



ROMANS

“The Chief Part of the New Testament
and the Very Purest Gospel”

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Bible Class Notes
Prepared for
Our Savior Lutheran Church
Houston, Texas

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Dedication

This work is dedicated

To the members of the Wednesday Morning Bible Class of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas. Their love for the Word of God and their eagerness for the careful study of that Word enabled and inspired the preparation of these notes;

and

In Memory of Dr. Rudolf Schäfer (1878 - 1961), the foremost Lutheran artist of the modern era, whose illustrations adorn these pages. Dr. Schäfer's remarkable work embodies the Biblical theology of our Church with unique effectiveness and power.

Introduction

I. Testimonies to the Significance of the Epistle

The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans has played a uniquely significant role in the history of the church. We begin our study with a series of testimonials from authorities both ancient and modern as to the importance of this magnificent letter.



***“The Conversion of St. Augustine”
by Benozzo Gozzoli***

“But when a profound reflection had, from the secret depths of my soul, drawn together and heaped all my misery from the secret depths of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by as mighty a shower of tears...I flung myself down, how, I know not, under a certain fig tree, giving free course to my tears and the streams of my eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice unto Thee. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, spake I much unto Thee: But Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry forever?...Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness? I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or a girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house, chanting and often repeating, “Tolle lege! Tolle lege!” (Latin - “Take up and read!)...So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell - “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision

for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.” (Romans 13:13-14) No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, by a light, as it were, of security into my heart, all the gloom of doubt vanished away.” (St. Augustine, Confessions, VIII, 12)

“I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the righteousness of God,” in chapter 1:17 because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous...At last, by the mercy of God, meditating night and day, I gave heed to the context of the words...and there

I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning...and whereas before the "righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to paradise.” (Martin Luther, *Preface to Latin Writings*, 1545, AE, 34, p.337)



**“Dr. Martin Luther” - 1551
Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Younger**

“This Epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, which, indeed, deserves that a Christian not only know it word for word by heart but deal with it daily as with daily bread for the soul. For it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled the more delightful it becomes, and the better it tastes...In this Epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe, and even toward our own selves. Moreover, this is all ably supported from Scripture and proven by St. Paul's own example and that of the prophets, so that one could not wish for anything more. Therefore it appears that he wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For, without doubt, whoever has this epistle well in his heart, has with him the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually. To this end may God give His grace. Amen.” (Martin Luther, *Preface to the Book of Romans*, 1546, AE, 35, p.380)

“Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and the most pure "evangelion," that is to say, glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also a light and way unto the whole structure; I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. Truly, no man can read it too often, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; the more groundly it is searched, the more precious things are found in it, so great is the treasure of spiritual things that lie hidden therein.” (William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, p. 484)

“I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” (Charles Wesley, *Journal*, 1878)

“Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the Book of Romans...It has been said that Romans will delight the greatest logician and captivate the mind of the consummate genius, yet it will bring tears to the humblest soul and refreshment to the simplest mind. It will knock you down and then lift you up. It will strip you naked and then clothe you with eternal elegance. The Book of Romans took a Bedford Tinker like John Bunyan and turned him into the spiritual giant and literary master who wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "The Holy War."...It is no wonder that Frederick Godet, the Swiss commentator, once exclaimed, "O St. Paul! Had thy one work been to compose the epistle to the Romans, that alone should have rendered thee dear to every sound reason." An anonymous poet wrote these moving words that capture much of the heart of the Book of Romans:

*O long and dark the stairs I trod; With trembling feet to find my God
Gaining a foothold, bit by bit, Then slipping back and losing it.
Never progressing, striving still With weakening grasp and faltering will,
Bleeding to climb to God, while He Serenely smiled, not noting me.
Then came a certain time when I Loosened my hold and fell thereby;
Down to the lowest step my fall, As if I had not climbed at all.
Now when I lay despairing there, Listen, a footfall on the stair,
On that same stair where I afraid, Faltered and fell and lay dismayed.
And lo, when hope had ceased to be, My God came down the stairs to me!”*

(John MacArthur, Commentary on Romans, I, p.xii,xiii.)

