God. The Jews possessed a certain degree of information; they had an intellectual awareness of the outward demands of God’s law. But their’s was the sort of superficial religious knowledge

which leads to pride and arrogance (1 Corinthians 8:1) but not the godly knowledge that produces faith and humility. They flawed knowledge was focused on human obedience to the Torah and failed to recognize that genuine righteousness comes only from God through Christ. Hence the very intensity of their religious ardor and zeal became the means of their downfall. Sincerity never replaces truth. Lenski notes:

“Here we have the answer to the statement that everything depends on a man’s religious sincerity, and nothing on the substance that his sincerity includes. Take poison ardently; the ardor will as little effect the deadly effect of the poison as the lack of ardor would. “It is better to limp in the road than to run eagerly away from it.” (Augustine) The greater the intensity of zeal devoid of true knowledge, the more damage it does to itself and to others. And this is true in all departments of life. Error, too, also tends to produce fanatical zeal, which we would not admire or offer as an example. No matter how great the zeal produced by truth and its true knowledge becomes, it always has the sanity and the balance that distinguish it from the morbidity of fanatical zeal.” (Lenski, p. 643)



“He that is of God Heareth God’s Words” by J. James Tissot

It is not the text’s intent to excuse Israel’s rejection of Christ as the Messiah on the

basis of ignorance. The use of the loaded term “*epignosis*” in the phrase “***their zeal is not based on knowledge,***” indicates that there is a moral, willful dimension to their not knowing. The problem here is not mere ignorance, the absence of information. This is an invincible, deliberate ignorance. They do not know because they choose not to know; they do not want to know; they have willfully determined to reject the truth which God has set before them in the person of His only Son. This is the tragedy described by St. John the Evangelist: “***He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, and His own did not receive Him.***” (John 1:10-11) Sinful man “***did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*** (Romans 1:28) and therefore spurned the unmistakable evidence of God’s invisible qualities revealed in creation (Romans 1:19-20) in a deliberate act of his perverted will. In the same way, Israel had chosen not to know that which she could have known, because God had graciously revealed it to her. Lenski is correct in asserting: “*The Jews were ignorant of divine essentials not because of any failure on God’s part to make them truly known, but because of guilty obduracy on their own part.*” (Lenski, p. 643) This stubborn resistance to the truth about God is in its essence a violation of the First Commandment as prideful sinners insist on knowing God on their own terms. Stöckhardt explains:

“The Jews do not comprehend because they do not want to comprehend...God had revealed to Israel in His Word who and how He is, and the manner in which He desired to be honored. But they did not believe. They did not want that kind of God - God as He is and as He reveals Himself. Instead, they chose to think of God in a manner consistent with their own desires. Therefore their zeal for God was not a God pleasing zeal. True zeal for God, true worship of God remains within the parameters of God’s revelation and is not determined by our own thoughts and desires.”
(Stöckhardt, p.477)

Verses 3-4

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God...” - The “*righteousness of God*” is the basic theme of the Epistle to the Romans and the heart of the Gospel of Salvation. The “***righteousness that comes from God***” is the forensic



*“The Twelve Year Old Jesus in the Temple”
by Max Liebermann*

act of the righteous God in declaring the sinner to be justified, that is, pronouncing a verdict of “*Not Guilty!*,” on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. The “*righteousness of God*” is presented 35 times in Romans (cf. notes on 1:17, p.27f.) It is precisely at this most crucial point that the “*not knowing*” of Israel is focused. The concept of a deliberate refusal to acknowledge that which could have been known continues in this verse. “*Since they did not know*” does not refer to the absence of information or knowledge, but to the

repudiation of that which has been revealed and the refusal to know or accept that which has been disclosed by God. The contrast between two mutually exclusive categories of righteousness is reinforced and explained by the phrase “*they did not submit to God’s righteousness.*” The verb “*hupostasso*” means to submit or be subject to the authority of another. The pride of sinful man rebels against submission. The descendants of fallen Adam would prefer to “*like God,*” (Genesis 3:5) independent, and answerable to no one. Instead of “*submitting*” to the righteousness of God, they chose to substitute another righteousness, a righteousness of “*their own,*” that is to say, a righteousness of their own making, based upon their own works. Such self-righteousness does not come from God. Man must attempt to “*establish*” it for himself. The futility of this effort is suggested by the verb “*sought*” (Greek - “*sateo*”) which means to search for or to pursue. The verb is in the present tense, indicating continuous, ongoing action. Lenski aptly summarizes the difference

between these two kinds of righteousness and the implications of that difference:

“The one “righteousness” is God’s, wrought and bestowed by Him, availing before Him, all the glory being His, we being wholly dependent upon Him; it is justification by faith alone. The other, “their own,” which they are “seeking,” pursuing, not catching up with (9:31), is one that, if it were attained, would emanate solely from themselves, count only in their sight, they being the ones who justify themselves (Luke 16:15), all the glory would be their own, they would be entirely independent of God, He would merely tell them what works they should do to establish this righteousness; this is the righteousness of works, “even that which is of the law” (Philippians 3:9).”
(Lenski, p.644)

Verse 4

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

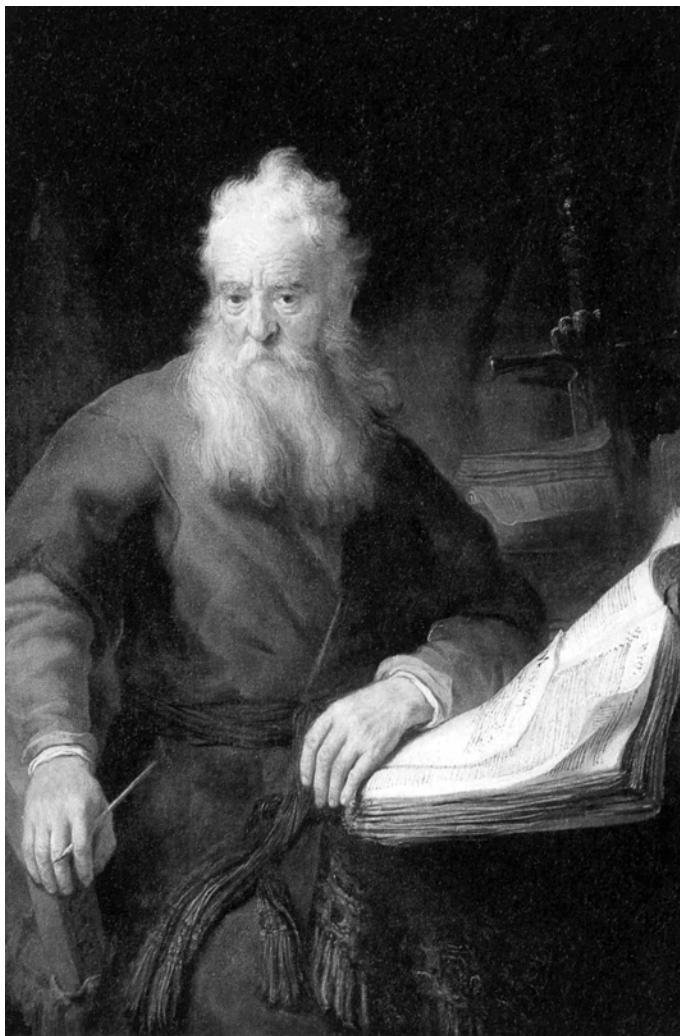
“Christ is the end of the law...” - The Greek text includes the conjunction “*gar*” (“*for*”) indicating that this verse is the summary explanation of that which has preceded. The verse constitutes one of the most famous of all of Paul’s theological affirmations.

In the original, the noun “***end***” (Greek - “*telos*”) comes first for special emphasis; thus literally “*for an end of law is Christ.*” In either language the term may refer to the termination of something or to its goal. That ambiguity has provoked considerable debate among the commentators. Given typical New Testament usage, the emphasis on termination probably should be maintained, although not in a temporal sense. That is to say, since mankind’s fall into sin, the law has never been a means of attaining righteousness. It is not as though at a specific date in history Christ put an end to the law righteousness which had prevailed prior to that date. There has never been any genuine possibility of law righteousness for sinful mankind, human pretensions to the contrary notwithstanding. The Old Testament was not a “*law covenant*” in contrast to the “*gospel covenant*” of the New Testament. The plan of salvation has been the same throughout history. Christ was “***the end of the law***” for Adam and for Abraham (cf. Romans 4) in exactly the same way that He is the end of the law for us.

The “***law***” (Greek - “*nomos*”) in question here is generic, law in any and every form, including, but not limited to, the law of Moses. This is the whole principle of law, law as a method of obtaining righteousness. Paul understands the difference between law

righteousness and Christ righteousness from profound personal experience. Like so many other great champions of the Gospel, Paul is a man who has himself lived under the terrible tyranny of law righteousness and religion. He uses the same terminology in Philippians 3:5-9 as he describes the course of his own spiritual journey -

“Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for the righteousness that is in the law, faultless. But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”



“The Apostle Paul in Rome” by Rembrandt

“Law” is linked to “righteousness” in this phrase with the Greek preposition “eis.” The preposition expresses the means by which something is accomplished or achieved and should thus be translated “for Christ is an end to law as a means to righteousness.” The NIV’s translation links the preposition to the phrase as whole in the sense of purpose, thus, “so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” This translation tends to obscure the sense of the passage.

God's plan of salvation, personified in Jesus Christ, is the repudiation and contradiction of any and every human attempt at self-justification. Dr. Stöckhardt hails this verse as "*a clear summary of the Gospel of God*" and "*the unmistakable shibboleth of the true religion.*" He goes on to summarize the overall application of this powerful passage:

"That which Paul writes here about the Jews applies generally to all unbelievers. This is a clear summary of the Gospel of God, the unmistakable shibboleth of the true religion. Christ is the end of the law. Whoever believes in Him is justified. Thus it is inexcusable ignorance for anyone not to know where to look for righteousness, salvation, and life. It is inexcusable ignorance for anyone to distort or deny the righteousness accomplished by God, or to establish in place of that righteousness one of his own." (Stöckhardt, p.481)

Verses 5-9

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (That is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

"Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law:..." - The contrast between law righteousness and Christ righteousness is amplified and explained in these verses using a series of quotations from the Old Testament. In this way, Paul is able to demonstrate that the Law/Gospel dialectic is not an innovation but that it has been part and parcel of God's revelation throughout history. Judaic rejection of the message of the Gospel is not a matter of adherence to the old covenant in preference to the new. Rather it is a fatal distortion of the plan of salvation as it had existed since the beginning.

The initial quotation comes from Leviticus 18:5. In contrast to much of modern scholarship which considers the Pentateuch to be a composite from four divergent sources (JEDP) compiled over many centuries, St. Paul unequivocally identifies Moses as the author of the passage. It is most appropriate that Moses, the great

lawgiver of Israel, who received the Ten Commandments from God's own hand on Mt. Sinai, is presented as the first authority on the nature of law righteousness. Note also that the verb which introduces the citation is in the present tense, "**Moses describes,**" thus indicating the ongoing contemporary relevance of a word written many centuries in the past. Because the text is the inspired Word of God it remains permanently pertinent and applicable.

The subject of the quoted text is "***the righteousness based on law.***" Theoretically, the law is a valid means of attaining righteousness. It is as Moses said: "***I am the Lord your God. Keep My decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord, your God.***" (Leviticus 18:5) The prophet Ezekiel reiterates the point three times in the twentieth chapter of his book of prophecy.

"I gave them My decrees and made known to them My laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them...Yet the people of Israel rebelled against Me in the desert. They did not follow My decrees, but rejected My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them... "But the children rebelled against Me: they did not follow My decrees, they were not careful to keep My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them." (Ezekiel 20:11,13, 21)

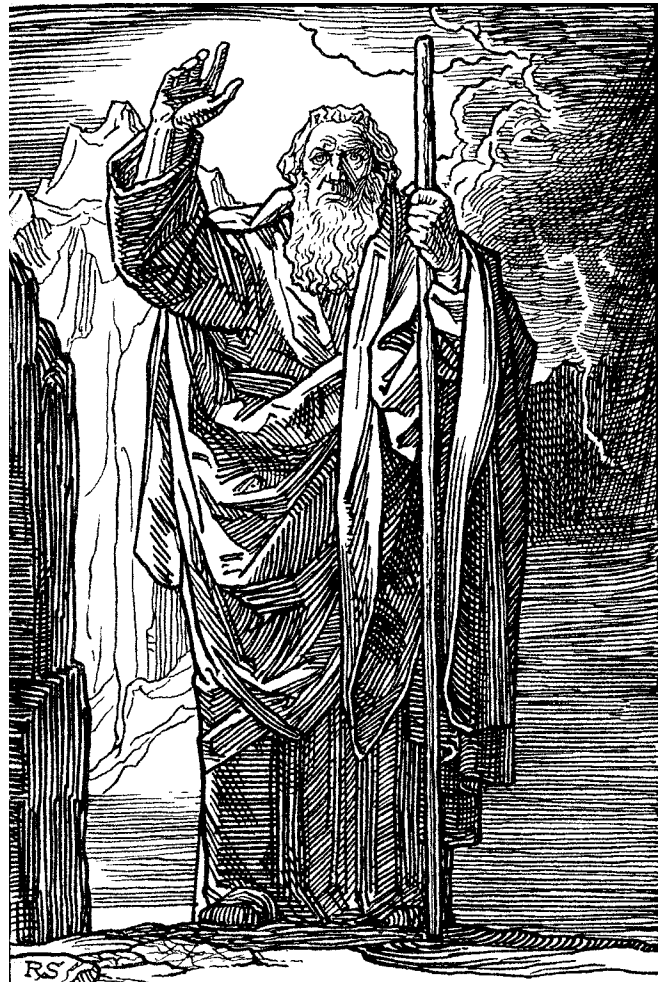
Our Lord Himself, in response to the legal experts accurate summary of the law's content, declares: "***You have answered correctly,***" ***Jesus replied, "Do this and you will live."*** (Luke 10:28) The problem with law righteousness, as indicated in all of these passages, is that it requires perfection. In order to be saved on the basis of the law, one must obey the law absolutely, without the slightest infraction. As St. James declares: "***Whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.***" (James 2:10) Thus while the law is a theoretically valid means of attaining righteousness, in reality no naturally born descendant of Adam can be saved on the basis of the law because the perfect obedience the law demands is an impossibility. Accordingly, Paul concludes in Galatians 3:10,11 - "***All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written; 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything that is written in the book of the law.'*** Clearly no one is justified before God by the law." Lenski sums it up this way:

"Yes, law is one way to righteousness, to securing God's favorable verdict...The trouble with the law as a means for attaining righteousness is that it requires complete doing on our part;...A single break in the doing, or a single omission in the

many things to be done is fatal. Man is in a sinful condition from the start and thus could not hope to achieve righteousness by doing the law. Only a man trained in pharisaic blindness (John 9:40-41) could dream of saying what the rich young ruler said in Matthew 19:20. The entire Jewish legal system with all its sacrifices for sin proclaimed that no man could do the law and thus gain righteousness and life. What Paul quotes from Moses is an old doctrine; every Jew should know it, and certainly every Christian.” (Lenski, p. 647)

“But the righteousness that is by faith says...” - The comforting promise of faith righteousness is in stark contrast to the unattainable demands of law righteousness. Whereas **“the righteousness that is by the law”** was introduced with a quotation from the inspired writings of the prophet Moses, **“the righteousness that is by faith”** is dramatically personified to speak for itself. Having demonstrated the futility of law righteousness, Paul now presents the divinely given means for conveying the righteousness of God to us, namely the Word. The apostle makes his point by paraphrasing and expanding upon the text of Deuteronomy 30:11-14. The original reads as follows:

“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it.”



“The Prophet Moses” by Rudolf Schäfer

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy marks the end of the ministry of the great prophet Moses. This is his valedictory message to the nation. The people are apprehensive and uncertain. What will they do when Moses is gone? How will they find God or know His will in the absence of the great lawgiver? The words cited above were written to calm their fears and assure them of the adequacy and efficacy of the Word of God. Even after Moses was gone that Word would remain and it would provide all that was needed to know God and understand His will. Paul uses an amplified reformulation of the text to make the same point about the righteousness of faith. Douglas Moo summarizes the parallel in this way:

“As God brought His Word near to Israel so that they might know and obey Him, so God now brings His Word near to both Jews and Gentiles, that they might know Him through His Son, Jesus Christ and respond in faith and obedience...The grace of God that underlies the Mosaic covenant is operative now in the new covenant; and, just as Israel could not plead the excuse that she did not know God’s will, so now, Paul says, neither Jew nor Gentile can plead ignorance of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. As Paul, therefore uses Leviticus 18:5 to summarize the essence of the law, so he quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-14 to encapsulate the Gospel. Throughout salvation history, these two words from the Lord have operated side by side; God making His demand on His people on the one hand and providing in His grace for their deliverance on the other...righteousness before the Lord can never come from the law, involving as it does human effort, but from the gospel of God’s grace.” (Moo, p. 353, 354)

The Word is the means through which that righteousness is offered and conveyed. It is not the result of human effort (***“Who will ascend to heaven...to bring Christ down? Who will descend...to bring Christ up from the dead?”***) but the self-disclosure of God and His plan of salvation in the Word. The allusion here to the incarnation (***“Who will ascend to heaven, that is, to bring Christ down?”***) and to the resurrection ***Who will descend into the deep, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead?”***) is intentional and unmistakable. God came down to us in the person of His Son, the Word made flesh, because we were incapable of going up to Him. Christ’s victory over death proclaimed in the resurrection declares Jesus to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. God comes to us now in the written Word which conveys to us the Gospel of Jesus. The medieval acrostic carol “In Dulci Jubilo” catches the sense of this concept very well:



“Christmas Night” by Ludwig Richter

*“Now sing we now rejoice, now
raise to heaven our voice;
He from whom joy streameth poor
in a manger lies;
Not so brightly beameth the sun in
yonder skies.
Thou my Savior art! Thou my
Savior art!*

*Come from on high to me; I cannot
rise to Thee.
Cheer my wearied spirit, O pure
and holy Child;
Thro’ Thy grace and merit, blest
Jesus, Lord most mild,
Draw me unto Thee! Draw me unto
Thee!*

This language about ascending to the heavens and descending into the abyss seem to have been proverbial expressions for attempting the impossible. Christ has accomplished the impossible for us. He has done that which we could never have done for ourselves. The

message proclaimed by *“the righteousness that is by faith”* is pure sweet Gospel. Martin Franzmann points out:

“The voice of righteousness by faith bids man cease his willing and his running after righteousness. Man need not scale the heavens to bring Christ down; Christ has come down, and that, too, in the likeness of our own sinful flesh and as a sacrifice for sin (8:3) Man need not go into the dark abyss of death, to bring Christ up from the dead; He has been raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, raised for our justification. (6:4; 4:25)...The voice of righteousness by faith says not “Do!” but “It is done!” (Franzmann, p. 188)

“But what does it say? “The word is near you...” - Verses 6 and 7 tell us that the word of the “righteousness that is by faith” categorically excludes any human effort. Now, the rhetorical question, “But what does it say?” serves to draw special

attention to the positive part of the word proclaimed by the “*righteousness that is by faith.*” This is not an esoteric, cryptic message, hidden from most while being revealed only to an inner circle of initiates who have undergone mystical journeys to heaven and hell (“*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.*”). The message of the Gospel is both accessible and understandable because God has made it so. Thus, in terms of Paul’s basic argument in this segment, the unbelief of Israel cannot be attributed to any failure on the part of God. The state of modern man is much the same. We in western culture are surrounded with readily available information about the Gospel, but the vast majority of men choose to ignore or deny that Gospel nonetheless. They choose instead, work righteousness in one of its endless variety of forms. As Geoffrey Wilson observes: “*The sheer perversity of unbelief is shown by the many who prefer to undertake an impossible odyssey rather than put their trust in an accessible Christ.*” (MacArthur, p. 71)

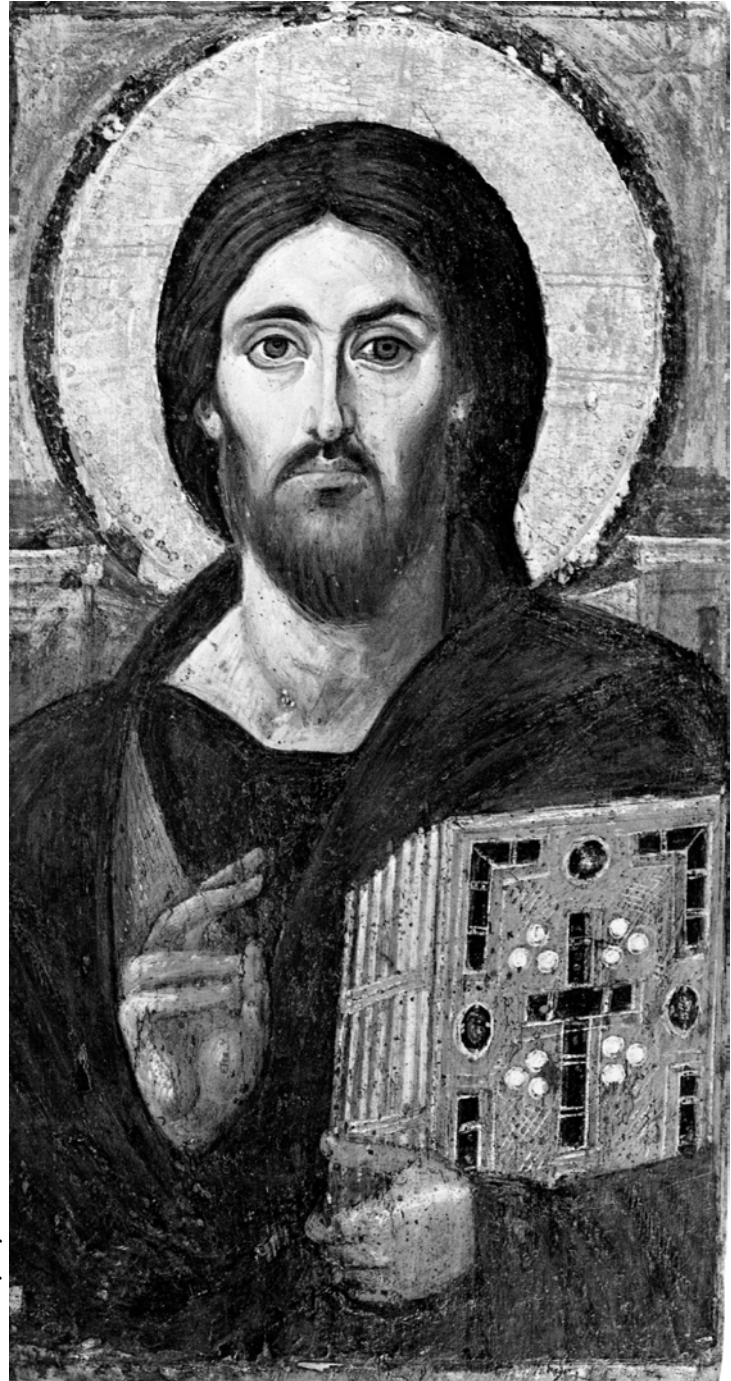
“*That is, the Word of faith we are proclaiming.*” - How can it be that this mighty word of salvation is available and accessible to men? It is because “*the word of faith,*” that is, the word which is preached, is a means through which personal justifying faith (Objective Genitive) is created. That faith creating message is conveyed in the apostolic preaching of the cross - “*we are proclaiming.*” Note the use of the first person plural verb which Paul utilizes to refer not only to his own preaching but also to that of all the other apostles.

“*That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart...*” -

The “*mouth*” - “*heart*” language is clearly drawn from the Deuteronomy text. Here, the order of Paul’s presentation follows that of the Old Testament passage with the “*mouth*” preceding the “*heart.*” In the sentence which follows, however, he will revert to the more logical chronological sequence - “*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*” (Verse 10) The Word first penetrates the heart, the innermost core of being, as God the Holy Spirit bestows the gift of faith, establishing a relationship of trust with the individual who is then enabled to confidently believe that Jesus is our Savior and our Substitute who was sacrificed upon the cross to pay in His blood the redemption price for our sin and whom God raised from the dead to proclaim our justification before all the world. The inevitable result of that faith is confession. The Greek verb is “*homologeo.*” The use of this term is somewhat unusual in the writings of St. Paul. The word has judicial overtones, referring originally to solemn testimony offered before a court of law. In this context “*confession*” is a public attestation of one’s faith,

an acknowledgment of one's identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. also 1 Timothy 6:12-13; Titus 1:16; 2 Corinthians 9:13). In the Old Testament, the basic confession of Israel's faith was the famous "*Shema*" of Deuteronomy 6:4 - "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.*" Most commentators agree that the affirmation "*Jesus is Lord*" served a similar function in the New Testament and that these words were a fundamental confession of the Christian Church from the earliest days. The phrase appears in the New Testament repeatedly in a variety of forms (cf. Philippians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 12:3) and its antiquity is conclusively indicated by the Aramaic transliteration "*Maranatha*" ("*Our Lord, Come!*") in 1 Corinthians 16:22. James Montgomery Boice notes:

"'Jesus is Lord.' What a tremendous statement! It is impossible to overestimate the significance of these three words (only two in Greek), for this was not only the first essential element of the Gospel proclamation, as well as of the first Christian confession. It was also a confession of their faith for which believers of the first century were willing to die." (Boice, p. 1191)



*"Christ the Almighty Lord" 6th Century Icon
from the Monastery of St Catherine at Mt. Sinai*

The phrase is pregnant with theological meaning. John Murray summarizes its theological content in this way: "*The confession 'Jesus is Lord' refers to the lordship which Jesus exercises in virtue of His exaltation. This lordship presupposes*

the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ and consists in His investiture with universal dominion.” (Murray, p. 55)

The Greek word “*Kyrios*” (Lord) is the equivalent of the Hebrew divine Name “*Jahweh*.” In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, “*Kyrios*” is used over 6,000 times as the translation of sacred Tetragrammaton. Accordingly, to declare that Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge Him as true God, the divine Son of the Father. Paul uses the term forty-four times in Romans. In thirty of those instances it is used in reference to Jesus Christ. In eight cases it is used of God the Father. In the remaining cases it is unclear whether the reference is to Jesus or to the Father.

This interchangeable usage clearly indicates Paul’s unqualified belief in the deity of Jesus Christ.



Bishop Polycarp

The profound significance of these words for the believers of the First Century is illustrated by the account of the martyrdom of a man named Polycarp, bishop of the church in Symrna. Polycarp died for the faith in February of 156 A.D. On the way to his trial, two of the soldiers guarding him took pity on him because of his advanced age. They urged him to go through the required ceremony and thus avoid condemnation. “What harm is there,” they asked, “in saying that Caesar is Lord” and offering the customary sacrifice if it could save your life? The old saint steadfastly refused. Before the stake he was again urged to hail the emperor as Lord and

renounce the Lord Christ. Again he refused in these courageous words: “*Eighty and six years I have served Him and He never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior.*” (ANE, 1, p.41) For old Polycarp, and for every true Christian there is one Lord and one Lord alone, Jesus Christ. To acknowledge or to bow down before another is to blaspheme the true God and betray the one Lord.

“That God raised Him from the dead...” - The resurrection is specifically cited as the decisive demonstration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. John Calvin is quite correct when he asserts: *“The resurrection alone is often set before us as the assurance of our salvation, not to draw away our attention from His death, but because it bears witness to the efficacy and the fruit of His death.”* (Moo, p. 658)

It is most important to recognize that the act of confession is not cited here as a meritorious work which takes its place alongside faith as a second requirement for salvation. Confession is the result and the demonstration of faith. Phillip Melancthon explains:

“I grant that a beginning of obedience is necessary, but it does not merit eternal life. Neither is it the purchase price of eternal life, nor is it pleasing except we believe in Christ. Since obedience is pleasing because of faith, it is a contradiction to imagine that works either justify or that they merit eternal life. By faith we declare that remission of sins and eternal life are given us gratis, because of Christ. There is nothing troublesome about this interpretation. It grants that obedience is necessary. It takes away the opinion about merit. It teaches how one pleases in order that Christ may be accorded His honor, and that faith may remain certain. For it would become uncertain if one had to think that we pleased God when we had sufficient merits. This is profitable to know in general about all statements of this kind. Now let us return to the text. It is certain that Paul does not approve of confession unless faith is present; he does not grant to confession that it is the purchase price or merit of eternal life. As has been said, that would be a contradiction. Yet he demands confession because, as has been said, obedience is necessary, and Paul wanted to show that he is speaking not of a hypocritical faith, that is, of idle thinking, about a true impulse of the heart that lays hold of the mercy promised because of Christ. Therefore, patience and every kind of good work shines forth in confession.”
(Melancthon, p. 200)

A careful balance must be maintained here. The act of confession may not be construed as a meritorious work that contributes in any way to personal salvation. To do so, would be to deny that salvation is by grace and to confuse justification with sanctification. But at the same time, we may not tone down the importance of confession in this text. Our Lord and the New Testament in general clearly indicate the vital role of confessing the faith as the most reliable demonstration of the presence of a genuine, saving relationship with the Lord. At the same time, the Bible warns that those who allow the intimidation and opposition of men to silence their confession will find themselves disowned on the great day of judgement.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

“I tell you whoever acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns Me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8-9)

“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That is why his parents said, He is of age, ask him.” (John 9:22-23)

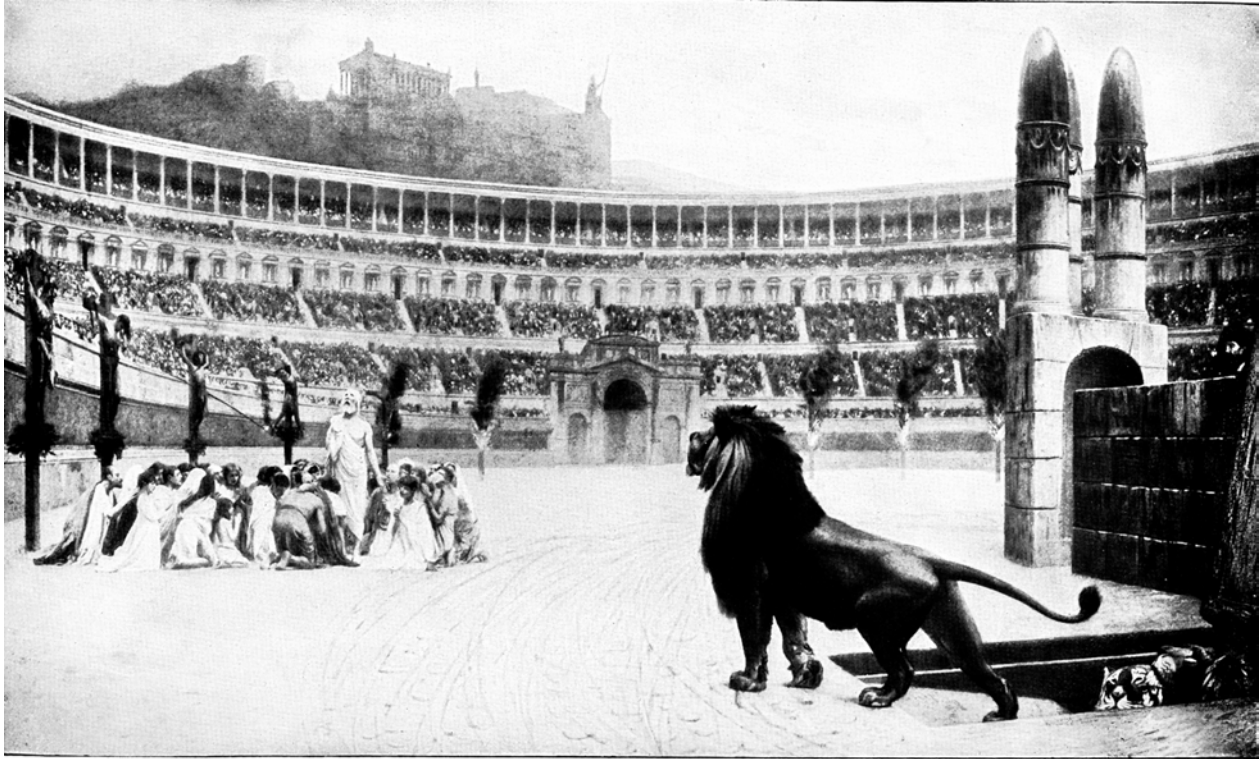
“Yet, at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12:42-43)

“Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus who, while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this commandment.” (1 Timothy 6:12-14)

“No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” (1 John 2:23)

“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” (1 John 4:15)

“Many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world.” (2 John 7)



“The Martyrs’ Final Prayer” - 19th Century Lithograph

Hence it can be seen that Robert Haldane, the great Scottish Bible teacher of the last century, was in no way guilty of exaggeration when he bluntly asserted:

“Confession of Christ is as necessary as faith in Him, but necessary for a different purpose. Faith is necessary to obtain the gift of righteousness. Confession is necessary to prove that this gift is received. If a man does not confess Christ at the hazard of life, character, property, liberty, and everything dear to him, he has not the faith of Christ.” (Boice, p. 1206-1207)

Secret discipleship, that is, a faith relationship with Christ that is deliberately concealed to avoid the persecution and opposition of men is an impossibility. Every believer has the opportunity, in a unique way determined by the circumstances of each individual situation, to confess the Lord Jesus Christ. To fail to do so, is to be subject to the tragic condemnation which the Evangelist St. John levels against the Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but would not publically acknowledge Him: ***“they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”*** (John 12:43)

Offering the good confession is not simply a matter of verbal expression, the formulation of words. That is of critical importance, to be sure, and cannot be

omitted, but Christ must be confessed in Word and deed. We confess the Lord Jesus as we gather with fellow believers around the means of grace and we deny Him when we fail to do so. We confess the Lord Jesus when we teach His Word in all of its truth and purity and we deny Him when we compromise the doctrines of Holy Scripture in order to accommodate inclinations and opinions of men. We confess the Lord Jesus in the values and priorities by which we live or we deny Him by allowing our actions to be determined by the worldly standards of the culture in which we live. We confess the Lord Jesus by cheerful submission in the face of the most severe trials and tribulations and even death itself and we deny Him when our response to suffering is fear, bitterness and complaint.

Of course confession without faith, the mere mouthing of the words, simple intellectual knowledge without personal trust, is of no value whatsoever. As Jesus declares: ***“Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from Me you evildoers.”*** (Matthew 7:22-23) The good confession can only be the result of a real personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ. ***“No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”*** (1 Corinthians 12:3) John Murray says it well: *“Confession without faith would be vain. But likewise faith without confession would be shown to be spurious... Confession with the mouth is the evidence of the genuineness of faith.”* (Murray, p. 56) St. John Chrysostom summarizes the relationship between heart conviction and genuine confession in this way: *“The understanding must be strongly fixed in pious faith, and the tongue must herald forth by its confession the solid resolution of the mind.”* (Bray, p. 276)

The result of that true faith which is demonstrated by the good confession is that ***“you will be saved.”*** The future tense of the verb points forward to the great day of judgement when believers in Christ will be delivered from the righteous wrath of God to be poured out upon sinful mankind.

Verses 10-11

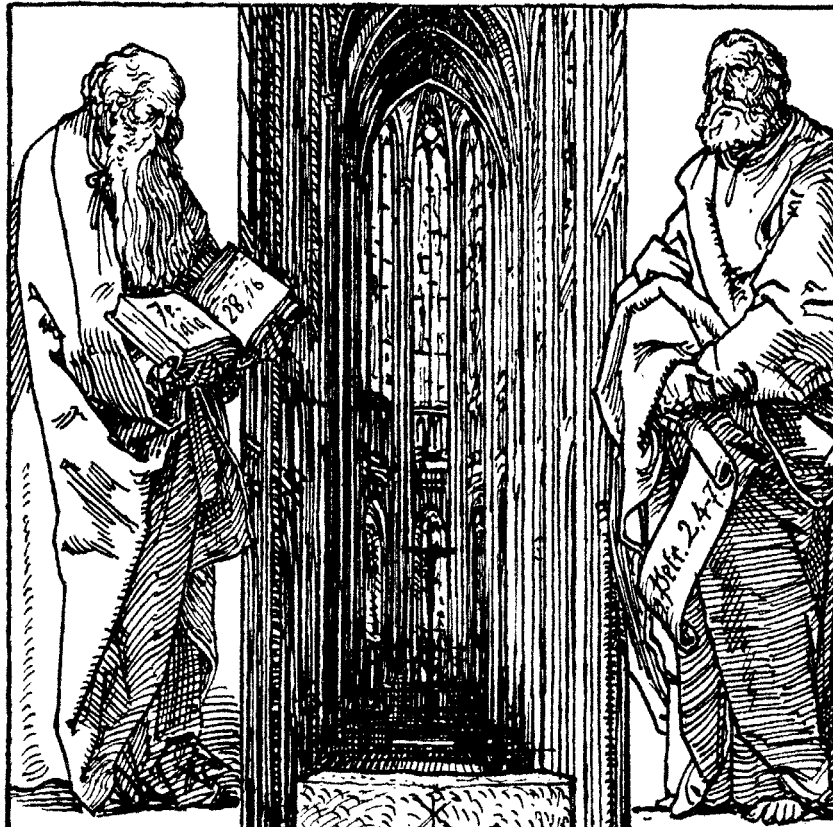
For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”

“For it is with your heart that you believe...” - As Paul now restates the point the natural chronological sequence is restored - first heart conviction, then oral

confession. The apostle distinguishes here between justification (Greek - “dikaiosyne”), associated with believing in your heart, and salvation (Greek - “soteria”), associated with confessing with your mouth. The former, (justification) describes the present reality that the instant the sinner believes by divine verdict he is accounted righteous for Christ’s sake. The latter, (salvation) emphasizes the eschatological reality of eternal life with God in heaven. Of course there is a considerable amount of overlap here, these are not mutually exclusive concepts.

“We may say that in the same instant salvation likewise results, for to be justified is to be saved...One who believes and is thereby justified confesses and shows that his faith is genuine, and the result is salvation, he is saved already now, and when the moment arrives and death calls him away, heaven is his.” (Lenski, p. 657)

“As the Scripture says....” - The thought is supported by a quotation from Isaiah



28:16 - *“So this is what the sovereign Lord says: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”* This text had been previously cited in Romans 9:33. The only difference here is the addition of the word *“Everyone”* which serves to emphasize the universal nature of the gospel, a crucial concept for that which now follows. The verb *“will never be put to shame”* refers to the vindication of the saints on the day of judgement.

*“Christ Jesus Himself as the Chief Cornerstone”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

“Shame, confusion, fleeing

in terror from the face of the great Judge shall not be the lot of him who rests his trust on Christ.” (Lenski, p. 658) The early church father Origen, sees in this phrase

an allusion to the shame of Adam in Eve in the Garden after the fall into sin: “*If no one who believes in Him will be put to shame, it is clear that those who sin will be just as Adam who sinned and was ashamed and hid himself. So whoever incurs the shame of sin obviously does not believe.*” (Bray, p. 276) Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf effectively expresses the same concept in his classic hymn “*Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness*” (“*Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit*”):

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

*Bold shall I stand in that great day;
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
(ELH # 432)*

Verses 12-13

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile” - The Verse is introduced with the explanatory conjunction “***For***” (Greek - “*gar*”) which links this sentence to the preceding thought. In effect, Paul is now explaining the “*everyone*” which he had inserted into the Isaiah passage in Verse 11. In Romans Chapter 3, Paul had argued that there is no difference among men before God’s judgement “***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***” (Romans 3:23). God justifies all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, by grace through faith. This must be so, the apostle insisted, because there is only one true God: “***Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.***” (3:29-30) Here in Chapter 10, Paul once again argues for the elimination of the distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in this instance the argument is based upon the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As there is only one God, so there is also only one Lord - “***the same Lord is Lord of all.***” The lordship of Jesus Christ is not limited by the petty dividing lines that men uses to distinguish themselves from one another. Jesus is the “***Lord of all.***” Just as He demands allegiance from all men so also He

graciously showers the riches of His blessings upon all those **“who call on Him.”** This phrase is a characteristic Old Testament expression for worship that is addressed to God with specific reference to the worship of prayer and supplication (cf. Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Isaiah 64:7). John MacArthur defines the term in this way:

*“In the Old Testament the phrase **“call upon the name of the Lord”** was especially associated with the right worship of the true God. It carried the connotations of worship, adoration, and praise and extolled God’s majesty, power, and holiness. Emphasizing the negative side of that phrase, the imprecatory Psalmist cried to God, **“How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? Will Thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations which do not know Thee, and upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Thy name.”** (Psalm 79:5-6) Again, the psalmist exulted: **“O give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples.”** (Psalm 105:1) Still another time in the Psalms we read that he **“called upon the name of the Lord,”** praying, **“O Lord, I beseech Thee, save my life! Gracious is the Lord, and righteous: yes, our God is compassionate”** (Psalm 116:4-5).”* (MacArthur, p. 82)

The point is reinforced by a quotation from Joel 2:32 - **“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.”** Joel had prophesied salvation for everyone who called upon the name of the Lord, no matter who they were or what nation they came from. Once again, the explanatory conjunction **“for”** serves to link the quotation to the previous assertion. All that Paul is saying is what the prophet had said before. Note also the equivalence in Paul’s thought between the **“Lord”** (Hebrew - **“Jahweh”**) in the Old Testament passage with the **“Lord”** (Greek - **“Kyrios”**) Jesus Christ. They are one and the same. The phrase **“the name of the Lord”** is also theologically significant. Lenski defines it in this way:

“It always means His revelation by which He draws nigh to us, makes Himself known, by which we may, indeed, know Him so as to trust Him and be saved by Him. His Name is the door to Him and at the same time the power that draws us through the door...It is the means by which He comes to us, by which we have Him, without which we cannot reach Him. The Word is His Name, and this whole chapter treats of the Word. Those who rejected it in unbelief doomed themselves. The Name is intended for faith and confession, for justification and salvation. There is salvation in no other name.” (Lenski, p. 660)



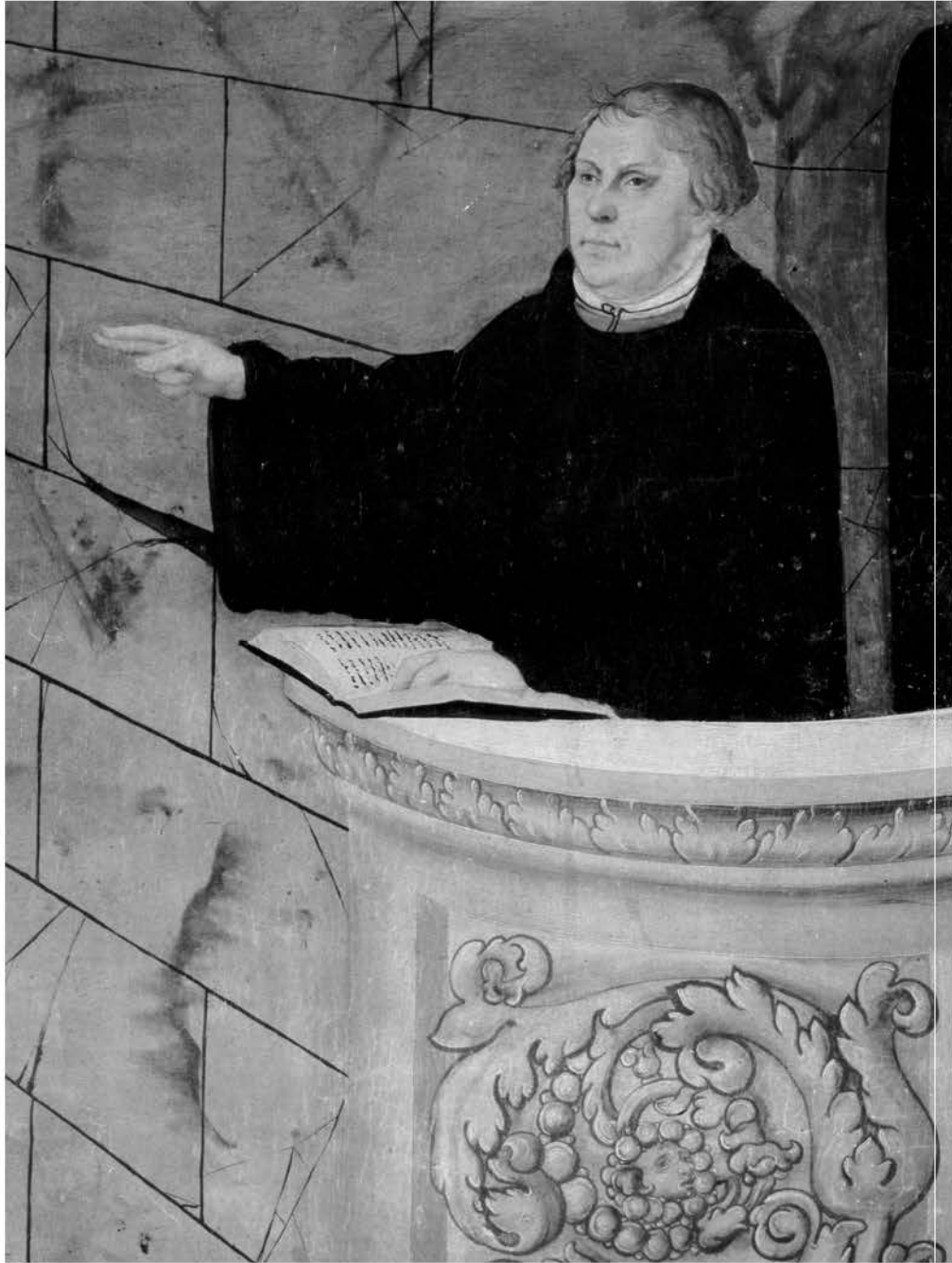
“O Give Thanks to the Lord; Call Upon His Name” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 14-15

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?” - There now follows a connected series of four rhetorical questions, each linked to its predecessor. Lenski notes: *“Now comes Paul’s famous chain...The Word as the means of grace for producing faith must touch all the links in the chain. Paul lets them form that chain and then fastens a golden Scriptural pendant to the last link in Verse 15.”* (Lenski, p. 660) The point of these verses is that faith is not created spontaneously, but through the Word, the means which God Himself has established. John Murray says is very well: *“The main point is that the saving relation with Christ involved in calling upon His Name is not something that can occur in a vacuum; it occurs only in the context created by the proclamation of the gospel on the part of those commissioned to proclaim it.”* (Murray, p. 58)

The series begins with the key phrase in the quotation from Joel 2:32 - ***“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.”*** To call upon the Lord is an act of faith, thus the first question in the chain is self-evident - ***“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?”***



***“Martin Luther Preaching at Torgau” by Lucas Cranach the Elder
From the Altar Predella of the City Church in Wittenberg***

It is obviously impossible to have faith, in order to call upon the Lord, if one has never heard the Lord, hence, the next question in the series - **“And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”** Each of these questions is posed in a broad general way. The logic of this extended syllogism would apply in any situation. The NIV’s translation of the second question, **“one of whom they have not heard”** diminishes the force of the original text. The Greek literally says - *“one whom they have not heard.”* This is not simply a matter of the casual gathering of second hand information. To hear of someone or about him is only an inferior substitute for hearing that person himself. It is that kind of direct contact that the text clearly has in mind, and that insight will become most significant in the question which follows.

“And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” The key word in this question is the verb **“preaching”** (Greek - *“kerussein”*). This word refers specifically to the proclamation of herald. By using it in this context Paul emphasizes the fact the apostles and those who come after them as spokesmen for Christ do not proclaim their own word, but that of the Lord. Jesus emphatically states exactly this in Luke 10:16 as he sends out the seventy-two disciples: **“He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent me.”** Lenski offers this helpful definition:

“Kerussein, which we translate “to preach,” means “to herald,” act as a herald for publically announcing some message of a king or commander. The point is that the herald announces no word more or less than he is bidden to announce and alters and changes nothing. He merely lends his voice to his master who is often present in person. This the apostles were to do, and they did it, and their message still rings through the world; this the prophets did before them, often with the direct preamble “Thus saith the Lord!” Applied to us who preach today, this means that we are Christ’s heralds through whom men hear Christ Himself only when we transmit His Word exactly as He has commanded it to us.” (Lenski, p. 662)

Having identified preachers as the heralds of the Word, the apostle now forges the final link in his magnificent chain with one last question - **“And how can they preach unless they are sent?”** There is no such thing as a self-appointed herald. That would be an oxymoron. A herald is by definition one who is duly sent and commissioned to speak on behalf of another. God is the Sender. His commission of faithful messengers to proclaim His Word is the implementation of His desire for the salvation of all men. Dr. Stöckhardt emphasizes the fact that this concept of a divine calling extends from the apostles down to the present day:



***“How Beautiful Are the Feet of Those Who Bring Good News”
by Rudolf Schäfer***

“The final expression obviously refers, first of all, to those proclaimers, those preachers, the apostles, who were immediately called and sent by Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:17. Yet the axiom “no preaching without sending” applies to the official preaching of salvation of all New Testament preachers. No preacher can rightly administer the preaching office in the New Testament unless he has been sent and equipped with the Spirit and gifts by the Lord. “No one can rightly preach unless he has been sent” (Körner) And the mediate call, through the church, is also a divine sending and call. Finally even the personal witness of all believing Christians, which is powerful enough to awaken saving faith, rests upon the

command of the Lord: “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you.” “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” “Preach the gospel to every creature.” The apostle’s entire preceding comment forms a chain of logically connected thoughts the result of which is that the prerequisites of saving faith and calling upon the Lord are hearing, preaching, and sending.” (Stöckhardt, p 493)

In the historic theology of the Lutheran Church, the centrality of the Word of God and the importance of the office of the public ministry as the office of the Word of God have always been strongly emphasized. The great Lutheran theologian Phillip Melancthon asserts a close connection between that emphasis and this passage. He describes this text as “*the foremost passage about the necessity and the dignity of the ministry*” in all of Holy Scripture. He contends that the people of God ought to study these inspired words of St. Paul diligently and carefully in order to guard against sinful man’s inherent tendency to supplant the Word with his own opinions and imaginations.