“Romans has always been highly praised, and it is beyond question the most dynamic of all New Testament letters, even as it was written at the climax of Paul's apostolic career. Early given the first place in the list of Paul's letters, Romans still holds that place in our Bibles in spite of the actual chronology of Paul's letters...To this day, the truth laid down in Romans forms the Gibraltar basis of doctrine, teaching and confession in the true evangelical church...In his "Table Talk" Coleridge feels constrained to say: "I think St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the most profound work in existence.” (R.C.H. Lenski, *Romans*, p.8,9)



“The Apostle Paul” - 1521

Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder

III. Authorship and Origin

The great missionary apostle Paul is the undisputed author of the Letter to the Romans. Hardly a voice, from the early church to the present, has ever been raised against his authorship. The historical references included in the letter agree with the facts of the life of Paul. The doctrinal content and style of the letter is also fully consistent with that of the apostle. Lenski notes:

“All the old orthodox, as well as all the old heterodox testimonies without a single exception ascribe this epistle to Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Stronger even than this united ancient testimony is that embedded in the epistle itself. The great chorus of commentators, down to the present day, presents a full harmony on this point. So few have been the later efforts to shake this fact by means of hypotheses that they scarcely deserve mention.” (Lenski, p.5)

The letter was written in the middle of the first century, between 55 and 58 AD, at the conclusion of St. Paul's third missionary journey. The apostle is in the Greek city of Corinth, making preparations to return to Palestine with the offering from the Gentile churches for the saints in Jerusalem. Paul viewed his work in the eastern Mediterranean as virtually complete and he was looking forward to establishing a base of operations in Rome for outreach to Spain and the West.

At this moment in history the city of Rome was at the pinnacle of her glory. As the glorious capital city of a thriving empire, Rome had become a vast cosmopolitan metropolis, with contingents from throughout the Mediterranean world among her citizens. Rome harbored a large Jewish community. Some scholars estimate that 40,000 to 50,000 Jews lived in Rome at this time. A century earlier, the Roman orator Cicero had lamented: *“For you know how numerous the Jews are, how*

clannish, and how they can make their influence felt.” (Bruce, p.380). In 41 AD, the newly crowned emperor Claudius prohibited public assembly among the Jews, and when that failed to limit the growth and influence of their community, he expelled all Jews from his capital in 49 AD. Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul met in Corinth, were Jewish exiles from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2). It would seem that their Christianity predated their arrival in Corinth. The imperial decree was not lifted until after the death of Claudius in 54 AD. Jews from Rome are mentioned among those present at Pentecost in Jerusalem and it may be that they brought their new faith home with them (Acts 2:10). In any case, it would appear that the typical pattern described in the Book of Acts also prevailed in Rome, namely that Christian missionary efforts began in the synagogue and spread out from there.

Ambrosiaster, a fourth century Latin commentator, writes: *“The Romans had embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, although they saw no sign of mighty works nor any of the apostles.”* (Bruce, p.379) The absence of an apostolic founder for the church in Rome finds further support in Paul's comment: *“It has*



“Peter and Paul” by Rudolf Schäfer

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.” (Romans 15:20) Thus the Roman Catholic tradition that Peter was the founder and first bishop of the church of Rome, serving in that capacity for twenty-five years, is without reliable historical support. Peter did get to Rome, but not until after Paul's first imprisonment. He was martyred there in 64 AD, prior to Paul's second imprisonment and execution.

The content of the Epistle suggests that by the mid-fifties, the congregation in Rome was predominantly Gentile with a substantial Jewish minority. The relationship between Israel and the church, and Israel's rejection of its Messiah are major themes of the letter. The church appears to have lacked formal organization, and most probably consisted of a cluster of informal household churches. Romans is the most systematic and substantive of the Pauline epistles. It reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter. Its reliance upon the Old Testament is also noteworthy. The Epistle quotes the Old Testament fifty-seven times, more than any other New Testament Book. The letter is regarded as Paul's doctrinal system, as summary of his theology, in a sense, the dogmatical and moral catechism of the apostle.



“Paul Entrusts His Letter to the Romans to Phoebe” by Lucas Cranach

III. Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-7)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- III. Theme- The Gospel of Righteousness from God (1:16-17)
- IV. God's Righteous Justice toward Unrighteous Mankind (1:18-3:20)
 - A. Gentiles (1:18-32)
 - B. Jews (2:1-3:8)
 - C. Summary: All People (3:9-20)
- V. Justification - the Righteousness of God (3:21-4:25)
 - A. Through Christ (3:21-26)
 - B. By Faith (3:27-31)
 - C. Abraham the Father of Believers (4:1-25)
- VI. The Results of Righteousness
 - A. The Assurance of Hope (5:1-11)
 - B. The Second Adam's Reversal of the Defeat of the First (5:12-21)
- V. Righteousness Imparted: Sanctification (6:1-8:39)
 - A. Freedom From Sin's Tyranny (6:1-23)
 - B. Freedom From the Curse of the Law (7:1-8:17)
 - C. Present Suffering - Future Glory (8:18-39)
- VI. God's Righteousness to Israel and the World (9:1-11:36)
 - A. The Justice of the Rejection (9:1-29)
 - B. The Reality of the Rejection (9:30-11:24)
 - C. God's Merciful Purpose for Mankind (11:25-36)
- VII. Righteousness Practiced in Everyday Life (12:1-15:13)
 - A. Within the Church (12:1-21)
 - B. Within the World (13:1-14)
 - C. Among Weak and Strong Christians (14:1-15:13)
- VIII. Paul's Plan to Proclaim the Gospel (15:14-33)
- IX. Commendation, Warning, and Greetings (16:1-27)

Romans Chapter 1

Verse 1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God -

Classical Greek and Latin letters typically begin with a “*Salutation.*” These openings followed a fairly standard format in which the author identified himself and the person or persons to whom the letter is addressed, followed by a greeting or salutation to the addressee. The opening paragraph of the letter to the Romans follows this standard format. St. Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1-6). He identifies the Christians in Rome as the group to whom the letter is addressed (1:7), and adds a word of greeting and commendation (1:7). This same pattern can be observed in the other epistles of the New Testament.

“*Paul*” - Paul was born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia to an observant Jewish household, during the first decade of the Christian era. He describes himself as **“*circumcised in the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee.*”** (Philippians 3:6). His father had been granted the privilege of Roman citizenship, which Paul inherited at birth. (Acts 22:27) His Roman cognomen was **“*Paulus.*”** His Hebrew name was **“*Saul,*”** after the first king of Israel who also hailed from the tribe of Benjamin. After his conversion to Christianity, Paul typically identifies himself with his Latin name (Acts 13:9 notes the transition). In keeping with Jewish custom, Saul learned the trade of his father, who was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Saul received his education in Jerusalem, where he studied under the great rabbi Gamaliel, the leading pharisee of the day (Acts 5:38f.; 22:3; Galatians 1:14). Prior to his conversion, Saul was an ardent pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), and an active opponent of Christianity (Acts 7:58; 9:1,2; 26:11). Paul's unique background - trained in the intricacies of Judaic law, from a wealthy family in a cosmopolitan Greek city, with the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship - equipped him for his special role as the major spokesman for the Gospel in his generation (Cf. Galatians 1:15). He truly was **“*God's keynote speaker for heralding the gospel*”** (MacArthur, p.4).