“In order that we may know in what way God works in us, and may not seek other illuminations outside of the Word, nor grant entrance to imaginations and opinions about God without a sure Word of God. This precept about the Word of God is wide open, for it is difficult for a man to stand fast by the Word of God and to say for certain that what he sets forth in the Word is the will of God, and so he easily slips into other imaginations. Thus Eve, thinking lightly of the Word, adds the imagination: “Perhaps God does not think so harshly.”...And we must know that God does not want His will about sin and grace to be known and apprehended in any other way except in the Word, and that the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Let us hold this rule fast, and for this great reason show all honor to and defend the public ministry of the Word.” (Melancthon, p. 201-202)

The “*golden Scripture pendant*” attached to the last link of the chain is a quotation from Isaiah 52:7. The original text anticipates the joyful celebration of God’s victory in the context of deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. The messengers sent to announce that victory speed their way over the hills surrounding Jerusalem. The people, anxiously awaiting their message, strain their eyes toward the horizon, eager for the first glimpse of those who carry the good news. The moment when they finally appear is a time of profound joy and intense jubilation. “***How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”*** The dusty, dirty feet of the messengers, bruised and bloody from their long journey, appear to be most beautiful indeed to those who rejoice in the announcement of their deliverance by God.

The message of salvation has been proclaimed. The heralds, God's prophets and apostles, have been sent forth and have faithfully discharged the responsibility of their office to proclaim the Word which God has graciously entrusted to them. God has charged that Word with the power to create saving faith in the hearts of those who hear



“The Call of Isaiah” by Rudolf Schäfer

it that they may call upon the Name of the Lord and be saved. But at this point in the text, the note of triumphant gladness which has characterized the description of the power and possibility of the Word turns to sadness. The response of most of mankind has been denial, defiance, and disbelief. Even among Israel, the chosen people of God, the vast majority has failed to heed the divine Word and believe. Has the Word of God failed? Has God reneged of His promise? Most definitely not! The problem lies not with God but with men. Paul now returns to the problem which permeates this segment of the epistle, the unbelief of Israel.

Verses 16-17

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.



“The Stoning of Stephan” by Matthäus Merian - 1630

“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.” - The shift from triumph to tragedy is signaled by the adversative conjunction **“But.”** (Greek - *“Ala”*) The text uses a literary device called *“litotes,”* that is, ironic understatement to underscore the tragedy of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. Not only have **“not all of the Israelites”** failed to accept the good news personified and proclaimed by Jesus, the overwhelming majority of the nation has rejected Him. The original text does not include the word **“Israelites,”** although that is probably what the apostle had in mind given the Isaiah quotation which follows. The term is an interpretive addition in the NIV translation. The verb **“accepted”** (Greek - *“hypakouein”*) literally means to listen and to submit to. It is the correlative of the *“herald”* terminology in the preceding paragraph.

“For Isaiah says “Lord who had believed...” - This is not a novel situation, a new and unprecedented problem. It is as Stephan noted, moments before his martyrdom:

“You stiff necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51) Eight centuries earlier, the great prophet Isaiah had lamented Israel’s failure to heed the divine Word which he had proclaimed among them. The quotation comes from Isaiah 53, the great *“Suffering Servant”* chapter, the most powerful description in the Old Testament of the Savior’s humiliation, suffering, and death. This is particularly pertinent here . The Jews rejected Jesus precisely because He was the Suffering Servant and did not meet their grandiose expectations of national deliverance and glory. Isaiah complains: ***“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*** (Isaiah 53:1) St. John the Evangelist had used the same verse to characterize the stubborn opposition of the Jews to Christ and His Gospel:

“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who had believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed.” For this reason they could not believe, because as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn - and I would heal them.” Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him.” (John 12:37-41)

Israel’s rejection of her Messiah was the culmination of a pattern of disobedience and defiance that had continued for centuries. Men had obstinately hardened their hearts and were in turn hardened by of God. The cup of God’s righteous wrath was now about to overflow for ***“the measure of the sin of your forefathers”*** had finally been filled up (Matthew 23:32).

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” - This summary statement is introduced with the conjunction ***“Consequently”*** (Greek - *“ara”*). The Isaiah quotation indicated the breakdown in the faith/salvation chain of cause and effect which had occurred in the case of Israel. The apostle now briefly restates that process and affirms that it is not the failure of that process that has result in the unbelief of Israel.

“But the unbelief of man does not make void the Word of God. If men have “not all heeded the Gospel,” some have heeded it; and for them the arm of the Lord, the power of God, has been revealed through it. The golden chain which binds men to the Lord

in faith has been fully forged; every link is there, from “sending” to “believing” and to “calling on His Name.” Christ has preached, in word and deed, His messengers have gone forth and have borne abroad His name, and men have come to faith and called upon His name for their salvation.” (Franzmann, p. 192)

Note carefully the connection reemphasized here between hearing the Word of Christ and faith. *“Faith is not the result of intuition, mystical experience, meditation, speculation, philosophizing, or consensus but by hearing the Word of Christ.” (MacArthur, p. 87)*

Verses 18-21

But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” But concerning Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”



“Luther Preaching in Wittenberg” by Gustav König

*“But I ask: Did they not hear?” - The willful and deliberate nature of Israel’s disobedience is now emphasized with a series of quotations from the Old Testament. Paul dramatically presents the evidence with two rhetorical questions: “**Did they not hear?...Did Israel not understand?**” In the Greek text, each of these questions is posed in the form of a double negative, thus indicating that a “no” answer is*

anticipated. Literally - *“It is not that they did not hear, is it?”* And *“It is not that they did not understand, is it?”* Both potential excuses are emphatically rejected - ***“Of course they did!”***

“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” - The first reference comes from Psalm 19:4 which extols the creation’s universal witness to the glory of God:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4)

Those who accuse St. Paul of appropriating this text to prove a point never intended by the Psalmist misunderstand the apostle’s intent in this instance. Psalm 19:4 is certainly not a proof text to demonstrate that Israel has heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nor is St. Paul attempting to use the text in that way. The typical formulas used to introduce a quotation (cf. i.e. vss. 19,20,21) are absent in this instance. Paul is merely using the language of the Old Testament, *“clothing his thoughts with Old Testament words which fittingly express what he wants to say.”* (Stöckhardt, p. 147) Lenski describes the process in this way:

“Paul quotes just as we do, but in a better way, for he knew his Old Testament better than we do. Take the present instance. Here a word taken from a psalm is simply adopted to express Paul’s own thought, he glides over into telling Biblical language without a formula of quotation. We do the same, but not always so pertinently when we quote the language of others in order to express our own thought.” (Lenski, p. 670)

Paul’s intention is not to present the original meaning of the verse of the Psalm, but to use its language about hearing the revelation of God to assert the universal preaching of the Gospel. *“As God’s word of general revelation has been proclaimed all over the earth, so God’s word of special revelation, in the gospel, has been spread all over the earth.”* (Moo, p. 667) Given the messianic content of the Old Testament, and the apostolic preaching of the cross throughout the Roman world and beyond, this is a fair and accurate assertion. The text specifically uses the Greek word *“oikoumene”* which refers not the entire world and every individual human

being on the face of the globe, but to the civilized world, most notably, the Roman Empire. Paul's point is well taken - Israel may not rightly contend that they have not been given the opportunity to hear the message of salvation.

"The Jews cannot excuse their unbelief by advancing that they did not hear of the Gospel. The voices of Gospel preachers resounded in all the lands and in all the cities of the known world. There wasn't a synagogue where the gospel was not heard; there wasn't a Jew in the world, who could justly plead ignorance of the gospel." (Stöckhardt, p.147)

"Again I ask: Did Israel not understand?" - If it was not a lack of opportunity to hear that prevented the Jews from being saved, then what was it? Could the problem have been a lack of understanding? As noted above, the question in the Greek text is posed in the form of a double negative, literally *"It is not that Israel did not understand, is it?"* Not only is the anticipated answer is a definite "no," but the form of the question serves to express the apostle's shock and amazement that such a thing could even have been suggested.

"It is unthinkable, unbelievable that Israel, the chosen people, to whom God from ages past had entrusted His Word and promises, should ignore and leave unnoticed the message of the promises' fulfillment, or despise and reject it. The apostle is astonished, surprised, and indignant over the undeniably clear fact that Israel did not understand and believe the Gospel." (Stöckhardt, p. 147)



"The Golden Calf" Illuminated Woodcut from the Lübeck Bible -1493

In this case the conclusion is supported by two quotations from the Old Testament, the first from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21 - ***“They made Me jealous by what is no god and angered Me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.”*** In the Song of Moses, the prophet recounts the history of God’s gracious dealings with Israel in stark contrast to the faithlessness and rebellion of the people. This verse describes God’s “equivalent” response to Israel’s idolatry. That which they have done to Him, He will do to them. The punishment fits the crime. As Israel had spurned the true God and turned to the worship of idols (***“what is no god”***), thus arousing His jealousy and wrath, so God would turn from Israel to chose as His own the Gentile world (***“those who are not a people”*** - ***“a nation that has no understanding”***) so that Israel might thus be stirred to envy and return to the Lord. This theme will be specifically developed in Chapter 11:11-16. The designation of the Gentiles as ***“those who are not a people”*** and ***“a nation that has no understanding,”*** is intended to highlight the blessings that God has bestowed upon Israel. As the chosen people of God, His own holy nation, the Jews tended to look down on the rest of humanity second class citizens - ***“those who are not a people.”*** God had chosen to reveal Himself directly to Israel, He had written the law with His own hand and presented it to them at Mt. Sinai. How could those who had been so uniquely blessed now claim that they did not understand? ***“Their unbelief cannot be excused on the grounds that they have not heard the gospel. They have. And their knowledge of their own Scriptures ought to have informed their hearing. They should have known what to expect and so they are doubly without excuse.”*** (Dunn, p. 631)

Not only did Israel know the gospel of salvation, but they were warned in advance that because of their unfaithfulness the kingdom of God would be taken from them. Their angry resentment against the inclusion of the Gentiles within the church is in itself the fulfillment of the prophecy of Moses.

“And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me...” - In the classic manner of a rabbinical teacher, a quotation from the prophets now follows one from the law. Paul returns to Isaiah, whom many commentators consider to be his favorite Old Testament prophet, to cite two more pertinent passages. The first is Isaiah 65:1. In this text the prophet minces no words. He speaks bluntly and emphatically - ***“Isaiah boldly says.”*** In the Isaiah passage, God warns of the rejection of apostate Israel and describes the manner in which His grace operates: ***“I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. To a nation that did not call on My name I said, “Here am I, here am I.”***

August Pieper, whose classic commentary on Isaiah remains the standard among Lutheran exegetes, describes this concept as “*a truth of revelation that is fundamental to the whole Gospel.*” Pieper writes:

*“The Lord is uttering the truth that He reveals Himself and lets Himself be found by people who do not search after Him, or have not sought Him, a truth of revelation that is fundamental to the whole Gospel. This is the doctrine of the **free** grace of the Lord, a doctrine that was not discovered by Paul, but which is found everywhere in the Old Testament (Cf. Exodus 33:19. Isaiah especially emphasizes it. Cf. 43:22ff. As an example) It is God’s way to reveal Himself to such as have never sought Him out. Had He waited until He had been sought after, there would never have been a revelation of God’s grace. It is of this way of the Lord that He is speaking in this passage. In accordance with Deuteronomy 32:21, Paul is entirely consistent with this truth when he makes the application of it to the acceptance of the gentiles and contrasts Israel as a people that had received grace according to the same divine principle but had treated it with contempt and had in consequence been rejected.”* (Pieper, p. 662)

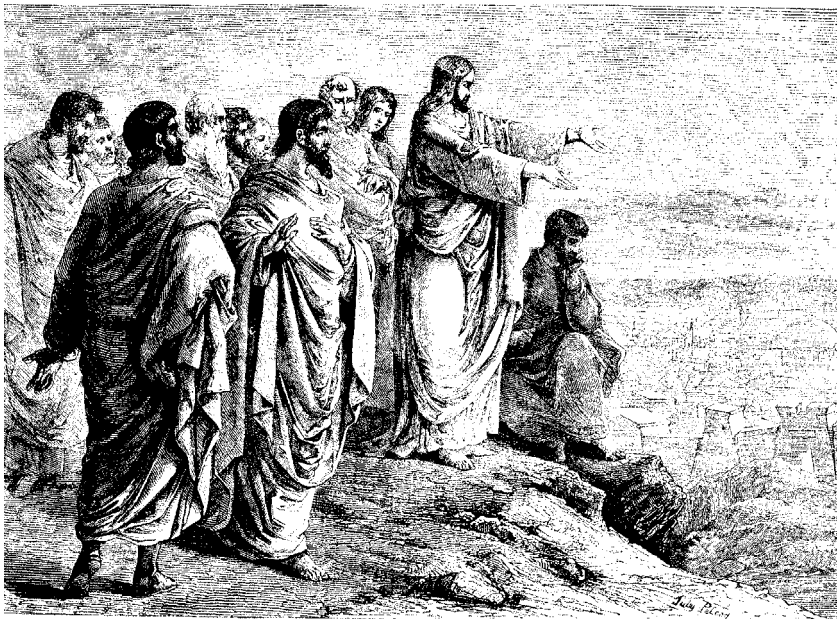


“The Lost Son” by Eugene Burnand

The language of the Isaiah text closely reflects Paul’s words in Romans 9:30 (“*What shall we then say? That the Gentiles, who have not pursued righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.*”) In this way, the text serves well to unify and advance the apostle’s argument.

“But concerning Israel He says, “All day long I have held out My hands...” - The contrast between the undeserved love freely demonstrated to the Gentiles and the stubborn disobedience of Israel could not be more clearly drawn. Paul continues his quotation from Isaiah 65: “All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.” John Murray notes:

“The perversity of Israel, on the one hand, and the constancy and intensity of God’s lovingkindness, on the other, are accentuated by the fact that the one derives its character from the other. It is to a disobedient and contradicting people that the outstretched hands of entreaty are extended. The gravity of the sin springs from the contradiction offered to the overtures of mercy.” (Murray, p. 63)



***“Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

The outstretched hands of a loving God are a poignant image of the Lord’s compelling and consistent desire for the salvation of His people. In the face of defiance, disobedience, and rejection, He continued to love them, and to reach out to them in love. The text calls to mind the heartbroken lament of Jesus over Jerusalem on the eve of His death: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets***

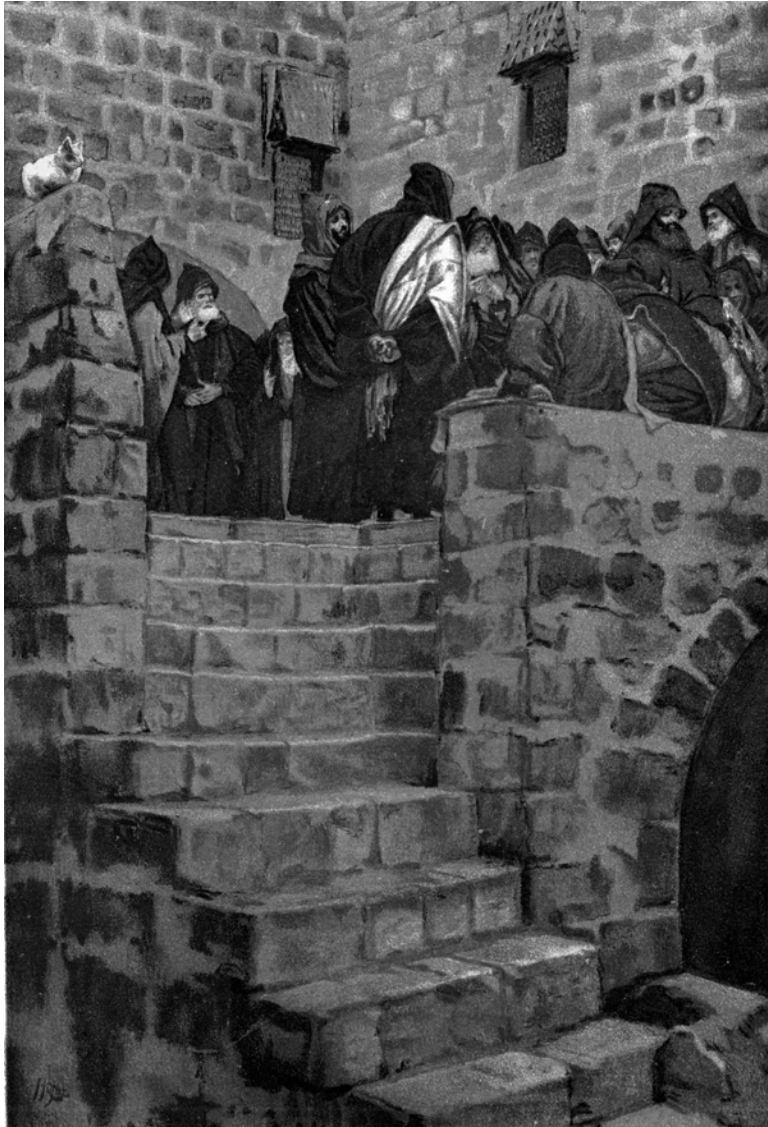
and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.” (Matthew 23:37-38) The fathers of the early church did not hesitate to see in the image of God’s outstretched hands an allusion to Christ’s crucifixion and the tortured hands of our Lord nailed to the rough wood of the cross. Diodore of Tarsus writes in the Fourth Century: *“It appears from the holding out of His hands that God is calling the people to Himself. It is also a sign pointing toward the form of the cross.”*



“The Destruction of Jerusalem” by Wilhelm von Kaulbach

Jesus sadly prophesied the coming of God’s judgment upon apostate Israel in the “*Little Apocalypse*” of Matthew 24. His predictions utilize the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions of Titus in A.D. 70 as an precursor of the destruction of the world in the final judgment. The Lord warned the Christians remaining in the city: ***“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘ the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”*** (Matthew 24:15) Wilhelm von Kaulbach’s masterful presentation of the scene depicts the moment when the Roman legions break through to the Temple sanctuary and raise their idolatrous eagle standard over the altar of sacrifice. The angels of God’s judgment herald the coming of Titus while Moses and the prophets look on sadly from heaven. In the foreground, the high priest commits suicide rather than allow himself to be captured, while the Christian flee in safety, forewarned by the Lord

Romans Chapter 11



“The Evil Counsel of Caiaphas” by J. James Tissot

Introduction

“God is free and Israel is guilty. This should suffice to justify the ways of God to man. Chapters 9 and 10 would by themselves provide a neat theodicy, a vindication of God. If Paul were a religious philosopher, he might well stop here. But Paul is not a philosopher; he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew of no limits to the creative possibilities of God; He knew that all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26). He saw in the hopeless spectacle of the harassed and helpless lost sheep of Israel the harvest field of God (Matthew 9:36-37). Paul serves Him, for Paul has the mind of Christ. Paul has been set apart for the Gospel of God. He serves the Creator God whose light has never failed (9:6). God’s Word says, “Let light shine out of darkness.” (2 Corinthians 4:6;

Genesis 1:3; cf. Isaiah 9:2); His Word can make light shine even out of Israel's darkness. His Word has uses for the dead branches cut from the tree of Israel; for Israel hardened in obdurate resistance to God (11:25). For God almighty's love is in His Word...God's Word has not failed. Therefore, a "disobedient and a contrary people" (10:21) cannot be the end and the goal of all God's ways with Israel. God has not rejected His people. Paul is living proof of that." (Franzmann, p. 194)

Verses 1-2

I ask then: did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.

"I ask then: did God reject His people? By no means!" - Once again, Paul uses a rhetorical question to introduce the next stage of the argument. The rhetorical pattern is introduced with the phrase ***"I ask then:"*** (literally - *"I say therefore"*) indicating that what follows is the result and implication of that which has gone before. In the Greek text, the question begins with the negative particle *"me"* signaling that a negative answer is anticipated. In English we might say - *"God has not rejected His people, has He?"*

At the end of the preceding chapter Paul had concluded that the Israelites were ***"disobedient and contrary people"*** (10:21). It might reasonably be expected, then, that God would have given up on this rebellious nation and consigned them to the judgment that they fully and richly deserved. Such a conclusion, however logical it may be, misunderstands the nature and purpose of God. The crucial issue in this Verse is the specific identity of ***"His people."*** As the apostle has already demonstrated ***"not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."*** (Romans 9:6) To be a child of Abraham is a matter of faith, not of blood. Thus, the ***"people"*** (Greek - *"laos"*) of God in this passage are not the Jewish nation as a whole, but rather believers. Stöckhardt is exactly correct when he argues:

"Some commentators incorrectly interpret this comment as a reference to the Jewish nation as such and to Israel's historical calling within the history of the plan of salvation. According to this view, the issue is whether Israel's calling would have been forfeited because of the unbelief of some Israelites or the majority of the Israelites. But rejection does not refer to the loss of a calling within the history of the plan of salvation. Rejection means the same thing as condemnation, exclusion from salvation. The expression "ho laos autou," "ho laos tou theou" has its full worth here and designates the people of God in the true, narrow sense of the term. In Chapter 9:6-13, Paul had already previously distinguished between Israel

according to the flesh (“kata sarx”) and Israel according to the spirit (“kata pneuma”), that is between Israelites who are merely descendants of Abraham physically and the children of God from Israel, the children of the promise, whom God had elected and called to adoption and to eternal life. That which he has said about the rejection of God is restricted to Israel according to the flesh. He will now develop this distinction further. The people of God, of whom he speaks in 11:1 are the sum total of all the true children of God (“tekna tou theou” - 9:8), “God’s people in Israel” (Luthardt).” (Stöckhardt, pp. 506-507)

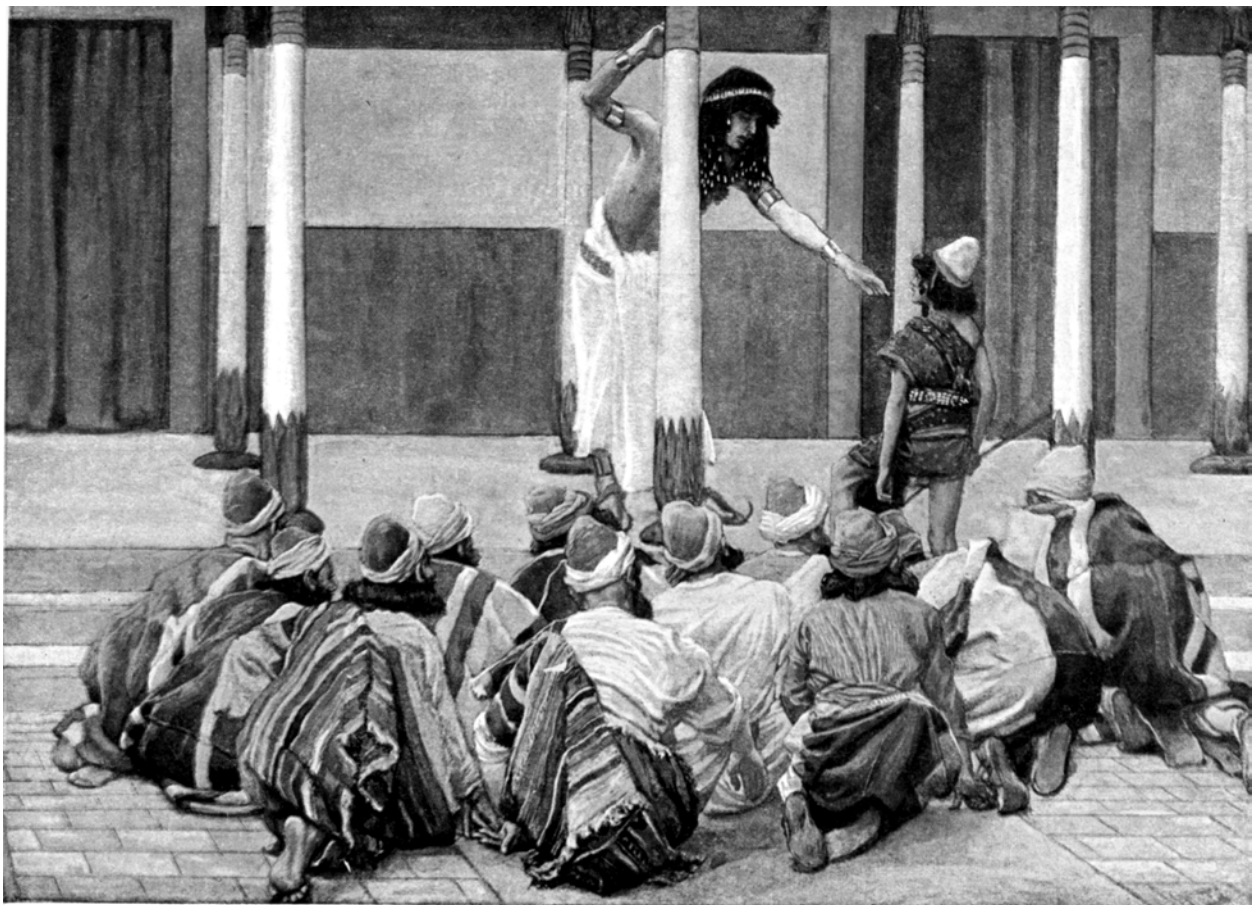
The identification of **“His people”** with believers is further reinforced by the phrase **“His people whom He foreknew”** in the Verse which follows. God’s plan of salvation was never about blood descent or national identity, but about the preservation of a faithful remnant made up of Jew and Gentile alike. That plan had neither failed nor changed.

The verb **“reject”** (Greek - *“apothéo”*) is most emphatic with the literal meaning of thrusting away from one’s self something that is hateful or disgusting. In this context it is the equivalent of condemnation or damnation. The thought that God would condemn those who are His own by faith because of the faithlessness of others is inconceivable, and Paul rejects it with the strongest possible language - **“By no means!”** *“The idea of this verse, then, is that God has not rejected those upon whom He has placed His covenantal love. Such an idea is unthinkable and indeed impossible.”* (Schreiner, p.581)

“I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.” As he did at the beginning of his discussion of Israel, Paul now reasserts his own identification with the nation of Israel. The Greek text introduces this phrase with conjunction *“for”* (Greek - *“gar”*) which indicates that Paul sees his own identity as a Jew as a reason to deny that God has rejected His people. The language is that of the Old Testament covenant. **“Israelite”** is the nation’s covenant designation based on the new name which God bestowed upon Jacob after he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 35:10). By identifying himself as **“a descendant of Abraham”** (Greek - *“ek spermata abraam”* - *“from the seed of Abraham”*) the apostle links his testimony with his earlier discussion of the true Israel (cf. Romans 4:13-18; 9:7-8). Some have suggested that the reference to the tribe of Benjamin is the result of Benjamin’s reputation as the most faithful of all the tribes. This view is reflected in the rabbinic tradition that Benjamin was the tribe which led the crossing of the Red Sea, and the fact that Benjamin was the only other tribe to remain loyal to the House of David when the Kingdom was divided. Such suggestions miss the point of the apostle’s

comment and tend to fall back into the same nationalistic mind set that is being repudiated in this section. Paul's emphasis upon his membership in the tribe of Benjamin is simply the furnishing of individual detail which demonstrates the accuracy of his assertion. Paul is a part of the believing remnant within the nation, and the continuing reality of the remnant proves that God's purpose and promise have not failed. *"Paul, himself, as a Jewish Christian, is living evidence that God has not abandoned His people Israel. Jews like Paul, are continuing to be saved and to experience the blessings God promised to His people."* (Moo, p. 675)

"God did not reject His people whom He foreknew." - The impossibility of God's rejected of His own is reinforced by a reference to divine election. From before the time when time began, God has known those who belong to Him, those whom He has claimed and called for eternal salvation. The foreknowledge of God is presented here in the same sense that it has in Romans 8:29 (cf. p. 323ff. for a complete discussion



"Joseph and Benjamin in Egypt" by J. James Tissot

of the term's meaning). George Stöckhardt captures the essence of the Biblical concept:

“When it is said in Scripture that God has known and knows us, this means that God has acknowledged, recognized, accepted us as His own, by such knowing has made us His own, adopted us as His own, has placed us into union, into fellowship with Himself, and so, as though bound to Him in unity and kindred with Himself, He loves us with His whole heart...We will not permit this comfort to be taken from us, the comfort that Scripture has opened up to us in and with the “foreknowledge” of God; that God, already in eternity has said to us, to each and everyone of us individually, You are mine. I have engraved your name upon My hands.” (Stöckhardt, Predestination, pp. 16,25)

This is the sense in which the term is used in Amos 3:2 - **“You (the people of Israel) *only have I chosen* (literally - “have I known”) *of all the families of the earth.*”** From before the beginning, God’s loving foreknowledge had chosen the lambs of His own flock both from the sheepfold of Israel and the nations (John 10:14-16). The love of God for His own does not change, nor can it fail.

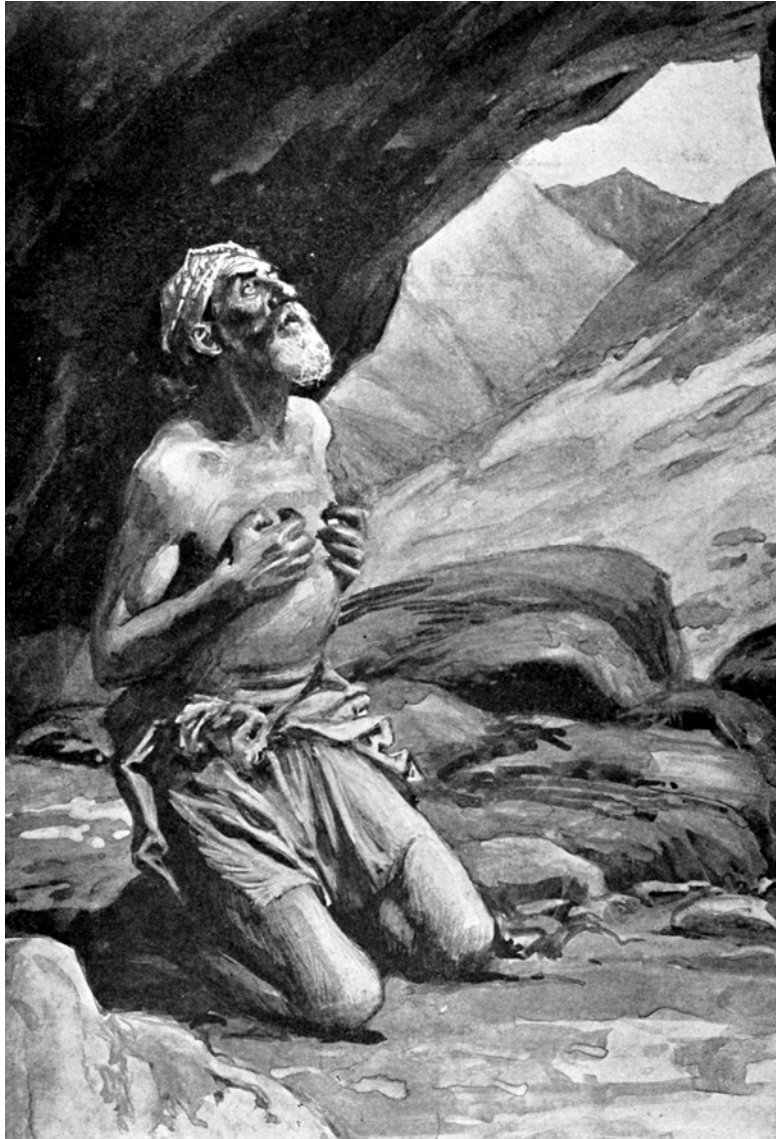
Verses 3-6

Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah - how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars; I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me?” And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

“Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah?” - The apostle appeals to the historical precedent of the prophet Elijah’s conversation with God in the dark days following his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on the summit of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 19:10-18) to document the preservation of the righteous remnant. Even amid the worst apostasy the Lord preserves His own. They many constitute only a tiny handful compared to the great multitudes who abandon or compromise the truth of God, but they will always remain, nonetheless. As Jesus promises, the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). The 1 Kings text serves perfectly to illustrate the apostle’s contention that God always preserves His own, and that the unfaithfulness of the majority does not negate the

promises of our faithful God.

“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace...” - The explicit connection between the historical precedent and the present situation is now drawn. In both instances the remnant remains. The apostasy of the overwhelming majority



“Elijah on Mt. Horeb” by J. James Tissot

of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel did not undo the gracious promises of God to His own. There still remained 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. So also the rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah by the overwhelming majority of Israel does not signify the failure of God’s plan of salvation for His people. A faithful remnant remains in Israel, exemplified by Paul himself, ***“a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.”*** (11:1). The preservation of the remnant is the work of God alone. Human effort, the works of man, are not a factor here. The remnant remains, ***“chosen by grace”*** (literally - *“in accordance with the election of grace”*). This is the first time these two profoundly significant theological concepts - *“election”* (Greek - *“eklogen”*) and *“grace”* (Greek -

“charitos”) - have been combined in Romans. It is a powerful combination. God’s action in choosing the remnant is not conditioned by anything in them. *“The existence of a remnant of believing Jews is not ultimately ascribed to their greater wisdom or nobility, or to their free will, or to their spiritual perception. The*

inclusion of the remnant in God's people is due to His electing grace." (Schreiner, p.582) It is God and God alone who is at work here. Martin Franzmann summarizes:

"Elijah found that he was not alone; and Paul, who knows the deadly enmity of Israel as Elijah did, and has looked full upon the tragic wreckage of his people, broken on the Stone of stumbling, Paul, too, knows that he is not alone. He knows that out of Israel God's elective grace has now called forth men who do not disobey and contradict God but call Jesus Lord and believe that God has raised Him from the dead. These men have gone the way that all who go into the new Israel of God must go; they have gone the way of grace and faith, not trying to establish a righteousness of their own but renouncing their own righteousness and submitting freely to the given righteousness of God." (Franzmann, p. 196)

The combination of "grace" and "election" is of profound theological importance. One cannot be denied or minimized without jeopardizing the other.

"One should also observe that Paul's teaching on election is indissolubly bound up with his gospel of justification. . . Those who deny unconditional election introduce, albeit subtly, the notion that human works play a role in obtaining justification and open the door for human boasting. . . For Paul, the purity of grace is bound up with the conviction that God elects apart from any human work. Luther saw this very clearly in his classic "Bondage of the Will." He defended the doctrines of the bondage of the will and unconditional election so vigorously because the denial of either compromised the Pauline gospel that justification is by grace alone through faith alone." (Schreiner, p. 583)

"And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." - No combination of grace and works is possible. These two categories are mutually exclusive. The absolute incompatibility of God's grace with human works is the hallmark emphasis of Paul's New Testament writings (Cf. Romans 3:21-31; 4:1-11; 5:2, 20-21; 9:11). Each and every attempt to combine that which a man does or is with the attainment of salvation is scorned and rejected by the St. Paul, the great apostle of grace. As he declares to Timothy: ***"God has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."*** (2 Timothy 1:9) If God's action is based in any way on "works," that which is done by a human being, then it cannot be "grace."

"There is no such thing in God as a diluted grace, a partial grace. If grace is not the free and round and whole and undivided love of God, the same to all, pure gold in

every hand that holds it, then it is not grace. Where God's grace works, there is simply no room for the works of men, for human merit, and acquired reward." (Franzmann, p. 197)

All those who attempt to bring the two together are guilty of following ***"a different gospel which is really no gospel at all."*** (Galatians 1:6,7). Whenever man's works become a factor, God's grace is necessarily and automatically eliminated. This had become the case in pharisaic Judaism. For Paul, the son of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin, the discovery of this grace was actually a rediscovery, a homecoming to the faith of Abraham, as it had truly always been.

"For Paul and for many other Jewish Christians, belief in Jesus Christ had been a rediscovery of the experience of the grace of God which had been obscured for them while they remained within the more traditional Judaism. But for Paul conversion was a rediscovery of what he now realized more clearly had always been at the heart of Judaism rightly understood - a rediscovery of God's choice not on the basis of good or evil deeds (9:11) but as an act of sheer generosity. Conversion to Jesus Messiah was not a movement away from the faith of the patriarchs and prophets, but a rediscovery of its pristine power." (Dunn, pp. 646,647)

Verses 7-10

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

"What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain..." - One more rhetorical marks the conclusion of this portion of the argument. Paul has contended that the presence of the remnant, Jews who are Christians, demonstrates that God has not rejected His people. In fact, the current situation in which only a small minority actually believe, is fully consistent with the historical pattern of the past. The language here is reminiscent of 9:30-31 which also serves as a summary of the preceding argument in Chapter 9 - ***"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel,***



“The High Priests Conspire with Judas” by H. Prell

who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.” The nation as a whole **“Israel”** has failed to attain what she was seeking, that is, righteousness before God (cf. 9:30-31). This failure is all the more tragic in light of all of Israel’s diligent efforts to achieve the desired goal. The nation is now divided into two categories, the **“elect”** (Greek - *“ekloge”*) and the rest who were **“hardened”** (Greek - *“porousthai”*). The elect are the remnant, those who God in His grace has chosen to be His own (cf. vss. 5-6). The Greek verb *“porousthai”* literally means *“to petrify,” “to be turned into stone.”* This is the judicial hardening of God by which His punishment for the obdurate sinner is confirmation in the sin he has chosen for himself (cf. 1:18-32; 9:16-17). Lenski notes: *“The punitive hardening that follows after self-hardening has fully set in is here described. They that will not shall not!”* (Lenski, p. 687)

“As it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.” - The judgement of hardening upon Israel is documented with a composite of citations from the Old Testament. This verse is a combination of Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. In the Deuteronomy passage Moses rehearses and foretells the history of Israel warning them of the judgement to come because of their unbelief - **“To this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands, or eyes that see or ears that hear.”** The

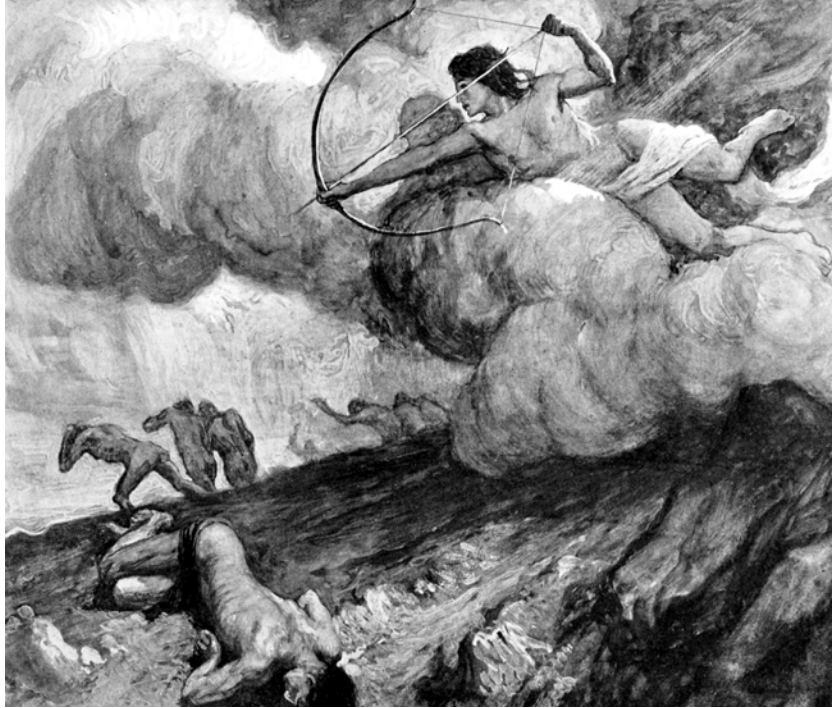
Isaiah text is also a stern word of warning that God will bring upon the people and their prophets *“a deep sleep”* and *“seal their eyes.”* Both quotations recall the classic Old Testament text on the hardening of Israel, Isaiah 6:9-11 -

“Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (Cf. Matthew 13:10-15; John 12:37-43)

By citing these passages Paul contends that the spiritual blindness of Israel is the culmination of a judgement process that had been at work in Israel for many generations.

“In both of these prophetic passages, just as in Isaiah 29:9ff., Israel was denied spiritual sight and hearing, the capacity to understand and to grasp God’s Word and work. The blinding and hardening of Israel had already begun in the time of Isaiah, indeed its earliest beginnings reach back to the days of Moses. Yet, because at the time of Christ and the apostles the judgement of obduracy upon Israel was truly consummated and completed, the apostle rightly applies these statements of Moses and Isaiah as prophecies of his own New Testament time.” (Stöckhardt, p. 513)

“And David says: May their table become a snare and a trap...” - In fine rabbinic style, having quoted from the Torah and the Prophets, Paul now turns to the Writings, the third segment of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanak with a citation from the Book of Psalms. These harsh words come from Psalm 69, the anguished lament of the dying Messiah upon the cross. The Psalm is repeatedly quoted and alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Christ (cf. Matthew 27:34,48; Mark 3:21; 15:23,36; Luke 13:35; 23:36; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:29; Acts 1:20; Romans 15:3; Hebrews 11:26; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 16:1). In the malediction quoted here, the Messiah is calling down the judgement of God upon His enemies. Psalm 69 is one of the so-called *“Imprecatory Psalms”* which call for the punishment and destruction of the enemies of God and His people. Those who are troubled by these often harshly worded passages fail to recognize that when the psalmist, or even the Messiah speaking through the psalmist as in Psalm 69, calls for the destruction or death of the wicked, this is not a matter of personal vengeance or vindictiveness. It is rather a plea for the vindication of the holy God and His divine justice by the exercise of

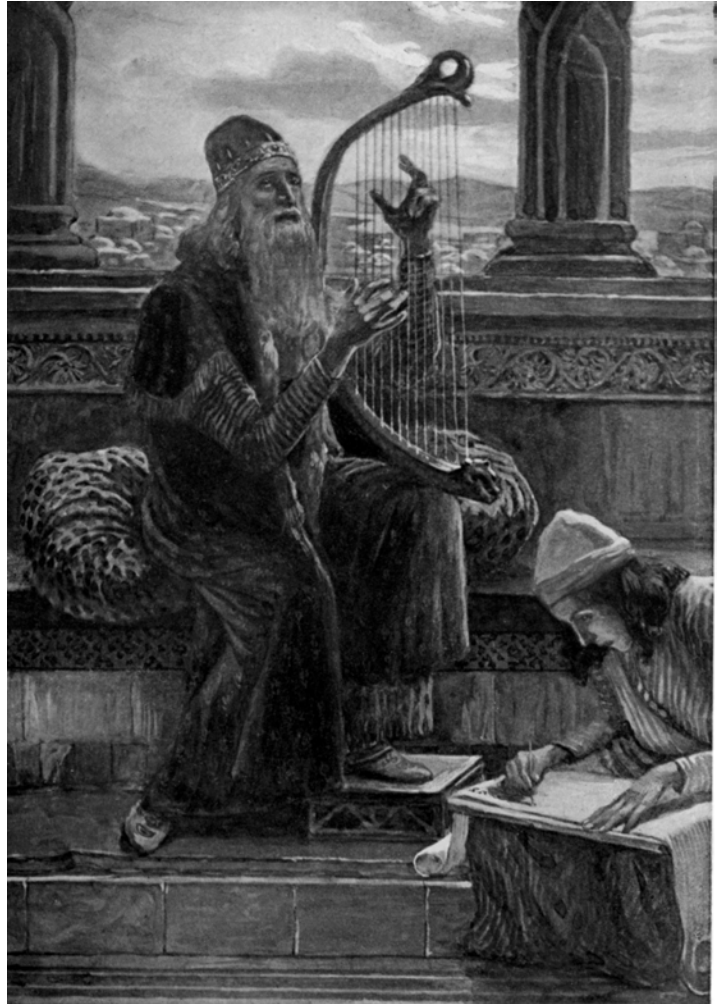


*“The Ungodly Shall Not Stand in the Day of Judgment”
by J. James Tissot*

judgment upon the those who have stubbornly and impenitently defied His will. The object of these fervent prayers for judgment are those who have hardened their hearts and who obstinately seek to prevent the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation. The motive of these prayers is never personal vengeance but the vindication of the justice of God. Dr. John Brug offers these helpful observations about the Imprecatory Psalms in general and Psalm 69 in particular:

*“We use the term “imprecatory psalms” to describe those psalms that contain curses or prayers for the punishment of the psalmist’s enemies...Many commentators dismiss these prayers as remnants of a less developed stage of religion, which we have now outgrown. They claim that such prayers are no longer valid in New Testament times, since we are now told to love our enemies and not to take revenge. Such claims, however, are not supported by a careful study of these Psalms or the rest of Scripture. These prayers, harsh though they sound, were proper prayers when they were first uttered, and they are still proper today...Luther once commented that we cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer without cursing. Every time we pray “Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,” we are praying that the plans of Satan and all who serve him will fail and that they receive the judgment which they deserve. We should indeed pray that God will lead our enemies to repentance and forgiveness as Christ and Stephan did, but we must also pray that all who continue to defy God will receive the justice they deserve. God is a God of absolute holiness...When the psalmist uttered such prayers, his concern was for the God’s glory and the success of God’s plans....Similar prayers for God to display His justice occur in the New Testament. Paul prayed for God’s judgment against those who opposed his preaching of the gospel (Galatians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:14). Even the saints in heaven pray, “**How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?**” (Revelation 6:10)” (Brug, pp.12-13)*

In the inspired words of Psalm 69, the dying Messiah calls down the judgment of God upon His enemies. As noted above, this is not a desire for personal vengeance, but a holy desire for the unhindered accomplishment of the will and purpose of God. The enemies of the Righteous One appear to have triumphed. They rejoice in their victory while they scorn and oppress the Servant of God. The table of the feasting, the symbol of their victorious self-confidence, shall become the instrument of their doom. The eyes of those who have gazed without pity upon Him whom God has smitten, shall be blinded, and the proud backs of the oppressors shall be bent forever beneath the yoke of slavery. By spurning the freedom that God offered, they chose for themselves slavery instead. By refusing to see the truth that God had plainly revealed they cursed themselves to stumble helplessly in the darkness. Thus Israel has brought the judgment of God upon itself by its defiant rejection of the Savior whom God had sent. This is a grim but realistic picture of the righteous judgment of God at work.



“David - the Psalmist” by J. James Tissot

John MacArthur notes:

“One of the saddest commentaries in history is that so many people place their trust in the very thing that damns them. All false religions - pagan, cultic, unbiblical Christianity, and every other kind - present counterfeit means of salvation. The more their adherents feed on the falsehoods, the more immune they become to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the living bread of life. As she continued to reject God, Israel became progressively more spiritually blind - so blind that she could not recognize her own Messiah and Savior. Just as David had prayed in righteous indignation against the sins of his own people, Israel’s eyes were darkened to see not. Because Israel refused to see the things of God, God judicially ratified her willing blindness.”

“Bend their backs” may suggest the hunched over posture in which blind people sometimes walk as they grope their way on a path they cannot see that leads to a destination they do not seek.” (MacArthur, p. 104)

Verses 11-12

Again I ask, Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring?

“Again I ask...” - A rhetorical question expecting a negative answer, similar to that of Verse 1, advances the discussion to the next thought. In the preceding verses, Paul has firmly asserted the hardening of Israel and the preservation of a believing remnant. He now proceeds to define the redemptive purpose of God in His judgement upon apostate Israel. ***“Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?”*** ***“Stumble”*** (Greek - *“ptaio”*) literally means to collide with or crash against something. It is commonly used in the sense of stumbling over an obstacle. James uses the same word in a spiritual sense in reference to sinning: ***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*** (James 2:10; cf. also 3:2; 2 Peter 1:10). In this instance, the stumbling of Israel is her rejection of Christ and the righteousness of God offered through Him. ***“To fall beyond recovery”*** (Greek - *“pipto”*) is the result of the stumbling. The term is used in the same sense in the Septuagint’s translation of Isaiah 24:20 - ***“The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it and it falls and will not rise again.”*** The term is often used in the New Testament to denote apostasy and spiritual ruin (cf. Romans 11:22; 14:4; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 4:11). The question posed here pertains to God’s perspective on Israel’s apostasy and His purpose therein, thus the use of the Greek preposition *“hina”* (*“so as”*). John Murray is correct in his assertion: ***“We are here advised, therefore, of the overriding and overruling design of God in the stumbling and fall of Israel.”*** (Murray, p. 76) Dr. Stöckhardt amplifies that thought in this way: ***“The sense of the question is this: did they stumble just so that they might never rise again? Is their fall an end in itself? Could it simply have been God’s intent that they fall and be destroyed so that He might find pleasure and satisfaction in their destruction?”*** (Stöckhardt, p. 514) Is this merely an example of the vengeful judgment of an angry God? The answer is immediate and emphatic. ***“Not at all.”*** Our God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked - ***“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the***

Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezekiel 18:22). Even in judgment there is redemptive intent, for above all else, God is love. God's desire for the salvation of His people never weakens or comes to an end. Even in the face of their obstinate rejection He would still restore them. Even as He punishes, He seeks to lead them to repentance and the punishment visited upon one becomes the occasion of blessing for another.



"This Generation Will Be Held Responsible for the Blood of all the Prophets..to the Blood of Zechariah who was Killed between the Altar and the Sanctuary" by J. James Tissot

astounding mercy of God that He makes even the hardening and the fatal fall of the Jews serve His redemptive purpose." (Lenski, p. 693)

"Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." - Paul now returns to the concept introduced in 10:19, based on Deuteronomy 32:21, namely the offer of salvation to the Gentiles as a means of stimulating a renewal of interest among the Jews. The *"transgression"* of Israel is once again their rejection of the Messiah and their attempt to attain a righteousness based upon the law which is the opposite of the righteousness of God in Christ. In the redemptive purpose of God, just judgment upon Israel's sin serves both as the occasion of salvation for all the nations and yet another opportunity to provoke within the Jews the jealous desire to recapture that which they had thrown away. *"Such is the*

“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” - The apostle is unwilling to simply write off ethnic Israel. He argues from the lesser to the greater to suggest the possibility that despite the Messiah’s rejection by the majority of the nation, those Jews like himself who have come to faith in Jesus are still uniquely positioned to play a special role in the blessing of mankind. God’s redemptive purpose in believing Israelites is greater still than His redemptive purpose in unbelieving Israelites. Paul, the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, is the perfect example of this truth. The key words here are the contrasting terms ***“loss”*** (Greek - *“hettema”*) and ***“fullness”*** (Greek - *“pleroma”*). *“Hettema”* is unusual in New Testament Greek. It is derived from a verb which means *“to be less,” “to be weaker,”* or, *“to be defeated.”* Israel’s ***“transgression”*** in rejecting Christ has been for her the ultimate spiritual defeat. The term is never used in a numerical, statistical sense. ***“Fullness,”*** in direct contrast, refers to completeness or fulfillment. The sense of the term in its every Biblical use is qualitative not quantitative. That which was lost by the apostate majority has been completely restored to the believing remnant (11:5,7) through whom the Gospel is now being proclaimed throughout all the world. Thus, ***“their fullness”*** is not something yet to be realized in the far distant future. It is present reality as Paul writes to the congregation in Rome. Millennialist fantasies about a general conversion of ethnic Israel during the Tribulation Period on the eve of a thousand year earthly kingdom for the Jews find no support in Romans 11. Lenski correctly defines the contrast in this way:

“The thought is not that if the Jewish loss made the world rich, then the Jewish gain would make it even richer. It is this: if the Jewish loss makes the world rich (which it surely does), this fact stands out as such still more when many of these very Jews themselves now embrace this fulness, these riches.” (Lenski, p. 694)

Verses 13-15

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry, in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

“I am talking to you Gentiles.” - This is the first instance in the letter where Paul addresses the Gentile members of the Roman congregation as such. He speaks as

“the apostle to the Gentiles” and urges them to avoid the temptation to view the Jews or Jewish Christian with scorn and disdain. To do so would be to fall prey to the same sinful pride which has resulted in the downfall of Israel. Paul has been an aggressive and unapologetic advocate of the mission to the Gentiles and of their inclusion as complete equals in the Christian Church. He has consistently been their spokesman and defender even in the face of bitter opposition. But even in this, a part of Paul’s motive has been a desire for the salvation of his own nation, the Jews. Like the God whom he serves, Paul is determined to find even in man’s rejection a way to enhance the progress of salvation. Franzmann notes: *“Paul cannot reach his fellow Jews directly; they break into anathemas at the sight of him. He must seek them*



“If You Are the Christ, Come Down from the Cross” by R. Schuler

roundabout, through the Gentiles; the Gentile Christians are Paul’s mission to the Jews.” (Franzmann, p. 200, 201) It is the apostle’s intent by the very emphasis of his ministry as an outreach to the Gentiles *“to arouse my own people to envy”* and in this way to reach out to the elect remnant of the nation - *“save some of them.”* In this context, *“their rejection”* refers to God’s rejection of Israel as the consequence of the nation’s unbelief, not Israel’s stubborn rejection of Jesus. *“The reconciliation of the world,”* the outreach of the Gospel to every nation, and the subsequent conversion of

countless Gentiles to faith in Christ, this is the miraculous result which God has brought about by His judgment upon Israel. **“Reconciliation”** (Greek - *“katallage”*) refers to the action of God in bringing sinners into a peaceful relationship with Himself by removing the barrier of sin which separated Him from fallen mankind by the sacrifice of His Son. The English word *“reconciliation”* is derived from the Latin *“to bring together again.”* It describes the restoration of friendly relationships and peace where before there had been alienation and hostility thru the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. This reconciliation is an objective reality in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross. The blessings of this reconciliation are received by each individual through faith, which is, of course, also a gift of God.

“The reconciliation obtained through the unbelief and the resultant rejection of the Jews, is not the objective reconciliation of the world with God through Christ’s blood and death but the subjective reconciliation, identical with the conversion of the heathen world to God of which 2 Corinthians 5:20 also speaks - “Be ye also reconciled with God.” (Stöckhardt, p. 517,518)

The theme continues to be God’s wondrous ability to turn negatives into positives; to take man’s most obstinate and flagrant rejection and use it in service of the plan of salvation. Within the apostate nation the faithful remnant is carefully preserved. Every Jew who is a part of that remnant, that is who comes to faith in Jesus (***their acceptance***) is a miracle of ***“life from the dead,”*** like the dry bones of Ezekiel’s valley restored to life again. The application of this principle transcends its specific application to Israel and the Gentiles to remain relevant throughout the history of God’s people:

“This characteristic feature of the progress of the Kingdom of God can also be observed in the history of the Church of Christ beyond the contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles. The lamentable fact remains that many, indeed most, of those who hear the Gospel do not believe and proceed to damnation. This sad reality will remain unchanged until Judgment Day. Nevertheless, God’s Kingdom continues to move forward on earth. In His own masterful way, God knows how to bring forth good from unbelief, the most terrible of all evils. God knows how to raise up some through the downfall of others. It has often happened that when the Gospel is driven away from one place by the ingratitude of men, that same Gospel moves on to another place, there to establish a firm foundation and bring forth abundant fruit. This is the way in which God’s Word came to the Gentiles from the Jews. In the same way the Word of God came from the Greeks and Romans to the Germanic peoples, and from the Old World to the New World. In the hand of God the

persecution of the Christians became the means to spread the Christian Church. As persecuted Christian fled into exile they took their great treasure, the riches of Christ, with them, and there, in exile found open and receptive hearts. The flourishing of faith far away among strangers has often produced the same wholesome reaction upon the church at home. The zeal of the newly converted excites and awakens many who have grown indolent or have already died. It is a particular comfort for Christian pastors to recognize that as Paul provoked Israel by his preaching to the Gentiles, their ministries reach farther than their eyes can see. If they but faithfully carry out their office at home to the souls entrusted to their care, they thus provide the instruments thru which God will carry out His saving work in others. All these are ways and means by which God brings together the elect from all the ends and corners of the earth. In this way, the Church of Christ is led toward her consummation and her glorification.” (Stöckhardt, pp. 519,520)

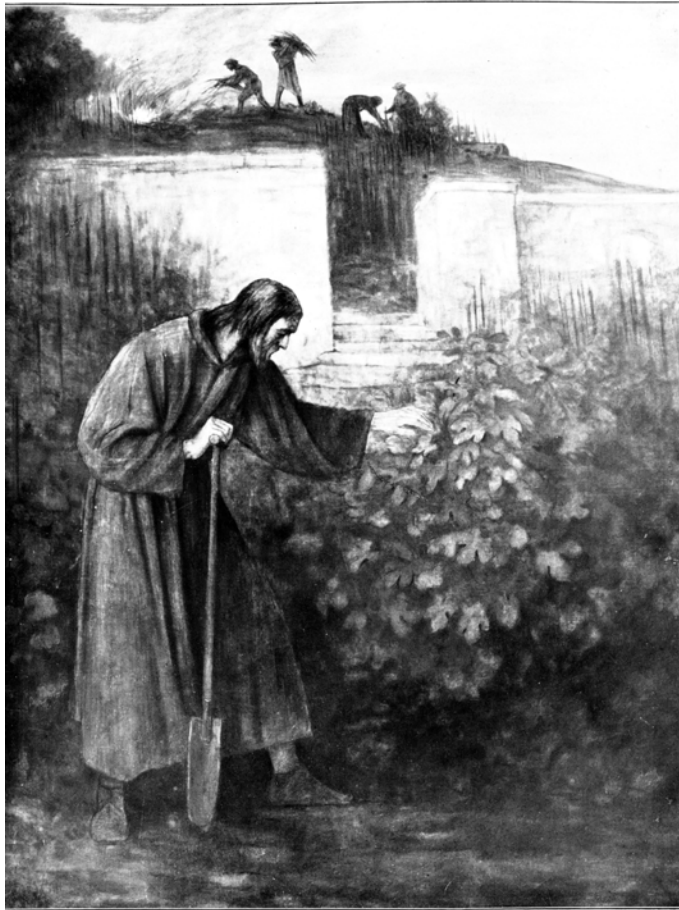
Our indolent and apathetic churches would do well to ponder the lesson of this pattern within the history of God’s people.

Verses 16-21

If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this; You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.

“If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy...” Two comparisons are offered to illustrate and drive home this fundamental truth. The first is derived from the worship life of ancient Israel (Numbers 15:17-21). From the first dough made of the new grain a portion was set aside and baked for the Lord. This sacrificial offering served to sanctify and bless the entire harvest. Later in the second metaphor (Verse 28) Paul explains that the root of the olive vine represents the patriarchs. That being the case, it would seem that the ***“firstfruits”*** of the batch would also represent the patriarchs of Israel. God’s choice of the patriarchs resulted in the fact that through

them all of their spiritual descendants are sanctified (cf. Romans 4:16-19). Of course, the patriarchs convey spiritual benefits on their spiritual descendants only as recipients and transmitters of the promises of God. That benefit is described in the text in terms of holiness (Greek - *“hagios”*). In the sacrificial language of the Old Testament, holiness carries the technical connotation of having been set apart by God for salvation. That sense suits Paul’s purpose here perfectly. In this way, the illustration of the firstfruits grain offering serves as the transition to the more detailed



“Christ in the Vineyard” by Wilhelm Steinhausen

and extended metaphor of the olive vine with the immediate addition of the phrase ***“If the root is holy, so are the branches.”*** The imagery of Israel as the vineyard of God is well established in the Old Testament (i.e.- Psalm 92:13; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 11:17). The dependence of the branches upon the root is also frequently asserted (i.e. - Job 18:16; Jeremiah 17:8; Ezekiel 31:7; Hosea 9:16). Thus, the introduction of the metaphor here is not unexpected. The point is the same as in the preceding phrase. The ***“root”*** represents the patriarchs and the ***“branches”*** which spring from that root represent the true Israel of God. The apostle maintains a careful balance. Physical descent from the patriarchs does not, in itself bring salvation (cf. Romans 2:25-29; 9:6-29). All mankind, both

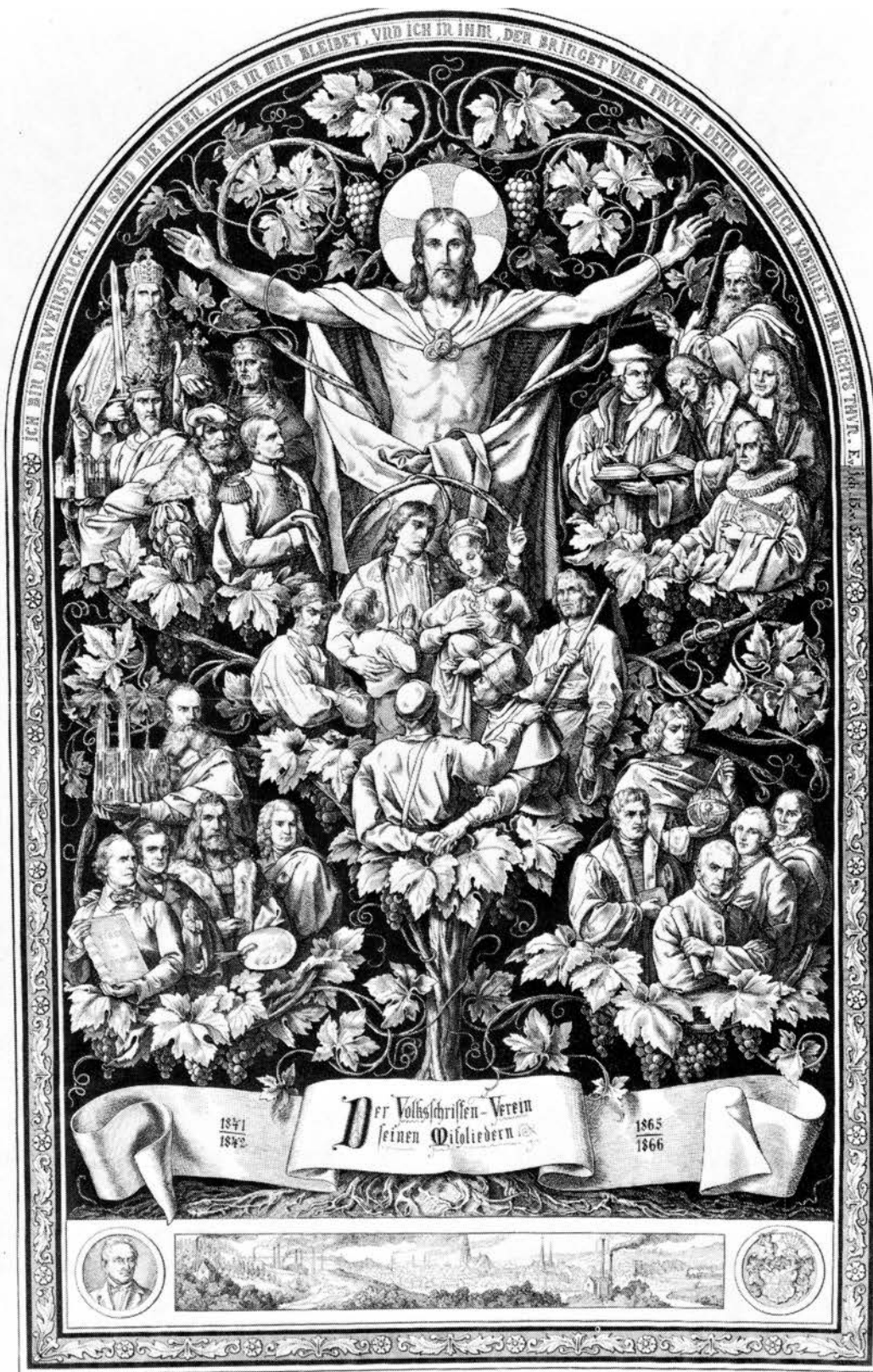
Jews and Gentiles are in the same position by nature in helpless bondage to the power of sin (2:1-3:20) and in need of God’s gift of faith to be saved (3:21-4:25). Yet salvation comes only to those who are *“of Abraham’s seed”* and thus the people of God are one, and that people has both a Jewish root and a continuing Jewish element.

“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot...” - The image of the root and the branches now serves to admonish and warn Gentile Christians. ***“The branches that have been broken off”*** are unbelieving

Israel. The clear implication of the imagery is that the broken off branches were dead. To say that “*some*” branches have been severed from the vine (Note the use of the passive verb to emphasize the divine action involved.) is a genuine understatement in the face of Israel’s overwhelming rejection of Christ. The pronoun “*you*” is highlighted for special emphasis, addressing the Gentile Christians in Rome personally and directly. The olive tree was the most widely cultivated fruit tree in the Mediterranean region. It had been carefully cultured and developed for centuries to provide lush and abundant fruit. The wild olive tree, on the other hand, was an annoying weed, notorious unfruitful. Thus the process of grafting which Paul describes is the exact opposite of what would normally be expected, and in this way the apostle brings out the wonder of God’s amazing grace. Lenski summarizes:

“The astounding miracle of grace is here pictured by an equally astounding figure; such a wild olive branch grafted in among good living olive branches and thereby made a joint partaker of the root of the good olive tree, of its fatness, its rich sap...The marvel of divine grace, which the Gentile Christians are to note well, is that they, together with the believing Jews are made blessed partakers of all that God originally gave to Abraham and to the great patriarchs of the covenant.” (Lenski, p. 705, 704)

“Do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.” - Unfortunately, sinful pride and arrogant superiority are not limited to any race or ethnic group. It is the natural propensity of all the fallen children of Father Adam. Gentile Christians are admonished lest they take pleasure in the downfall of the Jews and disparage their Jewish fellow-Christians. Having dealt most severely with all Jewish pretensions and pride, the apostle now bluntly eliminates the possibility of boasting among the Gentiles. The “*root*” which gives sustenance and support to the ingrafted “*branches*” is the Old Testament heritage of the people of God stretching all the way back to Abraham and beyond. To disdain that heritage is to diminish the grace of God which is the only basis for the salvation of every believer, whether Jew or Gentile. In view of that grace, the free gift of God’s absolutely undeserved love excludes all possibility of any kind of boasting (cf. Romans 3:27-28). A careful balance must be maintained here. Every Gentile believer is, in a sense, indebted to Israel as the custodian of the oracles of God. But recognition of and respect for our Old Testament Hebrew heritage must not be equated with an acceptance of Judaism as a viable alternative to Christianity. The acknowledgment of the Jews as “*our elder brothers in the faith,*” to use the language of modern ecumenism, dare



"I Am the Vine, You Are the Branches" by Karl Christian Andreae

never be construed as approbation of their ongoing rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the only Savior of the world.

“You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in...” - The argument follows a logical progression. The hypothetical Gentile boaster points out that he must be superior because others were removed to make way for him - ***“branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.”*** Paul ironically agrees - ***“Granted.”*** There is some truth here, but it is only a half-truth. As has already been demonstrated, God had much more in mind than the salvation of the Gentiles in His judgment upon Israel. The divine intent from the beginning was the salvation of mankind, both Jew and Gentile. It is sheer egotism for the Gentile to now conclude that God’s sole purpose in condemning the Jews was to save the Gentiles. This is exactly the same kind of egotism that had led the Jews to conclude that the choosing of Israel was an end in itself because God only the Jews and not the Gentiles. At the root of Israel’s rejection was a lack of faith - ***“they were broken off because of unbelief.”*** Gentiles must now guard against sinful pride and self-exaltation because the basis for their relationship with God is also faith - ***“and you stand by faith.”*** Faith is God’s gift, not man’s doing. This is no inherent virtue, merit, or superiority that contributes to its bestowal by God.

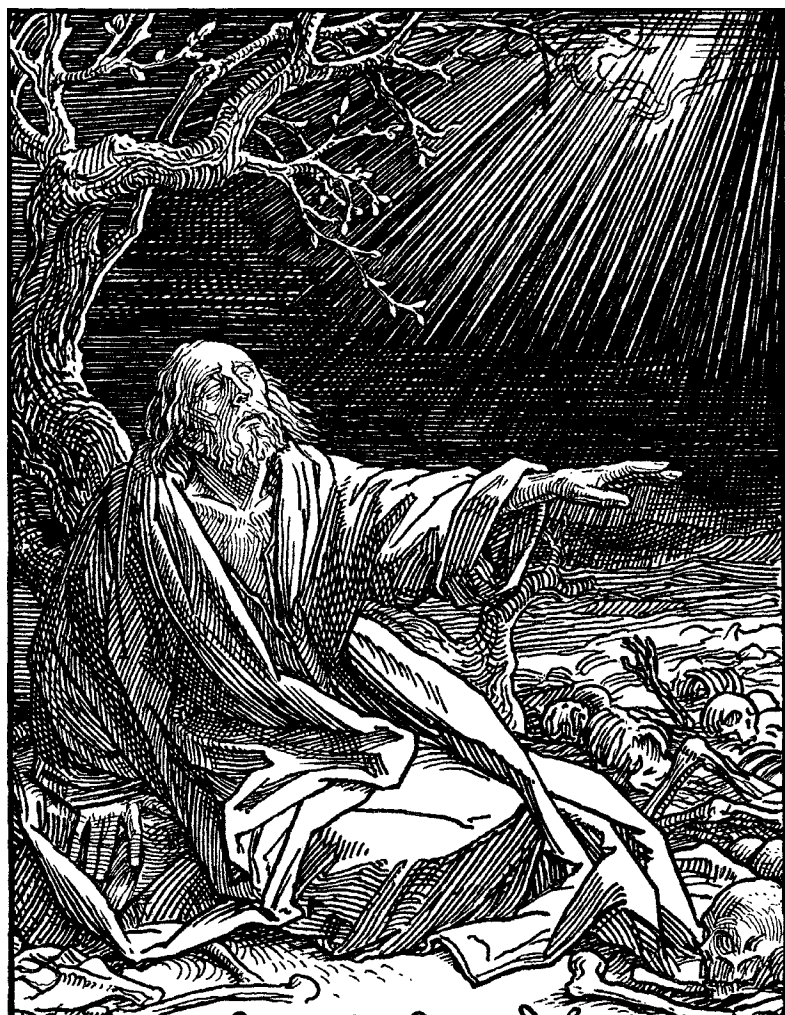
“Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.” - Thoughts of self-satisfaction, superiority and pride must give way to reverent awe before the mighty God. This is the fear of God which is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). ***“ Only fear of God can keep faith from deteriorating into presumption, since only in trembling creatureliness does faith retain its character as dependent trust.”*** (Dunn, p. 663) The Gentiles are urged to learn from the negative experience of Israel. When the descendants of Abraham fell from faith, they were cut off despite an ethnic pedigree that reached back across the centuries. If God so judged the Jews, who had a natural connection to the sustaining root, He will surely also judge those who have been grafted in as alien branches. We would all do well to heed the warning of Israel’s downfall. ***“Faith cannot become proud at the sight of God’s judgment upon unbelief. When faith sees broken branches lying withered on the ground, faith is filled with fear and says, “There but for the grace of God lie I.”*** (Franzmann, p. 204)

Verses 22-24

Consider therefore, the kindness and the sternness of God: sternness to those who

fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you will also be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.

“Consider therefore, the kindness and the sternness of God.” - The point is restated in the customary language of theology. The **“kindness”** (Greek - *“chrestoteta”*) and the **“sternness”** (Greek - *“apotomian”*) of God are set in juxtaposition with one another. **“Kindness”** indicates the generous, giving quality of God’s undeserved love - *“the fountain of all spiritual blessings and gifts.”* (Lenski, p. 709) **“Sternness,”** on the other hand, is a harsh word which literally means *“the cutting off”* derived from the sharp edge of the blade used in the severance. This is the only use of the word in Scripture. In classical Greek it carries the legal connotation of the condemning verdict of the judge in a courtroom. Both of these realities must be kept in mind. Do not presume on the **“kindness”** of God, lest, like those who have fallen, you experience the terror of His **“sternness.”** This is the dialectic of law and gospel. The proper distinction between them is of crucial importance. In this instance, the **“sternness”** of God is demonstrated by His just judgment upon fallen Israel and His **“kindness”** is shown by His gracious



*“Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

call to the Gentiles. Paul cautions that the Gentiles ought to be warned by that which befell the Jews and at the same time comforted by the incredible grace and mercy which they have already experienced. The decisive factor here is faith. If Israel were to return to the faith, God in His mercy would restore them to the position from which they have fallen. Like the father of the wayward prodigal, God is ready and eager to welcome His wandering children home. On the other hand, if the Gentiles were to slip into unbelief, they would be cut off as surely as Israel had been. Paul stretches the terms of his metaphor to emphasize God's readiness to forgive and restore Israel. The "*horticultural impossibility becomes a way of emphasizing the power of God.*" (Dunn, p. 675) The branches that have been cut off could be regrafted again if wayward Israelites were to return to the faith. Douglas Moo notes:

*"In speaking of such a regrafting, Paul again reveals how little he is concerned to stick to the details of actual olive cultivation in his metaphor. It is not the logic of nature that explains this regrafting, the **theologic** of the God who "give life to the dead and calls things that do not exist as if they did." (4:17)" (Moo, p. 707)*

The clear emphasis throughout this section is on the gracious action of God to the exclusion of all human effort. St. John Chrysostom properly observes: "*Paul does not point to human works, but to the goodness of God as a reminder to us that our salvation comes from God's grace and to us tremble.*" (Bray, p. 295) No room remains for ethnic pride from either Jew or Gentile.

"After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature..." - The apostle again employs an argument from the lesser to the greater ("*a fortiori*") to defend the appropriateness of the restoration of believing Israel. The argument is signaled by the repetition of the words "**how much more.**" The Gentiles nations were "**an olive tree that is wild by nature.**" They were not a part of the chosen people, nor did they enjoy any of the benefits and blessings of Israel's covenant with God. By contrast, Israel was "**a cultivated tree,**" meticulously cared for and carefully pruned by the God who had chosen this people for Himself. If God was capable of grafting branches from the wild tree into the cultivated one He would certainly be capable of regrafting the natural branches of the cultivated tree. Once again it is faith, not ethnic identity which is critical. Gentiles must resist the temptation to scorn the Jews lest they fall prey to the same self-righteous pride which had originally led to the downfall of Israel. The grafting of the wild branches into the cultured tree does not represent a new beginning but the reaffirmation of a faith based concept of the people of God, a concept that



“The Pharisees and Sadducees Come to Tempt Jesus” by J. James Tissot

had been obscured by Israel’s egotistical misunderstanding. Dr. Moo offers this helpful summary of the entire metaphor:

“Paul skillfully mixes theology and exhortation in this paragraph. His olive tree metaphor makes an important contribution to our understanding of the people of God. It is notoriously easy to squeeze more theology out of such a metaphor than it is intended to convey. But basic to the whole metaphor is the unity of God’s people, a unity that crosses both historical and ethnic boundaries. The basic point of the metaphor is that there is only one olive tree, whose roots are firmly planted in OT soil, and whose branches include both Jews and Gentiles. This olive tree represents the true people of God. The turn of the ages at the coming of Christ brought an important development in the people of God; the object of ones faith became clearer and more specific and the ethnic makeup of that people changed radically, as God extended His grace in vastly increased measure to the Gentiles. But Paul’s metaphor warns us not to view this transition as a transition of one people of God to another. Gentiles who come to Christ become part of that community of salvation founded on God’s promises to the patriarchs. And “messianic Jews,” following in the footsteps of their believing ancestors, belong to this same community...We must remember that, for Paul, the church was both rooted in the Jews and heavily populated by Jews. The coming of Christ did not for him involve ethnic subtraction, as if Jews were not eliminated, but addition, with Gentiles now being added to believing Jews. Paul’s boundary for the people of God is a religious one - faith in Jesus Christ - not an ethnic one.” (Moo, pp. 709-710)

Verses 25-27

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited; Israel had receiving a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited.” - This introduction highlights the profound significance of the conclusion which now follows and serves to draw the reader’s attention to these words. Given the context, the **“brothers”** addressed would appear to be the Gentile members of the Roman Church. Paul’s concern is that they not fall into the same trap of conceit which had so successfully snared their Jewish counterparts. The Greek text literally says - *“so that you might not be wise in your own estimation.”* The warning is against ethnic pride and exclusiveness. If faith is perverted into something other than a complete dependence upon God, a claim upon Him rather than trust in Him, then God’s love comes to be seen as a right to which one is entitled by birth or merit. Faith has then become what James Dunn aptly calls *“unfaith.”* That is the grim fate which befell Israel and against which Paul warns the Gentiles. *“In this way Paul underlines the precariousness of the Gentile believers situation - precarious because the history of Israel shows how quickly faith can be corrupted into unfaith, how easily grace can be perverted into human presumption.”* (Dunn, p. 675) Our eternal security rests in the grace of God alone.

That which is here explained is a **“mystery,”** a dimension of the plan of salvation that cannot be discerned by human effort but must be revealed or disclosed by God (cf. Ephesians 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 6:19). The implication is that that which Paul now uncovers for his readers has been revealed to him by God Himself. Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 3:6 to describe the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the plan of salvation: ***“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.”*** C.F.W. Walther comments on the appropriateness of the use of the term **“mystery”** in this regard:

“It is true to us, who look back on the eighteen centuries of the history of the Christian Church, who still have the Jewish nation before our eyes, who know of the conversion of Jews in all ages and countries, who observe how even today God faithfully keeps His covenant with Israel - to us this no longer appears as a great mystery, as little as the wickedness of Antichrist revealed to us by the Reformation.

However, if we imagine ourselves in the position of the Roman Gentile Christians to whom Paul wrote, it will soon become clear to us that for them the apostle's prophecy of Israel's survival and admittance to the Kingdom of Christ to the Last Day was bound to be an unexpected, great, marvelous mystery.” (Pieper,III, p.531)



“The Pharisees are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man both will fall into a pit.” By J. James Tissot

“Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved.” - The mystery includes three components: (1) the partial hardening of Israel; (2) that partial hardening will persist ***“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in;”*** and, (3) in the end, according to the plan of God, ***“all Israel will be saved.”***

The mystery's first component is that there will always be a remnant within Israel. The hardening which has come upon the nation will always be only ***“in part.”*** It is clear from that which has come before that the hardening which has befallen much of Israel is the judicial action of God upon men who have obstinately chosen to defy and disobey Him (cf. Romans 1:18f.; 9:18; 11:7). Nonetheless, a faithful remnant

remains within the apostate nation which continues to trust in the Lord and will be saved by Him. This repeats the point stressed earlier in the chapter. **“God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.”** (Vs.2) The Jews will never be excluded from the church. Israel’s remnant will continue to play an important role in the plan of salvation.

Next Paul asserts that this partial hardening of Israel will continue throughout the New Testament era, until the end of this age and the coming of the judgment when **“the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”** The verb **“has come in”** (Greek - *“eiserxomai”*) consistently refers to entrance into the kingdom of God in the New Testament. John Murray describes the phrase as *“the standard term in the New Testament for entering into the Kingdom of God and life.”* (Murray, II, p.93) (cf. Matthew 5:20; 7:3; 18:3; 19:17; Mark 9:43,45,47; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). The phrase **“the full number of the Gentiles”** echoes the same language used in reference to Israel in Verse 12. In both instances it refers to all of the elect within each group, each and everyone of those whom God has chosen for salvation. The end will not come until all of the elect have been saved, for God is unwilling to allow one of those whom He has chosen to be lost. (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) Considerable attention has been devoted to the preposition **“until”** (Greek - *“achri”*) Those who misuse this passage in support of mass Jewish conversion theories insist that the preposition implies a period of time that will come to an end and be followed by a change in the condition denoted. According to this view, the current hardening of the Jews will one day be removed and the Israelite nation will experience a spiritual rejuvenation. The Greek preposition, however does not necessarily imply a consequent change in condition. The same term is used, for instance, in the Septuagint version of 2 Samuel 6:23 - **“Micah daughter of Saul had no children until the day of her death”** - surely without any implication that the barrenness of Saul’s daughter changed and she began to have children after her demise (cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 2:10,25,26). The preposition is used similarly in this instance to indicate that there will always be a remnant in Israel, right up to, **“until”** the end of time.

The third element in the mystery is the salvation of **“all Israel.”** The phrase has prompted widespread debate among commentators, and spawned a host of millennial fantasies about a general conversion of ethnic Israel at the beginning of Christ’s thousand year reign on earth. What would be the point of a national conversion of the last generation of ethnic Israel, a tiny fraction of the totality of the nation, which left all the preceding generations dead and damned? Recognizing the inadequacy of this view, some extreme millennialists, driven by the flawed logic of their own position, have gone so far as to offer the ludicrous suggestion that there will be a

resurrection of the Jews alone for or during the millennium which will literally enable each and every physical descendant of Abraham to be saved.

Despite the impressive array of interpreters who have advocated some variety of this view, both the immediate and general context of the phrase preclude this interpretation. The phrase is introduced with the Greek preposition “*houtos*” which means “*thus*” or “*in this way*.” Accordingly, the relationship between the mystery’s three elements is not a matter of time sequence. Those who anticipate a future - end time, general conversion of the Jews outline the proposed sequence in this way: first the partial hardening of Israel during the dispensation of the Gentile church, followed by the incoming of the fullness of the Gentiles at the end of the church age, which in turn would be followed by the general conversion of ethnic Israel during the tribulation period on the eve of the millennium. The temporal sequence is essential to this view. However, there is no temporal sequence in the Greek text. The text does not say “*and then* (Greek “*kai tote*”) *all Israel will be saved*”; it says “*and in this way* (Greek - “*kai houtos*”) *all Israel will be saved*.” The preposition which introduces the final phrase indicates that the salvation of all Israel occurs through or by means of the partial hardening which preserves Israel’s remnant and the incoming of the fullness of the Gentiles. The grammarians call this an “*adverb of manner*.” The point is not when it happens but how it happens. Lutheran theologian Wilbert Garwisch explains the significance of the preposition in this way:

“The word “houtos” does not mean “then.” It means “so in this way, in this manner.” It sums up what Paul has said. In the preceding he emphasized that there is still a remnant chosen by grace from among the Jews. The hardening of Israel, the blood descendants of Jacob, is only “in part.” It does not include the whole nation. Through the years some will come to faith. But also the elect from among the Gentiles will come into Christ’s church. By adding the full number of these Gentiles to the remnant of Jewish believers, all of God’s true Israel, and the full number of His elect, consisting of believers of both Jewish and Gentile stock, will be saved.”
(Garwisch, p. 725)

This view fully agrees with Paul’s repeated assertions that salvation can never be a matter of national entitlement. “*All Israel*” refers to the whole people of God, the elect among Jew and Gentile alike, for these are the true descendants of Abraham (Romans 9:6f.), the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). This was the view of the early church fathers. Theodoret of Cyprus writes in the Fourth Century: “*All Israel means all those who believe, whether they are Jews, who have a natural relationship to Israel, or Gentiles who are related to Israel by faith.*” St. Augustine rightly contends: “*Not all the Jews were blind; some of them recognized Christ. But the*

fullness of the Gentiles comes in among those who have been called according to the plan, and there arises a truer Israel of God...the elect from both the Jews and the Gentiles.” (Bray, p. 298) A recent study on eschatology and millennialism by the CTCR argues that this is the only interpretation consistent with the text of Romans 9-11 and Paul’s description of the Israel of God elsewhere in the New Testament.

*“The apostle plainly states that **“not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel”** (9:6). The **“children of the promise”** not the **“children of the flesh”** (the national Israel), are God’s children (9:8). If Israel refers merely to Jews as a nation, then this distinction is removed. However, if Israel refers to **“children of the promise,”** then the distinction is maintained, and Paul’s argument in Romans 9-11 continues - namely, that God’s elect, both Jews and Gentiles, will be saved according to His plan which has been revealed in the Gospel (the **“mystery”**). The heirs of the promise are those who believe, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 4). Thus it is that elsewhere the apostle can refer to the church as **“the Israel of God.”** ... In Romans 11:1 Paul addresses the question of whether God has rejected all Jews, not whether He will save all Jews. In vv. 1-10, he answers in the negative. There is even in Paul’s day a remnant of believing Jews. In the rest of the chapter, the apostle explains the purpose served by the unbelief of the majority of the Jews. Paradoxically, through their rejection of the Gospel, the Gospel went to the Gentiles (11:1-12,19,25,30). In turn, the salvation of the Gentiles serves to make the unbelieving Jews **“jealous,”** i.e. to incite them to hear the Gospel and also be saved (10:19; 11:11,13-14,31). The mystery revealed in 11:25-27 is that **“a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.”** The word **“so”** means **“in this manner,”** that is, in the way just described, not **“then,”** as if it meant after the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. How will all Israel be saved? The answer is given in vs. 25 and is explicated throughout the chapter. The hardening upon part of Israel has allowed the Gospel to go to the Gentiles, and the inclusion of the Gentiles serves to incite the unbelieving Jews to believe the Gospel and thus be saved (regrafted into the olive tree). This process will continue until the end, **“until the full number of the Gentiles comes in.”** ...In summary, **“all Israel”** consists of the groups mentioned in v. 25, the believing part of the Jews and the **“full number of the Gentiles.”** **“All Israel”** is the whole olive tree consisting of the natural branches (Jews who believed), the wild olive branches (Gentiles who believe), and the regrafted branches (Jews who will believe). These constitute the **“all”** in verse 32. **“All Israel”** is made up of **“everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord”** (10:13), the elect of the Jews and the Gentiles, the **“new Israel”** (Romans 4:11-12, 16; 9:24; Galatians 3:26-29; 6:15-16) (CTCR, pp.36-37)*

“As it is written, *“The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.”*
- In the characteristic fashion, the point is now affirmed by Old Testament Scripture

through a series of allusions to Isaiah 59. Martin Franzmann describes Paul's method of citation in this way:

“Paul’s quotation of the promise from the Old Testament is extremely free; it might almost be called variations on a theme from Isaiah (Isaiah 59:20-21). The basic thought is from Isaiah 59, that mighty liturgy of repentance and absolution, an absolution spoken by the Lord, who Himself restores righteousness and brings salvation, so that all the world in East and West might fear His Name. But there are added touches from the Psalms (Psalm 14:7; 53:6), and the picture of the promised covenant is colored by reminiscences of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33-34).”
(Franzmann, p. 207)

The prophet foretells the coming of the **“Deliverer”** (Greek - *“ruomenos”*) This is the classic Hebrew Messianic title *“Go’el,”* which means *“Vindicator”* or *“Redeemer”* best known from Job 19:25 - ***“I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand on the latter day upon the earth.”*** The promised Messiah will come ***“from Zion.”*** **“Zion”** is the hilltop upon which the original Davidic fortress of Jerusalem was located which became the site where the temple was later constructed.



“I Know that My Redeemer Lives” by Rudolf Schäfer

The term comes to be used more broadly in the Old Testament in reference to the entire city of Jerusalem, the kingdom of Judah, and the Jewish nation. At this point, Paul digresses from the text of Isaiah 59 which says ***“for Zion”*** and uses instead the wording of Psalm 14:7 which says ***“from Zion.”***

In this way, the apostle avoids rekindling the concept of some sort of national primacy for Israel. Christ did not come only to save Israel. He came from Israel as the Redeemer of mankind. The purpose of

His coming is to ***“turn godlessness away from Jacob”*** and to ***“take away their sins.”*** The reference is the incarnation, the first coming of Christ and the results of His coming upon both Jew and Gentile throughout the New Testament era: *“It is a sweet statement because it teaches clearly that in the New Testament forgiveness of sins is to be preached. This liberation of the people is to be understood as extending from the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel until the end.”* (Melancthon, p. 207) The promised salvation is certain because it is not dependant upon human action. It will be brought about by God in His grace - ***“He (the Redeemer) will turn godlessness away...I will take away their sins.”***

Verses 28-32

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account, but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account...” - The apostle now returns to the subject of Israel’s remnant and urges his Gentile readers not to despise the Jews, for there are those among them who will yet come to believe. At the present moment ***“they are enemies”*** ***“as far as the gospel is concerned.”*** They have failed to respond to the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ and have chosen instead to pursue a righteousness of their own making based upon the legalistic observances of Judaism. They are adamantly opposed to Christ and His Gospel and have thus chosen to be ***“enemies”*** of God. But even in the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah God has a saving purpose. Paul again reminds the Gentiles that they are the beneficiaries of Jewish apostasy - ***“they are enemies on your account.”*** Nonetheless, the remnant still remains, hidden, as it were, among the great mass of their unbelieving countrymen. Gentile Christians cannot yield to the temptation to give up on the Jews, no matter how bitter their opposition to the Gospel may be, for the sake of this remnant. ***“God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.”*** (Romans 11:2) There are still those among them whom God has chosen for salvation. Of this remnant yet to be Paul says, ***“as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.”***



"The Call of Abraham" by E.M. Lilien

The language parallels that of the preceding phrase. As the Gentiles became the beneficiaries of the Jew's rejection of Christ - "*they are enemies on your account*" - so also the remnant are the beneficiaries of the covenant God established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - "*they are loved on account of the patriarchs.*" In them, God's ancient promises to the patriarchs will be fulfilled, for they will be true children of Abraham not by mere accident of physical descent but by the faith which God will create within them. The promises of God do not and cannot fail - "*for God's gift and His call are irrevocable.*" "*Irrevocable*" (Greek - "*ametameleta*")

is a legal term used to indicate a commitment that is absolutely unbreakable. God's will for the salvation of His elect has not changed over all the centuries that have passed since Father Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to wander as a stranger and a foreigner in the land of promise. God's plan of salvation for all those who are true children of Abraham by faith will be carried out, even for those who are, at the moment, still adamantly opposed to the Gospel of Christ.

“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you.” God in His grace will accomplish the salvation of the elect among the remnant of Israel in the same way that He has demonstrated His undeserved love to the Gentiles through the disobedience of the Jews. God gracious purpose throughout time has been for the salvation of Jew and Gentile alike. All who are saved must be saved by His grace alone. The crucial concept here is God’s ***“mercy”*** (Greek - *“eleos”*), undeserved love extended to those who have no basis upon which to claim or expect that love. There is no room for pride or particularism here. Both the Jew and the Gentile are guilty of ***“disobedience”*** and therefore absolutely dependent upon the mercy of God. And yet, even the stubborn disobedience of man becomes a tool in the hands of our loving God who uses the disobedience of one as a source of blessing for another.

“For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.” - The colorful language of the phrase serves to illustrate the effects and consequences of sin. The opening words of the verse literally say *“for God has imprisoned all in disobedience.”* The verb *“has imprisoned”* (Greek - *“synkleio”*) actually means *“to lock someone up in jail.”* Man’s sin confines him within a prison of his own construction. This most appropriate description of sin’s impact is completely consistent with Paul’s earlier description in Romans 1:18ff. James Dunn writes:

“God’s wrath as a handing over of man to his own desires and passions = God shutting all up to disobedience. Without detracting from man’s responsibility for his own acts, without preventing man from pursuing his own ends, God has nevertheless so ordered things (the way things work out at individual and social, human and natural levels) that persons who decide to go their own way regardless of God find themselves more and more confined and hemmed in by the consequences of their decisions. A path of disobedience freely chosen becomes more and more shut in and enclosed by that very disobedience.” (Dunn, p. 696)

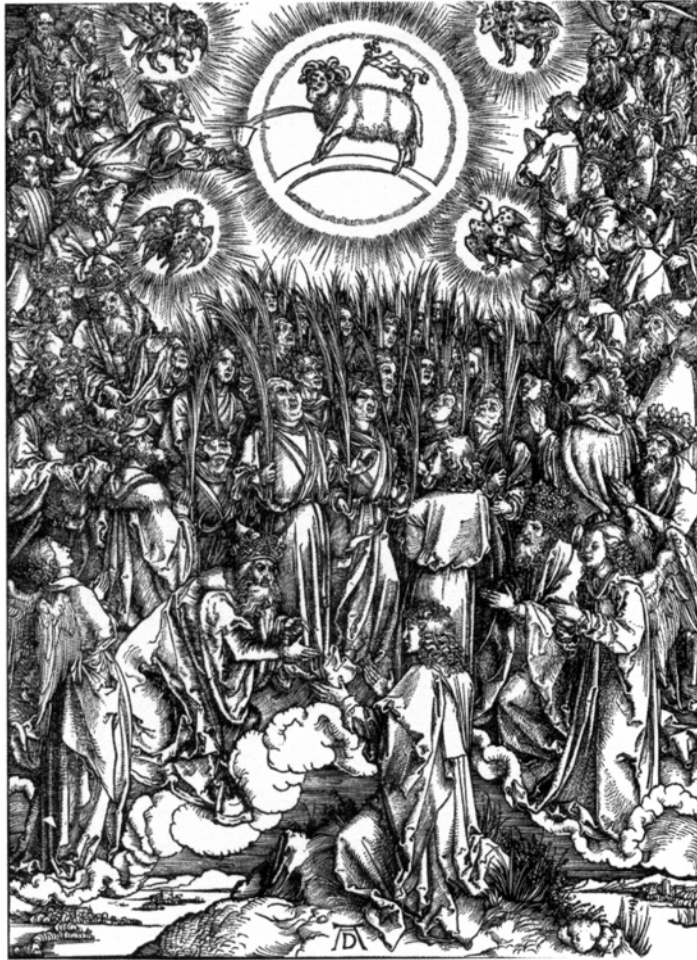
Paul emphasizes the fact that this confinement applies to **“all men,”** Jew and Gentile alike. They are locked up together equally helpless and hopeless, without the possibility of releasing themselves. Jewish presumption of national advantage and Gentile condescension toward apostate Israel are equally inappropriate. There is only one exit from this prison, the open door of God’s mercy.

“The Jew was not a whit better off than the Gentile; all his rights, prerogatives, claims, and boasts were gone, he lay in the same prison of disobedience with the Gentiles. The Gentile could not be high-minded and look down on the Jew as being one who had fallen so terribly, for his pagan disobedience was the same fearful prison.” (Lenski, p. 738)

Yet the wonder of God’s love is such that even the disobedience of men is enlisted to serve the cause of His mercy - **“so that He might have mercy on them all.”** The universal reality of man’s disobedience serves to confront man with his own helplessness and convince him of his absolute need for God’s gracious love. The Law must do its grim work before the sweet promises of the Gospel can be heard. *“In His wisdom He has by strange ways brought all men, both Israelite and Gentile, into that blind alley where disobedient man must turn about and face the wrath of God, acknowledging his disobedience.”* (Franzmann, p. 210) Only those who recognize themselves to be disobedient can be recipients of God’s mercy. As long as we rely on anything else, as long as we continue to cling to the delusion of our own worth or worthiness, we will continue to spurn and reject God’s grace. As Jesus declared: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. But go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”** (Matthew 9:12-13) In this way God uses the self-reinforcing consequences of sin to prepare the way for His mercy.

Dr. Stöckhardt discerns in these verses a valuable evangelism insight for the church in every age:

“By the way, the text of verses 30-32 contains a general word of warning which Christians would do well to keep in mind. We should never consider all the unbelievers with whom we have to work as people who are hopelessly lost, just because at the present time they vehemently oppose the Gospel. Instead, we would do well to consider the fact that the mercy of God is unlimited, and that He could very well do the same thing with others that He has done with us. If only we will forcefully bear witness to the mercy which we ourselves have experienced in word and deed wherever we are, then many souls can be influenced and helped.” (Stöckhardt, p. 549)



*“The Heavenly Praise of Saints and Angels”
by Albrecht Dürer*

Verses 33-36

Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! “Who had known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?” “Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?” For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.

“Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” - Having elucidated the mystery of God’s plan for the salvation of both Jew and Gentile, the apostle now breaks forth in spontaneous doxology. This powerful hymn of adoration opens with the exclamation “Oh,” which expresses strong emotion. “The human and weak Paul exclaims not in awe and fear, but in wonder and gratitude, at the

boundless providence of God in arranging the mutual assistance of Jews and Gentiles in the attainment of salvation.” (Fitzmyer, p. 634) “The wisdom and the knowledge of God” are depicted as an inexhaustible treasury of unimaginable immensity and scope - “the depths of the riches.” The image in further emphasized in the following sentence - “How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!” The language is reminiscent of the inter-testamental book the 2 Apocalypse of Baruch: “But who, O Lord, my Lord, can comprehend the workings of Your judgment? Who can search out the depths of Your way? Or who can trace the profundity of Your path? Or who can describe Your unfathomable counsel?” (14:8-9) The terms “wisdom” (Greek - “sophia”) and “knowledge” (Greek - “gnosis”) are closely related to one another (cf. Colossians 2:3). Wisdom is the ability to put knowledge to work in a proper and appropriate manner. Knowledge provides the information, the facts which are utilized by wisdom. “The wisdom and

the knowledge of God” are beyond the scope of human comprehension. They may be known by us only to the extent that God deigns to reveal Himself to us in His Word. The term “*judgments*” is used here in the broader sense of decisions in general. From man’s limited perspective these divine “*judgments*” are most often “*unsearchable,*” all of our efforts to decipher them are presumptuous and in vain. No man is capable of mapping out the ways of God or of predicting the course He will follow for “*His paths are beyond tracing out.*” Martin Franzmann rejoices:

“All men end up in beggary (11:32); only God is rich, inexhaustibly rich, rich in kindness and forbearance (2:4); rich in glory (9:23), and the Lord whom He gave to Jew and Greek is rich in His beneficence toward all who call on Him (10:12). God cannot fail for lack of means in accomplishing His ends. And God is wise. He uses all His riches in a sure, astounding governance of history that overawes and humbles men. When men put their trust in chariots and horsemen, those reliable makers of successful history, “...He is wise and brings disaster...When the Lord stretches out His hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.” (Isaiah 31:1-3) And when world empires fall (Isaiah 10) and Israel is judged and ruined, royal house and all, He makes His Spirit of Wisdom rest upon the Shoot that grows from Jesse’s stump (Isaiah 11:1-2) and through Him makes His earth a land of righteousness, a paradise of peace (Isaiah 11:3-9). Men quarrel with His ways; they carp at His prophet, the Baptist crying in the wilderness, and at His Son, the Son of Man who eats and drinks with men, and yet His “wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matthew 11:16-20). God knows as no man knows; His knowing is a knowing with a will and an effect. When he “foreknows” His people (11:2; 8:29), He has shaped His people’s history. As man only riches worth the name are to be enriched by Him, so man’s only real knowledge is to be known by Him (2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Corinthians 8:3). Man’s only wisdom is to fear, to stand in awe of, Him and to obey. His judgments are unsearchable; out of them salvation springs (cf. 11:32): “Thy judgments are like the great deep; man and beast Thou savest, O Lord.” (Psalm 36:6) His ways through history are inscrutable; who could have predicted that the fulfillment of His promises to Israel would bring judgment upon Israel? Or that the darkling Gentiles should reflect the light of God upon the Jew?” (Franzmann, pp.214-215)

The hymn draws to its triumphant conclusion with a series of Old Testament allusions. First from Isaiah 40:13 - “*Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed Him as His counselor?*” In the face of historical circumstances that are often bewildering or discouraging, the prophet urges man to remember his proper place and to humbly bow before the greater wisdom of God. The Lord always knows best, and man should never presume to question or challenge His will. The Creator does not require the advice or counsel of those whom He has created in determining His plan nor does He require their assistance in accomplishing His purpose. The next

citation is drawn from the Book of Job - ***“Who has a claim against Me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me.”*** (41:11) God exercises His will with sovereign independence. He who fashioned *“Behemoth”* and *“Leviathan”* (Job 40&41) is answerable to no one. No human being could ever have any claim upon Him or control over Him. Paul’s expanded paraphrase of the latter portion of the Job passage is an acknowledgment of the triune God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Goal of all the Universe - ***“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things!”*** A mighty *“Soli deo gloria!”* sounds forth in the closing words of the hymn - ***“To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”*** These words clearly reflect and are intended for use in the liturgical worship of the church designed to affirm and enhance God’s glory and renown by praise, prayer and thanksgiving.