“*A servant of Christ Jesus*” - Paul uses the salutation as a means of introducing himself to the Christians in Rome. In effect, he transforms the formal self-

identification of the sender into a personal confession of faith. He defines his essential identity in a series of three phrases. First and foremost, he is ***“a servant of Christ Jesus.”*** The Greek noun *“doulos”* literally refers to a bond-servant or a slave. It conveys the basic connotation of subservience and usually referred to those who were in permanent bondage from which there was no release but death. The Mosaic law provided the means by which an indentured servant could choose to become the permanent slave of a master whom he loved and respected (Exodus 21:5-6). This is clearly the sense in which St. Paul applies the term to himself. He has given himself wholeheartedly and irrevocably to the Savior Who had rescued him from sin and death. In genuine humility, Paul recognizes that the greatest honor in all the world is to be a slave of Christ Jesus. That which is true of the apostle is, of course, true of every Christian. The New Testament regularly uses this same powerful word in reference to all believers (cf. Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 2:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22). He designates his Master as ***“Christ Jesus”*** (*“Christ”* - Greek, the Anointed One; *“Jesus”* - Hebrew, Savior) using both the Hebrew title of the promised Messiah and the personal name of Jesus of Nazareth.

“Called to be an apostle” - The second phrase defines the authority of Paul's ministry and the basis for the letter which follows. Paul is not merely another slave of Jesus Christ, one among many thousands. He is a part of that select group of men who were directly chosen by the Lord to be His apostles. The Greek noun *“apostolos”*

means one who has been sent on a mission. The word is used seventy-nine times in the New Testament. In a few of those instances it retains its more general, original sense of a messenger or delegate (cf. Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7). But the word's primary reference in Scripture is to the fourteen men (the Twelve, Matthias as a



“The Conversion of Saul”
19th Century Bible Illustration by
Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

replacement for Judas, and Paul) whom Christ personally chose and called to proclaim the Gospel and lead the church with His personal authority (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:15-26). The “*call*” of an apostle comes immediately from Christ Himself (Galatians 1:1). For Paul, that call came in a blinding flash of heavenly light on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-21; 26:12-18) and from that moment on he proclaimed the Gospel which God had directly revealed to him (Galatians 1:11-24).

“Apostle is one of the least appreciated and even most misunderstood words in the Christian vocabulary...The apostles knew that they were to witness in an extraordinary, supernatural sense. Because they were apostles, God spoke authoritatively through them, so that what they said as apostles carried the force of divine teaching or Scripture...By calling himself an apostle in Romans, Paul reminds his readers that he is writing as no mere ordinary man but rather as one who has been given a message that should be received by them as the very words of God.” (Boice, I, p.27)

“The apostles, therefore, were the immediate messengers of Jesus Christ, sent to declare His gospel, endued with the Holy Spirit, rendering them infallible as teachers, and investing them with miraculous powers, and clothed with particular prerogatives in the organization of government of the Church.” (Hodge, p.22)

“And set apart for the gospel of God” - St. Paul asserts that he has been *set apart* by God for the ministry to which he had been called. The verb in the original text (Greek - “*aphorizo*”) is related to the concept of holiness and separation from sin. The same verb is used in reference to the nation of Israel in Leviticus chapter twenty: **“You are to be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be mine.”** (Leviticus 20: 26; cf. also Exodus 13:12; Numbers 8:11-14; 15:20) The word conveys the idea of total consecration and dedication. Some commentators suggest that its use here is an ironic reference to Paul's past as a leader of the pharisees. The term “**pharisee**” means “*a separated one.*” They believed that their careful observance of the traditions of the law set them apart from ordinary people who were less righteous than themselves. Paul had been the epitome of the obsessive, negative, judgmental, self-righteousness of the pharisees. Now God had called him - not to be separated from those who failed to measure up to a legalistic human standard - but to be separated for the sake of the gospel of the almighty God. The apostle acknowledges that the gospel has become the dominant and determinative focus of his whole life (Galatians 1:15,16).

“No language could be more eloquent of the decisive action of God and of the completeness of Paul's resulting commitment to the gospel. All bonds of interest and

attachment alien or extraneous to the promotion of the gospel have been cut asunder and he is set apart by the investment of all of his interests and ambitions in the cause of the gospel.” (Murray, p.3)

“Gospel” (Greek- *“euangelion”*) is a key word in the letter to the Romans. It is used sixty times in this epistle and occurs six times in the introduction. It's first occurrence, here in verse one, comes only nine words into the Greek text. The term means *“good news”* and in the verses that follow the apostle will begin to define the content of the good news. The good news is identified as **“the gospel of God,”** that is to say, God is its source and its author. The authority of the message comes from him (cf. Galatians 1:6-9). This is not man's good news. Rather it is God's good news for man.