“Rejoice in the Lord Always!” By Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 12



“The Vineyard of the Lord” by Lucas Cranach the Younger

Introduction

“In other letters addressed to congregations, Paul follows the same course as he does here and leaves the admonition concerning the Christian life, to the last. So he begins with the fundamental transformation and then marks the range of his first admonitions; the Christian as a member of the spiritual body created by faith in Christ (12:4,5). He shows the Christian among Christians. In the grand section chapters 6 to 8 the great fundamentals of the Christian life have already been fully

presented as the results of the righteousness of God apprehended by faith. There we are shown as such results: newness of life and salvation (chapter 6); deliverance from the law (chapter 7); guidance of the Spirit (8:1-17); consolation of hope, etc. (8:18-39) The present section, concerning the details of this life might have followed at once, but Paul chose to insert the intervening sections as to how the mass of Judaism lost God's righteousness by unbelief, and how God shaped His plans accordingly. How justification by faith governs this life in its details is thus reserved for the last and is unfolded with proportional fullness. By placing this portion with its details last Paul helps to round out the great subject of the letter even formally in an excellent way." (Lenski, p. 744)

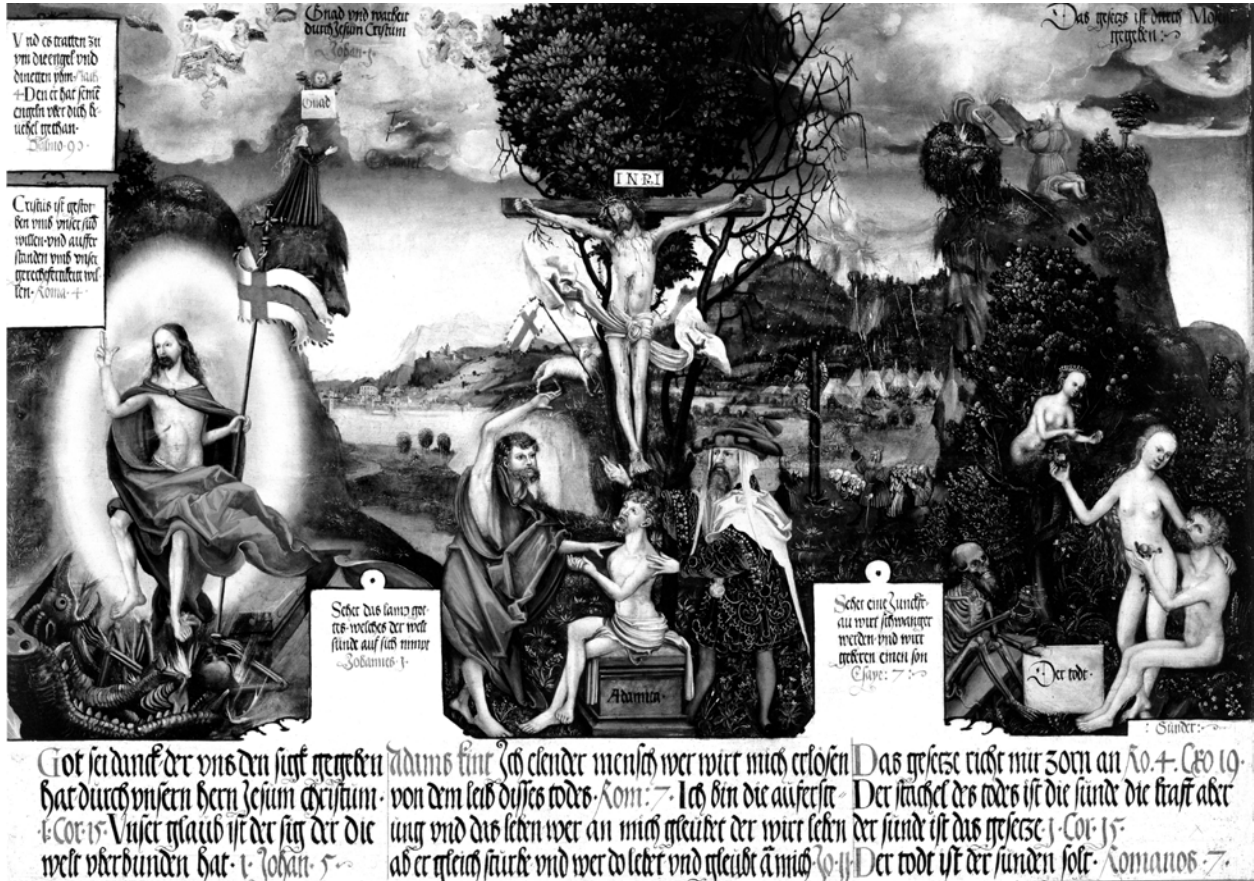
Verses 1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers..." - The conjunction ***"therefore"*** (Greek - *"oun"*) marks the transition to the next segment of the letter grounding the exhortation which is to follow firmly on the theology of justification by grace which has preceded it. The reference to ***"God's mercy"*** indicates that the link is not merely to the paragraphs which concluded chapter 11. Lenski is correct to assert - *The "oun" reaches back much farther.* All that which God in his gracious compassion has done to establish our justification becomes the basis for that which now follows. Sanctification must always be recognized as the result of justification. To view sanctification, even to the slightest extent, as a contributing factor in justification is to overthrow the grace of God in favor of human works. Paul addresses the entire congregation in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, with the fraternal salutation ***"brothers."*** The verb is most significant - ***"I urge you"*** (Greek - *"parakaleo"*). The Greek term means to exhort and encourage from the perspective of mutual concern and love. It sets the tone for all that is to follow. This is neither a threatening demand nor a command of the law. This is evangelical persuasion in contrast to legalistic coercion. Martin Luther notes the fundamental theological importance of this distinction in an Epiphany sermon on this text. The Reformer's forceful language is indicative of the profound significance of this point for the Christian faith and life:

"Paul does not say, "I command you." He is preaching to those already godly Christians through faith in the new man; to hearers who are not to be constrained

by commandments, but to be admonished. For the object is to secure voluntary renunciation of their old, sinful, Adam-like nature. He who will not cheerfully respond to friendly admonition is no Christian. And who attempts by the restraints of law to compel the unwilling to renunciation, is no Christian preacher or ruler; he is but a worldly jailer. A teacher of the law enforces his restraints through threats and punishments. A preacher of grace persuades and incites by calling attention to the goodness of God. The latter does not desire works prompted by an unwilling



“Law and Gospel” - The Cranach Workshop in Wittenberg c.1550

spirit, or service that is not the expression of a cheerful heart. He desires that a joyous, willing spirit shall incite to the service of God. He who cannot, by the gracious and lovely message of God’s mercy so lavishly bestowed upon us in Christ, be persuaded in a spirit of love and delight to contribute to the honor of God and the benefit of his neighbor, is worthless to Christianity and all effort is lost on him. How can one whom the fire of heavenly love and grace cannot melt, be rendered cheerfully obedient by laws and threats? Not human mercy is offered to us by divine mercy and Paul would have us perceive it and be moved thereby.” (Lenker, VII, pp.11-12)

The apostle links the congregation's response to "**God's mercy.**" The Greek noun is actually plural - "*God's mercies*" - thus indicating everything that God has done on behalf of His people. "*In that phrase Paul sums up the creative and transforming power of the Gospel of God as he has been proclaiming it in the first 11 chapters of the letter.*" (Franzmann, p. 216) Charles Hodge summarizes: "*All the doctrines of justification, grace, election, and final salvation, taught in the preceding part of the epistle, are made the foundation for the practical duties enjoined in this.*" (Hodge, p. 393) The preposition "**in view of**" (Greek - "*dia*") explains the basis for or the source of the exhortation. God's undeserved love toward us in Christ is not only the foundation for our sanctification, it is the present empowerment which enables us as Christians to live in a manner consistent with the will and Word of God.

"To offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." - Paul effectively uses sacrificial imagery to express the reality of the Christian life. While the Old Testament sacrificial system was rendered obsolete by the perfect, once for all, sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, the New Testament continues to use sacrificial language (cf. 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15), thus signaling the fulfillment of the institutions of the Old Testament in Christ. In this passage, however, the traditional language dramatically shifts. Paul urges not merely the offering of a sacrifice but the offering of "***your bodies as living sacrifices.***" The "***bodies***" in question are not merely physical bodies as such. The reference here is more broadly to the entire person with special emphasis on the person's interaction with the physical world. John Calvin accurately captures the sense of the language in his observation: "*By bodies he means not only our skin and bones but the totality of which we are composed.*" (Calvin, p. 264) The substance of the sacrifice in this instance is the totality of our being. Franzmann points out the interplay of the new and the old in Paul's language and the theological meaning it conveys:

"With the hallowed term "sacrifice" Paul marks the continuity of the new worship with the old worship under the Law; with the modifier "living" he marks the discontinuity, the newness of the new worship. The worshiper no longer gives to God the life of another creature, he gives God his living self. Since all men have bodies, all can sacrifice, all have become priests. Since men are never without their bodies, worship is constant. Since bodies are visible, all worship becomes a witness and a proclamation, a lived doxology to God; God is glorified in His servant people (cf. Isaiah 49:3). This is "spiritual" worship. What the old system with its ritual prescriptions for sacrifice foreshadowed has become reality. This is now worship in its deepest and truest sense. All previous worship has been but a parable of this reality." (Franzmann, p. 217)

Three adjectives modify the sacrifice to be offered - *“living,” “holy,”* and *“pleasing to God.”* The sacrifice in question is not a dead animal like the sacrificial victims of old, but the very life of him who offers the sacrifice. To this extent, the experience of the Christian reflects that of the Christ. The language here continues the thought of chapter 6 where Paul asserted that the believer is a participant in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians are called upon to die to sin and live to Christ in the

context of the same sacrificial language:



“The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel”

Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder - 1534

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather, offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to

life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.”
(Romans 6:11-13)

Lenski commends this phrase as *“one of Paul’s wonderful expressions.”* He carefully defines both the similarities and the differences between the sacrifices in question:

“It strikes a chord of many notes: likeness and difference as far as all Jewish and all pagan bloody animal sacrifices are concerned; the differences implying a vast superiority, for these are our own bodies and when the slaughter sacrifice is completed, these bodies not only live, they partake of a higher life, one that, even as far as the bodies are concerned, shall end in blessed eternal life. And this fact that we are such a sacrifice and yet live not only duplicates Christ in His death and His life, it is the result of His death and His life. However, the duplicate in us is not one that expiates, for a genuine expiation admits of no repetition, nor is it needed; the

duplication in us, i.e. in our bodies, is the evidence of our union with Christ, the evidence of the effectiveness of His truly expiating sacrifice in us.” (Lenski, pp. 747.748)

The second adjective is **“holy”** (Greek - *“hagios”*), the characteristic cultic term to describe offerings that have been set apart to be dedicated to God. In the same way, we are to be set apart from the world with its corruption and sin to be wholly dedicated to God. Hence the ethical connotation of holiness as absolute separation from sin is also clearly present in the text.

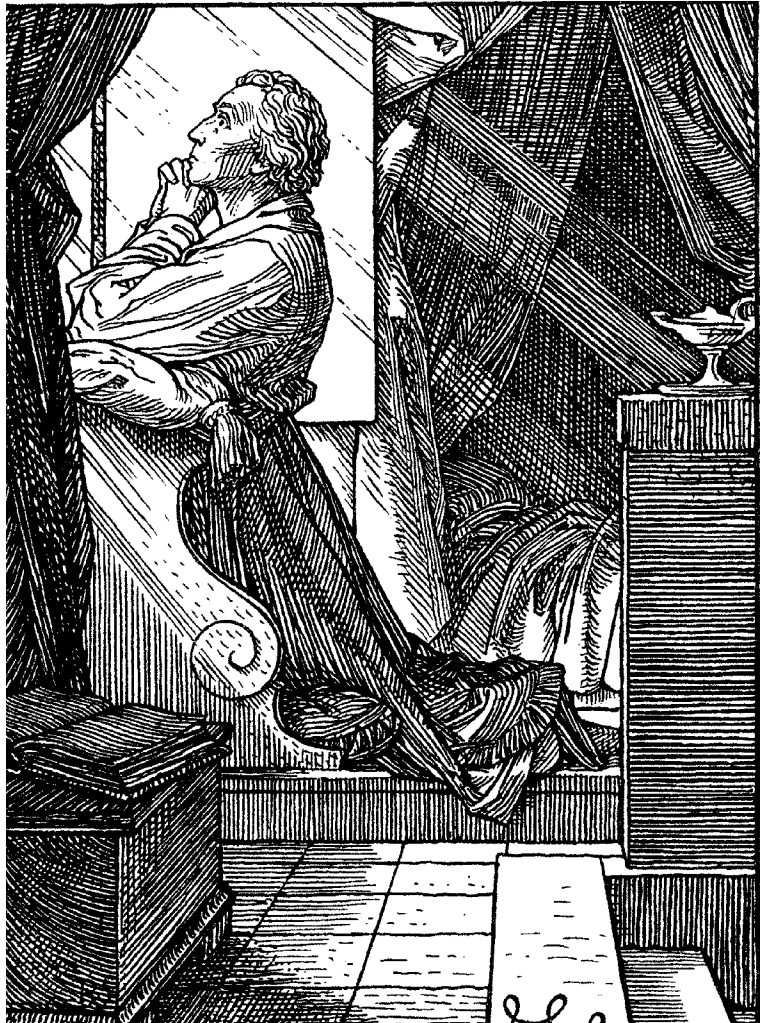
The third adjective which modifies the sacrifice is **“pleasing to God.”** The graphic imagery of the Old Testament depicted the smoke from the sacrifices of the faithful rising up to God in heaven as a **“sweet savor”** which pleased and satisfied Him (cf. Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18,23; Leviticus 1:9,13,17). Paul uses the same language here to indicate that such sacrifice is a delight to God and is accepted by Him.

“This is your spiritual act of worship.” - The term **“worship”** in this phrase is the Greek noun *“latria.”* This word is the characteristic term for the formal rituals and services of the temple in the Septuagint. *“Latria”* occurs much less frequently in the New Testament. Although it is used on occasion, primarily in Hebrews, in reference to the temple cult, the New Testament tends to broaden the term to include every form of divine worship, adoration, praise, and prayer. The most significant development in the New Testament’s usage of the word can be seen in its extension of the concept of *“latria”* to a total view according to which the whole life of the Christian is now worship as it corresponds to the will of God and is distinguished from the way of the world. Romans 12:1-2 is the classic statement of this view. Worship can no longer be isolated to one particular place or time, but reaches out to include whatever the believer does wherever he may be. St. John Chrysostom explains:

“And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let thy tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become an offering; let thine hand do no lawless deed, and it hath become a whole burnt offering.” (Moo, p. 754)

Given the vibrant dynamic of the believer’s new relationship to God in Christ, the traditional cultic view of worship with its segregation of formal worship for the reality of life as a whole is no longer viable. Just as the Old Testament believer was in the sacred presence of God within the confines of the Temple, so the Christian believer is

now constantly in the presence of God through the Christ who lives within Him. This insight is unique to Christianity. It is of basic importance for the Christian to understand the reality that all of life is a continuous act of worship. This unique perspective defines our corporate acts of worship and places the gatherings of believers around Word and Sacrament in dynamic relationship with every other dimension of our lives. Thus, our formal worship services are only one aspect of, and are crucially supportive of, the ongoing sacrifice of our bodies to the Lord throughout each and every day. Ernst Käsemann writes:



“Daniel at Prayer” by Rudolf Schäfer

“Christian worship does not consist of what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times and with sacred acts...It is the offering of bodily existence in the otherwise profane sphere...Worship services and the sacraments are no longer, as in cultic thinking, fundamentally separated from everyday Christian life in such a way as to mean something other than the promise for this and the summons to it...Either the whole of the Christian life is worship and the gatherings and sacramental acts of the community provide equipment and instruction for this, or these gatherings and acts lead, in fact, to absurdity.” (Moo, p. 754)

Paul characterizes that kind of worship as *“spiritual.”* The Greek adjective is *“logikos.”* The term is only used one other time in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:2 where the contrast is drawn between physical milk which nourishes the body and the *“pure spiritual milk of the Word”* which nourishes and sustains the faith of the believer. In this context *“logikos”* designates worship that is genuine and heartfelt in distinction to an external going through the motions.

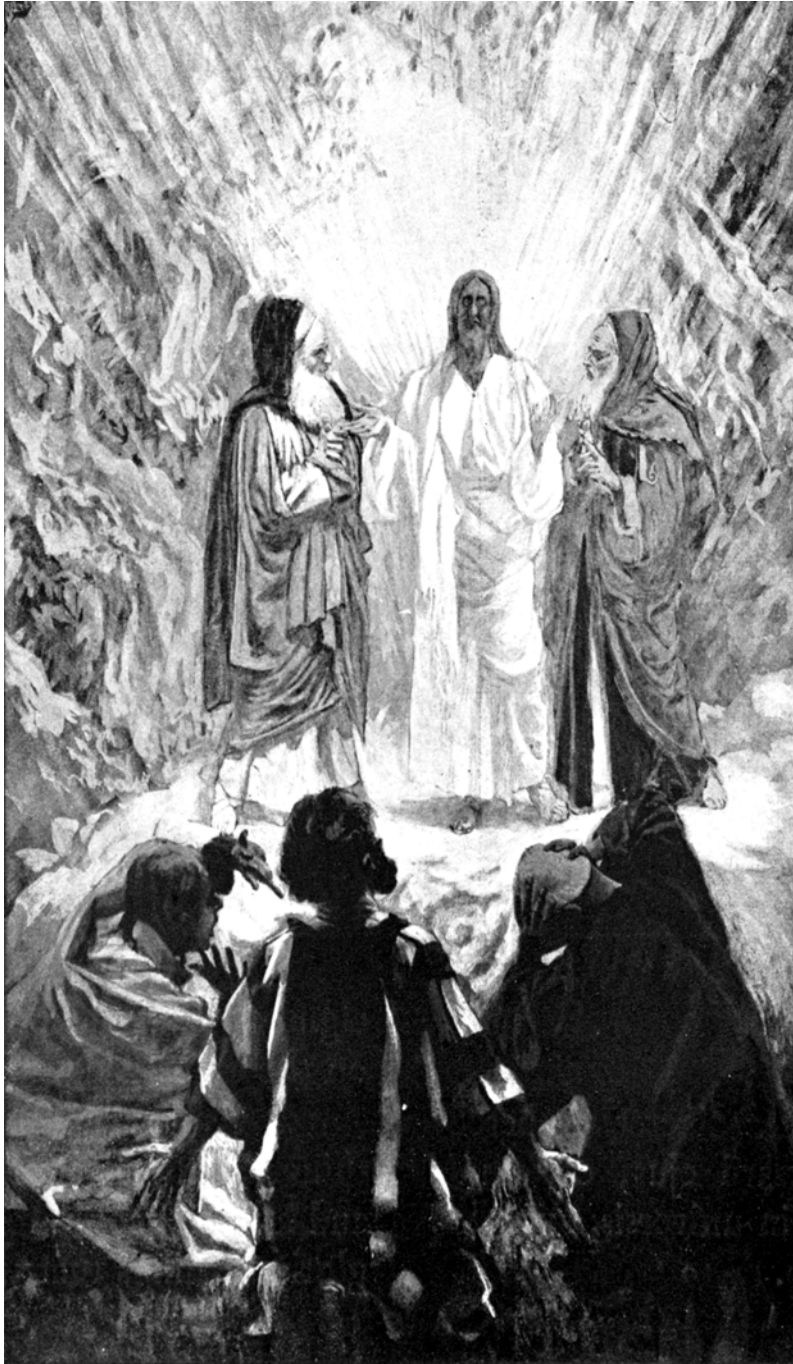
“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” - Verse 2 provides an explanation and an amplification of the sweeping exhortation provided in the opening verse of the chapter. This link is expressed in the original text by the conjunction “*kai*” (“*and*”). The apostle reminds his readers that the Christian is at war with the sinful world in which we live. This fundamental reality must be reflected in the Christian’s attitude and actions toward all the things of this present age. James Montgomery Boice offers the following paraphrase: “*Do not let the age in which you live force you into its scheme of thinking and behaving.*” The instruction begins with a present, negative imperative - “***do not conform to the pattern.***” The Greek verb is “*suschematizo*” which refers to an outward expression that does not reflect that which is within. It is used of maquerading, or putting on an act, specifically by following a prescribed pattern or scheme. It also carries the connotation of being transitory, unstable, or impermanent. Thus, J.B. Phillip’s paraphrase - “*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.*” - catches the sense of the verb very well. New Testament Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest expresses the full implication of the term in his extended paraphrase: “*Stop assuming an outward expression that is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God.*” The pattern or scheme to which the Christian is not to conform is that “***of this world.***” The Greek text literally says “*of this age*” (“*ainon*”). This is the sin-dominated, death producing era that has prevailed since father Adam’s fall into sin. John Murray defines the concept well:

“This age is that which stands on this side of what we often call eternity. It is the temporal and transient age. Conformity to this age is to be 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, ambitions, are determined by what falls within life here, then we are children of this age. Besides, this age is an evil age (1 Corinthians 2:6,8; Galatians 1:4) and if our fashion is that of this age then the iniquity characteristic of this age governs our life.” (Murray,pp. 113-114)

This is, of course, precisely the world-view of modern secularism which would exclude God and eternity altogether from contemporary life. R.C. Sproul explains:

“For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in the light of this present time. What matters is now and only now. All access to the above and to the beyond is blocked. There is not exit from the confines

of this present world. The secular is all we have. We must make our decisions, live our lives, make our plans, all within the closed arena of this time - the here and now." (Sproul, p. 35)



"The Transfiguration" by J. James Tissot

The people of God in Christ must firmly resist the temptation to conform to this world and yield to the spirit of the times both in their individual lives and together as the Church. When, in a desperate but doomed attempt to remain relevant, the Church allows the culture or man's perception of his own needs to determine its agenda or shape its message, she falls prey to the often subtle temptation to ***"conform...to the pattern of this world."***

The contrast to ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"*** comes in the positive imperative which follows - ***"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** The Greek verb is *"metamorpho"* from which is derived our English word *"metamorphosis."* The word occurs four times in the New Testament, here and in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to describe

our being transformed into the likeness of Christ, and twice in the Gospels (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2) to describe the glorious transfiguration of Jesus. On the Mount of

Transfiguration, Jesus put aside the earthly humiliation so that Peter, James, and John might glimpse the radiance of heavenly glory. To the Corinthians, Paul writes: ***“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*** (2 Corinthians 3:18) As Christ’s divine nature was revealed on the mountain top, so also the inner reality of our redeemed nature must be revealed in the outward transformation of our actions and attitudes.

“The renewing of your mind” is the means through which this transformation takes place. That which is to be made new is the ***“mind”*** (Greek - *“nous”*). The word refers to more than intellectual capacity. It is the organ of moral consciousness and will. St. Paul uses the term in this sense 18 times in his New Testament letters. Lenski catches the sense of the term in his translation - *“moral mentality.”* The apostle’s careful wording serves as a warning against the anti-intellectual, feeling focused emotionalism of much of modern Christianity. The renewal in question begins in the mind and the moral will as they are informed and governed by the Word of God.

“This is not a mystic’s dream of being absorbed into the life of God; it is conscious, waking, responsible life in the presence and in the service of God. This transformation, therefore, involves a perpetual renewal of the mind, a making new of the religious intellect for the life of the new age.” (Franzmann, p. 218)

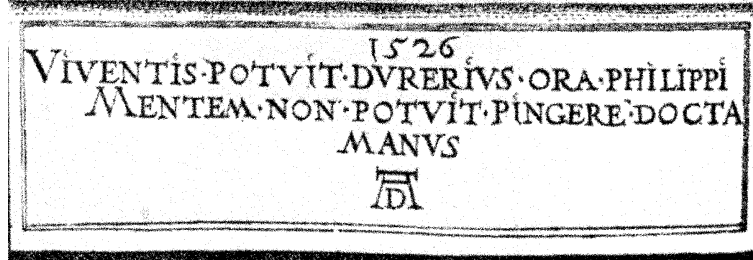
The term ***“renewing”*** (Greek - *“anakainosei”*) carries on the *“age”* (Greek - *“aion”*) language of the preceding phrase. Thus Paul indicates that transformation by the renewal of the mind involves the penetration of the coming new age into this present evil age. Origen, the great Bible teacher of the early church notes:

“By this Paul shows that there is one form of this world and another of the world to come. If there are those who love this present life, and the things which are in the world, they are taken up with this present age and pay no attention to what is not seen. But the things which are not seen are eternal and they are being transformed and renewed in the form of the age to come. For this reason the world does not acknowledge them but hates them and persecutes them.” (Bray, p. 308)

The downward spiral of sinful man’s thoughts outlined in Romans 1:18-32 is reversed in those who have been redeemed from sin. Their minds are not given over to meaningless and futility but are made new in the truth of God. The concept of *“newness”* (Greek - *“kainos”*) is the core of this verb. It relates closely to ***“newness”***

of life” (Romans 6:4) and “*newness of Spirit*” (7:6) previously emphasized.

“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” - The practical result of this renewal is the ability to discern and implement the will of God in a pattern of ethically responsible conduct. The NIV translation “*test and approve*” reflects the Greek verb “*dokimzein.*” It refers to a conclusion reached after a process of evaluation - “*to weigh and ponder and decide.*” (Franzmann, p. 218) The verb repeats the language of Romans 1:28 - “**Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God...**” That which the hardened sinner rejects as worthless, the renewed mind of the believer acknowledges and cherishes. In



“Phillip Melancthon” Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer

the connotation of implementation: “*to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view of putting it into practice.*” (Moo, p. 757) The object of evaluation is “**God’s will.**” To offer one’s life as a living sacrifice to God includes the subjection of our will to the will and purpose of God. We must be willing to lay aside our own plans and desires and to trustingly accept that which God has in mind for us. The emphasis on ethics, moral choice in matters of right and wrong, is suggested by the three adjectives which follow - “**good,**” “**pleasing,**” and “**perfect**” all of which carry a moral connotation. Phillip Melancthon observes:

“I understand this imply as the will of God set forth in His commandments and promises. He commands us to be renewed in such a way that we

conceive a new concept of God and put on new feelings, namely, true fear of God and true faith. These feelings will exercise themselves in all kinds of good works and afflictions so that we understand that obedience in afflictions is pleasing to God, and therefore bear adversities and do not flee from the cross. (Melancthon, p. 213)

The three adjectives are substantivised and stand in apposition to **“God’s will.”** Accordingly, they might be translated as nouns, *“the good,” “the pleasing thing,”* and *“perfection.”* The point of the phrase is not that the believer must determine for himself whether the will of God conforms to these categories, but rather that the will of God is the ultimate expression of that which is good, God-pleasing, and perfect. **“Good”** (Greek - *“agathos”*) refers to that which is morally good and beneficial. **“Pleasing”** (Greek - *“euarestos”*) is once again borrowed from the sacrificial language of the Old Testament. It designates an offering that is acceptable to God. **“Perfect”** (Greek - *“telion”*) indicates absolute completion - that which is all that it should and must be.

“Testing and approving what God’s will is” may never be reduced to a subjective process of human consideration. *“And what God’s will is, namely this thing which He wills, we discover from His Word and from that alone, and we subject all our own conceptions of what is good, etc., wholly to that Word. Every test made without the Word is deceptive and wrong.”* (Lenski, p. 752)

Verse 3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

“For by the grace given me...” - Paul begins his exhortation with a strong affirmation of his own apostolic authority. What follows is not simply good advice or personal opinion. The apostle has frequently expressed his awareness of the undeserved love which God had bestowed upon him in his apostolic commission (cf. Romans 1:5; 15:15,16; 1 Corinthians 3:10; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:7,8; 1 Timothy 1:13-16). He labors under no illusions in regard to his worthiness for this office or his ability to carry it out apart from the grace of God. He freely acknowledges: **“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect.”** (1 Corinthians 15:9,10) The

exhortation is emphatically addressed to the entire congregation - ***“I say to every one of you.”***



“Paul on the Damascus Road” by Rudolf Schäfer

new people of God.” (Schreiner, p. 649) This emphasis parallels Pauline remarks in other New Testament epistles (cf. 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16). The link with the preceding verses is indicated by the conjunction ***“for”*** (Greek - *“gar”*).

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...” - Harmony within the community originates in accurate self-assessment by each member of the community. Martin Franzmann observes that *“pious pride is the nastiest form of pride there is.”*

“Paul address the individual in order to overcome individualism, with its self-will and pride. For there is in the individuality of faith a temptation; the individual endowment given to the believer tempts him to be “conformed to this world,” in which greatness consists in being greater than others, in exercising authority over and lording it over others (cf. Matthew 20:25). The world’s pride invades the church and its worship in Christian form, as pious pride, the nastiest kind of pride there is...All men are solist by nature and inclination; they must learn the art of playing in God’s orchestra.” (Franzmann, p. 220)

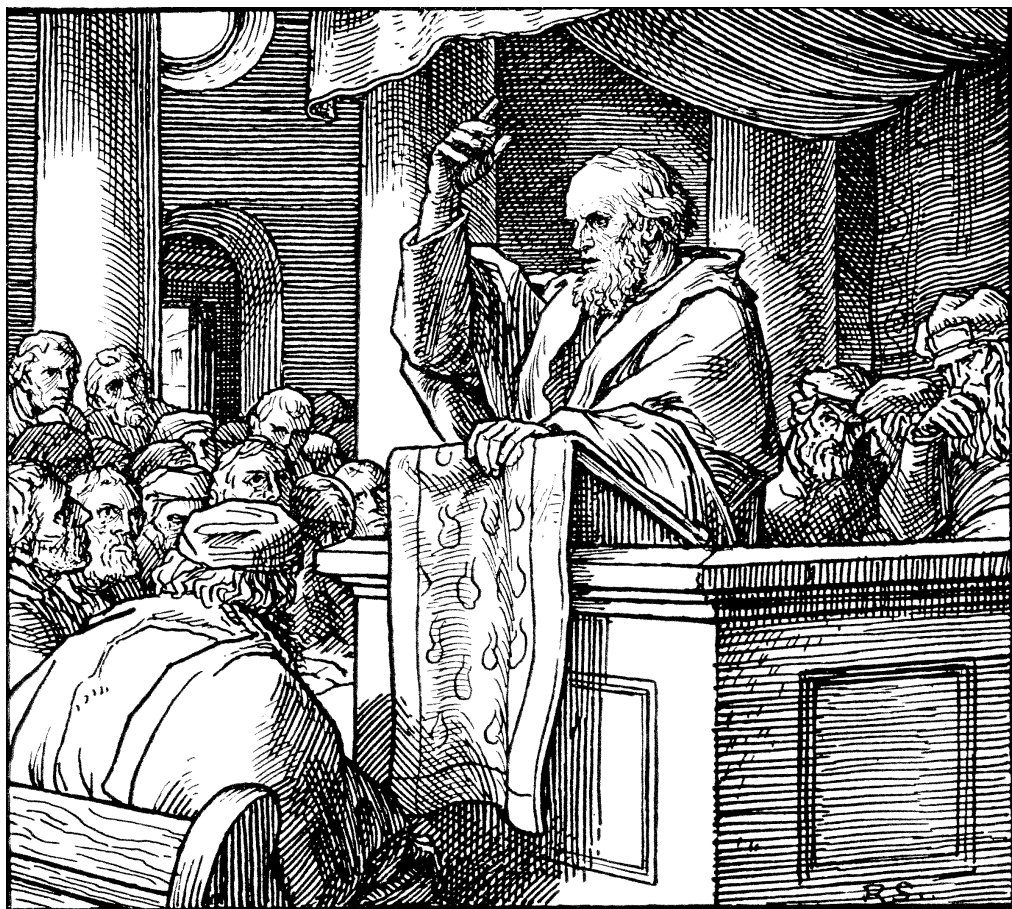
The key word in this phrase is the Greek verb “*phroneo*” which means “*to think*” or “*to make an accurate assessment.*” This word does not refer so much to the act of thinking in itself, but to the direction of one’s thinking, the way in which a person considers or thinks about something. The verb occurs four times in this phrase in the original, twice with prefixes to indicate a particular shade of meaning. The Greek could be literally translated: “*You should not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think of yourself but you should think of yourself in such a way as to have sensible thoughts about yourself.*” Paul urges the rejection of “*hyperphronein*” (“*to think proudly or highly*”) in favor of “*sophronein*” (“*to think wisely or sensibly*”). A realistic sense of humility is a foundational Christian virtue. As the apostle warns elsewhere “***For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.***” (Galatians 6:3) John MacArthur notes that the inclination of fallen humanity to self-absorption is not merely a modern problem, but has characterized fallen mankind since the days of the New Testament:

*“Such humility, which is essential for all spiritual matters, is not easily found or maintained. In New Testament times, some churches were characterized by members who desired to have more showy and spectacular gifts, the church at Corinth being the chief offender...With a clearly implied rebuke, the apostle John identified a self-seeking believer by name, a man named Diotrefes, “who loves to be first.” (3 John 9). Sadly, the church is still well saturated with members, who proudly seek personal pre-eminence and thereby forfeit the power of humility. Modern society looks down on true humility. It is, instead, characterized by brash, even exalted, self-centeredness, ego-building, pampering the body, and striving to fulfill every personal lust and ambition with little regard for who may be harmed. It is small wonder that depression and emotional chaos are so prevalent. In his book **Psychological Seduction, the Failure of Modern Psychology**, professor William K. Kilpatrick writes: “Extreme forms of mental illness are always extreme cases of self-absorption...The distinctive quality the thing that literally sets paranoid people apart is hyper-self-consciousness. And the thing they prize most about themselves is autonomy. Their constant fear is that someone else is interfering with their will or trying to direct their lives.” (MacArthur, pp. 158-159)*

“In accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” - The standard by which such sober sensible self-assessment is to be made is “***the measure of faith God has given you.***” The phrase “***measure of faith***” is unique to this verse, it occurs nowhere else in Scripture. The noun “***faith***” (Greek - “*pistis*”) ordinarily refers to that which we call “*saving*” or “*justifying*” faith, the personal trust bestowed upon the believer by God, through which the saving merit of Christ’s death in our place is

appropriated. That does not appear to be the meaning of the term in this context. Nowhere in Scripture is there any suggestion of such apportionment in regard to saving faith. Stöckhardt rightly declares:

“This faith (“pistis”), then, certainly does not refer to saving (“salvifica”) faith - trust in God’s grace in Christ, as, for example, both Fritsche and Meyer suppose. Nowhere in Scripture is it taught that God has measured out justifying and saving faith in varying measures among men. If a Christian is weak in faith, of little faith, that is his own fault, and not the result of a deficiency in the grace of God. In regard to faith in the customary sense of the word Scripture only says that it is worked by God (Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12) or given by God (Philippians 1:29). Scripture never says that God measures out faith in this sense. No, the faith (“pistis”) of which Paul speaks here is not the faith that makes a Christian a Christian, but something that is measured out to believing Christians after they have become believers or Christians.” (Stöckhardt, p. 562)



“Paul Preaching at the Synagogue in Antioch” by Rudolf Schäfer

The “*faith*” in question here refers to saving faith at work within the community of believers in the variety of gifts which God richly bestows upon all believers. Stöckhardt aptly describes it as “*practical faith*,” that is the trusting confidence to use the particular gift with which the individual has been blessed by God. As the gifts are each and all different from one another, so also the “*measure of faith*” necessary for the exercise of that gift will be unique to each particular individual. The sensible self-assessment which the apostle encourages must take place in terms of the practical faith which God has given to each to make effective use of the gifts which God has bestowed for the benefit of all.

Verses 4-5

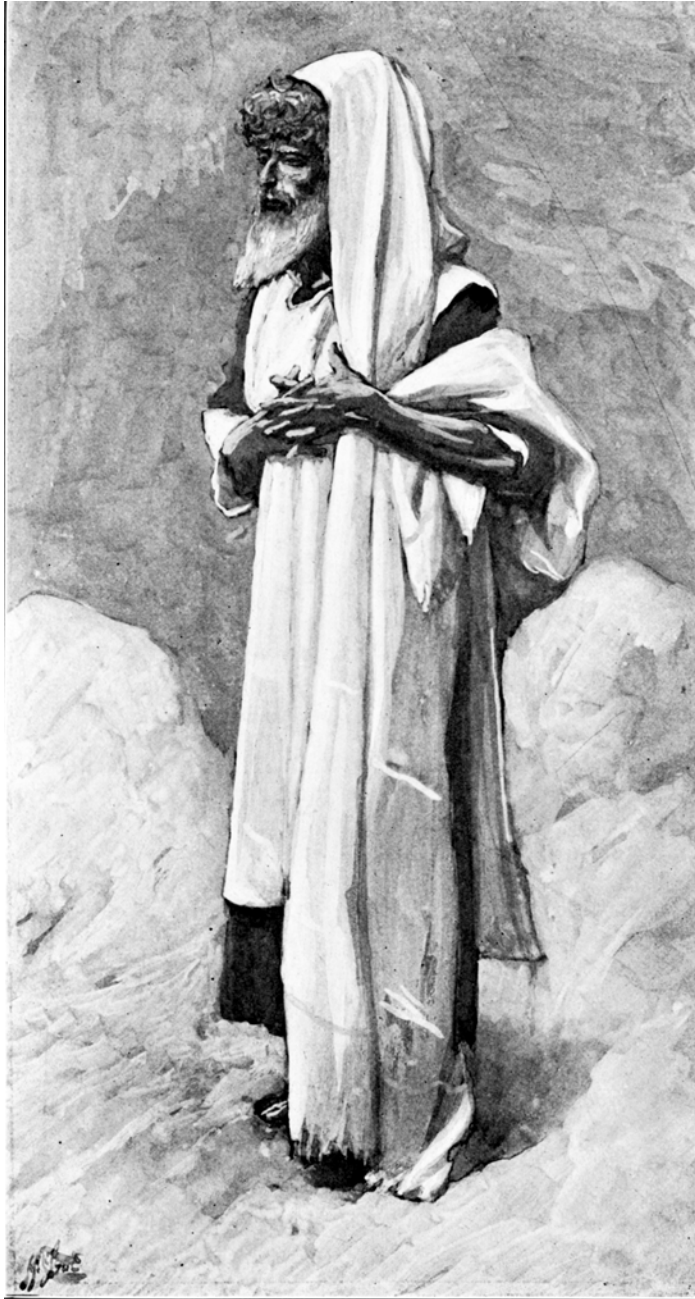
Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

“*Just as each of us has one body with many members...*” - The New Testament image of the church as the Body of Christ effectively expresses our relationship with and our dependance upon one another as believers. The radical individualism that infects much of Protestant Christianity today undermines and contradicts that interdependence. To be united with Christ means to be united to the Body of Christ, the church. The proper understanding of one’s role within the Body of Christ is seen as the natural consequence of a proper understanding of one’s self “*in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*” (Verse 3). If you know who you truly are in Christ then you will also know your place within the Body of Christ. The image of the church as the Body of Christ serves to simultaneously express both the unity and the diversity of the Christian community. Its usage here is similar to Paul’s other presentations of the concept in I Corinthians 12:12-31, Ephesians 1:23, 4:12, and Colossians 1:18; 2:19. Here, as in the other “body texts,” diversity of talent, interest, and ability within the church is depicted as healthy, and, in fact, essential for the overall well-being of the whole. The verses which follow amplify and apply the point.

Verses 6-8

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” - The rich diversity of gifts is a gracious blessing of God to His church. Those blessings are described as *“charismata”* - from the crucial Greek noun *“charis”* which means *“undeserved or unearned love,” “grace.”* The term occurs seventeen times in the New Testament, almost always (sixteen times) in the writings of Paul. The *“charismata”* are literally



“Aaron” by J. James Tissot

the *“things of grace.”* All believers are the recipients of God’s grace, for without God’s grace they would not be believers. In the same way, all those who have become believers by God’s grace are recipients of the richly varied *“things”* or *“gifts”* of grace, the *“charismata.”* Thus the dual emphasis of unity and diversity again comes through. Every Christian is in this sense *“charismatic,”* that is, *“grace gifted.”* These gifts are also called *pneumatika* - *“spiritual gifts”* cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1) - for they are graciously bestowed through the Holy Spirit. Representative lists of spiritual gifts are given five times in the New Testament (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11). There is no standard or complete list. Overall, nineteen gifts are mentioned. But each of the five is unique and the terminology used moves back and forth between functions and offices. The language also appears to overlap as different words describe the same activity or position. Thus, none of the lists are exhaustive nor should a compilation of their nineteen gifts be regarded as

complete. Romans 12 includes seven grace gifts. The consistent emphasis in the New Testament discussion of the “*charismata*” is upon function or office, not upon personal attributes which every individual must search out and identify often with the assistance of a so-called “*spiritual gift inventory*.” This misunderstanding is an unfortunate innovation of the modern church.

The first is prophecy. The Greek word for “*prophet*” literally refers to one who stands in front of another and speaks on his behalf. This is exactly the sense of Exodus 7:1 where God says to Moses: “*See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.*” Earlier at the burning bush, God had offered Aaron as the solution to Moses self-professed lack of eloquence: “*You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth... He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth, and as if you were God to him.*” (Exodus 4:15,16) Hence, in Scripture a prophet is one who speaks for God, who proclaims the Word of God. A prophet, in the strictest sense of the term, is one who speaks or writes by plenary verbal inspiration. Each and every word he speaks or writes are the words of God Himself. The term is also used more generally at times to describe proclamation that is based upon the Word of God but is not verbally inspired. It takes the form of the speaker’s own words but is completely consistent with the truth of Scripture. The gift of prophecy was prevalent in the Christian Church of the first generation until the end of the apostolic era and the completion of the New Testament.

Paul’s admonition here is that any man who has received the gift of prophecy ought to make use of that gift “*in proportion to his faith.*” “*Faith*” in this context is not the subjective act of believing, but the objective content of faith, that which is believed (Latin - “*fides quae creditur*” - “*the faith that one believes*”). The NIV translation “*his faith*” is incorrect. It suggests a note of subjectivity which is not present in the original text which simply reads “*the faith.*” The phrase “*in proportion to*” might be literally translated “*in accordance with the analogy of faith*” (Greek - “*ten analogia es pistos*”). The Greek noun “*analogia*” refers to a standard or rule. The sense of the phrase is that those who prophesy must not deviate from apostolic doctrine. Their words must measure up to the standard of divine revelation. The historic principle of Biblical interpretation known as the “*analogy of faith*” is based upon this text. Phillip Melancthon notes: “*Now he teaches that the interpretation of the Word of God should be analogous, that is, in agreement with the faith. It should not depart from the articles of faith, nor extinguish the true knowledge of Christ or faith in Christ.*” (Melancthon, p. 215) Any purported

revelation from God, or any proposed interpretation of a Biblical text, no matter how winsome or convincing it may be, which contradicts another article of faith clearly revealed in Scripture must be rejected and excluded (cf. Galatians 1:8).

The second grace-gift is “*servicing*” (Greek - “*diakonian*”). Jesus declared: “*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*” (Matthew 20:28) This term is used broadly in the New Testament from everything from waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-6) to the offering of financial or material assistance (Acts 11:29). The common thread that unites all the various meanings of the word is that action is taken on behalf of another to the glory of God. This is the only occurrence of “*diakonia*” on a list of specific gifts. In this instance it may refer to the ability to provide for the physical or material needs of those within the church. To assert, “*If it is servicing, let him serve.*” emphasizes the importance of recognizing the “*on behalf of others*” nature of this gift, lest the gift become an occasion for pride.

“*Teaching*” (Greek - “*didaskalia*”) is enumerated next. This gift is included on the lists in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. In both instances it is also linked to prophecy, indicating the close relationship between the two. While prophecy tends to focus on the original revelation from God, “*teaching*” stresses the passing on of the truth of the gospel to others in the church. In this sense, “*teaching*” is the means by which prophecy is conveyed throughout the church and to subsequent generations. The term becomes very prominent in the later pastoral epistles (cf. 1 Timothy 1:10; 3:2; 5:17; 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 7:10). We use the word “*preaching*” in a very similar way. The concern, once again, is the faithful use of the gift, in a manner consistent with the truth on behalf of others. In our day, pastors are called upon to carry out many different roles within the institutional church. It is all too easy to forget in the midst of all our organizing and administrating that a pastor’s first and foremost role is that of a teacher. James Montgomery Boice, Senior Pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, paraphrases the text in a word of collegial advice that ought to be well taken:

“I am a pastor. This is the preeminent gift of pastors, and this leads me to say to pastors that, having been called to teach, they must teach. No one has the opportunity a pastor has for carefully studying and faithfully expounding the Bible. What is more, if he does not do it, then in most churches it will not be done at all. Teaching is hard work because we must learn ourselves before we teach. But what better calling can one have? So get on with it, and be faithful in it, it that is your gift. I notice that Paul handles his admonition here exactly as he handled it when he spoke of serving earlier,

and as he will speak of encouraging later. No fuss. No fanfare. Just do it.” (Boice, p. 1586)



“The Office of the Holy Ministry by Michael Ostendorfer from the Altar of the Neupfarrkirche in Regensburg - 1553

The fourth gift is **“encouraging”** (Greek - *“paraklesis”*). This term occurs 107 times in the New Testament. In John 14, Jesus uses the word as a title for the Holy Spirit (John 14:15,26). In that context the English translations render the noun as *“Comforter”* or *“Counselor.”* At times the term is simply transliterated as the English title *“Paraclete.”* The word literally means *“one who is called alongside of another for the purpose of rendering aid or assistance.”* Its Latin counterpart is *“advocatus.”* In this context **“encouraging”** is closely linked to teaching (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:13). It serves to emphasize the *“pastoral application of the gospel and focuses on its concrete applications for everyday life...Teaching concentrates more on the content of the tradition, while exhortation summons others to action and stirs them from lethargy.”* (Schreiner, p. 658)

Number five on this representative listing of “*charismata*” is “**contributing to the needs of others.**” (Greek - “*ho metadidous*”). The emphasis here appears to be on one who shares his or her own resources with those less fortunate. Those who have been given this gift are urged to exercise it with cheerful generosity. The text does not imply great personal wealth on the part of the giver for the most generous and joyful givers are often those who have the least (cf. 2 Corinthians 8).

The next gift, “**leadership**” (Greek - “*ho proistamenos*”) has elicited a good deal of discussion. The etymology of the word refers to “*he that is placed in front*” much like the traditional German title for an elder - “*Vorsteher.*” This word is used elsewhere to denote the leaders of the local congregation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and should probably be associated here with the office of elder/overseer. Kurt Marquart points out that this particular “*charismata*” illustrates the fallacy of viewing spiritual gifts as personal talents to be inventoried, identified, and implemented:

“Perhaps the most telling case against the “gift as personal attribute” idea is that of the “presider” or “ruler” (“proistamenos”) of v.8. It would be absurd to imagine St. Paul meaning something like this: “If you have the ability to preside or rule, then be eager to organize somebody to preside over!” What he obviously means is this: “If you have been appointed to preside or rule (perhaps as pastor/bishop, or as president at the eucharistic assembly), then put your heart into it”... It is not at all a question of asking oneself: “Do I enjoy teaching, or ruling, or giving. Do I then have these gift abilities? What office in the church should I try to get in order to put these abilities to use?” The proper question is: “How can I serve the common good best and most faithfully in the responsibility or office with which I have been entrusted?” (Marquart, p. 53)

The apostolic admonition in this instance is - “**let him govern diligently.**” The term denotes an eagerness to carry out the assigned responsibility. Lenski says it well: “*The word means “haste” in the good sense; prompt efficiency, no delay, no excuses, no dilatoriness.*” (Lenski, p. 765)

The concluding “*charismata,*” number seven in the listing, is “**showing mercy.**” The reference should be understood broadly as ministry in general including “*any act of mercy toward others, such as visiting the sick, caring for the elderly or disabled, and providing for the poor.*” (Moo, p. 769) The attitude in which such activities are to be carried out is to be one of cheerfulness. The Greek word is “*hilaroteti*” from which the English word hilarity is derived.

“He who does acts of mercy should let his acts be the free and splendid radiation of the mercies of God, which he himself has received. Let him perform them with cheerfulness, not with the sullen, grey demeanor that degrades the recipient of the gift and make ungracious even our most gracious deeds.” (Franzmann, p. 223)



“Charity” by Lucas Cranach the Younger c. 1560

Verses 9-13

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

“Love must be sincere.” - In 1 Corinthians 12-13 Paul’s masterful treatment of the grace-gifts is followed by an eloquent assertion of the central importance of love (Greek - *“agape”*). The same pattern prevails here. The charismata can only be rightly understood and properly used in the context of the selfless giving love which is to be present in every Christian as the result of their experience of such love from God in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 4:9-11). Such Christ-like love *“must be sincere.”* The English adjective *“sincere”* is based upon the Latin words *“sine cera”* (literally - *“without wax”*). In the ancient world inferior pottery was often disguised and sold for a higher

price by carefully concealing its cracks beneath a layer of wax. The master potter who wanted to assure his customers of the superior quality of his wares often stamped them with the words “*sine cera*” to show that they had not been doctored. Hence one who is “*sincere*” is a person who does not attempt to conceal his true feelings or opinions with hypocritical words or actions. The Greek adjective used in the original text is “*anhypokritos*” which literally means “*not hypocritical.*” It serves to modify and explain the preceding phrase. A literal translation could read: “*without a mask*” with reference to the theatrical masks used in ancient Greek plays. “*Agape*” love must be real, not a matter of pretense or role-playing. John Calvin observes:

“It is difficult to express how ingenious almost all men are in counterfeiting a love which they do not really possess. They deceive not only others, but also themselves, while they persuade themselves that they have a true love for those whom they not only treat with neglect, but also in fact, reject.” (Calvin p. 271)

“Love must be sincere, hating what is evil and clinging to what is good.” The hating and clinging describe how genuine love operates. The deliberate juxtaposition of true love and hate in this text is striking. Authentic love necessitates hate. Origen, the great teacher of the early church points out:

“Perhaps it seems odd to find hatred listed among the virtues, but it is put here of necessity by the apostle. Nobody doubts that the soul has feelings of hatred in it; however, it is praiseworthy to hate evil and to hate sin. For unless a person hates evil he cannot love.” (Bray, p. 314)

The Greek verb “*apostygountes*” is most emphatic, even stronger than its English counterpart. This is the only instance in which the term occurs in Biblical Greek. It should be translated “*to hate most intensely*” or “*to abhor.*” To love God and good must involve the utter hatred and rejection of all that is evil. Hatred is not love’s opposite. It is, in fact, its inescapable counterpart, the two sides of our strongest and most intense emotions. Apathetic indifference is the opposite, the denial of love. The second verb is equally intense in the Greek text - “***Cling to what is good.***” The verb is “*kolaomai.*” It is typically used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the intimacy of sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 6:16,17; Matthew 19:5). Lenski aptly translates “*Glued to the good thing!*” Authentic love necessitates an absolute rejection of evil and an unwavering commitment to that which is good.

Now follow a series of nine admonitions which further define and apply the concept

of genuine love. The Greek text is nicely balanced with each of the nine opening with a dative or accusative of relation. The placement of the nouns at the beginning of each phrase provides both emphasis and structure - as regards brotherly love, honor, etc.

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” - The Greek text makes use of a paronomasia, that is, a play on words, in the first phrase as it effectively presents variations of the same term to make its point. The verb *“philostorgoi”* (*“to be devoted to”*) is linked to the noun *“philadelphia”* (*“the love of family members for one another”*). The church is the family, the household of God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15), and thus its members should conduct themselves toward one another as members of an extended family who care about and are concerned for one another. As St. John Chrysostom notes: *“You should love one another because you are brothers and have been born from the same spiritual womb.”* (Bray p. 315)



“Paul’s Farewell from the Ephesian Elders” by Rudolf Schäfer

“Honor one another above yourselves.” - Next, the apostle deals with the subject of recognition and praise. In Philippians 2:3-4 Paul offers this advice: ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** The apostolic urging here is very similar. A literal translation of the phrase might read: *“And in respect to honor, lead the way for each other.”* This understanding reflects the typical meaning of the verb *“proegoumenoi”* which

normally means to go before or to lead, hence, to set an example. Evidently, the same destructive envy, jealousy, and resentment which exact such a toll in the modern church were also prevalent in the congregation in Rome. Boice paraphrases: *“In other words, Don’t wait around for people to recognize your contributions and praise you. Instead, be alert to what they are contributing and honor them.”* (Boice, p. 1599) We should eagerly seek to outdo one another in bestowing honor and recognition upon one another.

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” - The noun ***“zeal”*** (Greek *“spoude”*) means eagerness, earnestness, zeal, or diligence. It conveys the sense of vitality and energy. The negative thrust of the admonition is provided by the Greek word *“okneroi”* which is often used of indolence or laziness (i.e. Matthew 25:26). Hence the phrase literally reads - *“In regard to diligence, don’t be lazy.”* As Paul urges elsewhere: ***“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*** (Galatians 6:9) The striking combination of these two opposites, zeal and laziness, serve well to make the point. The Christian life is not a sprint - it is a marathon. It is all too easy to grow weary and discouraged as we struggle day after day against the weakness of our own sinful nature and the relentless opposition of the devil and the world around us. *“Such slowness is a common fault; many necessary tasks are put off. Procrastination is the thief of time.”* (Lenski, p. 768)

The next phrase, number four in the series of nine, draws the contrast even more forcefully - ***“but keep your spiritual fervor.”*** (literally - *“as regards the spirit be set on fire”*). The same phrase is used in Acts 18:25 in reference to Apollos: ***“He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and he spoke with the fervor of the Spirit...”*** Given the phrase which follows, most commentators understand the *“spirit”* in this phrase as a reference to the Holy Spirit rather than the spirits of men. Hence the antidote to the slothfulness of sinful human beings is the mighty power of the Spirit of God whose presence was demonstrated at Pentecost in the tongues of fire which appeared over the apostles. ***“Fervor”*** (Greek - *“zeontes”*) means to bubble, to boil, or to burn.

The next phrase, ***“serving the Lord,”*** is linked to that which precedes it as an objective standard by which to assess and direct spiritual manifestations (cf. I Corinthians 12:3; 14:29-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Douglas Moo explains the connection:

“The exhortation to serve the Lord might at first seem like an anticlimax, too obvious

and too broad to have any real application. But a closer look at the context suggests otherwise. The encouragement to be set on fire by the Spirit, is, as church history and current experience amply attest, open to abuse. Christians have often been so carried away by enthusiasm for spiritual things that they have left behind those objective standards of Christian living that the Scriptures set forth. This, it seems, is Paul's concern; and he seeks to cut off any such abuse by reminding us that being set on fire



*“St. Christopher - A True Servant of Christ”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

by Spirit must lead to, and be directed by, our service to the Lord. It is not the enthusiasm of self-centered display (such as characterized the Corinthians) but the enthusiasm of humble service of the Master who bought us that the Spirit creates within us.” (Moo, pp. 778,779)

This phrase (“as to the Lord, be a slave”) balances and establishes the context for the preceding phrase (“as to the Spirit, be set on fire”). The Greek text (“*douleuontes*” - literally “slaving” or “being a slave”) is considerably stronger than the English translation. The connotation of slavery in the Biblical world was not so much that of very hard work, as in our English usage, but of absolute submission to the will and control of the master. That is, of course, exactly the sense

which Paul has in mind here. The Christian is one whose no longer possesses an independent will. He is completely subject to the will of the Lord as that divine will is expressed in the Word of God. The terminology reflects the typical language of the master slave relationship in the ancient times (“*kurios*” - “master” and “*doulos*” - “slave”).

“Be joyful in hope.” - **“Hope”** in Scripture is never a mere sense of tentative expectation but confident trust. That is because Biblical hope deals with that which God has promised but that we have not yet seen or received. Our expectation is sure because it rests completely on the promises of Jesus. Because of the certainty of our hope in Christ we can already rejoice for when God makes a promise that which is promised in a present reality although it may still lie in the future. (Cf. Romans 5:2) *“Believers are to be filled with joy due to the hope that awaits them. Joy evaporates when hope vanishes, and thus the fires of joy can only be stoked by focusing on hope.”* (Schreiner, p. 666)

“Patient in affliction” - Characteristically, when St. Paul discusses the Christian hope it is in the context of trial and tribulation (cf. Romans 5:2-3; 8:24-27). **“Affliction”** is a general term which denotes all of the pressures and troubles which afflict believers in this present evil age. These are the consequences of sin and the context of our hope. Affliction is not to be avoided or evaded but expected as an inevitable result of our faithfulness to Christ. **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 14:22) Paul goes so far as to urge us to **“rejoice in our sufferings.”** (Romans 5:3). The term **“patient”** indicates the willingness to remain under a burden without seeking to evade it with quiet acceptance and endurance. Lenski laments the failure of the modern church to recognize and apply this insight.

“In the early church affliction was expected as a matter of course; the scars it left were considered medals of honor, bestowed by the Lord’s own hands. Now, most Christians seem to expect to get through unscathed, without even a bruise, and they cry out if they are buffeted a little, as though a great wrong were being done to them instead of experiencing something that is altogether normal. So many even try to avoid the world’s hate and to win its favor by shaping doctrine, practice, and conduct so as to avoid offending the world. So many Christians resemble the children of this world to such an extent to such an extent that they cannot be distinguished from them.” (Lenski, p. 771)

“Faithful in prayer” - The joyful hope that enables the Christian to patiently endure the hardships of this life is sustained by steadfast prayer. This is the same participle that is used to indicate the unwavering doctrinal faithfulness of the first congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). It denotes deliberate effort - *“to busy one’s self with, be devoted to, hold fast to, or persevere in something.”* (Dunn, p. 743) Persistent prayer as a lifestyle pattern does not just happen. Those who would remain joyful in hope and patient under tribulation must consciously and deliberately set their minds and hearts to do so.



“Lord, Teach Us How To Pray” by J. James Tissot

“Share with God’s people who are in need.” - The phrase literally reads - *“as regards the needs of the saints, fellowshiping.”* The language is similar to that which Paul will use in Chapter 15 in reference to the special collection for the needs of the churches in Palestine (Romans 15:25-28) The **“saints”** (Greek - *“hagioi”*) are the *“holy ones,”* those who have been cleansed from the guilt of sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The verb **“share”** is the action form of the crucial New Testament term *“koinoinia”* which means to participate in something together and

thus to share. It is the most significant word in the New Testament for the fellowship of God's people together in Christ. It is often used in the Bible to designate financial and material help for those in need (cf. Acts 2:44; 4:32; 2 Corinthians 8:4,9; 9:13; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 1:5; 4:15; 1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16). That is clearly the intended sense here as the phrase is linked to the practice of hospitality. The "**hospitality**" that is to be practiced is not merely a general social graciousness nor an ability to entertain friends and acquaintances, but rather comes in the form of aid to be supplied to travelers in need, particularly to exiled or persecuted fellow Christians. The ministry of the early church was often characterized by itinerant preachers traveling from town to town, dependent upon the congregations they visited for room and board. Thus, the virtue of hospitality would have been of special importance.

Verses 14-16

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

"Bless those who persecute you..." - Verse 14 shifts the focus to relationships with those outside of the community of believers, in fact, to those who are actively opposed to the church. The general theme of demonstrating "**sincere love**" which began in Verse 9 continues in this segment. While these words are not cited as a quotation, the language is strongly reminiscent of the preaching of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). The imperative verb "**Bless!**" (Greek - "**eulogeite**") is repeated twice for special emphasis. The word is usually associated with God as the source of all blessing. "*To bless one's persecutors, therefore, is to call on God to bestow His favor upon them.*" (Moo, p. 780) If blessing refers to the invocation of God's favor, then cursing is its precise opposite. To curse means to invoke God's wrath or judgement. Our Lord Himself is, of course, the preeminent example of this pattern as work as He prayed that God might forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). Stephan, the first martyr of the church, followed Christ's example as he prayed, while he was being stoned to death: "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" (Acts 7:60) St. Paul was present at that event and must have been powerfully moved by this loving prayer of faith. St. Augustine contends: "*The church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephan.*" (Boice, p. 1609).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” - The thrust of the text now returns to relationships within the community of believers. Our connection to one another within the Body of Christ ought to be so intimate and compelling that

we automatically identify with our fellow believers both in the joys and their sorrows. The apostle says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12:26, in the midst of his discussion of the church as the Body of Christ: ***“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, and the members rejoice together.”***

Instead of resenting or envying the success and the happiness of others, as is so often the case in the world. As the richness of our joy is intensified in its sharing, so the burden of our sorrows is lightened as we bear it together. The classic hymn says it well indeed:



“Stephan’s Prayer” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

*“We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.*

(ELH # 420)

This genuine sense of empathy is only possible where the love of Christ has enabled the individual to transcend the concern of self which is the inherent obsession of every naturally born descendant of Adam and Eve.

“Love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer’s joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter wholeheartedly into that same joy. Similarly, love that is genuine will bring us to identify so intimately with our brothers and sisters in Christ

that their sorrows will become ours.” (Moo, p, 782)

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” - The way in which the Christian thinks of himself and of his position relative to his fellow believers is of crucial importance in this area. Three variations of the of the Greek verb *“phronein,”* to think,” occur in this verse. Paul is calling us to a common way of thinking, a particular mind-set as the people of God. The opening phrase literally reads: *“think the same thing”* or *“be in agreement with one another.”* The phrase is used elsewhere in reference to doctrinal harmony and unity within the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16; 6:5;7:40; 14:37-38). In this context the emphasis appears to be on our thinking in regard to one another, thus the NIV translation - **“Live in harmony with one another.”** The most significant obstacle to unity is pride. Accordingly two warnings against the dangers of pride and conceit immediately follow. **“Do not be proud”** (literally - *“Don not think too highly of yourself.”*) is defined in terms of our opinions about and our actions toward others - **“but be willing to associate with people of low position.”** Those who men scorn as unworthy and insignificant are precious in the sight of God. Remember Christ’s comment from the throne of Judgment: **“If you have done it to the least of one of these, my brethren, you have done it to me.”** (Matthew 25:40). Our perspective ought to be that of God not of men. St. John Chrysostom writes:

“Here again Paul insists on humility, which is how he started this whole exhortation. For since there was a probability that the Romans would be high-minded because of the greatness of their city and for many other reasons, he keeps drawing off the sickness of pride...There is nothing so likely to cause schism in the church as vanity...If a poor man comes into your house, behave like him and do not put on airs because of your riches. In Christ there is no rich or poor. Do not be ashamed of him because of his outward dress, but receive him because of his inward faith. If you see him in sorrow do not hesitate to comfort him, and if he is prospering, do not feel shy about sharing in his pleasure...If you think you are a great person, then think others are also. If you think they are humble and lowly, then think the same of yourself.”
(Bray, p. 318)

“Do not be conceited” literally means *“Do not be wise in your own estimation.”* Origen captures the sense of the phrase as he comments: *“The conceited person is stupid in his own arrogance, no can he know the wisdom of God if he clings to his own foolishness as if it were wisdom.”* (Bray p. 319)

Verses 17-21

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



"The Good Samaritan" by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil..." - The thrust of the text now shifts to our attitudes toward our enemies and those outside of the family of faith. The famous *"lex talionis"* - *"eye for eye and tooth for tooth"* (Matthew 5:38) - is clearly repudiated. This grim maxim is one of the basic operating principles of sinful humanity. It appears in virtually every human culture (i.e. German - *"Wie du mir - so ich dir!"*). Man's sinful nature twists the charity of the golden rule - *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."* - into a pre-emptive strike - *"Do unto others before they can do unto you."* This prohibition of just and measured retaliation in the face of evil is strongly reminiscent of Christ's teaching in the

Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:38-42). The forbearance in the face of evil provides a powerful witness to the world and cannot help but make a profound impression upon the unbeliever as he observes the love of Christ in action - ***“Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”*** Leon Morris explains:

“Paul is calling on them to live out the implications of the gospel. Their lives are to be lived on such a high plane that even the heathen will recognize the fact. They will always be living in the sight of non-Christians, and the way they live should be such as to commend the essential Christian message.” (Morris, p. 452)

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” - Those who follow the *“Prince of Peace”* out to be the ambassadors of that peace wherever they go. Our Lord declares: ***“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.”*** (Matthew 5:9). And yet, in this sinful world, peace is most difficult to achieve and maintain. The two qualifying phrases (***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you”***) clearly indicate that at times conflict is inevitable. One may not surrender or compromise the truth of God’s Word for the sake of outward harmony nor may the believer yield to the corruption and wickedness of the world all around us to maintain to avoid conflict and opposition. God’s prophet Jeremiah denounced the religious leaders of his day who urged such surrender for the sake of peace with these scathing words: ***“From the least to the greatest all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. “Peace, peace,” they say, when there is no peace.”*** (Jeremiah 6:13-14). Origen reminds Second Century Christians: *“We cannot have peace and fellowship with evil. It is one thing to love people but quite another to love crimes...Therefore those who are perfect will love the sinner but hate his sin.”* (Bray, p. 320) In matters of truth and morality the Christian in this world is militant, constantly and consciously engaged in spiritual warfare. However that warfare must always be conducted in Christlike humility and self-sacrifice, so that insofar as conscience allows we may be at peace with all men.

“Paul recognizes that the goal of peace with all people cannot be realized perfectly...Peace with all people is not possible in every situation. One cannot violate the truth of the Gospel and devotion to Christ in order to make peace with those who resist the truth. Further, one may desire to be at peace with others, but they do not extend the same hand of charity back. In this instance, peace is unattainable, not because we have failed to strive for peace but because the other person refuses to be reconciled.” (Schreiner, p. 672)



*“Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet”
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath...” - Those who would live at peace in a world filled with conflict must be willing to forgo revenge, even, and perhaps particularly, in those situations where the revenge is justified. The desire to *“get even”* is one of humankind’s most basic instincts. Paul urges us, instead, to place the matter in the hands of God and to rely upon His justice. In the Greek text, the second phrase - **“but leave room for God’s wrath”** simply reads *“leave room for wrath.”* The insertion of **“God’s”** is an interpretive insertion by the translators of the NIV. Most commentators agree that this is the intent of the text given the words that follow. Paul reinforces his assertion with a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35 where God assures Israel that his just judgment will come upon the wicked. **“It is mine to avenge, I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”** (Cf. Hebrews 10:30) To exact vengeance is to usurp the place of God as John Murray perceptively reminds us:

“Here we have what belongs to the essence of piety. The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care on Him and to vest all our interests in Him. In reference to the matter in hand, the wrongdoing of which we are the victims, the way of faith is to recognize that God is judge and to leave the execution of vengeance and retribution to Him. Never may we in our private personal relations execute the vengeance which wrongdoing merits.” (Murray, II, pp.141-142)

God will balance the scales of justice in His own time and in His own way. We, as His people, are to trust in Him and believe that He will set things right. The noun **“wrath”** is a powerful word in both Old and New Testaments. It carries an eschatological connotation and points toward the last judgment at the end of time. Let the evil-doer beware for **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:36)

“On the contrary, “If your enemy is hungry...” - Not only is vengeance prohibited, but love is commanded. The Old Testament citation is from Proverbs 25:21-22. The reference to **“coals of fire”** has stimulated a good deal of discussion among the commentators. Some would argue, in terms of the preceding Verse, that this is the fire of God judgment upon the enemies of His people. This view does not appear to be consistent with the thrust of the passage. Rather, the **“coals of fire”** are a metaphor for the shame and repentance stimulated within the sinner by the Christian’s unselfish love. Augustine expresses the consensus of the early church in this way:

“This may seem to many people to contradict what the Lord teaches, that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, or the apostle’s own statements in verse 14 and 17 above. For how can it be love to feed and nourish someone just in order to heap coals of fire on his head, assuming that coals of fire mean some serious punishment? Therefore we must understand that this means that we should provoke whoever does us harm to repentance by doing him a good turn. For the coals of fire serve to burn, that is, to bring anguish to his spirit, which is like the head of the soul, in which all malice is burned out when one is changed for the better through repentance.” (Bray, p. 322)

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” - This broad summary statement concludes Paul’s series of ethical imperatives. To live by the ways of the world in anger, self-assertion, and retribution, is to have been defeated by the world. To live by the ways of Christ in patient endurance, self-sacrifice, and love is to

triumph over evil. *“Not only have we not allowed it to corrupt our own moral integrity, but we have displayed the character of Christ before a watching and skeptical world.”* (Moo, p. 790)



“Divine Service in a German Country Village” by Fritz Mackensen

Romans Chapter 13



“The Forum in Rome - Seat of the Imperial Government” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“What is the role of the state in human affairs? How is the state to relate to the church of Jesus Christ? How are Christian people to relate to the government’s authority? It is these questions that Paul raises and answers in the first seven verses of Romans 13. What a source of controversy they have been! J.C. O’Neill in Paul’s Letter to the Romans wrote: “These seven verses have caused more unhappiness and misery in the Christian East and West than any other seven verses in the New Testament.” That is probably not true. But they have certainly puzzled many and caused unhappiness among some scholars. Some of them, like the one I just quoted, have attempted to eliminate the verses from the letter, reasoning that they are un-Pauline and come rather from a Stoic source. Such persons think the verses have been interpolated, arguing that verse 8 would follow nicely after 12:21, and that there is nothing quite like this section anywhere else in Paul’s writings. This is true, but that does not mean that Paul did not write it. Furthermore, it can be argued equally well that his discussion of the legitimate authority and proper function of the state is a natural follow-up to the immediately preceding section in which he presented the duty of the Christian to return good for evil, since to do that does not always mean that a Christian has to be victimized by evil persons. It is the state’s duty to restrain and punish evil. Again, a discussion of the role of the state is natural in a letter to Christians living in the center of the Roman world. Jews were notoriously resistant to all outside authority. They had fomented numerous rebellions, and the

greatest one of all, the rebellion that was to be crushed by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D., was only a decade away from the time Paul wrote this letter. In the sixties, Christians were shielded by a law originally promulgated by Julius Caesar, but turmoil was coming. Were the followers of Christ to align themselves with the coming revolution, or were they to be loyal citizens of the all-encompassing Roman Empire? If so, what about the lordship of Jesus Christ? Was he King, or was he not? If they were not to be loyal citizens what was their position regarding Rome to be?...We often speak today of the separation of church and state, and we should be thankful for that separation. It is a dearly won liberty to have a church free from government interference or control and to have a state free from clerical domination. But the separation of church and state does not mean the separation of God and state. And though we do not rule the state, nor should we, it is nevertheless our duty as Christians to speak out against the civil rulers' sins and remind governing authorities that they are ultimately accountable to him from whom their authority comes. So we are accountable too! We are accountable to speak up. We do not have the power of the sword. That is reserved for the civil authorities, as Paul will show in Romans 13:4. Our weapon is truth, for we are a kingdom of the truth. The truth is stronger than the sword. But woe to us if we do not wield the sword of truth powerfully." (Boice, pp. 1640-1641,1646)

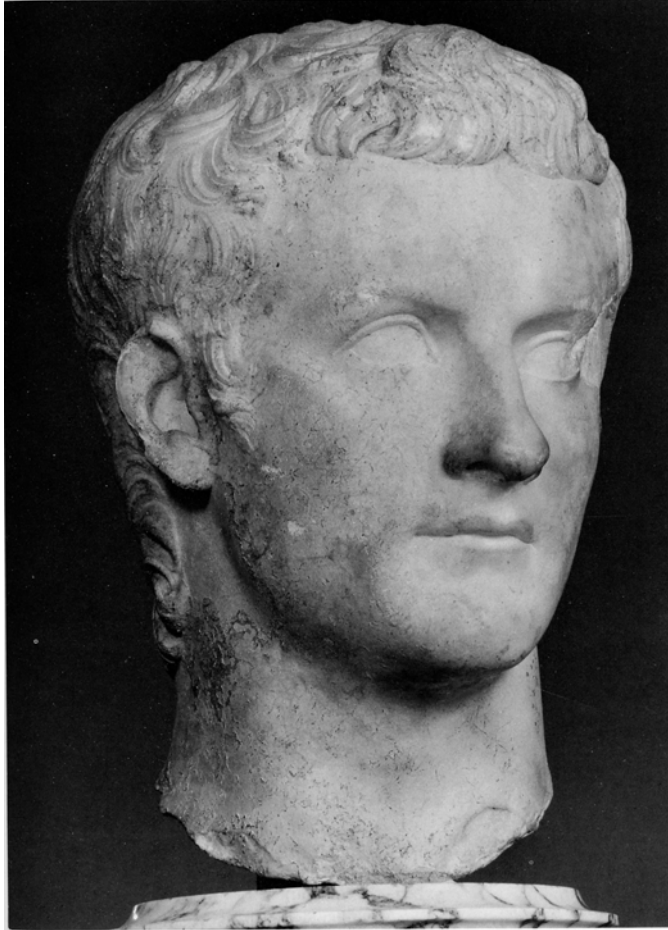
Verse 1

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authority, for there is not authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authority..." - Paul's opening statement is comprehensive and categorical. John MacArthur summarizes:

"These seven verses contain the clearest and most specific New Testament teaching on the Christian's responsibility to civil authority. Every Christian, no matter what form of government he lives under, is under command from the Lord to maintain proper and useful submission to that government for the sake of leading a peaceful life and having an effective witness. This recurring theme of submission to society's controlling power is nowhere more forcefully dealt with than here." (MacArthur, pp.205-206)

James Boice is not guilty of exaggeration when he declares: *"As far as Romans 13:1 is concerned, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for anyone to write a more all-encompassing, absolute, or utterly unqualified statement than the one Paul has given."* (Boice, p. 1643) The subject at hand is a matter of urgency and importance. Revolutionary tensions were rising to explosive levels in Palestine and would shortly culminate in the catastrophic uprising of 70AD. Rome itself was in the grip of



“Caligula - Third Emperor of Rome”

political turmoil throughout the period. The faltering reign of Tiberius Caesar (14-37AD) was replaced by the tyranny of the bloodthirsty madman Caligula (37-41 AD). Caligula was assassinated by the praetorian guard in 41AD. The guardsmen placed his uncle Claudius, the stutterer, upon the royal throne. Claudius surprised everyone by being a rather competent emperor. He reigned until 54AD. During his rule the Jews were expelled from the city of Rome (49AD) because of their contentious behavior. The infamous Nero became emperor in 54 AD. He instituted the first systematic imperial persecution of Christians after the burning of Rome in 64 AD. The Epistle to the Romans was written around 58AD during the reign of Nero. This is the historical context in which Paul’s comments about the role of government were written.

The admonition is addressed **“Everyone”** (literally - *“every soul”*). The submission enjoined in the text applies not only to Christians, but to every human being without exception.

The most crucial term in the phrase is the verb - **“must submit himself.”** (Greek - *“hypotasestho”*). This word is most significant in the New Testament. It literally means *“to place under*, a combination of the preposition *“hypo”* (*“under”*) and the verb *“tasso”* (*“to place”*). It means to take one’s place or to subordinate one’s self within an ordered structure or system, so that the structure or system in question may function effectively and accomplish its goals. Submission applies to the acceptance of the authority of another and obedience to their will within the context of a given relationship (cf. 1 Peter 3:5-6). In classical Greek the word is used in a military context in reference to units in an army or ships in a fleet taking their assigned

position on the field of battle. In the Bible the term denotes the recognition that God the Creator has placed certain people or institutions in positions of authority so that His creation may function in accordance with His intent for the common good. Such submission is not only enjoined in the realm of government (cf. also Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14). It also applies to spiritual leaders in the church (1 Corinthians 16:16; Hebrews 13:7,17); to the activities of Christian men and women within the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-38; 1 Timothy 2:11-15); to the relationship between a Christian wife and her husband in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-6); to the relationship between children and parents in the family (1 Peter 5:5; Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1); and slaves to their masters (Ephesians 6:5; Titus 2:9). In every case, the concern is that human relationships may function in the way that God designed for the maximum benefit of everyone. Ultimately our submission to those whom God has placed in positions of authority is an expression and an application of our submission to Him (Ephesians 5:24). Note also that the verb in this phrase is in the middle voice **“Must submit himself,”** thus indicating that this submission is a voluntary action on the part of the one who submits.

The object of submission in this phrase is **“the governing authorities”** (Greek - *“exousias hyperechousais”* - literally *“the ruling powers”*). The use of *“exousias”* rather than the more general Greek word for power - *“kratos,”* signifies a power that has been given or delegated, as the apostle will specify in the phrase which follows. The language of the text identifies the governing authority simply in terms of the possession of power, not the means by which it was obtained or the manner in which it is exercised. Lenski is completely correct in his assertion:

“No particular form of authority is specified; imperial, monarchial, oligarchical, republican, democratic. Whether this authority is exercised in a noble or in an oppressive manner, whether it was attained in a legitimate or an illegitimate way, neither limits nor qualifies the Christian’s position.” (Lenski, p. 786)

The adjective **“governing”** means *“ruling over.”* It does not define a particular level of governmental authority but includes all those who are over or above me within a given governmental system. Once again, Paul’s language is unmistakably comprehensive. John MacArthur summarizes:

“There is no civil authority, Paul says, except from God. No matter what form it takes, no human government at any time in history, at any place on earth, among any people on earth, at any level of society, has ever existed or will ever exist apart from the sovereign authority of God because all power belongs to God (Psalm 62:11)...The autocratic, ruthless, and demonic regimes of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin,

and Mao Tse Tung were no exception to God's command to be subject to civil authority. The equally ruthless empires of ancient Assyria and Babylon were no exceptions...There are no exceptions." (MacArthur, pp.219-220)

The basis for our submission to all governmental is clearly defined - ***“for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”*** The language is inescapably absolute and all inclusive. All those who hold the power of government have received that power from God. This fundamental assertion is not unique to Paul or the New Testament. Scripture applies the same legitimizing principle to Babylonian emperors (Daniel 4:17; 5:21; Jeremiah 27:6) and the Persian conquerors who replace them (Isaiah 45:1-5): to Hebrew kings (1 Samuel 14:13-14) and to Roman governors (John 19:11).



***“Emperor Vespasian - Conqueror of Jerusalem”
by Peter Paul Rubens***

Implicit in that assertion, however, is the truth that since God has established all government, all government remains answerable to the God who established it. There are limits beyond which human government cannot properly go. As our Lord declares: ***“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.”*** (Matthew 22:21) When those limits are transgressed and human government seeks to command or compel that which is contrary to God's Word and will then Christians must choose to ***“Obey God rather than men.”*** (Acts 5:29) In those specific instances where obedience to the government would mean disobedience to God the Christian has not only the right but the duty to disobey men because of a primary loyalty to God. Charles Hodge notes:

“There is no limitation to the injunction in this verse, so far as the objects of obedience are concerned, although there is as to the extent of the obedience itself. That is, we are to obey all who are in actual authority over us, whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust. The actual reigning emperor was to be obeyed by Roman Christians no matter what they might think of his title to the sceptre. But if he transcended his authority, and required them to worship idols, they were to obey God rather than man. This is the limitation to all human authority. Whenever obedience to man is inconsistent with obedience to God, then disobedience becomes a duty.” (Hodge, p. 640)

Such God-pleasing civil disobedience, however, applies only to particular situations with individual laws or government policies. It does not release the Christian from his overall responsibility to submit to or obey the government.



“Martin Luther Preaching in the Wartburg” by Hugo Vogel

Verse 2

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment upon themselves.

“***Consequently, he who rebels...***” - The conclusions drawn in Verse 2 are the natural, logical result of the basic principles established in the preceding verse. If all governmental authority has been established by God then all those who participate in attempts to overthrow or resist the government must be guilty of rebelling against God and that which He has established. The correlation between the two verses is nicely expressed by the contrasting verbs. The verb “***rebels***” (Greek - “*antitassomenos*” - literally - “*to place one’s self against*”) is the counterpart and opposite of the verb “***submit***” (Greek - “*hupotassestho*” - literally - “*to place one’s self under*”). As submission to the authority of government constitutes submission to the authority of God who established government, so also rebellion against the government constitutes rebellion against God. “*The people of God then ought to consider resistance to the government under which they live as a very awful crime, even as resistance to God Himself.*” (MacArthur, p. 220) Rebellion and revolution are never an alternative for the conscientious Christian, no matter how evil or corrupt the government may be. Luther most emphatically agrees: “*No rebellion is justified, however justified its grievance may be... I side and will ever side with the party that suffers rebellion, however unjust a cause it may have; and I will oppose the party that starts a rebellion, however just a cause it may have.*” (Martin Luther, SL,10.365)

The consequences of rebellion against the government which God has established are dire. Paul warns that those who participate in rebellion “***will bring judgement upon themselves.***” The noun “***judgement***” (Greek - “*krima*”) refers in the first instance to the temporal consequences of revolution as the government acts to defend itself and to suppress the revolt. Revolution is a violent and bloody business. Most often the result is the very chaos and anarchy which government was designed by God to prevent. In addition to all this there are also eternal consequences involved and “***judgement***” points beyond time to the ultimate judgement of God who will punish in eternity those who choose to deny and defy Him.

Verses 3-5

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do

wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, and agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.



“Luther Preaching Against the Peasant’s War” by Gustav Koenig

“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right...” - Paul asserts the role of government in maintaining peace and order as yet another reason why Christians ought to submit and obey those in authority. Luther makes the same point, arguing that if all men were perfect Christians there would be no need for government. The purpose of this divine institution is to restrain the destructiveness and violence of sin.

“When a prince so rules his people so as not to permit anyone to be wronged and punishes the evildoer, he does well and is praised. For thus it is in this government...Such government we must have, but no one will get to heaven that way, nor will the world be saved by it. However, it is necessary in order to prevent the world from getting worse. It is simply a protection against and a restraint upon wickedness. For if this government did not exist, men would devour one another and no one would be able to protect his life, goods, wife, and child. So, God has

instituted the power of the sword in order to prevent the destruction of everything and at least partially restrain wickedness. Thereby, government can secure and maintain external peace and no one may inflict injustice upon someone else. Therefore it must be tolerated. Nevertheless, as we have stated, it was not established for citizens of heaven, but simply so that people may not fall more deeply into hell and make matter worse.” (Martin Luther, SL, XI, 1789)

The role of government is, in this sense, essentially negative, to hold back evil and to minimize its destructive impact on the weak and the vulnerable. Unfortunately, Robert Haldane does not exaggerate in the least when he offers this grim assessment:

“The world, ever since the fall, has been in such a state of corruption and depravity, that without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than in human society. As soon as its restraints are removed, man shows himself in his real character.” (MacArthur, p. 225)

The apostle’s advice is practical and straightforward - to avoid conflict with the government, obey its laws, and do that which is right. For the law-abiding citizen, there should be nothing to fear from those whom God has placed in authority.

“But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing.” - The wrong-doer, however, has good reason to fear the government. Without that fear, peace and order could not be maintained. Hence, God has entrusted to civil government the coercive power of the **“sword,”** that is, the authority to use physical force, up to and including so-called capital punishment and the waging of just war to protect its citizens and uphold justice. To punish the criminal or repel the aggressor are the very tasks for which civil government was instituted and those responsibilities must be carried out relentlessly. When the government does so, it is functioning as **“God’ servant, an agent of wrath.”** The Greek text in this phrase is considerably stronger than the translation. It designates the government as **“an instrument of vengeance for wrath,”** that is, one who exacts justice and repays blood for blood. The state is thus charged with that which is explicitly forbidden to the Christian. The use of the powerful term **“wrath,”** usually connected with the judgement of God in the Book of Romans, emphasizes the role of the government as God’s agent in punishing the wrong-doer. Luther bluntly remarks:

“Into the hands of some people, God places a sword, which they are to wield. These

people are all those who through regular and customary means are called to temporal government in order to rule, to look to and further the common welfare, and to prevent public offense. Into the hands of these people, God places the sword; that is, it is God's will and ordinance that they are to wield the sword, not in their own interest but in the interests of their subjects; as St. Paul says, temporal government is the "minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." (Romans 13:4) For since the world will not let itself be drawn by words so that general peace and harmony is sustained and wantonness prevented, severity must be used and people must be kept from sin by force. If a thief will not quit his stealing, let him be hanged on the public gallows. Then one is protected against him. If a malicious scoundrel wants to harm everybody as he pleases and wants to beat and stab at the provocation of a word, let justice be meted out to him at the place of public execution. Then he will no longer disturb one's peace; he will no longer beat or stab anybody. The executioner will nicely keep him from doing that." (Martin Luther, SL 13a, 373)

Mercy, kindness, and forgiveness are not the role of government. The government cannot create morality, but it must enforce the moral values of its people through the laws of the land. When it fails to do so, the result will be anarchy. In his classic book ***Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government***, Dr. Robert Culver writes:

"What must not be lost sight of is that, unpleasant as is the task of the jailor and the use of the whip, the cell, the noose, the guillotine, these things stand behind the stability of civilized society, and they stand there necessarily, for God has declared it so, in harmony with reality, rather than with apostate sociological opinion. Government, with its coercive powers, is a social necessity, but one determined by the Creator, not by the statistical tables of some university social research staff! No society can successfully vote fines, imprisonment, corporal and capital punishment away permanently. The society which tries has lost touch with the realities of man (his fallen sinful state), realities of the world, and the truth of divine revelation in nature, man's conscience, and the Bible." (Culver, p. 256)

"Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." - For the Christian, the desire to avoid punishment should not be the basic motive for submission and obedience. Instead, this becomes a matter of ***"conscience."*** The believer recognizes the hand of God in the institution of government and willingly submits to the authority of the government because of his compelling desire to obey and honor God.

Verses 6-7

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give

their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.



“Render Unto Caesar the Things That Are Caesar’s” by J. James Tissot

“That is also why you pay taxes...” - The most concrete and practical expression of submission to the government was, and is, the payment of taxes. Oppressive taxation was no more popular in the ancient world than it is today (cf. 1 Kings 12). In the case of the Jews, Rome’s taxes were bitterly resented as a constant reminder of their status as a conquered nation. The Roman system of taxation in the provinces was all the more infuriating because of its pervasive corruption. Tax collectors grew fat and rich by drastically over-collecting the taxes and keeping the difference for themselves. These infamous publicans were despised by the people as traitors and thieves. Christ’s willingness to associate with *“publicans and sinners,”* like Matthew or Zacchaeus, was highly controversial. The Pharisees and the Herodians conspired together to use this issue as a trap which would discredit the Lord in the eyes of the people with their clever question: **“Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes or not?”** (Matthew 22:15-22). Christ’s classic response: **“Render unto**

Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" not only evaded their trap but also clearly expressed the Biblical view of the responsibility of the Christian to government. Paul's explanation in this text brushes aside the passions of nationalism and affirms the Christian's duty to support the work of the government through the payment of taxes. Two different words for paying taxes are used: ***"taxes"*** (Greek - *"phoros"*) which refers to the taxes paid by a subject nation; and, ***"revenue"*** (Greek - *"telos"*) which refers to the tariffs, tolls, and sales taxes which were paid by all. The payment of taxation in whatever form provides support for those who are ***"God's servants."*** The text uses the fascinating noun ***"leitourgos"*** for the agents of the government as servants of God. The English word ***"liturgy"*** is derived from this Greek noun. It is frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to those who conducted the services of the Temple. The same usage also carried over into the New Testament (cf. Hebrews 8:2; 10:11). Paul's use of the word here more closely reflects the classical Greek usage in which ***"leitourgia"*** was public service performed on behalf of the state.

"Give everyone what you owe him; If you owe taxes pay taxes..." - The segment concludes with a broad summary statement. The Christian citizen must be one who fulfills his obligations in every respect, based upon his recognition of the divine establishment of government. Justin Martyr, the 2nd century theologian and church father, summarized the Christian perspective in these words addressed to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius:

"Everywhere, we Christians, more readily than all men, endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus; for at that time some came to Him and asked Him, if one ought to pay tribute to Caesar; and He answered, "Tell me, whose image does the coin bear?" And they said, "Caesar's." And again He answered them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgement." (ANF,1, p., 168)

Verses 8-10

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your

neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt...” - This discussion of love and the law is linked to the preceding verses by the repetition of the concept of obligation. Verse 7 - *“Give everyone what you owe him...”* Verse 8 - *“Let no debt remain outstanding”* (literally - *“owe nothing to anyone.”*) The idea of debt repayment becomes the transition from the issue of supporting the government through paying taxes to Paul’s main concern, in the following segment, the never-ending debt of love. This verse should not be understood as an absolute of borrowing of any kind. Lending and borrowing were common and legitimate practices in



*“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

ancient Israel. The Law carefully regulated the practice, limiting interest rates to honest and reasonable levels, and prohibiting the charging of interest (KJV *“usury”*) to those who were destitute altogether (cf. Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25: 35-36; Nehemiah 5:7; Ezekiel 22:12; Psalm 37:21,26; Proverbs 19:17). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends the practice with these words: *“Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”* (Matthew 5:42) In Christ’s parable of the talents, the master condemns his unprofitable because he hadn’t even bothered to deposit his money in a bank so that *“on my arrival I would have received my*

money back with interest.” (Matthew 25:27). “*This command does not forbid a Christian from ever incurring a debt (e.g. to buy a house or a car); it rather demands that Christians repay any debts they do incur promptly and in accordance with terms of the contract.*” (Moo, p. 812) Hence, the NIV’s translation “**Let no debt remain outstanding**” better reflects the sense of the text that the KJV’s more literal **Owe no man anything.**” The prohibition is of financial irresponsibility and greed not borrowing and lending in general. “*It does condemn the looseness with which we contract debts and particularly the indifference so often displayed in the discharging of them.* (Murray, pp. 158-159) James Montgomery Boice makes pointed application of this passage to the contemporary American situation:

“The point of Romans 13:8 is not that Christians should never borrow, but that they should never leave their debts unpaid...But the problem for many Americans, including our government, is that debt financing has become a way of life, and those who borrow are frequently enticed, misled, or trapped into borrowing more than they are able to repay. Then they default on their payments and often escape the weight of their financial obligations by declaring personal bankruptcy. Bankruptcy means cheating the person or company that has lent the money and it is an unjust and impermissible course of action for a Christian.” (Boice, p. 1682)

“Except the continuing debt to love one another.” - While financial debts can be repaid and satisfied in full we owe another debt that can never be fully repaid, namely **“the continuing debt to love one another.”** The imagery of debt and repayment is effective in this context as an expression of the reality that our love for one another is the necessary response to the love which we have received from God in Christ. In that sense, our obligation to love one another is indeed a debt, something which is to be repaid. Origen, the great Bible scholar of the early church paraphrases the verse in this way: “*Let you only debt that is unpaid be that of love - a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge, but will never succeed in discharging.*” (Moo, p. 813)

“For he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.” - The concept of love as the perfect fulfillment of the law is clearly based upon the teaching of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:43-48; 22:37-40; 19:17-19; Mark 12:28-33; Luke 10:25-28; John 13:34-35; cf. also Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Such love cannot be reduced to a mere feeling or emotion. It is rather “*an energy that works, namely with inherent intelligence and purpose. It could not possibly remain inactive.*” (Lenski, p. 800) The Law of God is an expression of His love and concern for the well-being and

happiness of mankind. Accordingly, as that Law pertains to our conduct and attitude toward one another, its specifications are merely the application of love to particular circumstances. They guide the Christian in discerning how love expresses itself in these specific instances. Therefore the generalization that love is the fulfillment of the law is valid. Paul illustrates his point with reference to the sixth, seventh, fifth, ninth and tenth commandments, but adds the generalizing conclusion - **“and whatever other commandments there may be”** - to indicate that his list is not intended to be exhaustive. The principle applies to all the precepts of God’s Law. *“Love is the entire summation of the law and not a further part of it. Love for another human being is the whole of the second table of the law even as Paul here state.”* (Lenski, p. 798) The quotation **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** is drawn from Leviticus 19:18, following the precedent of Christ’s earlier comments (cf. references above). Such love is inherently constructive. It cannot damage or destroy. **“Love does no harm to its neighbor.”**

Verses 11 -14

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because your salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

“And do this, understanding the present time.” - All this must be a matter of profound urgency. Our time is not unlimited. The end is upon us. We have come to the latter days. This segment of admonition and encouragement concludes with an emphatic assertion of *“the eschatological context of all Christian ethics.”* (Dunn, p. 785) Christ has come and He is coming again. For the believer **“understanding the present time”** means a recognition that we are living in the final era of human history, the end times. Paul uses the powerful Greek noun *“kairos”* to describe the moment. In contrast to *“chronos,”* the more ordinary Greek word for time, *“kairos”* designates an appointed time, a moment of divine destiny in which God offers His people an opportunity and confronts them with a challenge. There is a sense of great urgency inherent in this term. It comes, and then it goes, and once having gone it is

lost forever. The text impresses this sense of urgency through a series of images that deal with wakefulness and sleep, day and night, and light and darkness. Time is limited. The opportunity is brief. To the Ephesians, St. Paul had written - *“Awake sleeper and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”* (Ephesians 5:14) The Christians in Rome receive an equally urgent wake up call. This is no time for



“How Lovely Shines the Morning Star” by Rudolf Schäfer

spiritual dozing. *“Sleep is figurative for anything resembling delay, carelessness, indifference. The sleeper likes to put off rising out of his easy bed.”* (Lenski, p. 802) Each days of our lives we literally move one day closer to *“our salvation,”* that is, our transfer from the church militant to the church triumphant. Whether that salvation is accomplished as a part of Christ’s glorious return to judgement for mankind or individually through my death makes no difference. The end result will be the same in either case. We are moving ever closer to the complete realization of

the salvation which was God's gift to us when he bestowed the gift of faith upon us - **"when we first believed."** The dark hours of the night are drawing to their conclusion. The dawn of the great day is near. The shameful **"deeds of darkness"** must now be put aside. In the parallel text in Ephesians 5, the apostle develops the imagery of light and darkness in greater detail:

"For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible." (Ephesians 5:8-14)

The concept of warfare between darkness and light is suggested by Paul's use of the phrase **"put on the armor of light."** (cf. Ephesians 6:13-18) The Greek text, which literally urges **"put on the weapons of light"** (**"ta hopla tou photos"**) is even more forceful.

The text goes on to specify a representative list of the **"deeds of darkness."** They include: **"not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy."** This list is not exhaustive but is characteristic of the numerous vice-lists found in the Pauline literature of the New Testament (cf. Romans 1:29-31; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:31; 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5,8; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 6:4-5; 2 Timothy 3:2-4; Titus 3:3). The first pair - **"orgies and drunkenness"** is in the plural, perhaps indicated the prevalence of these sins. The term **"orgies"** (Greek - **"komois"**) originally referred to wild celebrations held in honor of the Greek god Dionysus, the god of ecstasy and wine. These revels involved violent obscene sexuality of every description combined with drunkenness and drugs. **"Drunkenness"** (Greek - **"methe"**) describes the excessive or abusive use of alcohol. The theme throughout this segment appears to be the excess and abuse which leads to compulsion and addiction. John Chrysostom, the great teacher of the early church notes:

"Paul does not forbid alcohol; he is opposed only to its excessive use. Not does he prohibit sexual intercourse; rather, he is against fornication. What he wants to do is get rid of the deadly passions of lust and anger. Therefore he does not merely attack them, but goes to their source as well. For nothing kindles lust or wrath so

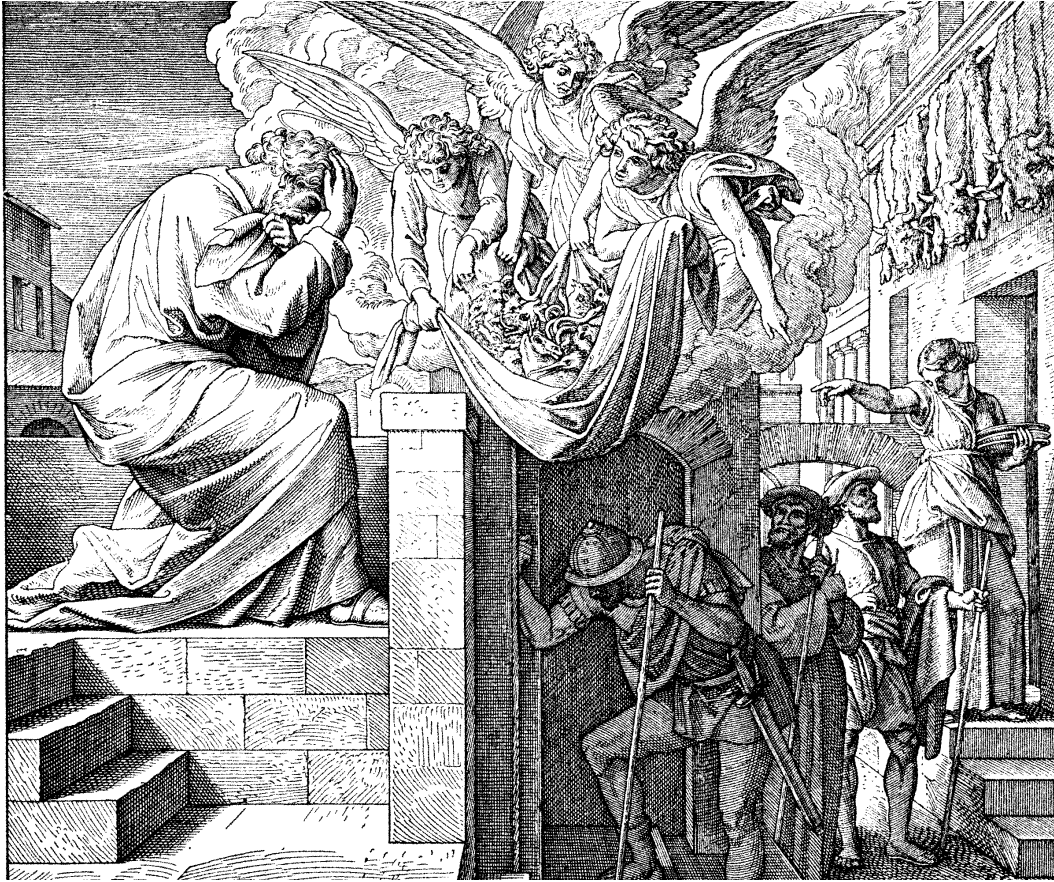
much as excessive drinking.” (Bray, p. 335)

The second combination combines **“sexual immorality”** (Greek - *“koite”*) and **“debauchery”** (Greek - *“aselgeiais”*). The former generally refers to any sexual intercourse, however in combination with the latter it takes on the meaning of inappropriate or sinful sexual activity. **“Debauchery”** is a strongly negative term which describes corrupt, depraved, excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures and licentiousness.

The focus shifts in the final pair of dark deeds - **“dissension and jealousy.”** **“Dissension”** (Greek - *“eridi”*) expresses the concept of contentiousness that leads to quarreling and strife. **“Jealousy”** (Greek - *“zelo”*) can also have a neutral or positive meaning depending on its context. The word itself simply describes intense emotion or zeal. Here it denotes *the kind of zeal which does not try to help others but rather to harm them, the predominant concern being for personal advancement.*” (Dunn, p. 790) These two characteristics are also combined in 1 Corinthians 3:3 and Galatians 5:19-21.

“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” - The point is reiterated once more in a final combination of imperatives. As the deeds of darkness were to be **“put aside,”** then in their place we are to **“clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The language recalls Romans 6 and our incorporation into Christ in Baptism (cf. Colossians 3:9-10; Galatians 3:27). In Ephesians 4, Paul uses the same terminology to urge believers to **“put on the new man.”** (Ephesians 4:13). *“Paul’s exhortation to put on the Lord Jesus Christ means that we are consciously to embrace Christ in such a way that his character is manifested in all that we do and say.”* (Moo, pp. 825-826) That means, of course, a complete repudiation of the way of the old Adam, our sinful nature. To gratify its desires means to deny Christ, that we may share in His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is the ongoing struggle of sanctification, the daily battle between the saint that I have become in Christ and the sinner that I am by nature.

Romans Chapter 14



“Peter’s Vision of Unclean Foods” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Verse 1

“Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters.”

“Accept him...” - The discussion of the question of offense begins a broad thematic statement. In the Greek text the phrase begins with the transitional conjunction “*de*” which is translated “*now*” or “*but*.” The conjunction expresses a sense of continuity with the preceding section. The manner in which the statement is posed, addressed to the strong in reference to the weak, suggests that the strong are the dominant element in the congregation while the weak are in the minority. The imperative verb “*accept*” (Greek - “*proslambanesthe*”) means “*to receive or accept into one’s society, home, or circle of acquaintances.*” This is not so much a matter of official action or formal membership but the everyday recognition and practice of brotherhood. The weak are

not simply to be tolerated or put up with but are to be fully treated as brothers and sisters in Christ within the intimacy of the family of God. To some extent, the examples which follow, dietary rules and the observance of Sabbaths and holy days, define the sense in which **“him whose faith is weak”** is to be understood. This is not primarily a matter of weakness in personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Instead, the implications of the faith are involved, specifically in terms of Christian freedom and what is permitted and forbidden. *“The faith with respect to which these people are weak therefore, is related to their basic faith in Christ, but one step removed from it. It involves their individual outworking of Christian faith, their convictions about what faith allows and prohibits.”* (Moo, p. 836) The choice of terms clearly indicates Paul’s sympathies in these matters. The verb **“is weak”** is a Greek present participle which suggests a brief temporary condition. The scruples of the weak should gradually be overcome as they grow more mature in the faith and come to recognize the full implications of their relationship with Christ for their attitudes and behavior. *“The brother is to be welcomed as he is, in his weakness, and he is to borne in his weakness until his weakness has been overcome.”* (Franzmann, p. 245)

Not only are the strong to cordially accept and welcome the weak within the life of the congregation but they are to do so in the right spirit and with the right motivation - **“without passing judgment on disputable matters.”** The Greek phrase begins with the preposition *“eis”* which literally means *“for the purpose of.”* The concern appears to be that the majority might view the reception of those whose opinions in these matters are deficient as an opportunity for debate and intimidation. These differences of opinion must not be allowed to spark quarrels and mutual recrimination within the church. *“The church is not called upon to whip the weak man into shape forthwith with arguments, even though they may be well-intentioned arguments. Faith is not fed by logic.”* (Franzmann, p. 245) This should not be construed as an absolute “gag rule,” prohibiting the strong from any expression of their opinions. Those who are more mature must hold to their convictions and humbly express them as the opportunity presents itself. The weak must eventually be won over. This is a delicate matter. The difference between fraternal discussion, motivated by loving concern, and intellectual jousting, motivated by ego and a sense of superiority, is oftentimes a subtle thing. Patience, humility, and love are ultimately much more convincing than clever arguments and sharp words. *“The weak ought to grow strong. The way to make them strong is not to offend them nor to contend with them in debate; but to show them forbearance and loving consideration, thereby enabling the weak to build up their strength.”* (Lenski, p. 813) The NIV’s translation **“passing judgment”** reflects the Greek verb *“diakrisis”* which denotes a

process of deliberation whereby a decision is reached. The prohibition does not refer to “*passing judgment*” as such, which the NIV translation seems to suggest. Instead, the point is that unanimity should not be required in “*disputable matters.*” (Greek - “*dialogismon*”). In Lutheran theology, the classic term for such matters is “*adiaphora*” (from the Greek - “*indifferent things*”). *Adiaphora* are matters of ethics, morality, or ceremony neither commanded nor prohibited in Scripture whose appropriateness must be determined on an individual level, based on the particular circumstances of the situation. Where Holy Scripture does not speak - there the church must remain willing to tolerate a diversity of opinion and lifestyle.

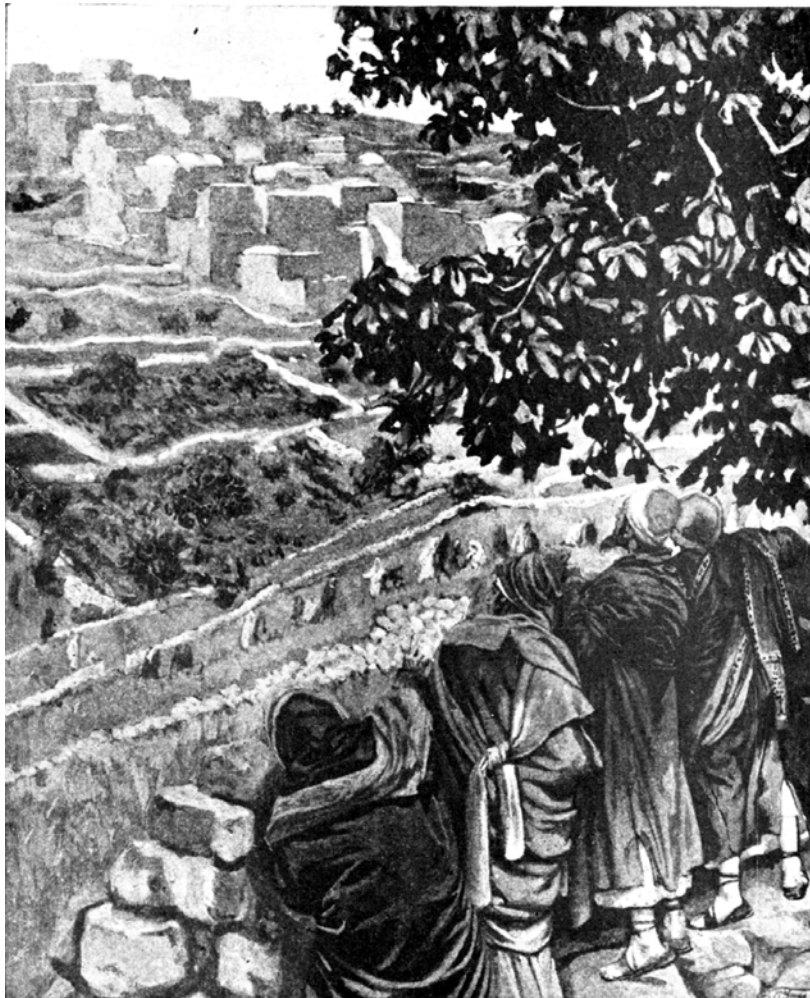


*“Peter’s Vision and the Baptism of the Roman Centurian Cornelius”
Bible Engraving by Matthäus Merian - 1630*

Verses 2-3

“One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.”

“One man’s faith allows him...” - Paul proceeds to cite an example of one such disputed matter. The context of the situation appears to be the dietary laws of the Old Testament. None of those regulations required vegetarianism. However, on occasion, when Jews found themselves living in circumstances where they could not be sure that food or wine had been prepared in a “kosher” manner, they would avoid meat and wine altogether. The practice of Daniel during the Babylonian captivity illustrates this pattern (Daniel 1:8). It may be that some Jewish Christians in Rome, perhaps cut off



*“Jesus’ Disciples Pluck Corn on the Sabbath”
by J. James Tissot*

from their own community because of their conversion to Christianity, found themselves in a similar situation. Others within the church, perhaps both former Jews and Gentiles, felt no such constraint, because they recognized that as Christians they were no longer obligated to observe the Mosaic law. Their view was in fact correct. However they are warned not to look down on (literally - not to hold in contempt or despise) those who have not yet come to recognize that freedom. *“Despise connotes a disdainful, condescending judgment an attitude that we can well imagine the strong majority, who prided themselves on their enlightened liberal perspective. Taking toward*

those who they considered to be foolishly hung up on the trivia of a bygone era.” (Moo, p. 838) The weak, on the other hand, are also warned not to criticize those who do not consider themselves obligated to continue to observe the laws of Moses. The Greek verb is *“krinein”* which means to criticize in contrast to the much stronger *“katakrinein”* which means to condemn or damn. *“The weak, Paul suggests,*

responded in kind, considering themselves to be the righteous remnant who alone upheld true standards of righteousness and piety and who were standing in judgment over those who failed to meet these standards.” (Moo, p. 838) These people are not Judaizers. They did not believe or teach that obedience of Old Testament law was necessary for salvation in addition to faith in Christ. They do not condemn those who fail to meet their standards as damnable sinners. If they had, the condemnation which fell upon the Galatians and the Colossians would also have fallen upon them. *“They were not legalists who has false doctrinal views, made no demands on others, started no so-called reforms, segregated themselves into no party. If they had done so, Paul would have treated them in a different fashion.”* (Lenski, p. 816) They are simply weak Christians who do not yet feel comfortable changing the habits and patterns of the past. Both sides are clearly told to stop criticizing and looking down on the other.

“For God has accepted him.” - The final statement is, in effect, the *“theological bottom line.”* No man may reject or criticize that which God has accepted. The church may not establish standards more stringent or more lenient than those which God Himself has established in His Word. *“A Christian is one who stands before God not on the basis of his or her own righteousness but because of the work of Jesus Christ. Since the other believer has been accepted and not rejected by Jesus, you should accept him or her too.”* (Boice, p. 1736) This is the same verb used in Romans 15:7 to describe that which God in Christ has done for each and every believer. ***“Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you in order to bring praise to God.”***

Verse 4

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

“Who are you to judge...” - This verse completes and amplifies the thought of the preceding phrase. This strongly worded rebuke seems to be pointed more in the direction of the self-righteous weaker brethren. The inherent self-righteous of the man who presumes to judge his neighbor in such matters is quickly revealed. The question is abrupt and harsh. In effect - *“Who do you think you are, butting in where you have no business?”* The Lord God is the sole master here and every Christian is His servant. Your fellow Christian does not belong to you but to God. When you judge him you put yourself in God’s place. Your judgment here matters not at all,

but only that of the Master. Ultimately we must all answer to Him and to Him alone (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5). The analogy ends on the confident note of God's grace - ***“And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”*** Our standing before God depends not upon us nor upon our deeds. If it did we would all, strong and weak alike, be lost and fallen creatures. Our standing before God depends completely upon what He has done for us in the blood of Christ, His Son - ***“He is able to make him stand.”*** It must be strongly emphasized that the judgment here forbidden applies only to matters of adiaphora where God's Word has not spoken. It is sadly ironic that very often the over-regulation of the Christian life and the rigorous infliction of man-made rules and standards is perpetrated by those who are, in fact, weak in the faith, as an unconscious expression of that very weakness.

“We must, of course, distinguish in our criticism. It is not presumption, but the very best service we can render each other to point out each others deviations from the Master's will and His Word and to remind each other what His will and His Word really require. It is an entirely different matter and the height of presumptuousness to go beyond this and to judge another where the Lord has laid down no requirements, misread His Word as if He had, or just add requirements we deem excellent. It is again paradoxical; the tyranny of the weak often exceeds the tyranny of the strong.” (Lenski, pp. 818-819)

Verses 5-6

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

“One man considers one day...” - The point is reiterated, this time in reference to the observance of holy days and festivals rather than in regard to foods. Here too, the “*weak*” and the “*strong*” have occasion to disagree with one another. Although the text does not explicitly indicate the nature of the disagreement, since the argument is advanced in a manner very similar to the preceding statement on dietary restrictions, it is safe to assume that the issue once again focuses on the continuing observance of Old Testament rules and regulations. The Sabbath, with its complex restrictions and limitations, no doubt figures prominently in the debate (cf. Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16). In traditional Hebrew piety, the observance of the Sabbath as a sacred day of rest, set aside for the Lord, was of crucial importance.

“It is not difficult to see that a few Jewish Christians, some of them who perhaps came from the old mother church in Jerusalem, still clung to the Sabbath, much as the Christians did after Pentecost. This does not imply that they insisted on this day or on any legal observance, but only that they closed their shop or their store, ceased work and kept the day holy.” (Lenski, p. 821)



“Christ Reproving the Judgmentalism of the Pharisees” by J. James Tissot

Once again, Paul does not take sides in this matter. This is an adiaphoron. In the absence of command or prohibition from the Lord, his apostle remains silent. He lays out both positions and simply encourages that ***“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”*** That is not to say that each one should be complacently convinced that he is right and the other is wrong, while tolerating the wrong-doing of the other. Convenient permissiveness of this sort is the way of the world, not the way of Christian love. It is not toleration, but careless, self-serving indifference to look the other way when another is involved in sin or caught up in error. If the issue is a matter of moral right or wrong or of Biblical truth or falsehood, then it must be confronted. Our loving responsibility to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ demands no less. Instead, the apostolic exhortation urges all parties to recognize that this is a matter of personal preference which does not involve obedience to the Word

of God. Each is to hold to his own opinion in this matter, as that which is best for him, without casting aspersions upon those who may disagree and act differently. The argument which earlier (vss. 3-4) was directed primarily toward the weaker brother is now broadened to apply to the strong and the weak alike. Both positions are mentioned as viable ways to live out the faith and serve and glorify God. In matters of adiaphora the issue is often not what you do but why or how you do it. Those on both sides of these issues can be properly motivated in their contrasting actions by a desire to serve and glorify the Lord. The noun “kurio” (“Lord”) occurs three times in these two verses. The noun “theo” (“God”) occurs twice. The repetition serves to emphasize the proper focus. Concentrate on God and His will, not man and his. The repeated phrase “**to the Lord**” is called a “*dative of advantage*.” The phrase means “*in the interest of*” or “*to the benefit of*” the Lord.

Verses 7-9

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

“***For none of us lives to himself alone...***” - These verses are “*the heart of Paul’s rebuke of the Roman Christians for their judgmental attitudes.*” (Moo, p. 844) The basic principle which has been presented, applies not only in these matters of adiaphora, but to the entirety of the Christian’s life and death. “***None of us***” indicates that this is true of all Christians, both weak and strong. The language is deliberately comprehensive. “*We are never autonomous - our whole living is a living to the Lord...And the Lord’s lordship over us does not cease at death...in dying we belong to Him. He never lets us go. No power, not even the power of that last enemy death can loose the power of His almighty hand.*” (Franzmann, p. 247) For the Christian believer every dimension of life takes place in the context of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our motive should never be simply self-interest, living for ourselves alone. All of our thoughts, actions, ambitions, and decisions are to be carried out from the perspective of that which serves and glorifies our Lord. That which is true of our life is also true of our death. The meaning of the phrases - “***none of us dies to himself alone***” and “***we die to the Lord***” is clearly defined in verse 8 - “***So whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.***” The physical death of every



“Christ the Conqueror of Death” by Joachim Skovgaard

believer occurs in the context of our faith. Death does not break that relationship, nor even interrupt it. Death for the believer is transformed into the blessed doorway to life eternal and an enhanced experience of the presence and love of Jesus. *“Our lives do not end in futility, like water seeping away into the sand; they end in personal communion with Him who is in life and death our Lord.”* (Franzmann, p. 247). This becomes possible only because of the death and resurrection of Christ. By His death He has overcome death for us, and by His resurrection from the dead, He has irrefutably demonstrated His lordship over life and death. The phrase *“returned to life”* refers precisely to the *“vivification”* of our Lord, the instant in which His body and soul were reunited on the third day after His physical death. The term *“resurrection”* refers more broadly to Christ’s departure from the tomb and subsequent appearances. All this took place so that *“He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”*



“The Death of the Believer and the Unbeliever” by Hans Vogtherr the Younger, 1540 - This 16th century woodcut dramatically depicts the diametrically different significance of physical death for the believer and the unbeliever. Two emaciated figures are presented sharing a death-bed- the believer at the head, the unbeliever at the foot. On the right side of the bed, the unbeliever dies, contorted in agony and fear. The candle stick burning at his bedside signifies that he dies in darkness. The skeletal specter of death (German - “todt”) approaches the unbeliever on the back right side of the image, bearing the skull and cross bones banner of death’s victory and displaying the hourglass in which the sands of time have run out. In the moment of his triumph, death leers down upon the dying man. The female personification of the world (German “Die Welt”) flees in terror. During his life, he lavished his love and attention upon her, living for the things of this world, but now, she abandons the dying man at his moment of greatest need. In the right foreground the jaws of hell gape open to receive the damned soul. Hell is labeled with the text of Job 18:21 - **“Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man, such is the place of one who knows not God.”** The monstrous figure of the devil, depicted as a chimera of various fierce animals, surges up out of the flames to seize the arm of the dying man and drag him down into hell. The text of 1 Peter 5:8 identifies the Adversary - **“Be sober, be vigilant, for your enemy the devil prowls around like a**

roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” In the right background, behind the dying unbeliever a herd of goats contend with one another on the rugged crags of a mountainside. The goats represent the damned who will be segregated from believers to stand at the left hand of Christ on the great day of judgment (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). The left side of the woodcut presents the blessed death of the believer. The saint rests comfortably upon his death bed, his hands folded in prayer. He is surrounded by three ladies, personifying Faith (German - “Glaub”), Hope (German - “Hoffnung”), and Love (German - “Liebe”). Faith kneels in humility her hands outstretched over the open Bible. Hope gazes expectantly upward toward an angel beckoning toward heaven. Love looks toward her two counterparts, holding heart aflame with passion in her hands. A second angel, identified as “Thanksgiving” (German - “Danksagung”), holds the crown of victory over the dying believer. In the left background, the flock of the Good Shepherd grazes in secure contentment on a lush pasture. They represent the redeemed who will stand at the right hand of God to inherit the kingdom on the Last Day. This classic example of Reformation era art powerfully presents the vast difference in the significance of death for the believer and the unbeliever.

Verses 10-12

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘Every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

***“You, then, why do you judge your brother? -** The discussion now becomes more pointed as Paul addresses the members of the congregation in Rome directly - **“You, then...”** The rebuke is addressed first to the weaker brother - **“Why do you judge your brother?”** The temptation for those who do not participate in these things is to judge and condemn those who do. We cannot condemn an action as sin when the Bible does not condemn it. We may believe such action to be unwise or inappropriate. Martin Luther once noted: *“You can’t stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair.”* We may believe such action is prone to abuse, can easily lead to sin, or could be sinful in certain circumstances. But nothing can be judged to inherently sinful, sinful in and of itself in every situation without specific Biblical warrant. We cannot see into the heart of another. We dare not judge their motives. Wherever possible, we must always put *“the best construction on everything.”* In this instance, those who continued to keep Sabbath and observe the dietary laws are called upon to refrain from rendering negative judgment upon those who no longer feel bound by such constraints. The following phrase - **“Or why do you look down on your brother?”** shifts the rebuke from the weak to the strong. The temptation in this case is for the stronger brothers*



“The Final Judgment” by Ian Provost - 1525

who recognized their Christian freedom, to look down with condescending disdain upon those who have not yet come to that point. Both sides are urged to leave the judgment to God before whose **“judgement seat”** all men, weak and strong alike, will one day appear. The point is reinforced with the citation of Isaiah 49: 18 and 45:23 - **“As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God.”** The introductory formula from Isaiah 49 serves to add the magisterial title **“Lord”** (Greek - **“kyrios”**) to the quotation. The core of the text, drawn from Isaiah 45, stresses the unique and unparalleled authority of God - **“I am God, there is no other.”** (Vs. 22) When judgment is rendered on the solid basis of the divine Word, the judgment is in effect God’s. When the Christian presumes to judge a fellow believer without a clear Word from God, he has in fact usurped the

position of authority which belongs to God alone. This applies to each and every believer, weak and strong alike, for - ***“each of us will give an account of himself to God.”***

“We must all face Him together with the marks of our graceless squabbles graven on our faces. When the Lord, the Creator of the world and the Ruler of all history, shall receive the homage of all men, when all shall bow the knee and praise their God, then it will be terrifyingly clear that those differences which seemed so great and so intolerable when we were all cooped up in the cramped chambers of our time were in reality no real differences at all. It therefore behooves each man, whether his sin be passing judgment or contempt, to learn these differences in that perspective now; for God will take us one by one, and each of us shall give an account to God, not his contemptible brother, or of his loose-living callous brother, but of himself.” (Franzmann, p. 248)

Verse 13

Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

“Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another.” - Up to this point, the admonition has basically focused on the weaker brethren urging them to avoid the temptation of entering into self-righteous judgment over against those whom they perceive to be involved in inappropriate activity. With verse 13, the apostle’s basic emphasis now shifts to the strong and their responsibility to their weaker brethren in these matters. The desire to criticize and condemn must give way to a loving concern for one another within the body of Christ. In the Greek text, the symmetry of this thought is expressed by the repeated use of the same verb, “*krino*,” in both sentences - literally: *“Therefore, let us not judge each other but make this your judgment...”* In the first phrase, the verb carries the negative connotation of judgmentalism, while in the second it simply refers to a decision or determination. The point of the exhortation is that stronger brothers should not use their Christian freedom in such a way that they would cause spiritual to weak. Paul does not deny that they have that freedom, as the following verse will clearly indicate, but he does urge that Christian freedom be used in a conscientious and considerate way. The potential peril to the weaker brother is described with two words - ***“stumbling block”*** (Greek - “*proskomma*”) and ***“obstacle”*** (Greek - “*skandalon*”). The former refers to that which causes someone to trip or to suffer injury. The latter, “*skandalon*” is a much more powerful word, referring originally to the trigger that sets off the death

trap. It suggests the ominous possibility that the weaker brother may fall from the faith altogether and be lost.

“The same principle applies to any activity or practice that is not inherently sinful...The loving, caring Christian will determine in his mind and heart to be sensitive to any weakness in a fellow believer, and avoid doing anything including what is innocent in itself and otherwise permissible, that might cause him to morally or spiritually stumble. (MacArthur, p. 291)

Verses 14-15

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

“As one who is in the Lord Jesus...” - Paul speaks as one who was rigorously trained in the most scrupulous school of Judaism, ***“ a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee,”*** (Acts 23:6). No one observed the dietary laws more carefully than they. But now, ***“in the Lord Jesus,”*** Paul has been led to a different conviction. This is not a matter of rational deduction, but divine revelation. This phrase points to ***“the enlightening, convincing, persuading connection of His Word.”*** (Lenski, p. 834) Through Christ and His Word, Paul has come to recognize that the ancient regulations of the law concerning food, drink, and festivals were but a pale shadow of greater things to come. The reality is Christ. The shadows have no further meaning of their own and can no longer bind the consciences of men.



***“The Pharisee and the Publican”
19th Century Bible Engraving***

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations...Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:13,16-17)

The phrase ***“no food is unclean”*** recalls Peter’s vision at Simon the Tanner’s house where the voice from heaven declared: ***“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean!”*** (Acts 10:15). The problematic uncleanness is not objective, it is subjective; it exists only in the mind of individual who continues to consider the food unclean. The food is not, in fact, unclean. Paul declares to Timothy; ***“God***



“Peter’s Vision” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

has created all foods to be shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the Word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:3-5; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:4-7). But the problem remains, nonetheless, in the immature and incomplete understanding of the weaker brother - ***“But if anyone regards something as unclean, for him it is unclean.”***

The conscience of the weaker brother is in error, but to act contrary to one’s conscience is in itself sinful. Therein lies the dilemma.

“The simple principle here taught is, that it is wrong for any man to violate his own

sense of duty. This being the case, those Jewish converts who believed the distinction between clean and unclean meats to be still in force, would commit sin in disregarding it; and, therefore, should not be induced to act contrary to their own consciences.” (Hodge, p. 666)

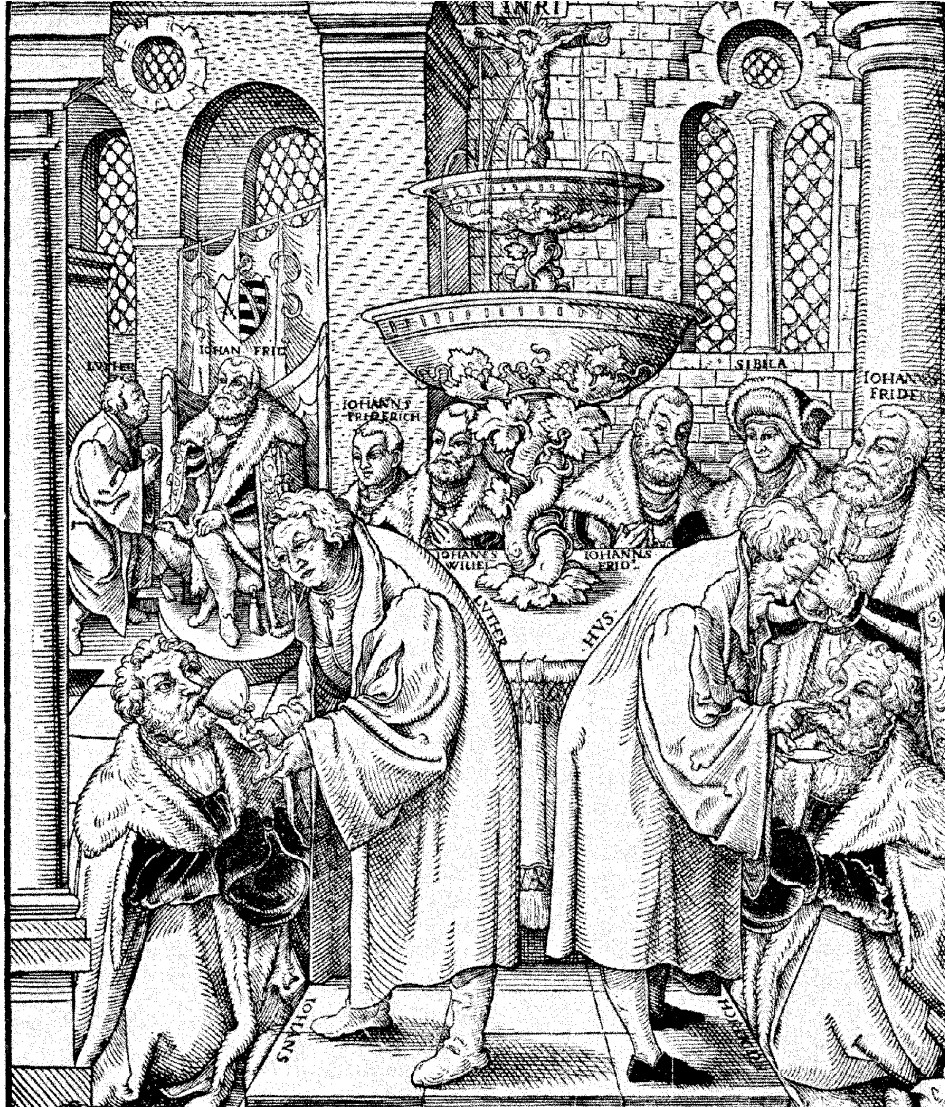
The attempt by the strong to compel the weak to recognize and practice their liberty in these matters trapped the weak believer, with his erring conscience, between two sinful alternatives. Luther categorizes the problem in this way:

“Not that there was any wrong in the act so far as the food was concerned; the wrong consisted in the indiscretion of the strong in causing the weak to err through the act. For the weak could neither agree with the strong nor dissent from them. Had they thought to consent, their weak consciences would have interposed, protesting, “It is sinful. Do it not!” Had they thought to dissent, their conscience again would have interposed, objecting, “You are not Christians, for you do not as other Christians do; your faith must be false!” Thus they could neither do one thing nor the other without opposing conscience. Now to violate conscience is the equivalent of violating faith, and is a grievous sin.” (Martin Luther, Lenker, VI, p. 30)

Our sensitivity to the erring consciences of our weaker brethren must recognize the dilemma in which their weakness has placed them. For the weak believer to act against his conscience is, in effect, to act against what he wrongly perceives to be the will of God. Accordingly, even though his perception is in error, his disobedience of his conscience places him in violation of the First Commandment. That is sin. Phillip Melancthon explains: *“It is truly a sin to act against one’s conscience...To do something when he is in doubt, or when his conscience disapproves, is an act of contempt of God and without faith.”* (Melancthon, p. 234) In his classic book on the topic of adiaphora, Dr. Theodore Graebner places the issue in a more contemporary context.

“But there are people who have a weak conscience. They consider these things wrong. Now regarding these, our verse says to them that such things become sinful indeed! The Roman Catholic who eats meat on Friday against his conscience sins, not because he eats meat, but because he acts contrary to his conscience. He does what he believes to be contrary to the will of God. He lacks the fear of God to that extent and to that extent, sins against the First Commandment.” (Graebner, p. 24)

Similar difficulties were often experienced at the time of the Reformation, as Biblical



*“Luther and Hus Administer the Sacrament to the Dukes of Saxony”
Lucas Cranach - 1551*

worship was restored in place of the traditional rites and practices of Roman Catholicism. The restoration of both kinds in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, that is, the distribution of both the bread and the wine to all communicants, was a particularly difficult issue. In his *Instructions to the Visitors of Parish Pastors* in 1528, Luther emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the “*obstinate*” who denied and defied the clear teaching of Scripture in this matter, and the “*weak*” who did not challenge the doctrine, but whose erring consciences were sincerely troubled by such a basic departure from their traditional practice. In dealing with the weak, the Reformer allowed for the temporary continuation of the traditional practice, on the basis of Romans 14.

“First, as indicated above, in every way and manner the doctrine itself shall be firmly held and positively preached and made known that according to the institution of Christ both kinds are to be used in the Sacrament. This teaching shall be presented without compromise to everyone, including the weak and the obstinate. Secondly, where there are weak Christians, who as yet have not heard, or been sufficiently instructed and strengthened by the Word of the Gospel, and so out of weakness and terror of conscience rather than obstinacy cannot receive both kinds, one may allow these to take communion in one kind for the time being and where they ask for it the pastor or preacher may so administer it. The reason is this: In this way the doctrine of both kinds will not be weakened or compromised, but only the application or use of the doctrine will be temporarily postponed through Christian patience and love... Even nowadays God tolerates much in us and in others which is wrong and insufficient, as a weak faith and other defects, according to Romans 14 and 15. If despite all this, the doctrine nevertheless is maintained and in no wise contradicted, love forgives and endures its inadequate application. Furthermore, it is uncharitable, even unchristian to force those weak ones to receive the sacrament in both kinds or to withhold it in one kind. For thus they feel they are made to sin. We have often experienced that they make confession and do penance for gross heresy when they have taken both kinds against their conscience. Also they think themselves guilty of heresy when they do not receive the one kind as has been their inclination. In both cases, the weak faith burdens itself with grievous sin such as heresy, though falsely. This is much worse than for a while not practicing full obedience to the doctrine of both kinds. St. Paul in Romans 14 says: “He who judges himself in that he eats is condemned.” Thirdly, as for the obstinate who will neither learn nor practice this doctrine, one should simply offer them neither kind, but let them go...For such obstinate ones are not only imperfect in the practice of the doctrine, but also want to pervert and condemn the doctrine. This we should not suffer nor tolerate. For the doctrine must run straight and clear, even if the deed and practice creep and crawl, run or leap, after it. The pastor who knows his people, and daily associates with them must distinguish between the weak and the obstinate. He can easily observe those folk who have a good disposition, who gladly listen to preaching and gladly want to learn and rightly guided thereby. But the rough and perverse who pay no attention to preaching are under no circumstances to be considered weak, however loudly they claim to be so.” (Martin Luther, AE, 40, pp.290-292)

“If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.” - The bottom line in these matters is not my rights as a Christian but a loving concern for the welfare of my fellow believers. William Barclay notes: *“It is a Christian duty to think of everything, not as it effects ourselves only, but also as it effects others.”* The verb ***“is distressed”*** (Greek - *“lupeisthei”*) means to grieve or anger another individual. In this context a stronger sense is indicated. *“What Paul*

has in view is not merely a passing sense of irritation or momentary pang of grief, but an actual wounding of conscience which destroys the whole balance of the brother's faith." (Dune, p. 820) "**Acting in love**" is the key motive throughout this segment. The Greek noun for love is "*agape*," the selfless, giving love which Christians have experienced from God in Christ and are now called upon to practice in their dealings with one another. To act "*kata agape*" - literally "*according to selfless love*" means that every word and action must be measured in terms of its impact upon other. The exercise of our freedom in Christ cannot be allowed to harm the faith of other Christians.

"Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died." - The issue is restated as a direct command in the strongest possible language. The triviality of that which the strong are being asked to give up in comparison to that which could be lost by the weak is bluntly revealed. How important can mere eating be in comparison to the salvation or damnation of one for whom Christ died?

"The weak sees his stronger brother eating food that he hitherto has not dared to eat. He is enticed, or perhaps shamed, into eating what his conscience tells him is forbidden food. Thus he is "injured," made to sin, by what his stronger brother eats. The strong man's eating is no longer innocent, for it has become an act of ruthless lovelessness and destroys his brother. The brother is weak, wrong in his convictions, wrong as wrong can be. But Christ died for him, in his foolish weakness, a brother infinitely precious in the eyes of all for whom Christ died. To injure him is to sin against Christ Himself." (Franzmann, p. 251)

The verb "**destroy**" (Greek - "*apollyme*") should be understood in the strongest possible sense to refer to utter spiritual ruin, apostasy, and ultimate damnation (cf. Matthew 10:28). This is consistently the manner in which Paul uses the term with a personal object (cf. Romans 2:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:10). The stakes in this matter could not possibly be higher.

Verses 16-18

Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing God and approved by men.

“Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.” - These closing remarks bring this segment of the discussion to its conclusion. They are addressed to both the strong and the weak. The Greek text actually says - *“Therefore, do not let your good be brought into contempt.”* The **“good”** (Greek - *“agathon”*) in question is God’s great gift to the congregation in Rome and to His people everywhere. *“The term is intended to be comprehensive...When we define this Good, various descriptions may be given: the whole Christian faith, our whole salvation in Christ, the Gospel, etc.”* (Lenski, p. 839) The pettiness and trivial divisions of the church bring the entire cause of Christ into disrepute in the eyes of the world. When the world fails to see Christ in us, they turn away and reject him altogether. The atheist philosopher Frederick Nietzsche once contemptuously dismissed Christianity with these words: *“I will not believe in the Redeemer until his people start acting more redeemed.”* The verb **“be spoken of as evil”** is the Greek *“blasphemeistho.”* literally *“to blaspheme against.”* It is a strong word which serves to indicate the urgency of the apostle’s concern in this matter. By our selfish actions God is brought into disrepute.



“The Macedonians Presenting Their Gifts to Paul for the Church in Jerusalem” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking...”

- The heat of controversy has a way of distorting ones priorities. The apostle now returns to first principles to place these issues in their proper perspective. **“Righteousness,”** the most important word in the Epistle to the Romans occurs here for the last time in the letter. Our Lord had promised His disciples, **“Seek ye**

first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (the material needs and necessities of this world) **will be added unto you.”** (Matthew 6:33) In comparison to the wondrous blessings of citizenship in His kingdom of grace these matters **“of eating and drinking”** are revealed as insignificant trivialities. The

“kingdom of God” consists, instead, of three substantive realities - ***“righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*** God’s righteousness, the declaration of full and free forgiveness in Christ, is the God’s gracious gift to every believer. The result of that divine declaration of ***“Not Guilty!”*** is ***“peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*** The same combination is found in Romans 5:1-2 - ***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”*** ***“Peace”*** is the sense of well-being and security that comes from the knowledge that everything that God has done everything that needed to be done to restore my relationship with Him in time and in eternity. The result of that wondrous peace is ***“joy,”*** the cheerful confidence which God can sustain even in the face of persecution and pain. As the children sing: ***“Happiness is to know the Savior, living a life within His favor, having a change in my behavior, happiness is the Lord! Real joy is mine, no matter if the teardrops start. I’ve found the secret, it’s Jesus in my heart!”*** These blessings come to the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit. The prepositional phrase ***“in the Holy Spirit”*** is instrumental. It indicates that these blessings occur through the work of or in connection with the Holy Spirit.

“Because anyone who serves Christ in this way...” - When one retains and focuses upon these first principles rather than wandering off down the byways of trivial controversy the result is ***“pleasing to God and approved by men.”*** This is the way God would have us live, in perfect harmony with one another as sinners redeemed in Christ’s blood at the cross. Such a life pleases and glorifies God, exemplifying the message of the Gospel before the world. Instead of blasphemy the result of such a life is approval from men. These results are exactly the opposite of the negative consequences described in the preceding verses.

Verses 19-21

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” - Having outlined the first principles of Christianity, the apostle

proceeds to admonish the congregation in Rome to conduct themselves in conformity with those principles. The original text literally reads - “so then, let us pursue what makes for peace.” The peace at issue is clearly harmony among the members of the congregation, specifically between the weak and the strong despite their differences on the subjects of dietary rules and holy days. The phrase “*to mutual edification*” (Greek - “*oikodomes tes eis allelous*” - “*the building up of one another*” introduces



“Built on the Rock, the Church Doth Stand” by Rudolf Schäfer

the basic theme of this segment.. This is the first occurrence of this crucial New Testament term in the letter to the Romans. The word appears eighteen times in the New Testament, fifteen of them in the writings of St. Paul. This term pictures the church as a building which must be carefully constructed and meticulously maintained. Jesus introduces the concept in His comment to Simon Peter; ***“Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** (Matthew 16:18) The image of the church as a building serves to emphasize our interdependence upon one another, just as the various components in a physical building are constructed upon one another. Much of the activity to which God calls His people within the church is specifically designed to enable us to edify, to build up, one another (cf. Hebrews 10:24-25) Paul details the idea in Ephesians:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief Cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)

“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.” - To selfishly insist upon one’s own way in matters of genuine adiaphora is not edification but destruction. The language in this phrase deliberately and directly contrasts that of its predecessor. The NIV translates the Greek verb *“katalue”* as ***“Do not destroy.”*** The verb in this context more accurately means *“Do not tear down.”* This is precisely the opposite of the building up which Paul encouraged. The admonition is repetition of Verse 15 - ***“Do not by your eating destroy your brother...”*** - in the context of edification imagery. Note that it is God’s work that is being torn down. God creates faith in the hearts of His people. God calls His people together around Word and Sacrament to form the Church. When I demand my own way in matters of dietary preference, regardless of the damage caused to other believers and to the Church, then I have become guilty of tearing down ***“the work of God for the sake of food.”*** ***“This calls for self-sacrifice on the part of the strong; their love must be a self-denying love...The weak whom they despise are God’s own workmanship created by Him in Christ Jesus (Eph.2:10). The clean food which they confidently eat will turn to poison in their mouths if by their eating they make others fall and sin.”*** (Franzmann, p. 253) The juxtaposition of destroying the work of God and food is designed to highlight the

relative importance of these two matters in relation to one another.

“All food is clean, but it is wrong to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.” - Once again Paul asserts the correctness of the strong’s position in these matters but insists that concern for the spiritual welfare of the weaker brother must take priority. In similar circumstances in Corinth, the specific issue was eating foods that had been sacrificed to idols. The apostle offered the same carefully balanced advice, asserting Christian liberty in this matter, while cautioning against offending the weak:

“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in world, and that there is no God but one...But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak consciences, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” (1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-13)

Later in the same epistle, Paul restates the principles at stake even more forcefully, reminding every believer that personal freedom and the exercise of my individual rights cannot be the Christian’s ultimate goal:

“Everything is permissible - but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you,

“This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience sake - the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews,



“Beloved, Love One Another” by Hans Schüpflein - 1522

Greeks, or the church of God - even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved.” (1 Corinthians 10:23-33)

My concern for the welfare of my weaker brother and for the witness of the church to the world must always take priority over the satisfaction of my desires or the assertion of my prerogatives. *“Before the church and before the world it is much more important to demonstrate our love than our freedom.”* (MacArthur, p. 297)

Verses 22-23

So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

“So whatever you believe about these things keep it between yourself and God.” - Once again, the comment is directed toward the stronger brother and the responsible exercise of his freedom in Christ. The Greek text of this intriguing phrase literally reads - *“As to you, the faith that you have, keep to yourself before God.”* The *“faith”* (Greek - *“pistis”*) in question here is both the subjective trust of the believer and *“the objective faith of Christian truth, in particular also that part of it which produces liberty in all adiaphora for the believer.”* (Lenski, p. 851) The inability of the weaker brother to recognize that liberty in matters neither commanded nor prohibited by Scripture indicates a lack of spiritual maturity. However, the stronger brother dare not denigrate the weak for their weakness nor attempt to pressure or propagandize those who have not yet come to a comparable level of spiritual maturity. At the same time, the text is careful not to suggest that the strong should abandon their convictions in these matters. - ***“whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God.”*** While the strong may forego the exercise and even the advocacy of their liberty for the sake of the weak, they may not give up that liberty which has been purchased for them in the blood of Christ.

“The freedom of faith carries with it the obligation not to force that freedom on others. The more liberal may rejoice in the freedom that they have in matters of personal conduct before God without having to parade that liberty before others. The liberty is no less real for not being exercised. Indeed it only shows itself as true liberty when it restricts its full range for the sake of another.” (Dunn, p. 834)

The strong should cherish and celebrate their God-given liberty as a precious blessing. ***“Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.”*** Luther’s German translation captures the sense of the phrase exceedingly well: *“Selig ist, der sich selbst kein Gewissen macht in dem, was er annimmt.”* (*“Blessed is the man whose conscience is untroubled by scruples over that which he approves.”*)

“But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith, and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” - In this final verse, Paul returns to the implications of these issues for the weaker brother. The ***“doubts”*** (Greek - *“diakrinomenos”* literally *“to waver”*) at issue here are the conscience scruples of the believer in regard to the eating of formerly forbidden foods. The verb ***“is condemned”*** (Greek - *“katakekritai”*) is a powerful term which is typically applied to the judgement of God upon the sinner. It serves to emphasize the profound importance of these issues. The phrase reinforces the earlier assertion that the disregard or disobedience of conscience is sinful even when that conscience is in error (cf. vs.14). It is not the eating itself which is sinful and brings condemnation but the disobedience of conscience. *“By partaking they are transgressing what they believe to be absolute moral norms. Faith cannot survive if people consistently flout what they consider to be moral absolutes.”* (Schreiner, p. 737) The further explanation is added that such eating is sinful because it ***“is not from faith.”*** As in the preceding phrase ***“faith”*** is used both subjectively - personal trust in Christ as Savior and Lord - and objectively - individual conviction stemming from one’s faith in Christ. The argument concludes with the general maxim - ***“Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”*** Douglas Moo explains:

“What he here labels “sin” is any act that does not match our sincerely held convictions about what our Christian faith allows us to do and prohibits us from doing. For a Christian, not a single decision and action can be good which he does not think he can justify on the ground of his Christian conviction and his liberty before God in Christ. Violation of the dictates of conscience, even when conscience does not conform perfectly with God’s will is sinful.” (Moo, pp.863,864)

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Excursus: The Scriptural Doctrine of Offense

Definition of Terms:

POPULAR USAGE -

“OFFENSE: 1. In biblical use: striking the foot against something; stumbling (rare). 2. a stumbling block; a cause of moral and spiritual stumbling; an occasion of unbelief, doubt, or apostasy. (archaic). 3. The action of attacking or taking the offensive; attack, assault, aggressive action. b. Sports and Games. The attacking team or players, the attack (N. Amer.). 4. Hurt, harm, injury, damage, pain, (inflicted or felt). 5. The act or fact of offending, wounding the feelings of, or displeasing another; offended or wounded feeling; displeasure, annoyance, resentment, umbrage. b. disfavor, disgrace (rare). 6. The fact of being annoying, unpleasant, or repulsive; offensiveness. b. A cause of annoyance or disgust; an offensive person or thing; a nuisance. 7. A breach of law, rules, duty, propriety, or etiquette; and illegal act, a transgression, a sin, a wrong, a misdemeanor, a misdeed, a fault.” (From The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1993)

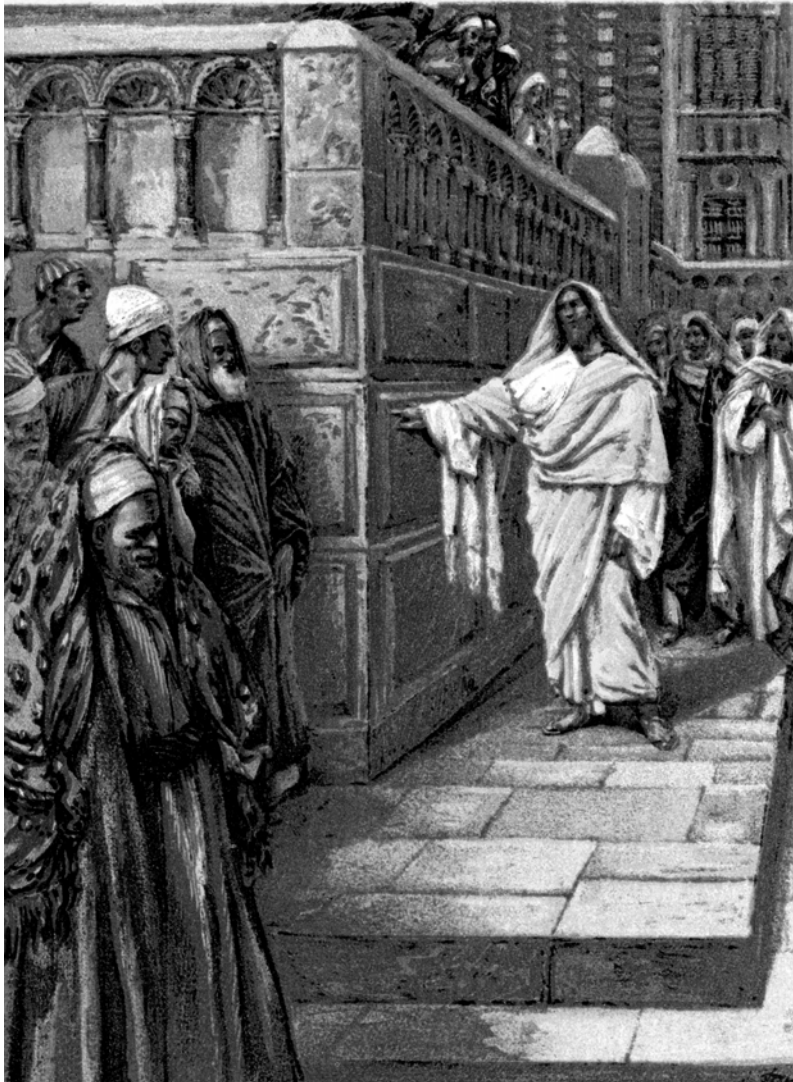
BIBLICAL USAGE -

Scripture uses two basic terms, closely related in meaning, to describe the concept of offense. The first is the Greek word "*proskomma*" from a root which means "*to strike*," "*smite*," "*trip*" or "*fall*." The Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this word for Hebrew words which mean "*to trap*" or "*snare*" and "*to fall*" or "*cause to fall*." William Tyndale's early English version of the Bible was the first to translate this word with the English compound "*stumbling-block*." That translation is also commonly used in the King James version (cf. Matthew 4:2).

The second and more prominent term for offense is the Greek noun "*skandalon*" from which the English word "*scandal*" is derived. This intriguing word comes from a root which means "*to jump up*" or "*snap shut*." It was the label for the wooden trigger used to spring an animal trap and was used at times to refer to the bait or lure used to draw the quarry into the trap. It is also frequently translated as "*stumbling block*" although at times the original connotation of entrapment is maintained. (cf. Romans 11:9) It must also be noted that "*skandalon*" is a very strong word in Scripture. It always carries the connotation of that which is fatal. To be caught in the trap means

death. *"skandalon"* is the trigger which springs the death trap. Wherever the Bible uses this powerful word the idea of fatality prevails. This is in marked contrast to the popular usage of the word in modern English where offense most often refers to injured feelings, displeasure or annoyance.

"This word here (Romans 14) has not the ordinary sense of causing mental distress or being affected disagreeably, as when we say 'an offensive odor,' or also, 'He offended me by laughing at my remark.' Offend has nothing to do with insult. Keep this in mind if you don't wish to lose the entire point of this chapter." (Graebner, p. 47)



***“The Stone the Builders Rejected Has Become the Capstone
- He Who Falls on this Stone Will Be Broken to Pieces” by
J. James Tissot***

The significant difference between the more casual popular usage of the concept of offense and the catastrophic Biblical sense of the terms must be clearly understood and carefully maintained in dealing with the Biblical concept of offense.

In the New Testament these terms are used in a variety of closely related ways:

(1) *"a temptation to sin, an enticement to fall away from the faith into unbelief"* (cf. Matthew 5:29; 13:41; 16:23; 18:6-9; John 11:7-10; Romans 16:17; Revelation 2:14; I John 2:10; 11).

(2) Jesus, His Gospel, and His cross are an offense to the unbelieving world because

they do not conform to human expectations and preconceived notions. God's eternal decree that man's salvation shall be by grace through faith in Christ crucified without human effort or co-operation of any kind is a stumbling block which causes the downfall of all human pride and self-righteousness. As Christ was unwilling to modify His messianic mission so that he might become more popular and acceptable to the world so Christians today must still be willing to endure the world's scorn and rejection so that Christ crucified may be proclaimed with saving power. In that sense, we must be willing to be "offensive" to those in our sinful world who scorn the Gospel and its message of salvation and patiently endure the rejection and opposition which are the consequences of that offense. (cf. Isaiah 8:14,15; Matthew 11:2-11; 13:53-58; 16:22,23; 26:31-33; Mark 6:3; Luke 7:23; Romans 9:32-33; I Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11; I Peter 2:6-8.)

(3) While faithfulness to Christ and His Word requires us to offend the world, Christians are sternly warned to be careful lest their inconsiderate actions or attitudes give offense in the sense of contributing to the temptation and the downfall of others in matters of "adiaphora." We are to bear with our weak and immature brothers in the faith. The law of love must take precedence over our freedom to do as we choose even when the action in question is not actually prohibited by the Word of God. (Luke 17:1-3; Romans 14:1-23; I Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23-33).

"The Greek word is `skandalon', taken from `skazo,' that is, `to limp.' For it signifies a stumbling block, that is, something into which a person bumps and falls or becomes confused. A thing is called a scandal or a scandalous example when a person becomes worse, or because he is confirmed in his error, or because he imitates a bad example, or because he develops even greater feelings of hatred toward the Gospel.." (Melancthon, *Loci*, p. 236)

"The commoner term for offense is "skandalon." It is the shorter form of the old Greek word "skandalethron," the trap stick, the crooked, moveable stick (instrument) to which bait was affixed and by which a trap was sprung. The "skandalon," then is the trigger on the trap, and in the New Testament usage means the trap itself, an impediment, a pitfall, a stumbling block. The stumbling which is inherent in the word is not just any kind of tripping or stumbling, from which one might easily and quickly rise. It is the death trap, a stumbling or falling to destruction, to total ruin. In its Biblical use it is always used in the figurative sense and is anything which causes the Christian to fall from faith, or an obstacle that prevents the sinner from coming to faith." (Doberstein, pp.348-349)



“If Anyone Causes One of these Little Ones who Believe in Me to Sin, It Would Be Better for Him to Have a Large Millstone hung around his Neck and to be Drowned in the Depths of the Sea” by J. James Tissot

"The words "offender," "offensive," "to give offense," have a special meaning. As already stated, in the ordinary sense to offend means to do something that injures or wounds the feelings or cause displeasure, as when we say, "No offense was intended by the question." But in the Biblical sense (in which it was first used in English) it means to cause a person to stumble. We distinguish three modifications of this meaning. 1. There is an offense which every Christian must give and which he cannot refrain from giving without sinning. This is called in the New Testament "the offense of the cross," Galatians 5:11; 1 Peter 2:8; Romans 9:33. The unbelieving world takes offense at the doctrine of the atonement, the redemption of the world through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. At this men stumble, by it they are "offended." Their pride does not want salvation by the merits of another, and their reason does not tolerate the idea of redemption through the sacrifice of God's Son. As certain as it is that we must preach the doctrine of the cross, so certain it is that we thereby will cause an offense to human pride and philosophy. 2. In the second place, there is an offense which is sinful and which we can never give without sinning. This is referred to in such texts as Matthew 18:6-7; Mark 9:42. By an evil life, offense is given in the sense that others will follow the bad example, will be encouraged to persist in wickedness, and even be taught forms of wickedness of

which they might otherwise be ignorant. 3. There is a third kind of offense for which we may be blamed or of which we may be innocent; in this sense the term is used in Romans 14. As already explained, it is the effect which our use of Christian liberty may have upon another Christian who is not fully instructed as to the will of God. Such offense implies a wrong on our part if it is due to a use of liberty which ruthlessly disregards the scruples of a brother in the faith. Such offense may be innocently given if it is unintentional. In some rare cases it may be necessary to give such offense, that is, to use things we might otherwise yield to the weak Christian, for the simple reason that the brother makes his own point of view a condition of fellowship or a proof of Christianity. We use sprinkling in baptism instead of immersion for this reason. Just where the line must be drawn, the welfare of the church and love for our neighbor must decide." (Graebner, p. 49ff.)

"The word "offend" is here used not in the popular meaning of causing dislike, anger, displeasure, but in the sense of causing one to stumble in his faith, to fall into sin. An offense, therefore, is anything that is likely to lead a person into unbelief, misbelief, or sin, or anything whereby he is encouraged to continue therein. Such offense is given by false teaching, Romans 16:17, by setting a bad example, Romans 2:23,24, by an inconsiderate use of our Christian liberty without due regard for the weak in faith, Romans 14:13...In its effect offense is soul murder." (Koehler, p.68)

"Seducing others to sin the Scriptures call "giving offense," (Romans 16:17). We may define it thus: To give offense means to teach or to do something by which we lead another not to believe or to believe error or to lead a wicked life and thus cause him, as far as we are involved, to perish eternally...Scripture teaches that offense is not only given by doing evil (false doctrine and wicked life) but also through the inconsiderate use of permissible things ; for by our example, Christians who are weak in knowledge may be induced to do things which in their erring conscience they regard as wrong and thus endanger their faith....We must be willing to restrict this correct theological knowledge in practical use in every case where our use of the right knowledge would induce the brother who is weak in knowledge to act contrary to his erring conscience. The general rule to be observed is this: we must waive the use of our Christian liberty unless the truth of the Gospel is at stake. And that is the case when the weak brother insists that his error be acknowledged as the true doctrine, and judges him who has the right knowledge, declaring him to be a transgressor of God's commandment." (Pieper, CS, I, p. 561)

SUMMARY PRINCIPLES:

1. The Scriptural distinction between "giving" and "taking" offense must be carefully maintained. Offense is taken when true doctrine or faithful practice is rejected

because it does not conform to human expectation or desire or because of an unwillingness to endure trouble or persecution on account of that doctrine or practice. Thus, when offense is taken, the sinner uses the words or actions of another - which are, in fact consistent with the will and word of God - as the excuse or justification for his own sin.

"Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away (*`skandalizthe'*) on account of me." (Matthew 11:4-6)

"The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away (*`skandalizetai'*)." (Matthew 13:20-21)

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away (*`skandalizthesontai'*) from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people." (Matthew 24:9-11)

"Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, "See I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 9:32-33)

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

"For in Scripture it says, "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to

those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for." (1 Peter 2:6-8)

The Bible clearly teaches that when offense is taken because of the faithful testimony or godly life of the Christian, the responsibility for the ensuing downfall must remain with the sinner himself. Christians may not compromise the purity of their doctrine or the godliness of their lives to make them more acceptable - less offensive - to the sinful world in which we live.

"In speaking of offense, a stumbling block, Scripture cites both giving offense and taking offense. The two are quite different even though the same term is used. Offense is taken when an unregenerate uses the words or acts of another as the excuse to sin - without any fault on the part of the other person...It may apply to Christians, as well, whenever they fall away because they are not willing to follow Christ for one reason or another." (Dobberstein, p. 350)

"There is a two-fold scandal or a two-fold offense. The first is Pharisaic offense, or, as they say, offense that is taken. This is when the ungodly rage against the true doctrine of the Gospel, or against honorable and necessary actions, as when they are unwilling to allow the true doctrine to be proclaimed and errors to be attacked...There are many reasons why the ungodly are angry at the true doctrine or at these necessary changes in conditions. Some are contending for their bellies - men who are unwilling to give up the great profits that came from the masses or the prayers for the dead. Others are contending for their own authority... Although the destruction of the people certainly brought



"Phillip Melancthon" by Lucas Cranach - 1546

sorrow to the apostles themselves, they rejected this hypocritical offense and strongly opposed these judgements. They clearly confessed that they owed obedience to God rather than to men since they were under the command of Christ, who had commanded them to gather the church by the word of the Gospel. It is necessary to attack errors concerning God and idols even if the world falls. We must give priority to the First and Second Commandments above all human matters - our own life, our fortunes, our family, or the peace of the nation. Hence we must maintain this rule. It is necessary to confess the true doctrine and to flee idols and to carry out the commands of God, even if the ungodly rage and fight back and conceive fierce hatred against the Gospel, regardless of the great dissensions which may arise out of the stubbornness of the ungodly. But the ungodly are the enemies of the Gospel and the cause of dissensions themselves, because they must yield to the truth...The godly are comforted by this rule even in times of controversies in the church. And we have need for this consolation now. For this prospect of divisions and this clamor which these hypocrites inflict upon us brings great sorrow to right-thinking people. It is not easy to endure it when they call us the enemies of God and the church, parricides, seditious men, and finally plagues of the human race. (Phillip Melancthon, p.236)

"Properly speaking, someone offends as often as they lead anyone to become wicked or godless by their own evil example. Therefore, "giving offense" may only be accurately applied if someone has actually given an evil example. However, it is to be labeled as "taking offense" whenever someone does something that is not, in fact, wrong, but completely good and holy, and someone else improperly takes that as an occasion to commit sin. In the same way, the enemies of Christ took offense at His holy changes and great wisdom, as, for instance, in Matthew 13:57, where they became envious, angry, and embittered and sought after His life." (Christian Loeber, Evangelisch - Lutherische Dogmatik, p. 401)

Offense is given, on the other hand, when false doctrine or ungodly living cause others to fall into sin. The stern warnings of Scripture against Christians giving offense are indicative of the profound seriousness of this matter. The falling, stumbling, in the word `skandalon' is a complete fall, utter destruction, spiritual ruin as unrepented sin separates the sinner from God. Accordingly, if the false doctrine or immoral living of one person contribute to someone else's downfall the Lord will demand a stern accounting from the one whose words or actions proved to be a death trap.

"I urge you brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles (`skandala") in your way that are contrary to the teaching that you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By

smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."
(Romans 16:17-18)

"Jesus said to His disciples: `Things that cause people to sin (skandala') are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves." (Luke 17:1-3)

"You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin (skandalidzei'), gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin (skandalidzei'), cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."
(Matthew 5:27-30)

Dr. Franz Pieper does a good job of expressing the offensive implications of false teaching in the Christian church in a 1912 sermon on Romans 16:17. Pieper writes:

"Paul labels divisions as "offenses" not as something good or even indifferent. The mere fact of the division is already a scandal to the world and to weak Christians. The world thereby excuses its unbelief. Weak Christians are cased to err in their faith. The offense becomes all the more apparent if we add that the divisions originate through deviation from the doctrine of Christ. Teaching another doctrine as the Word of Christ is a slap in the face to every Christian who desires the church to be ruled and taught only through His Word. Teaching another doctrine as the Word of Christ is a slap in the face to Christians whose honor and glory as Christians is that they are not subject to the words of men but only to the Word of Christ. Finally, to teach another doctrine as the Word of Christ can only result in damage to souls. This, therefore, becomes a matter of life and death. The word of man, even with the best of intentions, could never save a humanity that is dead in sin. Only the Word of God can do that...Only God's Law, insofar as it is taught without weakening or human addition, can truly lead men to recognize that they are poor sinners. Only God's Gospel, insofar as it is proclaimed without mixing in the works of the law can produce faith in Christ, give the highest salvation, and provide power and desire to follow the narrow way to eternal life. Any alteration of that Gospel by mixing in the works of men whether directly through their own merit or indirectly through improper behavior is poison and death. That death positions itself as a barrier,



“Dr. Francis Pieper”

a trap, and a stumbling block between men and the grace and salvation won for them by Christ.”

Considerable damage can be caused within the Christian community when the concept of "giving offense" is abused. Dr. Theodore Graebner, Concordia Seminary Professor and longtime editor of the Lutheran Witness, warned of the divisive potential of the promiscuous use of this concept.

"Sometimes the doctrine of adiaphora is not denied but ignored by raising against some fellow Christian this charge of having "given us offense." Now, this is a dangerous proceeding, especially if it develops into a habit. It is likely to give a bitter tinge of contentiousness to differences among brethren which should never go beyond an honest discussion or possibly a

lively debate. By charging the brother with "giving offense" a situation is immediately created which has in it the seeds of an unchristian quarrel. No doubt a Christian will sometimes overstep the bounds of propriety and also in his methods of church work, his forms of worship, and his attitude towards his fellow Christian "give offense." But Scripture does not permit us to pass judgement on a brother on so indefinite a charge as being "offended" by him. We must be able to establish the transgression of a moral principle - the law of love, one of the Ten Commandments, some specific prohibition - if we intend to urge steps of church discipline. By simply accusing the brother of having given offense we really take the entire right of judgement into our own hands. We do not use the only standard of judgement among Christians, which is the Word of God, but use as a standard of judgement our own feelings. This will never do. Whether it is in the field of domestic life or in congregational life, we can never compel a brother or a congregation to act in harmony with our own view simply because we feel a wave of displeasure or inward revulsion against something the brother or the congregation has done. We may freely express our dissent, even our displeasure; we may argue and plead; we may cite authorities and examples; but if we cannot quote the authority of Scripture, or cite the example of our Lord and His apostles, we have no right to make demands...No church or synod, let us take notice, no conference or congregation, can bring charges or exercise discipline on the mere grounds of being 'offended.' As soon as 'offense' is charged, the question arises, Has this offense been given,

or has it merely been received? In other words, the first consideration must be, Is the offense taken justifiably, or is it charged by some arbitrary, human definition of what is sinful? But since in any such case what must be proved is the reality of the offense, and since this can only be proved by showing that the offending brother has sinned against the Word of God, it is evident that any charge of offense (so far as church discipline is concerned) is only the halfway station. We can never operate with it, but in every case must come down to the Scripture proof by which the brother is convicted of wrongdoing." (Theodore Graebner, The Borderland Between Right and Wrong, p. 51ff.)

2. Offense can also be caused in matters that are not, in and of themselves, right or wrong. "Adiaphora" (German - "Mitteldinge" - Middle things) are things which God's Word has neither commanded nor forbidden. In this area sanctified judgement and Christian liberty must prevail. Where God has not spoken, a Christian is free to act one way or another. The elevation of human rules, regulations, and traditions to the status of divine commands jeopardizes the Gospel itself. Thus St. Paul urges the Galatians to reject the Judaizer's efforts to re-institute the requirement of circumcision, the dietary laws, and the Sabbath prohibitions as infringements upon our freedom in Christ. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) However, constrained by our love for one another in Christ, we must take care lest the insensitive exercise of our freedom in matters of adiaphora create doubts and problems of conscience among our fellow believers. "Be careful, however, does not become a stumbling block to the weak." (1 Corinthians 8:9) At times, these issues are not equally clear to all Christians. The New Testament passages which discuss this concern deal with issues like eating meat, drinking wine, observing Sabbaths and festival days, or, eating foods that had been sacrificed to idols. These are matters that are not sinful in and of themselves. Nonetheless, the consciences of some may be troubled in such matters of adiaphora because of their individual cultural or religious background.

To do something that conscience forbids or is uncertain about is to sin against conscience (cf. Romans 14:14,23).

"As one who is in the Lord Jesus I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean...But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not

come from faith is sin."

Theodore Graebner's comments on these verse are helpful:

"Now, all those things which are under consideration - the use of God's temporal gifts and anything not commanded and not forbidden - are termed by Paul 'clean.' They are not forbidden to the Christian. But there are people who have a weak conscience. They consider these things wrong. Now regarding these our verse says that such things have become sinful indeed! The Roman Catholic who eats meat on Friday



"The Lord's Supper" by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1565

against his conscience sins, not because he eats meat but because he acts contrary to his conscience. He does what he believes to be contrary to the will of God. He lacks the fear of God to that extent and to that extent, sins against the First Commandment. As Martin Luther insisted before the Imperial Diet at Worms: "I cannot and will not retract anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right." In his Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528), Luther followed this same principle in advising that those whose consciences were troubled by the restoration of the Scriptural practice of receiving the Sacrament in both kinds be allowed, for the time being, to continue the traditional practice of taking only the bread (cf. pp. 561-562).

A believer whose conscience is erring or in doubt in a question of adiaphora is described in Scripture as a "weak brother". These are fellow believers who are immature, and therefore vulnerable in their faith. We are urged to deal with such fellow believers patiently and considerately so that the exercise of our Christian freedom does not become a stumbling block for them. That patient consideration, however, should not be construed as condoning or encouraging their weakness.

"And this is not to say that weakness should be encouraged. Weakness is never a virtue. The church will always seek to inform and strengthen. But as long as there is a church militant, we will be faced with weaknesses in one matter of adiaphora or another. There will be Christians who are not as strong, still very weak. Scripture urges us to tolerate them, be considerate of them, lest we become guilty of offense and they become trapped again in the dungeon of sin and death." (Dobberstein, pp. 354-355)

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters. One mans faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him." (Romans 14:1-3)

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good to build him up." (Romans 15:1-2)

"Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's

temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by you knowledge." (1 Corinthians 8:9-11)

"To win the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22)

"And we urge you brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone." (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

A Christian must be willing to forego the exercise of his Christian liberty for the sake of his weaker brother. Our love for one another in Christ demands no less. When our actions, although not wrong in and of themselves, cause a weaker brother to sin against his own conscience, or become an obstacle to sharing the Gospel of salvation with him, then we are obliged by Christian concern to refrain from that action.

"Paul's meaning is that if I have knowledge of some weak brother who may go wrong because I indulge myself, I ought to forego the indulgence. I am obligated to this self-sacrifice, however, not by a vague danger, but by a pretty definite knowledge. If a man unable to control his appetite for drink were among my dinner guests, I ought not to serve drink.. I ought to omit either the man or the drink. But not both. It is unreasonable to demand that I exclude drink from my table simply because some weak brother who is not there may hear that wine was served and make it a pretext to go off on a spree. My conduct surely must not be governed by his bad logic. The principle is not: "A gets drunk; therefore B must not drink;" but: "A gets drunk; therefore A must not drink, and B must not drink when A is around." The declaration is conditional. If the apostle knows of definite cases in which his eating food will lead to others being encouraged to violate the dictates of conscience, then certainly he will never eat meat so long as there is real danger. But if he knows of no such danger, he will use his Christian freedom and eat without scruple, I Corinthians 10:25-27,29. He does not, of course, mean that the whole practice of Christians is to be regulated with a view to the possible scrupulousness of the narrowminded. That would be to sacrifice our divinely given liberty (2 Corinthians 3:17; Colossians 2:16-17) to the ignorant prejudices of bigots. The circumstances of this or that Christian may be such that it is his duty to abstain from intoxicants, although he is never tempted to drink to excess; but Christians in general are bound to no such rule, and it would be tyranny to try to impose such a rule." (Graebner, pp. 48-49)



*“The Worship of the True Church and the False Church”
by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1546*

The conscientious application of the Biblical concept of offense in matters of adiaphora must maintain a careful balance between a concern for the weaker brother and a concern for the truth of the Gospel.

"A Christian will forego his Christian liberty only as long as the truth of the Gospel is not at stake. If at any time a weak Christian should insist that his incorrect position is the right one and passes judgement on the strong Christian for his correct position, then the matter can no longer be treated as any other adiaphoron. In such cases a weak Christian becomes an erring brother. Consciously or unconsciously he has set out to rob a Christian of his liberty, to place him back under the law." (Dobberstein, p.354)

When the weak Christian begins to issue demands and passes judgement on the correct doctrine or practice of others, then a concern for the truth must take priority.

Luther wisely distinguishes between the brother who is weak, and must be dealt with patiently, and the brother who is obstinate, and must be dealt with firmly for his own good and the welfare of the church.

"Secondly, where there are weak Christians, who as yet have not heard, or been sufficiently instructed and strengthened by the word of the gospel, and so out of weakness and terror of conscience rather than obstinacy cannot receive both kinds, one may allow these to take communion in one kind for the time being...Thirdly, as for the obstinate who will neither learn nor practice this doctrine, one should simply offer them neither kind, but let them go. So St. Paul according to Galatians 2:3f., refused to circumcise Titus when the Jews wanted to insist on it and to condemn liberty. For such obstinate ones are not only imperfect in the practice of the doctrine, but want also to pervert and condemn the doctrine. This we should not suffer nor tolerate. For the doctrine must run straight and clear, even if the deed and practice creep or crawl, run or leap, after it. The pastor, who knows his people and daily associates with them, must distinguish between the weak and the obstinate. He can easily observe those folk who have a good disposition, who gladly listen to the preaching and gladly want to learn and be rightly guided thereby. But the rough and the perverse who pay no attention to preaching are under no circumstances to be considered weak, however loudly they claim to be so."
(Martin Luther, Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony, 1528)

The primary obligation of the church of Jesus Christ is to bear witness, clearly and unequivocally to the truth. Dr. Pieper's summarizes the issue in this way:

"The general rule to be observed is this: we must waive the use of our Christian liberty unless the truth of the Gospel is at stake. And that is the case when the weak brother insists that his error be acknowledged as the true doctrine and judges him who has the right knowledge, declaring him to be a transgressor of God's commandment. In this case, the weak brother becomes a false teacher, and then Colossians 2:16 applies: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect of an holy day," etc., and Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." It may happen that by the commanded use of the Christian liberty weak Christians are offended, that is, are induced to act contrary to their conscience; but the responsibility for the offense rest on those who, by demanding recognition for their error have forced us to make use of our Christian liberty." (Pieper, I, p. 562)

The question of immersion baptism is a good example of this principle at work. Scripture does not require a specific method of baptism. The Biblical term "baptize"

may refer to any application of water. At the time of the Reformation, the Anabaptists insisted that immersion was the only appropriate method of baptism, and that baptism by any other method was invalid. At that point, the method of baptism, which is in and of itself a matter of indifference, became a matter of confession. Lutherans, among whom the immersion of infants had been widely practiced, abandoned that custom and typically baptized by pouring or sprinkling to demonstrate their rejection of the Anabaptist assertion.

In the days following Luther's death, the Lutheran princes suffered major political and military defeats. The emperor assumed control of Saxony and attempted to reinstitute many traditional Roman Catholic practices under the guise of compromise. Although many of those practices were not inherently unscriptural, (i.e. recognition of the bishops, restoration of the mass, acceptance of the seven Roman Sacraments, vestments, fasting, etc.) Lutherans contended that their imposition by force required them to be rejected as a matter of confession. Article X of the Formula of Concord states the position of our church:

"We believe, teach, and confess that at a time of confession, as when enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the Holy Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially ministers of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God. In such a case we should not yield to adversaries even in matters of indifference, nor should we tolerate the imposition of such ceremonies on us by adversaries in order to undermine the genuine worship of God and to introduce and confirm their idolatry by force or chicanery...For here we are no loner dealing with external adiaphora which in their nature and essence are and remain of themselves free and which accordingly are not subject either to a command or to a prohibition, requiring us to use them or to discontinue them. Here we are dealing primarily with the chief article of our Christian faith, so that, as the apostle testifies, the truth of the Gospel might be preserved." (FCSD,X,10-14)

At times this balance between love for the weaker brother and love for the truth is difficult to maintain. We must carefully search our own hearts and evaluate our motives lest a sinful desire for self-assertion determine our action. Once again, Theodore Graebner's observations are most helpful:

"But it still remains true that this scrupulousness is a weakness, a fault. The church

must tolerate it, must even treat it tenderly; but encourage it the church must not. It has also, and even more, to cherish and vindicate the glorious liberty of the children of God. The weak in faith who scruple over meats and drinks, the times and seasons, are not to be allowed to obstruct the Gospel; not to be allowed to pervert others to their ignorance and error; not to be allowed to set up their defective, yes, their false, gospel as a rival to the perfect law, the law of liberty, which whosoever looketh into shall be blessed in his doing, James 1:25. The church can tolerate a private practice, or, for a time, a private belief that is defective; but it cannot tolerate a rival gospel. To do so would be, not charity, but unfaithfulness. The Christian who is weak in faith is not to be regarded as a schismatic so long as his error not does vitiate his life, and so long as he is content to hold his error in a private, individual, modest fashion. But as soon as he erects it into an aggressive, proselyting, intolerant faction, or schism, he is to be given place to, in the way of subjection, "no, not for an hour," Galatians 2:5; then the church must cry aloud and spare not. Then these weak brethren have become false brethren, who spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they may bring us into bondage, Galatians 2:4. A weak brother is tolerable, but a weak church, never! Indeed it is the duty of the church to work upon the weak, so that Christian liberty be acknowledged by the largest possible number." (Graebner, p.46)

BEER AT THE CHURCH BARBEQUE?

A Case Study in the Scriptural Doctrine of Offense

The question of whether or not a church should allow beer or wine to be served at church functions or events held on the church property comes up regularly. This question can serve as a helpful case study as we examine the Scriptural doctrine of offense and our responsibility to be concerned for and sensitive to one another within the Body of Christ.

OBSERVATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. One of the most frequent concerns expressed in this area is the apprehension that a change in our practice will cause offense among other Christians who do not approve of drinking. The objections of those from other denominations who believe that drinking is sinful are a matter of offense that is taken, not given. Their insistence that a practice which God's Word does not prohibit is sinful and their demand that all true Christians must conform to their view undermines the Gospel and our freedom in Christ. Like the pharisees of old they are guilty of "teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9) To yield to their objections would be to condone and encourage their error. By complying with their legalistic demands we could be giving the false impression to them and others that more is required of a Christian than simple faith in Jesus. (cf. Galatians 2:11-13) In any

case, the offense taken by those who believe that the consumption of alcohol is sinful, applies no matter where the drinking occurs. They are equally offended by the beer in a stein and the wine in a communion chalice. In their view, it is the action itself that is offensive; not merely its location. Thus, if we were to decide that because some might be offended the law of love requires abstinence, then in order to be consistent we must abstain from any public consumption of alcoholic beverages in deference to the scruples of those who oppose alcohol.

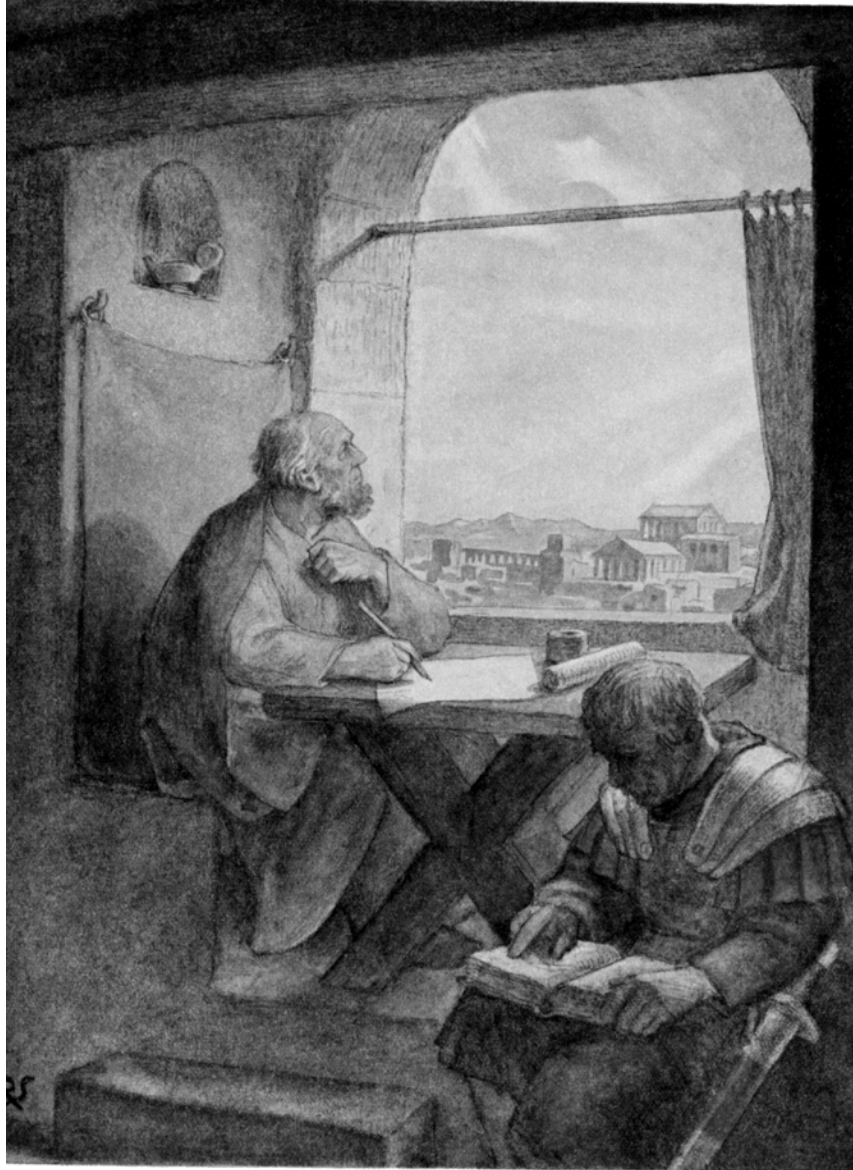
2. Consideration for those members of the congregation who struggle with a drinking problem or are alcoholic must be taken into account. Would the serving of beer or wine at specifically designated church functions lead them into temptation, place a stumbling block in their way, and possibly cause them to fall into sin? Given the widespread abuse of alcohol in our society and the possibility of drunkenness which would be a disgrace to the church would it not be better by avoiding the problem altogether by maintaining the general prohibition? Before a specific answer can be given we ought to consider the ethical principles involved in a more general way. Is there a moral difference between drunkenness and other sins? Does the possibility that some may abuse an activity to sinful excess mean that the church should totally avoid it? If so, should we do away with church suppers because some among us are gluttons or at least stop offering dessert because we have diabetics in the congregation? Or, should all church socials be prohibited because some among us are gossips? Virtually any activity could potentially be the occasion for sinful excess or abuse. It would seem to be more responsible to prohibit the excess and to clearly establish a policy of zero tolerance for sinful behavior than to attempt to ban every activity which could potentially lead to excess. A distinction must be made between activities which could theoretically lead to sinful excess and activities which are inherently prone to excess. In the case of the latter, discretion would seem to dictate that the activity in question should be avoided. It is irresponsible to place one's self in a situation where temptation is probable. As Luther has observed: *"You cannot stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from making a nest in your hair."*

3. For some, the issue is simply a matter of propriety. They are convinced that drinking beer or wine at church events or on church property is inappropriate while it may be completely permissible to do so elsewhere. However, by adopting this admittedly double standard we run the risk of being perceived as hypocrites. If it is permissible to drink elsewhere, why shouldn't it be permissible to drink at church sponsored social activities? If there is something wrong with drinking we shouldn't do it anywhere. If there isn't anything wrong with drinking why don't we allow it at

church functions? Are we different people at church than we are anywhere else? Is there any valid reason why different rules of behavior should apply? Those who oppose drinking altogether may see our double standard as a tacit admission that we really know it's wrong to drink but we choose to do it anyway when our church is not directly involved.

Questions of propriety are by nature matters of individual taste and preference. Thus we must always be willing to tolerate a diversity of opinion in such matters. Within a Christian congregation, issues of this sort will typically be resolved by majority vote, after conscientious efforts to achieve consensus. Those in the minority ought to be willing to defer to the preference of their fellow believers so that unity and harmony may be maintained among us. By the same token, the majority ought to be willing to defer or forego the implementation of its will, if some within the family of believers remain troubled by the decision and the result of its implementation would be division or tension among us. All of God's people should be motivated by a desire to build the body of Christ instead of a selfish insistence upon getting our own way.

Romans Chapter 15



"Paul in Rome" by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 1-2

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

"We who are strong ought to bear with..." - The theme of Chapter 14 continues through the first half of this chapter but in a more general way. There are no further

references to dietary observance or the question of the Sabbath. This concern applies across the board, throughout the Christian life. Paul has previously indicated his agreement with the perspective of the **“strong.”** Now, for the first time, he specifically designates them as such and exhorts them as one who shares their perspective - **“we who are strong.”** The transition to a more general discussion is further indicated by a shift in the term for the **“weak”** the Greek word *“astehnes”* to the word *“adynaton”* which means to be without power or capability. The verb, **“ought”** (Greek - *“opheilomen”*) is placed at the beginning of the sentence in the Greek text for particular emphasis. This is *“the personal religious “ought of grace which has its basis in God’s redeeming act in Christ.”* (Franzmann, p. 255) (cf. John 13:14; 1 John 3:16; Romans 1:5,14) It is used to describe an obligation that is incumbent upon Christians by virtue of their faith in Christ. The obligation in this instance is **“to bear with the failings of the weak.”** The verb means to take up a load and carry it for someone else. The *Revised English Bible* aptly paraphrases the verse in this way: *“Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of the weak.”* The nature of the intended support is further defined by the phrase **“and not to please ourselves.”** Martin Franzmann explains:

“Bearing with the weak is something more positive than toleration of them or indulgence toward them; it means self-renunciation on the part of the strong. They can no longer “please themselves,” look out for their own interests, even if that interest is religious self-development. They “bear with” the weak by taking the weak upon themselves as their responsibility, by existing for and serving the weak, by imparting their strength to the weak in a gracious ministry that builds him up.”
(Franzmann, p. 255)

“Each of us should please his neighbor for his good to build him up.” Verse two restates the point. The language - **“please his neighbor** recalls the *“Golden Rule”* of Leviticus 19:18- **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** The term **“neighbor”** occurs 16 times in the New Testament, always in reference to this classic text. In Chapter 13 the apostle cited Leviticus 19:18 in discussing the primacy of love in the Christian life (cf. Romans 13:9). Mere self-satisfaction can never be the goal of the Christian. Instead, the motive of the believer must always be **“to please his neighbor for his good to build him up.”** The *“pleasing”* in question certainly does not refer to a servile catering to the selfish desires and whims of others. Paul has sternly warned elsewhere that Christians are not to be *“men-pleasers”* (Ephesians 6:6; cf. also Galatians 1:10; Colossians 3:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:4)). The Christian seeks to **“please his neighbor”** in the sense of strengthening and supporting him in his faith

and in his spiritual growth. “Building up” (Greek - “oikodome”) is the characteristic New Testament word for such spiritual advancement. It serves to emphasize our interdependence upon one another as living stones within the temple of Christ’s church.

Verses 3-4

For even Christ did not please Himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.



“The Suffering Servant” by Rudolf Schäfer

“For even Christ did not please Himself...” - Our Lord Jesus is the prime example of such selfless living. Throughout His earthly life, Christ humbly submitted to the will of the Father for the salvation of humanity. Neither the devil’s subtle temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), nor the anguish in the Garden (Luke 22:39-46), nor the agony and humiliation of the cross (Matthew 27:41-44) could dissuade Him from that course. All that He did, He did for others. Paul cites the prophetic words of Psalm 69:9 and places them upon the lips of the Savior as an illustration of his point. After Psalms 22 and 110, Psalm 69 is the psalm most frequented quoted in the New Testament. The messianic nature of the Psalm is clearly attested by all of the New Testament

references (cf. John 2:17; 15:25; Romans 11:9,10; Acts 1:20 Matthew 23:38) In Romans 11:9 Paul attributes the human authorship of this Psalm to David, a claim disputed by many modern commentators, including the great Lutheran Old Testament scholar Franz Delitzsch. R.C.H. Lenski defers to the apostle's opinion in this matter, ironically noting, "*Paul is a much safer authority than Delitzsch.*" (Lenski, p. 859) David, the Messiah's ancestor and predecessor, "*becomes a typical example of the things that are experienced by all who are truly zealous for the Lord's house.*" (Leupold, p. 501) The psalmist's experiences become the counterpart and the preview of those of the coming Messiah whom he represents. The point of the quotation is simply that those who oppose and resist God also oppose and resist His representative. Recognizing this fact, Jesus willingly endured their insults and persecution as a part of His submission to the will of the Father for the salvation of humanity. Origen, a great Bible scholar of the early church notes: "*Christ did not please Himself, nor did He think it was robbery to be equal with God, but wanting to please men, that is, to save them, suffered the reproaches of those who reproached God, was it is written.*" (Bray, p. 354) In his commentary on this text, John Chrysostom stresses the voluntary nature of Christ's suffering: "*He had the power not to have been reproached, power not to have suffered what He did suffer, had He been minded to look to His own things.*" (Moo, p. 869)

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us..." - Paul explains the pertinence of the precedent by reminding his readers of the didactic purpose of Scripture. The Old Testament continues to play a crucial role in the life of the people of God in accordance with God's plan and purpose. He inspired the written record of His mighty deeds and promises so that they might serve to teach and instruct His people today. To the Corinthians Paul asserts: "***These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.***" (1 Corinthians 10:11) Martin Franzmann points out:

"Paul appropriates Israel's Bible for the new Israel of the last days...Through Christ the Old Testament, this dark, perplexing book, becomes clear and luminous for the eyes of faith; through Him the veil which screens its deepest and true meaning from the eyes of hardened Israel is removed (2 Corinthians 3:15-16). Then the Old Testament speaks encouragement and inspires steadfastness; it gives us hope."
(Franzmann, p. 257)

The central role of Scripture in maintaining the confidence and endurance of the

people of God is clearly asserted. For this very reason, God caused His book to be written - **“so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** Those who discount the Bible as an ancient book irrelevant to the cares and concerns of modern man or those who deny the Bible as an unreliable human production riddled with inaccuracies and errors both deprive God’s people of

that hope by depriving them of the means to obtain and sustain that hope.



“Come Unto Me” by Rudolf Schäfer

The proposition **“through”** (Greek - **“dia”**) is repeated in the Greek text to emphasize that both **“endurance”** and **“encouragement”** are directly linked to the teaching role of Scripture. **“Endurance”**

(Greek - **“hypomone”**) is the ongoing willingness to remain under the load of a heavy burden. It occurs thirty-two times in the New Testament, usually in reference to the disciple’s submission to trial and tribulation.

“Encouragement” (Greek - **“paraklesis”**) is used twenty-nine times in the New Testament. Its most prominent variation is the title **“Paraclete”** ascribed to God the Holy Spirit by Jesus in John 16:7. It literally means one who comes alongside another to offer aid and assistance. These are the precious blessings which

God offers in His Word to create and sustain the **“hope”** of His people. **“Hope”** in the Bible is never the impotent desire for change or improvement. It is the rock-solid confidence of the believer that the promises of God hold true and that although we



“In the Days of the Reformation” by Eduard Gebhardt

have not yet seen the fulfillment of those promises, they will most certainly come to pass. That hope is sure because it rests completely upon God and His Word, not upon the attitude or actions of men.

Verse 5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity...” - A

profound concern for the unity of the church has been Paul’s underlying theme since the beginning this discussion about the strong and the weak in 14:1. That concern now comes explicitly to the fore. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, the prayer that Christians may recognize and implement the unity which is God’s gift to His people is closely linked to teaching authority of the Word (Vs. 4 - Greek - *“didaskalia...ton graphon”*) (cf. John 17:17,21,23; Ephesians 4:1-16). Paul’s prayer is that while diversity in adiaphora must be tolerated in Christ-like humility, there may be, nonetheless, complete unanimity where Scripture speaks clearly. Paul is, in effect, paraphrasing the historic slogan of the Moravian Brethren - *“In essentials, unity - In non-essentials, diversity - In all things charity”* - that is, if *“essentials”* are understood to be all Biblical doctrine and *“non-essentials”* are understood to be all matters of adiaphora and human opinion. As the diversity in adiaphora is motivated by love for Christ so also *“a spirit of unity”* is motivated by a compelling desire to *“follow Christ Jesus.”* As God’s people realize and demonstrate this unity it becomes possible to *“glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* with *“one heart and mouth.”* The opposite is, of course, also true. When God’s people are divided and the church does not speak with one voice

on matters of Biblical doctrine, this division and doctrinal diversity detracts from the glory of God and serves to discredit Him and His Word in the eyes of the world. Lenski explains the critical importance of this unity as a reflection of the unity and glory of God:

*“As God’s glory is one and unchangeable and His every deed, gift, blessing are one, so our making these manifest must be one. The Word that tells of Him is one and our apprehending and our voicing of that Word must thus also be one, whatever part of it we mention. This oneness of conviction and confession, like our mystical oneness in the *Una Sancta*, is far deeper than many suppose, for its ultimate basis, source, and substance are the oneness of God and of His glory. Here we have an answer to the idea that each man may have his own views and the right to his own personal views, to the idea that we may agree to disagree, that creeds and confessions are hindrances, that creedlessness is the ideal. Where oneness of mind and mouth is lost, somebody is wrong, somebody is not glorifying God but himself, is darkening the glory of God, forsaking the Word, injuring the church, putting in jeopardy his connection with the *Una Sancta*, perhaps tearing himself away from its spiritual bond. The clearer our view of the ultimate ground of our confessional oneness is, the more serious and dangerous our division and rents in confession will appear.”*
(Lenski, p. 864)

Verses 7-12

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “Therefore, I will praise You among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to Your name.” Again it says: “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him all you peoples.” And again Isaiah says: “The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him.”

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...” - This segment of the epistle now draws to its conclusion. “*Acceptance*” is an active concept denoting much more than minimal toleration. It indicates the love and mutual concern which characterizes the relationships between family members. Earlier in Romans 14:3 Paul admonished the weak not to judge the strong because God had “***accepted***” them. The same argument is now broadened to establish Christ’s acceptance of all Christians as the foundation for our acceptance of one another. We are all people whom God loves

in Christ. Our acceptance of one another is the inevitable result of His acceptance of us all. The mutual love of God's people for one another serves to demonstrate the reality of His love before the world and thus glorifies Him - *"in order to bring praise to God."*



"Behold Your King Comes to You" by Rudolf Schäfer

"For I tell you that Christ has become a servant..." - The introductory phrase, *"For I tell you"* signals a solemn doctrinal declaration which summarizes one of the basic theological themes of the epistle - the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant by the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God . As Paul asserts in Galatians 3:14 - *"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."* Christ voluntarily submitted to the servant role in order to accomplish this divine purpose - *"on behalf of God's truth."* By fulfilling God's promises and covenant commitments to the patriarchs, Christ vindicated the truthfulness, the faithfulness,

of God. The use of the formal messianic title *"Christ"* rather than the personal name *"Jesus"* emphasizes His role as the Anointed One of God, the promised Savior. The text literally reads - *"Christ has become a servant of the circumcision."* The NIV offers the interpretive paraphrase - *"a servant of the Jews."* That is, no doubt, the intent, but the paraphrase lacks the precise emphasis of the original which focuses specifically on the ritual obligations of the Old Testament. Although Christ as the

Son of God was not subject to the law, He submitted Himself to the demands of the law in order to accomplish the plan of salvation.. He was ***“Born under the law to redeem those under the law, the we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** (Galatians 3:4-5) The concept of Christ taking on the role of a servant is reminiscent of Philippians 2: ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*** (Philippians 2:5-7).

“So that the Gentiles may glorify god for His mercy...” - Even the obstinate rejection of the Messiah by the majority of Israel is transformed in God’s grace to a source of blessing for the Gentile world (cf. Romans 9-11). Lenski summarizes the thrust of the argument:

“Paul’s purpose is admonitory, to make the Roman Jewish and Gentile Christians be of one mind among themselves in accord with Christ Jesus and to glorify God with one mouth (vs. 5-6). Their oneness centers in Christ and in God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; four times we read “Christ,” five times “God.” (Vs.5-9) The glorifying with one mind and with one mouth will strike two chords: truth - mercy, but how harmoniously they accord! The Jewish Christian as well as the Gentile Christian thinks not only of himself but also of the other; each sees God’s glory in what Christ has done for him, and also for the other.” (Lenski, pp. 869-870)

“As it is written...” - The customary phrase introduces a series of Old Testament citations to document the point and demonstrate the united chorus of praise to the glory of God from both Jews and Gentiles. The first quotation comes from Psalm 18:49, words from the inspired pen of King David: ***“Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to Your Name.”*** David is the greatest of Israel’s historic monarchs. God had given him the victory over the Gentile nations surrounding his kingdom. David rejoices in that victory as a means of glorifying God among the nations. The second quotation is drawn from Deuteronomy 32:43 - ***“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!”*** The phrase celebrates what God has done and summons the Gentiles to join with the Children of Israel in rejoicing over God’s mighty deeds on behalf of His own. Jews and Gentiles together singing the praises of God - that is the theme of this series of quotations. Next, the apostle turns again to the Book of Psalms, this time to Psalm 117:1 - ***“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him all you peoples.”*** Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible - only two verse long. The verse which follows this citation refers to the ***“mercy”*** and the ***“truth”*** of God as the basis for mankind’s praise of the Lord.



*"Melchizedek's Benediction of Abraham"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

Finally, the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10 concludes the list of quotations: *"The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him."* The juxtaposition of the *"Root of Jesse"* a Messianic title which stresses Christ's identity as the scion of Israel's royal house, and the hope of the Gentiles reinforces the point that God's plan of salvation included Jew and Gentile from the very beginning.

Verse 13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"May the God of hope fill you..." - This is the first of three magnificent benedictions in the closing verses of the letter to the

Romans. It is, as Donald Grey Barnhouse affirms *"a great summary of the blessed life in the brotherhood formed by our oneness in Christ."* (Boice, p. 1835) The words of Paul's prayer of blessing are directed to *"the God of hope."* The title acknowledges God as the sole source and giver of our hope. It is particularly appropriate in the aftermath of the preceding quotation's reference to the hope of the Gentiles. Four qualities are highlighted within the blessing - hope, joy, peace, and trust. Hope is given particular emphasis by its primary position and its repetition at the end. All flow from God and are graciously bestowed upon us *"by the power of the Holy Spirit."* Paul's prays for a superabundance of these blessings- *"May the God of hope fill you...so that you may overflow."* Each of these concepts has been enunciated and elucidated previously in the letter. The are now combined as the

culmination of Paul's desire for the Christians in Rome.

Verses 14-16

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

“I myself am convinced, my brothers...” - The text now turns to personal matters. The apostle explains, at some length, how he has come to write this letter at this time and describes his present activities and future plans for a visit to Rome. Opening with the warm fraternal greeting, *“my brothers,”* He begins the segment by affirming his confidence in the spiritual maturity of the congregation. The pronouns are emphatic for particular emphasis - *“I myself - you yourselves.”* The *“goodness”* which characterizes the Roman church suggests kindness and generosity toward others. The term (Greek - *“agathosune”*) is relatively rare. It occurs only in Biblical Greek with primary reference to kindness, thoughtfulness, and charity toward the poor. The apostle applauds the congregation's familiarity with the full range of Christian doctrine - *“complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”*

“I have written to you quite boldly on some points....” - Paul explains that their level of spiritual maturity and knowledge enabled him to write to them in an unusually forthright and direct manner - *“quite boldly.”* He subtly suggests that his teaching to them is nothing new or novel, but that his goal was to simply *“remind”* them again of things which they already knew. The basis and authority for his reminder is his apostolic commission - *“because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.”* The assertion of Paul's apostolic authority is both gentle and unmistakable. Issues of Jewish/Gentile concern have been a primary emphasis in the epistle, issues which clearly fall within the purview of Paul's unique role as the apostle specifically designated by Christ to carry the Gospel into the Gentile world. It is interesting to note that Paul does not use the title *“apostle”* in this context. Instead he identifies himself as *“a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.”* The Greek word for *“minister”* is *“leitourgos,”* a word used in the Septuagint with primary reference to the role of the Levitical priesthood in the conduct of the temple services. Carrying on



“Aaron the High Priest Before the Altar of God” by E.M. Lilien

this theme, Paul uses the picturesque language of the Old Testament sacrificial system to present the mission to the Gentiles in a manner that is most accessible and acceptable to the Jews - *“with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God.”* The sanctification of the Gentiles as *“an offering acceptable to God”* is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The verb is passive. God the Holy Spirit is the active agent in this sanctification, not the Gentiles themselves.

Verses 17-19

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the

Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ.



“And So We Turn to the Gentiles” by Frederic Shields

“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.” - Paul hastens to clarify the reason for his claim to a central role in the mission to the Gentiles, lest his words be dismissed as mere bragging. The issue here, he argues, is not personal aggrandizement but the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. God has accomplished that which He intended in the ministry of St. Paul. As Paul rejoices in the success of that ministry, he seeks to draw attention, not to himself, but to the God who called him and enabled him to do that which he was called to do. Complete credit is given to God. The language is most emphatic - *“I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.”* The apostle acknowledges that he is nothing more than the humble instrument in the hand of the Lord. All that which he has said and done - including the *“signs and miracles”* which have been performed to authenticate the message - have been done *“through the power of the Holy Spirit.”* *“Signs and miracles”* is the standard Biblical phrase for the miracles of God. *“Signs”* (Greek -

“*semeia*”) indicates the purpose of the supernatural feat while “*miracles*” (Greek - “*terata*”) the supernatural event itself.



“The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit” by Rudolf Schäfer

“*So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum...*” - Paul uses the geographic poles of Jerusalem in Judea and Illyricum, north of Macedonia on the Balkan peninsula to summarize the scope of his ministry to date. Paul’s presence in Jerusalem at the outset of his ministry is well documented in Acts and Galatians (cf. Acts 9:26-30;26:20; Galatians 1:18-22). Illyricum was viewed as the far northern fringe of the empire. Paul may have passed through the region during his third missionary journey

(Acts 20:1-2). Wherever he journeyed in response to God's call he "**fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ.**" The phrase emphasizes the faithfulness of Paul's preaching.

Verses 20-22

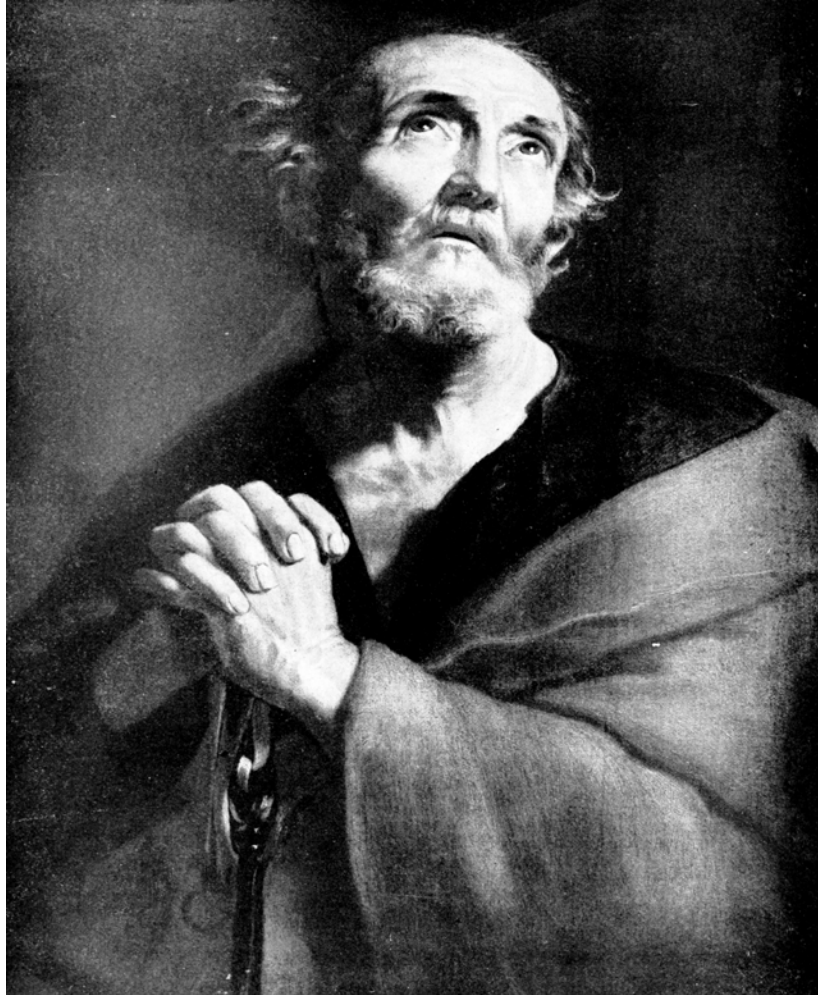
It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, "Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

"It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel..." - Paul perceived himself to be a missionary on the frontier of Christianity. "*Paul here indicates that he believed that God had given him the ministry of establishing strategic churches in virgin gospel territory.*" (Moo, p. 896) The history of the early church seems to indicate that this was a general perception of the apostolic role. The chosen thirteen were sent out to found new churches where none had existed before, and then move on to establish other churches throughout the world. The care and development of the congregations which had been founded was delegated to others chosen for that role by the apostles (i.e. Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete). Accordingly, Paul's assertion is not merely a matter of personal inclination or preference. This was, in fact, the strategic purpose for which Christ had called His apostles.

"And this was the very call of the apostles: to lay the foundation and not to build upon it (Note 1 Corinthians 3:10). This was not only Paul's duty; the other apostles likewise knew that their calling was laying the foundation in one place or locality; as soon as the Gospel was well established, they moved on to a new locality. For this reason the Gospel extended so far in so short a period." (Lenski, p. 886)

The point is made here to explain why Paul has not found it necessary before this to visit Rome. The church in that great city was already well established. Paul does not refer to the involvement of another apostle in the founding of the Roman congregations and it is therefore "*quite likely that the church had not been founded by, nor visited by, any apostle at this point.*" (Moo, p. 897) This point becomes particularly significant given the claims of the Roman papacy that the apostle Peter was the founder and first bishop of the church in Rome and the all subsequent bishops of Rome therefore enjoy primacy over the universal church as the successors of Peter. As the following "*Excursus*" demonstrates, this claim cannot be validated either Scripturally or historically. The absence of any reference to Peter in Paul's

closing comments here in the Epistle to the Romans are of particular significance in this longstanding debate.



“The Apostle Peter” by Pieter van Lint

Peter and the Church in Rome

Vatican I declared with absolute assurance that the apostle Peter was the founding bishop of the church of Rome and that having been martyred there, the Roman Church has been consecrated by his blood. Therefore, *“on account of the greater authority of the pryncedom,”* the church of Rome shall be the foremost of all churches to whose authority every Christian Church must conform. The Council decreed:

“That which the Prince of Shepherds and great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ our Lord, established in the person of the blessed Apostle Peter to secure the perpetual welfare and lasting good of the Church, must, by the same institution, necessarily remain unceasingly in the Church; which, being founded upon the Rock, will stand firm to the end of the world. For none can doubt, and it is known to all ages, that the holy and blessed Peter, the Prince and Chief of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith and foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of mankind, and lives, presides, and judges, to this day and always, in his successors, the bishops of the holy see of Rome, which was founded by him and consecrated by his blood. Whence, whoever succeeds to Peter in this See, does, by the institution of Christ Himself obtain the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. The disposition made by Incarnate Truth therefore remains, and blessed Peter, abiding through the strength of the Rock in the power that he received, has not abandoned the direction of the Church. Wherefore, it has at all times been necessary that every particular Church - that is to say, the faithful throughout the world - should agree with the Roman Church, on account of the greater authority of the principedom which this has received; that all being associated in the unity of that See whence the rights of communion spread to all, might grow together as members of the one Head in the compact unity of the body. If, then, any should deny that it is by the institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.”
(Schaff, p. 261f.)

The definitive assertions of Vatican I notwithstanding, the historical relationship between the Apostle Peter and the churches of Rome remains a matter of widespread speculation and debate.

The New Testament makes no mention of a visit by Peter to the city of Rome. Acts tells us nothing of such a visit and Paul’s letter to the Roman church gives no hint that this church has had any connection with Peter. The chronology of events in the Book of Acts is difficult to reconcile with the assertion that Peter spent a protracted period of time in Rome. Peter’s activities seem to have remained based in Jerusalem and Palestine until the heightened persecution which followed the martyrdom of James the brother of John which took place around 44 AD (Acts 12). Subsequently, Peter appears in Antioch in Syria (Galatians 2) and may have spent some time among the congregations of northern Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). By the time of the Jerusalem Council in 49 AD, Peter is back in Jerusalem again and actively participates in the discussion of Gentile responsibility to Old Testament ceremonial law. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans around 58 AD at the end of his third missionary journey. He was

arrested in Jerusalem shortly thereafter and arrived in Rome as a prisoner in 61 AD. Acts 28 provides a detailed account of Paul's arrival in Rome and his imprisonment in the city. The absence of any reference or allusion to Peter in Romans or Acts 28 strongly suggest that Peter was not yet in the city at that time. The Neronian persecution broke out between 64 and 67 AD. Early church tradition from the Second Century on strongly indicates that both Peter and Paul died in Rome in the course of



“The Neronian Persecution in Rome” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

that persecution. The remains of an ancient shrine in memory of the martyrdom of Peter, dating to the middle of the Second Century, were discovered beneath the altar of St. Peter's Basilica in the 1940's. Although the Vatican's claim that bones uncovered nearby are actually those of the Apostle remains shrouded in controversy, the presence of the shrine itself clearly indicates widespread acceptance of the view that St. Peter died in Rome by the middle of the Second Century.

These facts would seem to rule out the likelihood that Peter spent a protracted period of time in Rome or that he played an influential role in the founding or formation of the church. The widespread assertion after the Third Century that Peter was the

founder and first bishop of the Church of Rome had more to do with rivalries and power struggles among the leading churches of ancient Christendom than with historical reality.

The closest we can come to a Biblical connection between the Apostle Peter and the city of Rome is an cryptic reference at the end of 1 Peter. Here, at the conclusion of his first general epistle, the Apostle writes: “***She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son, Mark.***” (1 Peter 5:13) Most commentators believe that this is a veiled reference to the city of Rome. Here, as in the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 14:8; 17:5), the fallen and by now desolate city of Babylon, once the oppressor of God’s people and master of the world, comes to represent the great wickedness of the pagan world. Babylon is used as a cryptic designation for Rome, the current center of worldly power and iniquity. Lenski suggests that as these careful words are consistent with the historical situation in Rome during the mid sixties. Nero is on the imperial throne and his capricious and irrational reign is degenerating into violent instability. If 1 Peter was written in Rome at this time it was written in the context of imminent persecution. There would have been ample reason for caution in identifying Peter’s location. “*This salutation has the sound of: morituri salutemus!*” (Lenski, p. 232 “*Morituri salutemus*” is the traditional greeting of the gladiators before the emperor in the arena - “*We, who are about to die, salute you!*”)

Note also in the 1 Peter 5:13 text the intimate reference to Mark as “***my son.***” This is presumably John Mark, well known from the Acts and the writings of Paul.(cf. Acts 12:12-13:13; 15:37f;. Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). The historical evidence from the early church clearly indicates a close relationship between John Mark and the Apostle Peter. The fathers refer to Mark as Peter’s secretary (Papias, 140 AD), and describe the Gospel of Mark as “the memoirs of Peter.” (Justin Martyr, 106 AD) This is significant for our purpose because of the close connection between Mark and the city of Rome. Those same early church fathers report that the Gospel was written in Rome, around the time of Peter’s martyrdom. The fact that the text of Mark’s Gospel includes more “*Latinisms,*” that is terms and phrases based upon the Latin language, which was spoken in Rome, than any other New Testament book also tends to support this tradition. Thus 1 Peter 5:13's reference to John Mark as “***my son***” becomes a significant in the debate over potential Biblical evidence for the presence of St. Peter in Rome.

Contemporary Roman Catholic scholar J. Michael Miller offers the following objective assessment of the evidence on the issue of Peter's relationship with the city and church of Rome:

“There is no explicit Scriptural evidence that Peter ever went to Rome, nor any for the route he traveled, the time of his arrival, the length of his stay there, or his role in the community...Early non-biblical sources, however, provide solid evidence that Peter passed his closing years in Rome, before his martyrdom which probably occurred during the Neronian persecution of 64. It is impossible to affirm with any certainty how long he spent in Rome. A third century legend recounts a twenty-five year stay in the city. More likely, however, is the opinion that Peter spent no long period in Rome before 58, when Paul wrote to the Romans. He may have arrived only in the sixties, shortly before his martyrdom. Peter, then, was not the original missionary who brought Christianity to Rome.” (Miller, p. 50)



**“St Peter Bestowing His Authority on Pope Leo III”
- 7th Century Mosaic from the Church of S.
Giovanni in Rome**

Martin Luther had come to a similar conclusion nearly five centuries earlier. In his personal opinion, Peter may well have been in Rome, but certainly not for the extended stay asserted by the papacy's apologists. Luther also recognized that his opinion in this matter could not be proven from the Bible. Accordingly, the absence of an explicit Biblical link between Peter and the city of Rome became an important component in the reformer's rejection of the papacy's claim to absolute authority in the church. In his characteristically colorful manner Luther writes:

“Although I maintained that St. Peter was in Rome, and still do, I would not want to die for it as an article of faith. Moreover, I do not know how it could be either maintained or proven; indeed, no one, as far as I know, can prove it. It is not an

article of faith, and no one is a heretic if he does not believe St. Peter was in Rome. On the other hand, it is outrageous to deny it unless it is thoroughly refuted. The safest thing is to let it remain uncertain and doubtful. For we ought to believe only what God has commanded us to believe in Scripture, and no one should either add to it or subtract from it...For if it cannot be proven with certainty by Scripture that St. Peter was in Rome (which is not possible), the papacy already lies in mud and amounts to nothing. For just as unnecessary as it is to believe that St. Peter was in Rome, since Scripture does not say so, so it is equally unnecessary to believe that the pope is the heir to the see of Peter, and therefore the pope. Now we see what the pope is sitting on. All they do with their propaganda is enable us to find their false and unworthy foundation even earlier, and so we may see them unhorse themselves with their wild raging. That is why I come to the conclusion here that it is unnecessary to consider the pope either the pope or the heir to St. Peter's throne until they verify with Scripture that St. Peter was in Rome. Hey now, you papists! Be clever and lively, and look for spear, dagger, and sword to drive away this fog of Scripture!" (Luther, 39, p.205)

The identification of Peter as the first in an unbroken succession of Roman bishops is also fraught with historical difficulties. While there are abundant indications, beginning at the end of the First Century, that Peter and Paul were both in Rome and were martyred there, it is not until the middle of the Third Century that we find an explicit assertion that Peter was the first bishop of the Church in Rome (St. Cyprian, 252 AD). This reflects the historical reality that the “*mono-episcopacy*,” that is, the church order in which local churches are governed by a single bishop, appears to have evolved gradually over the first 200 years of Christian history. The existence of an single ruling bishop cannot be reliably documented in Rome or elsewhere prior to the middle of the Second Century. Within the next few decades, however, Eamon Duffy, in his recently published “*A History of the Popes*” describes the earliest years of the congregation in Rome in this way:

“Christian organization in Rome reflected that of the Jewish community out of which it had grown. The Roman synagogues, unlike their counterparts in Antioch, had no central organization. Each one conducted its own worship, appointed its own leaders, and cared for its own members. In the same way, the ordering of the early Christian community in Rome seems to have reflected the organization of the synagogues which had originally sheltered it, and to have consisted of a constellation of independent churches, meeting the houses of the wealthy members of the community. Each of these house churches had its own leaders, the elders or presbyters...To begin with, indeed, there was no “pope”, no bishop as such, for the church in Rome was slow to develop the office of chief presbyter or bishop.” (Duffy, p. 7)

Father Miller concurs with this assessment and concludes that it is “*anachronistic*” to consider Peter the first bishop of Rome:

“In recent years, many scholars have suggested that the original form of pastoral government in Rome following Peter’s martyrdom was more collegial than monarchical. After examining the available documentation, Eno concludes that it “points us in the direction of assuming that in the first century and into the second, there was no bishop of Rome, in the usual sense given to that title.” (Miller, p. 61)

Thus, *1 Clement*, an epistle written around 100 AD by one of the leaders of the Roman Church, indicates that at that point the government of the Church in Rome consisted of a group of elders and bishops, rather than any one individual. A generation later, around 120 AD, “*The Shepherd of Hermas*” another early letter originating in Rome, refers collectively to “*the elders that preside over the church*” in that city without any mention of a single ruling bishop. The first historical evidence of a presiding bishop in Rome comes from a conversation reported by Polycarp with a man named Anicetus, the bishop of Rome, on the question of the date of Easter. In the official Roman lists of the popes, Anicetus (155-166 AD) is cited as the eleventh pontiff. To label the ten individuals who precede Anicetus as bishops of Rome is a matter of speculation, conjecture, and imagination.

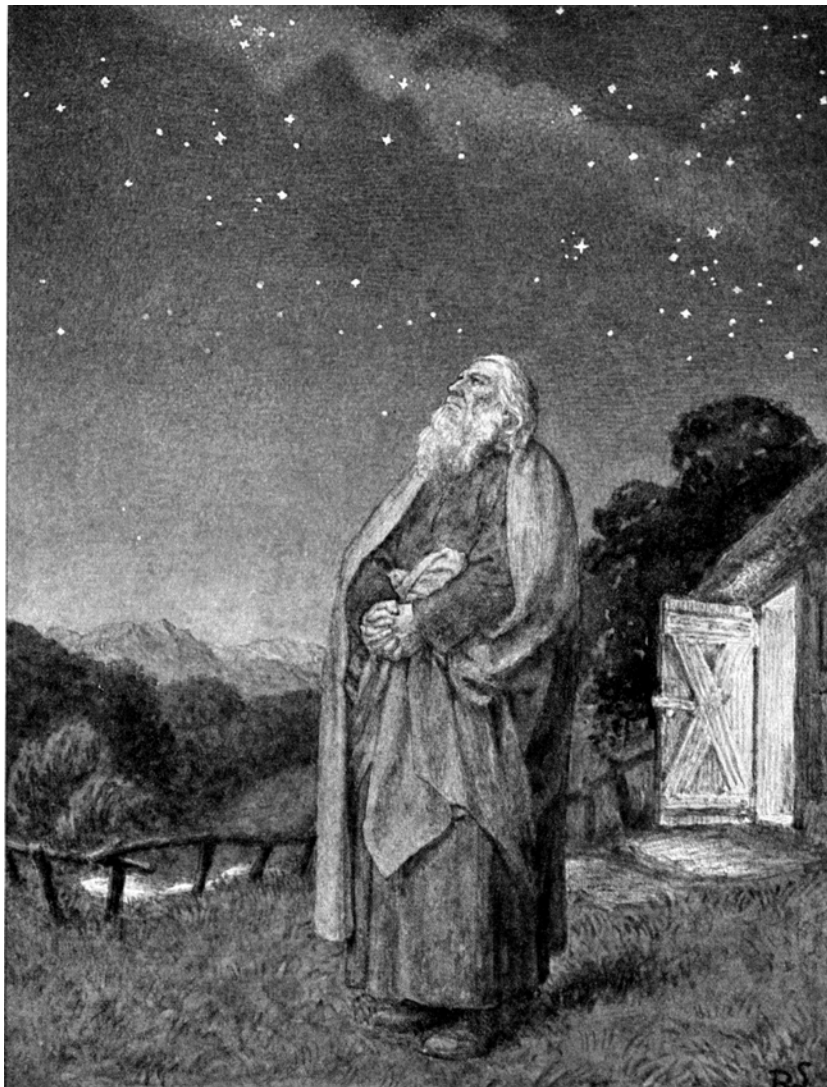
The preeminence of the Roman Church within Christendom, particularly Western Christendom, by the Third Century is the result of a combination of historical and theological factors. Duffy notes:

“A general belief in the precedence of Rome emerged in the Christian writings of the Second Century, and was accepted apparently without challenge. From its beginnings, this was rooted in the claim that both Peter and Paul had ended their lives in martyrdom at Rome under the emperor Nero.” (Duffy, p. 5)

The ability to claim a dual apostolic pedigree made Rome unique among all the churches of the West. Add to this the prestige and power of the city of Rome itself as the historic capital of the Empire, the traditional seat of supreme governmental power, and the hub of world commerce, and the unique stature of the Roman Church can be readily understood. This preeminence, however, in no way equated to the supremacy asserted by Vatican I. Nor was it perceived to be based upon any unique jurisdiction bestowed upon Peter over the other apostles, or through Peter to his would-be successors, the bishops of Rome. At best, the bishop of Rome was

considered to be the first among equals and his advice or instruction while influential and respected, was often disregarded by other bishops who considered themselves to be his peers. Rivalries and power struggles among the bishops of the empire's largest cities continued through the centuries which followed, ultimately narrowing down to competition between the Pope of Rome and his counterpart in the empire's second capital city, the Patriarch of Constantinople. This rivalry would result in the Great Schism (1054 AD) and the tragic division of Christendom between Roman Catholicism in the West and Eastern Orthodoxy in the East.

+ + +



“Rather, as it is written: Those who were not told...” - The section concludes with a quotation from Isaiah 52:15 which foretells the broadcasting of the Messianic gospel throughout the world to those who *“were not told”* and *“have not heard.”* The inclusion of the Gentile world in the plan of salvation is not an afterthought or a change in plans. God intended from the very beginning to bless all nations through the promised Descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:3). Paul clearly perceives his mission to the Gentiles as the fulfillment of the ancient promises of the Old Testament.

“The Call of Abraham” by Rudolf Schäfer

“This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.” - Once again, as in the beginning of the letter (Romans 1:11-13) Paul asserts his long-standing desire to visit the Roman congregations. One commentator describes these words as Paul’s “*semi-apology*” for not having been to Rome previously (Moo, p. 898).

Verses 23-24

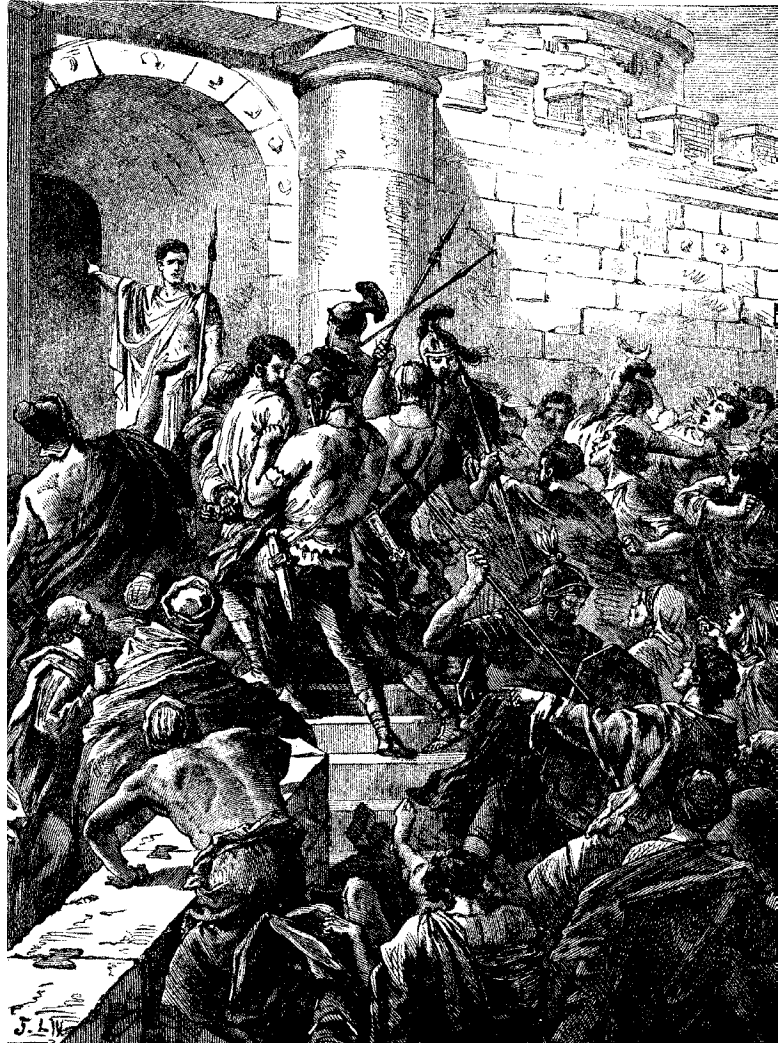
But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

“But now that there is no more place for me to work...” - But now conditions have changed. A visit to Rome is finally imminent. Paul’s ministry in the East has basically been concluded with the exception of some unfinished business in regard to the special offering for the saints in Jerusalem, to which he will refer shortly. For the first time, he is nearly in a position to realize his long-standing desire to visit the congregation in Rome. Evidently, Paul hopes to use Rome as his base of support for the new initiative in the Roman province of Spain on the western borders of the Empire. Most scholars agree that Paul realized his dream of a fourth missionary journey to the western reaches of the Empire after his release from Roman imprisonment recorded in Acts 28. The early church historian Eusebius reports that Paul was released following his appeal to the emperor. A number of the earliest writings of the church, including Clement of Rome’s “*Epistle to the Corinthians,*” indicate that Paul carried the gospel as far as Spain which was the western boundary of the then known world.

Verses 25-29

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem...” - One task remains unfulfilled before Paul can proceed to carry out his future plans. During his third missionary journey the apostle had promoted a love offering from the Gentile congregations on behalf of the mother church in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9). Palestine had been stricken with a famine and the need was urgent. For Paul, this collection was more than an exercise in Christian compassion. It was a golden opportunity to help ease the tensions between Jews and Gentiles and demonstrate the unity of the church. The text here mentions both of these themes. Once Paul’s responsibilities in regard to the offering have been completed he intends to get on with his mission to Spain. The Book of Acts indicates that this proved to be more complicated than anticipated. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on a charge of sedition during a riot in the temple. As a Roman citizen, he exercised his right of appeal to Caesar. The concluding chapters of Acts detail his journey to the capital city under Roman guard (Acts 21-28). At that time Paul remained in Rome for two years.

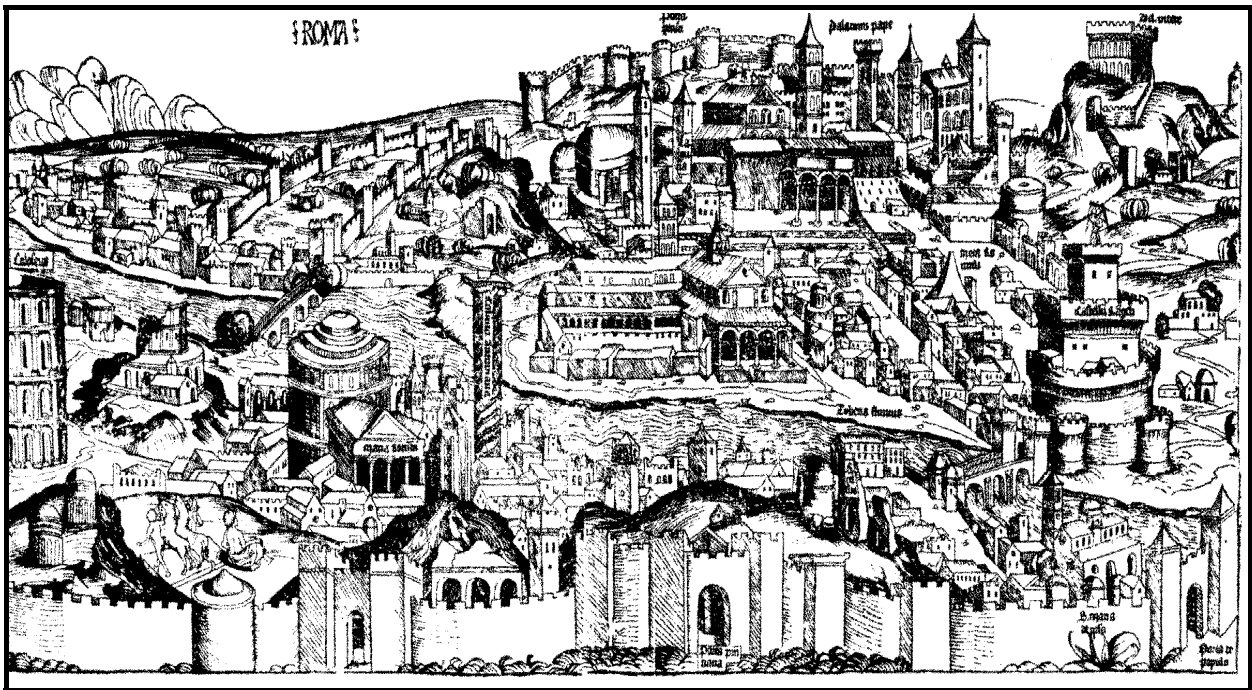


***“Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem”
19th Century Bible Engraving***

Verses 30-33

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by our love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

“I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ...” - The concluding sections of St. Paul’s letter typically include requests for prayer. For Paul, such prayer was not only his personal reliance, but a expression of our solidarity in Christ. By praying for him and his mission the congregations not only invoked the blessing of God upon his work, they became participants in that mission. That sense of solidarity is clear in these opening words. ***“I urge you”*** is the Greek verb *“parakaleo”* which designates an urgent request motivated by love and concern. The traditional KJV translation of the term is *“beseech”* which carries much the same connotation in English. The strong verb is immediately followed by the repetition of the fraternal designation ***“brothers”*** which reinforces the emphasis. The repeated pronoun ***“our”*** also stresses the experience of the ***“Lord Jesus Christ”*** and the ***“love of the Spirit”*** which Paul shares with the believers in Rome. On the basis of all this, the apostle pleads for the Romans ***“to join me in my struggle.”*** The specific focus of his petitions is twofold. First of all ***“that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea.”*** Paul labors under no illusions about the personal risks involved in his return to Jerusalem. He is walking into the lions’ den. To the leaders of Judaism he is an apostate, a traitor who has betrayed them and gone over to the enemy. His friends attempted to dissuade him from this journey without success (cf. Acts 20:13-38). He is resolved to carry out this mission at any cost. Secondly, Paul solicits prayer that the presentation of the offering may be well received and may serve to ease the tensions between Jew and Gentile in the church - ***“that my service to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there.”*** He reiterates his intention to come to Rome as soon as these tasks have been accomplished - ***“so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.”*** The apostle appears to anticipate his stay in Rome as an opportunity for mutual encouragement and strengthening in the faith. This segment concludes with a brief prayer/blessing which invokes the presence of ***“the God of peace”*** - that is, the God who is the Source and Giver of peace - upon the Roman church.



“The City of Rome” by Hartmann Schedel from the “History of the World,” Nuremberg, 1493

Romans Chapter 16

Introduction

“The last chapter of Romans contains the names of many people in Rome, to whom Paul was writing, as well as those who were in Corinth with Paul and who joined him in sending greetings - thirty-three names in all. Twenty-four of these people were in Rome. Nine were in Corinth. But there are also two unnamed women and an unspecified number of unnamed men. Far from being an uninteresting listing, this chapter is actually one of the most fascinating in the New Testament. One fascinating thing about Romans 16 is what it reveals about Paul. Some have the idea that people who are interested in ideas - in this case, those who study Christian theology - are not interested in people. They are supposed to immerse themselves in books. They are not “relational,” as we say. There are people like this, of course. But Paul is the refutation of the idea that those who are interested in doctrine cannot be interested in those for whom the doctrine has been given. No one could be more interested in the great truths of God than Paul. The entire epistle to the Romans has been an unfolding of them. But here we see that Paul was also intensely interested in people. In fact, to judge by this chapter, Paul can be said to show more interest in people than anyone else in the Bible except Jesus.” (Boice, pp. 1911-1912)

Verses 1-2

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe...” - Letters of commendation were common in the ancient church where itinerant preachers frequently traveled from congregation to congregation. Those traveling were often unknown and dependent upon the hospitality and support of the local church to carry on their ministries. Letters of commendation from a recognized authority served as their accreditation. In keeping with this custom, the commendation of specific individuals is not unusual at the end of one of Paul’s letters (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:10-12,15-18; Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9; 2 Timothy 4:20). The list of commendations in Romans is more extensive than elsewhere and is also unique in that it contains an appeal for individual assistance from the congregation. ***“Phoebe”*** (Greek - *“pure,” “bright,”* or *“radiant”*) heads this list of commendations. According to the traditions of the early church, Phoebe was the emissary who actually delivered this epistle to the congregations in Rome. This is the only reference in the Bible to Phoebe, although the manner of Paul’s description suggests that she was a prominent member of her home congregation and played an important role in supporting his ministry. Phoebe is described as ***“our sister.”*** The use of the first person plural pronoun ***“our”*** serves to identify her both with Paul and the Christians at Rome as a fellow believer and a dear sister in the faith. Phoebe is from the city of Cenchreae, the eastern end of the port of Corinth. Acts 18:18 reports that Cenchreae was Paul’s point of departure after his long sojourn in Corinth.

Paul further indicates that Phoebe is ***“a servant of the church in Cenchreae.”*** The Greek word is *“diakonon,”* the accusative form of *“diakonos.”* George W. Knight summarizes the meanings of the most significant word as follows:

“The word is the common Greek word for servant (cf. John 2:5,9). Christ is designated as a servant by this term (Romans 15:8); the state is called a servant (Romans 13:4); Christians are called servants of Christ and God (cf. John 12:26). Because the model for leadership in the church is the servant Jesus, and because leadership is manifested in service, those leaders are called servants or ministers by means of this Greek word (cf. Matthew 20:26; Mark 10:43; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Colossians 1:7,23,25; 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:6). Paul speaks of himself and others in these passages as servants or ministers of Christ, of God, and of the church. Finally, the

word is specially and specifically applied to those offices of the church whose task is primarily, if not exclusively, service - namely, the deacons, who bear this Greek word in their title, in distinction from the bishops (cf. Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1,8,12).” (Knight, p. 38)

The context here in Romans 16 would appear to indicate that Phoebe held the office of deaconess in the congregation at Cenchreae (cf. 1 Timothy 3:11). The role of the deaconess and her function in the Christian community cannot be historically documented until early in the third century. The “*Didascalia Apostolorum*,” a summary of apostolic doctrine and practice dating from the beginning of the third century, describes the role of the deaconess in some detail as an assistant to the elder/bishop with special reference to the women of the congregation.

The need for such an individual in a culture which strongly emphasized the compartmentalization of the sexes is evident. Deaconesses would perform the baptisms of adult women, typically carried out by immersion in the nude, and the preparation of the bodies of dead women for burial. They instructed women, especially new converts. They cared for sick women at home, visited the poor, and generally served as the elder/bishop’s liaison with the women of the community.

“I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help...” - Paul heartily endorses Phoebe and accredits her to the Roman congregation. He urges the congregation to afford her a Christian welcome which no doubt including assistance in finding lodging, food, and the like. The apostle explains his commendation in terms of the assistance which Phoebe has provided for his own ministry in the past - ***“for she has been a great help to many people, including me.”*** The Greek noun “*protasis*” which occurs in this phrase has elicited



***“Paul Entrusts the Letter to the Romans to Phoebe”
12 Century Bible Illumination***

a great deal of discussion. The word is a hapaxlegomenon, that is to say, this is its only occurrence in the New Testament. The word means to care for or to give aid to. In reference to an individual it means a patron or benefactor. Evidently, Phoebe was a wealthy woman who was distinguished for acts of charity and financial contribution. Paul's language suggests that she may have played an important role in supporting his personal ministry.

Verses 3-4

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets in their house.

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus...” - An extended series of 26 individual commendations and greetings now follows. This is the first of 16 sentences in the Greek text, each of which begin with the same second person imperative verb ***“Greet.”*** At the head of the list are the husband and wife missionary team Priscilla and Aquila. Paul first met this couple in Corinth on his second missionary journey. He stayed in their home and worked in their shared trade as tent makers. Luke reports that the pair were, Jews from Pontus who had come to Corinth from Italy after Claudius had ordered the expulsion of all the Jews in Rome in 49 A.D. (Acts 18:1-4). They traveled with Paul after his departure from Corinth as far as Ephesus and served as tutors for Apollos, ***“a learned man with a thorough knowledge of Scripture.”*** (Acts 18:18-26). The New Testament refers to the couple a total of six times. Evidently, by the time Paul writes this epistle, they had returned to their home in Rome after the imperial decree of banishment lapsed with the death of Claudius in 54 A.D. Paul hails them as ***“my fellow workers in Christ Jesus”*** (Greek - *“synergoi”*). He acknowledges that they risked their own lives to save his. There is no specific Biblical reference to this event, although it may have occurred during the violent riots which accompanied Paul's ministry in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:23-41).

The reference to ***“the church that meets in their house”*** is reflective of the common practice in the early church during the decades when Christianity lacked official sanction and was regularly subjected to persecution. Groups of Christians would gather, sometimes secretly, in the homes of members of the congregation. The fact that Priscilla and Aquila were able to host such a gathering suggests that they were a fairly wealthy couple who could provide an adequate meeting room within their home.



“The Martyrdom of Pricilla and Aquilla” - 12 th Century Byzantine Bible Illumination

Verses 5-15

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junius, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Appelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodian, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them. Greet Philogus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.

“Greet my dear friend Epenetus....” - The extended list of greetings which now follows includes 24 more individuals, two families, and three more house churches. The majority of the names are Gentile which is an important indication of the makeup of the churches in Rome. Paul refers to six of the individuals as *“relatives.”* The term is almost certainly being used in a more general sense to refer to fellow Jews as kinsmen. It is most unlikely that six members of Paul’s literal family would be present in Rome. Most of the names are typical of slaves or freedmen which reinforces the view that Christianity spread most rapidly among the lower economic classes. Nine of the twenty-four names are women, commended for their work in and support of the church. This points to an unprecedented level of female involvement and participation in the church affairs. In every instance, all we know for certain of these individuals are the tantalizing fragments of information provided in Paul’s closing remarks. Donald Barnhouse picturesquely describes them as *“these shadowy figures who walk against the grey stones of ancient Rome.”* (Boice, p. 1917) These fragments alone are sufficient to provide an intriguing glimpse into the life of the early church.

The reference to **“Andronicus and Junius”** as **“outstanding among the apostles”** deserves further comment. In Greek, the latter name in *“Jounian”* which could be either a masculine or feminine accusative noun depending on the accent mark that is used. The NIV opts for the masculine and translates the term *“Jounian”* as a man’s name, *“Junius.”* This is a contracted form of the male name *“Junianus.”* Many commentators believe the noun is feminine, the accusative form of the woman’s name *“Junia,”* suggesting that Andronicus and Junia are another husband and wife team. Both alternatives are linguistically viable. The significance of the issue intensifies because Paul describes them as **“outstanding among the apostles.”** The possibility of a female apostle has proven to be positively enthralling for modern feminists. In any case, whether Junius or Junia, the problem of the relationship of these two individuals to the apostles remains. John Murray, along with other more conservative scholars, argues that the phrase should be translated as *“outstanding in the eyes of the apostles.”* This rendering resolves the problem and is linguistically possible, but requires a somewhat unusual translation of the Greek preposition. Others suggest a broader understanding of the term apostle in this context. In the technical sense, an *“apostolos”* is one of the select group of 14 men directly chosen by Christ to be His authoritative representatives and teachers in the early church. However, the Bible does use the term in a more general way to refer to a messenger or an emissary, at times to traveling missionaries or evangelists (cf. 2 Corinthians

8:23; Philippians 2:25; Acts 14:1-4,14; Galatians 1:19). It is clear that no matter which alternative one prefers, Paul is not suggesting an augmentation of the 14 authoritative apostles chosen by our Lord in this phrase.

A pair of names on the list may be recognizable from extra-Biblical history. *“The household of Aristobulus”* is mentioned in verse 10. The wording indicates that Paul is not greeting Aristobulus himself but members of his extended household. This



“Paul Under House Arrest In Rome” by Rembrandt

suggests that he himself was not a Christian. Secular history tells us that a grandson of Herod the Great named Aristobulus was living in Rome at this time. The identification of the Aristobulus on the list with Herod’s grandson is strengthened by the greeting of *“Herodian, my relative”* which follows in Verse 11. Herodian would be a natural and expected name for a Jewish slave in the household of Herod the Great’s grandson. The second possible historical identification is *“Nereus”* in Verse 15. In A.D. 95 two members of the imperial household, aristocrats from among the most distinguished people in Rome, were condemned for being Christians. They were

husband and wife - Flavius Clemens and Domatilla. The earliest Christian cemetery in Rome is named after the woman. Flavius was executed. Domatilla was banished to island of Pontia because she was of royal blood, the grand-daughter of the former emperor Vespasian and the niece of Domitian who was the current emperor. The record indicates that the name of this couple’s chamberlain was Nereus. Given the

historical setting of the Epistle to the Romans it is possible that the Nereus on this list was in fact the steward of these famous Christian martyrs.

Verse 16

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss...” - At the conclusion of his long list of individual commendations and greetings Paul adds a general salutation from the churches to all of the Christians in Rome. These words are common in the epistles of the New Testament (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). The Kiss of Peace is derived from the custom and social practice of Judaism. As a sign of respect, friendship, or reconciliation, the Kiss of Peace was a time honored practice among the Jews (i.e. Isaac’s blessing of Jacob - Genesis 27:26-29; and Jacob’s reconciliation with his brother Esau - Genesis 33:4). By New Testament times the kiss was a courteous preliminary to any formal meal and its omission was cause for comment and offense (cf. Luke 7:45). In this context, our Lord’s reproach of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, ***“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*** (Luke 22:48) takes on added poignancy. The *“kiss of peace,”* or the *“peace”* as it more simply came to be known in later years, became a standard part of the liturgy of Holy Communion. The *“First Apology of Justin Martyr,”* written in the middle of the Second Century, describes the service of the sacrament in this way:

“Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the presiding brother bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he, taking them, give praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at his hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen...And when the president has given thanks and all the people have given their assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced...And this food is called among us the Eucharist of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined.” (ANF, I, p. 185)

In the centuries that followed, while the precise position of the Kiss of Peace varied somewhat - always at some point early in the communion liturgy from before the

Offertory (as noted by Justin Martyr above) to immediately prior to the distribution - it remained a very important part of the service of the sacrament. The early church went to great lengths to insure that Christians understood the sacrament as a celebration of their unity in Christ and that disputes and disagreements among them were resolved prior to their approach to the altar. The early church father Pelagius explains: *“For in the church the peace is proclaimed first, so that we may show that we are at peace with all who are about to partake of the body of Christ.”* (Bray, p. 375) Dom Gregory Dix, a widely recognized authority on the history of the church’s liturgy writes:

“The unity of the church as the Body of Christ, which ever since St. Paul’s day had been understood to be of the essence of the sacrament, can be violated by personal disputes among its members, as well as by a formal ecclesiastical schism, whose token as well as reality lies in the holding of a separate Eucharist apart from the catholic communion... It is a striking instance - one among many - of the way in which the liturgy was regarded as the solemn putting into act before God of the whole Christian living of the church’s members, that all this care for the interior charity and good living of those members found its expression and test week by week in the giving of the liturgical kiss of peace among the faithful before the Eucharist. In the East, from the third century, the deacon from beside the bishop’s throne cried aloud, while the kiss was actually being exchanged”Is there any man who keepeth aught against his fellow?” - as a final precaution so that even at the last moment the bishop might make peace between them. By the fourth century, this question had become stereotyped into the warning by the deacon, “Let none keep rancour against any! Let none give the kiss in hypocrisy!” which survived in some Eastern rites for centuries, even after the actual giving of the kiss had been abandoned.” (Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, p. 106ff.)

In the modern church, only vestiges of this ancient practice, most often shorn of their original power and significance, remain. Only the Coptic Churches of Egypt and Ethiopia fully maintain the practice of apostolic Christendom in this regard.

The occurrence of the phrase here hints at the usage of apostolic epistles in the life of the early Christian congregations. The church had assembled for worship and prayer. St. Paul’s letter was presented and read to the congregation. At the conclusion of its reading, the exchange of the Kiss Of Peace would signal the beginning of the service of the Sacrament. Paul anticipates that arrangement and broadens its powerful significance by incorporating it into the conclusion of his letter and reaching out beyond the church in Rome to include *“all the churches of Christ.”*



"Luther's Arrival at the Marburg Colloquy - 1529" by Peter Janssen

Verses 17-19

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

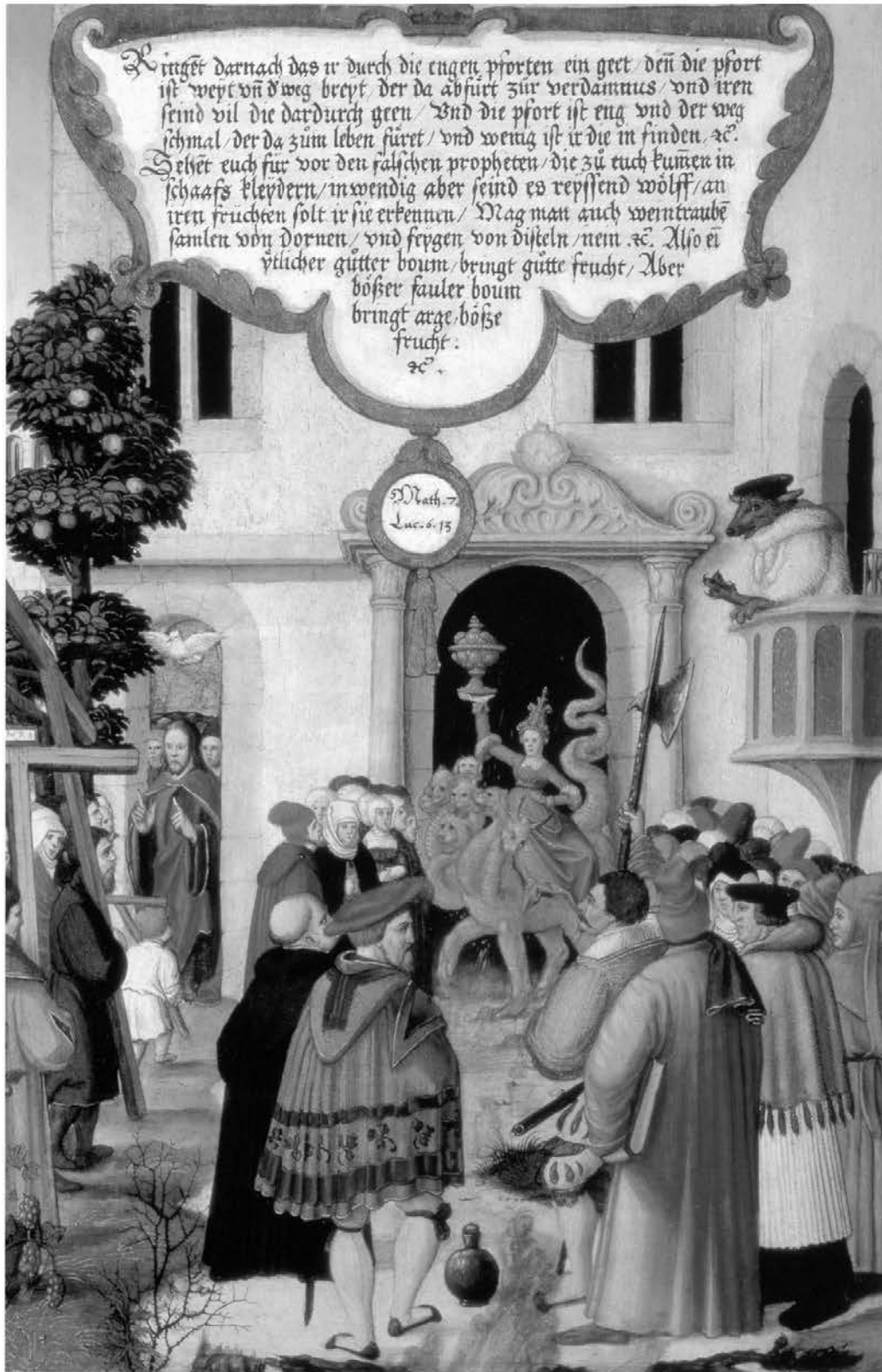
"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for...." - In the context of that most compelling demonstration of Christian unity, the apostle issues a stern warning against the danger of false doctrine and false teachers. The opening phrase, *"I urge you, brothers,"* stresses both the urgency of the issue and the loving concern from which it springs. *"I urge you"* is the Greek verb *"parakaleo."* It has occurred frequently in Romans as Paul's preferred term for apostolic admonition. It suggests counsel motivated by

love and concern motivated by a desire for the safety and well-being of the individual addressed. The sense of the verb is reinforced by the repetition of the fraternal address “**brothers**” which follows. “**To watch out for**” (Greek - “*skopeo*” from which the English “*scope*” as in telescope and microscope is derived) means to observe closely, pay attention to, or be on guard against. In this context the negative thrust of warning is well expressed in the English translation “**to watch out for.**” The objects of this watchful scrutiny are “**those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way contrary to the teaching you have learned.**” The description is deliberately general. It is properly applied to all those who divide the church by teaching or adhering to false doctrine. It is unlikely that Paul has a specific faction or teacher in mind. The language of the text is powerful, signifying the importance of the warning. Paul is unequivocal in identifying those who are responsible for the division of the church (Greek - “*dichostisias*”). It is not those who stand steadfastly and uncompromisingly in defense of the doctrines of Holy Scripture. It is instead those who deny and contradict “**the teaching that you have learned.**” The language is comprehensive. It does not point to a particular doctrine or type of doctrine. On the contrary, it includes anything and everything that is clearly taught by the prophetic and apostolic Word of God. St. John Chrysostom observes:

“Division is the subversion of the church. Turning things upside down like this is the devil’s weapon. As long as the body is united, he has no way of getting in, but harm comes from division. And where does division come from? From doctrines which are contrary to the teaching of the apostles.” (Bray, p. 376)

Those who cause division by deviating from the doctrine “**put obstacles in your way.**” The word for “**obstacles**” is “*skandala*,” the trigger that trips the death trap. False doctrine is not benign. It is always malignant. Every false doctrine bears within itself the potential of damnation. This is a most serious matter indeed. The commanded response is forthright and direct - “**Keep away from them.**” The contrast between the intimate fellowship of the kiss of peace and the celebration of the sacrament on the one hand, and the stark command to turn away from false teachers on the other, could not be greater. In fact, it is concern for that precious unity which necessitates the stern demand of separation.

“**For such people are not serving our Lord Christ...**” - Verse 18 adds a word of explanation, introduced by the Greek conjunction “*gar.*” Two reasons are offered. The first is one of motive. Those who deviate from the doctrine are idolaters. They do not serve Christ but the false god of self. That is, of course, not to say that this is



“Beware of False Prophets” by Matthias Gerung

deliberate or intentional. False teachers generally believe that their falsehood is the truth. They are wrongly convinced that they are serving Christ but instead it is **“their own appetites”** (literally **“their own belly”** cf. Philippians 3:19) which are actually in control. The second reason such people are to be avoided is their method - **“By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”** The phrase contrasts innocence with guile, and warns that those who are not wary will be taken in by the eloquent speech and devious methods of false teachers. Cyril of Jerusalem, one of the fathers of the early church explains: **“The heretics do this by coating over their poison pills of godless doctrines with the honey of the name of Christ.”** (Bray, p. 377)

R.C.H. Lenski summarizes the crucial significance of these verses with these well chosen words:

“These verses reveal the true nature of all false teaching. They deserve more attention than they often receive. Verse 17 is one of the “sedes” against unionism, fraternization with errorists. The entire paragraph should be used. The efforts to make Paul’s words apply only to the most fundamental errors, like the denial of Christ’s deity, atonement, incarnation, resurrection, leaves the door open to a host of other errors as though these are not to be stamped out. Paul’s “para” in Verse 14 covers all errors. Paul says that the seamless garment of the divine “didache” is not even to be frayed or snagged by some errorist who acts as Satan’s finger.”
(Lenski, p. 923)

“Everyone has heard about your obedience...” - The apostle’s words recall the admonition of our Lord - **“Therefore be a shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”** (Matthew 10:16). Paul commends the Roman congregations for the **“obedience”** for which they are renown. That obedience is the source of great joy and satisfaction for him. Yet, at the same time he warns the Romans to practice careful discernment. Do not be so simple minded as to be taken in by those who wish to substitute their own errors for the truth of God (cf. Matthew 7:15-20).

Verse 20

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan...” - Having issued a stern warning against the dire threat of false doctrine and the devious cleverness of false teachers, Paul adds

a promise of deliverance and a word of assurance. The language of the promise alludes to the “*proto-evangelium*,” the first gospel promise of Genesis 3:15. Satan and his minions will not prevail. The truth of God will remain and ultimately overcome despite all of their efforts to the contrary. This is the victory, the great salvation which God, “*the God of peace*,” has achieved for His people in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of Paul’s letters conclude with a benediction of some sort (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 6:24; Philippians 4:23; Colossians 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 3:15; Philemon 25). Romans is no exception to that rule. This is, in fact, the third benediction in the closing segment of Romans (cf. Romans 15:13,33). The simple words of this brief blessing express the heart of the Christian gospel as they commend the believers in Rome to the undeserved love of God which comes to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Verses 21 -23

Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality, I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

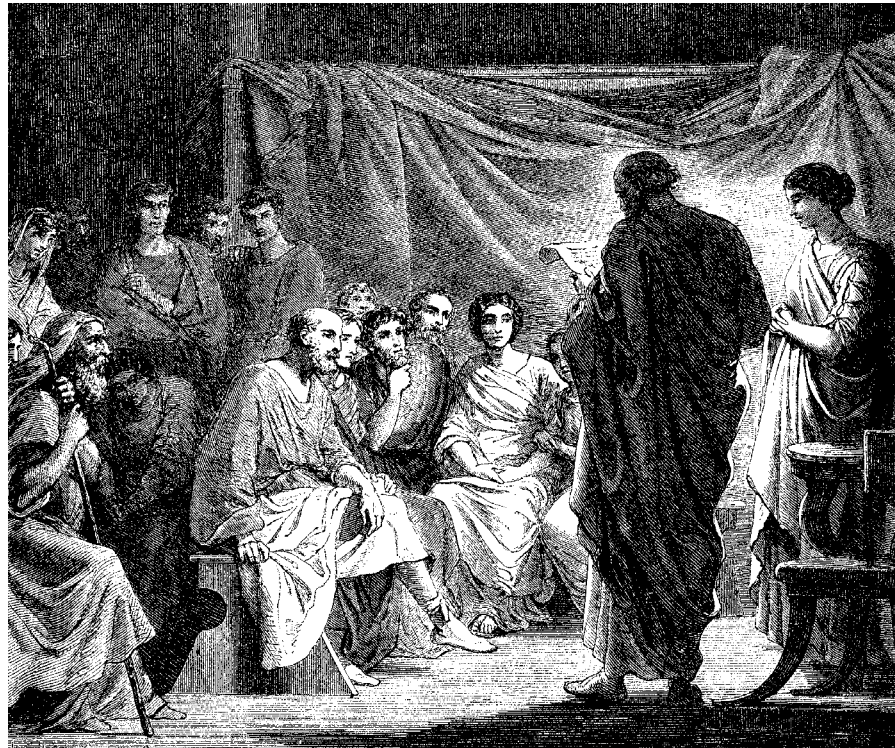
“*Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you...*” - The inclusion of greetings from Paul’s fellow workers is, again, characteristic of his New Testament letters. Foremost on the list is Timothy, considered by many to be Paul’s closest associate in ministry. Timothy was a native of Lystra in south Galatia. He began his work with the apostle at the beginning of the second missionary journey (Acts 16:2-3). He continued to labor at Paul’s side intermittently for the remainder of Paul’s ministry (cf. Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 20:3-4; 1 & 2 Timothy). Timothy is mentioned in the salutations of six of St. Paul’s New Testament letters (2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).

“*Lucius*” has been identified by some as Luke the Evangelist and by others as Lucius of Cyrene who was a prophet in the congregation at Antioch in Syria (Acts 13:1). The text here in Romans does not provide the basis for a definite identification. “*Jason*” may be the individual who provided Paul with hospitality during his short visit to Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9). “*Sosipater*” is probably the same man mentioned in Acts 20:4 who met Paul in Berea and traveled with him from there. Paul identifies

this trio as *“my relatives,”* namely, fellow Jews. The scribe *“Tertius,”* who identifies himself as Paul’s *“amanuensis”* for the letter to the Romans, is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. This pattern of dictation was common in the ancient world. *“Gaius”* was a very common name at this time. At least three are mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 20:4; 1 Corinthians 1:14; 3 John 1). It is most likely that this Gaius is the church leader from Corinth since that’s where Paul writes the letter to the Romans. The existence of *“Erastus, who is the cities director of public works”* is confirmed by the archeological discovery of an inscription in Corinth that bears his name. There is no reference to *“our brother Quartus”* elsewhere in Scripture.

Verses 25-27

Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus



“Paul’s Epistle Being Read to the Congregation in Rome” 19th Century Bible Engraving

Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey Him - to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

“Now to Him who is able to establish you...” - The Epistle to the Romans is unique among the letters of the New Testament in that it concludes with a doxology rather than a benediction. This most magnificent song of praise is a fitting culmination to the grandest of all the New Testament’s epistles. It summarizes the great themes of the letter in a beautiful harmony. In response to the incredible theology of Romans Paul bursts forth into joyful song. The apostle hails God as *“Him who is able to establish you by my gospel.”* The Greek text literally reads - *“to the One who is able*

to strengthen you according to my gospel.” The verb is *“to de dynameno.”* The strengthening in question is the ability to stand steadfast in the faith and to firmly resist the temptations and snares of the enemy which seek to draw us away from that faith. The means of strengthening is *“my gospel”* defined by the epexegetical conjunction *“kai”* which ought to be translated *“that is”* thus indicating its explanatory function in the Greek. Paul’s gospel is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the world’s only Savior and Lord. As Paul has previously explained in Romans, this plan of salvation predates the creation of time and space reality, a *“mystery”* which God has graciously chosen to reveal through the Word of His prophets and apostles. That which was concealed (*“hidden for long ages past”*) has now been fully and decisively revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. That which the prophets and apostles proclaim is in fact the Word of God Himself, written *“by the command of the eternal God.”* This precious gospel is for every human being - *“so that all the nations might believe and obey Him.”* The *“One who is able”* from the opening phrase of the doxology is now clearly identified as *“the only wise God”* whom we worship and adore throughout time and eternity *“through Jesus Christ.”*

The letter to the Romans concludes in the only appropriate manner - with one final, triumphant affirmation, a thundering - *“Amen!”*

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