“The First Gospel” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 2-4

The Gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding His Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and Who, through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead; Jesus Christ, our Lord.

“The gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures” - The gospel which Paul proclaims did not originate with him. It is the fulfillment of ancient promises from God. The first announcement of that good news took place in the Garden of Eden (cf. Genesis 3:15). The promise of the Messiah was repeated and expanded hundreds of times during the long centuries of the Old Testament. That broad stream of messianic prophecy comes to perfect fulfillment in the life

and ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The core of the apostolic preaching of the gospel was the demonstration of that fact (i.e. Acts 2:14-36; 8:35; 17:2,3). God's inspired spokesmen, the prophets, are the human instruments through whom the promise was presented. The essence of prophetic ministry was that a prophet spoke not for himself, but for God. Thus, they are **“His prophets.”** That which the prophets wrote by divine inspiration is not their own word, but the Word of God Himself (1 Timothy 3: 14-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21). Hence the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, gathered in the **“Holy Scriptures,”** are in a category of their own. They are the place, the only place, where God's great good news can be found. Every Christian ought to be drawn to the Book with an insatiable yearning to hear the Word of God. John Wesley says it well:

“I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf, till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity, I want to know one thing - the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be "homo unius libri" ("a man of one book"). Here, then, I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book - for this end, to find the way to heaven.” (Boice, I, p.34)

“Regarding His Son” - Paul's brief summary of the content of the gospel opens with an acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God. God's gospel deals with God's Son, from its beginning to its end. He is Christianity. Without Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the second Member of the divine Trinity, the foundation is destroyed and our faith and hope are gone. Lenski categorically asserts:

“The fact that Paul has in mind the second person of the Godhead as confessed in the ecumenical and in other Christian creeds never admitted of either question or doubt. Those who dissent must do so on other than Biblical grounds, which dissent places them outside of the Christian pale.” (Lenski, p.34)

“Who as to His human nature was a descendant of David” - The doctrine of the two natures in Christ is now forcefully presented as the heart of the gospel. Jesus is both true God and true man. The verb **“was”** (Greek - *“genomenou”*) literally means *“came to be.”* Christ was not always human. His humanity began at a specific point in time, at the instant of His incarnation in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. The

NIV text correctly translates the noun “flesh” (Greek - “sarx”) as “*human nature*” for the reference is not merely to the physical body of Christ but to His humanity. Humanly speaking, Jesus was “*a descendant of David*” and thus the great stream of messianic prophecy finds its perfect fulfillment in Him. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, reigning forever upon the royal throne of David.

“And Who, through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” - Unlike Christ's humanity, which began at the moment of His conception (indicated in the preceding phrase by the verb “was”), the divinity of our Lord is from eternity. He has always



“A King of Royal David's Line”: by Rudolf Schäfer

been, and will always be, true God, the eternal Son of the Father (cf. John 1:1-5; 8:58; 17:5; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 7:3; Revelation 22:17). Hence these words cannot refer to the origin of His divine nature. That is clearly indicated by the change in verbs. Jesus does not become the Son of God. He is **“declared”** to be the Son of God. The precise meaning of the Greek verb (*“horizo”*) is to mark off the boundaries of something. Our English word *“horizon,”* the line which marks the boundary between the earth and the sky, is derived from this Greek term. The NIV's translation of this important phrase tends to obscure the meaning of the original text. The Greek literally says: *“declared as God's Son in power according to His spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.”* It is immediately evident that this phrase is a parallel to Paul's magnificent Christological hymn in Philippians chapter two. Christ's state of humiliation (Philippians 2:6-8) began with His conception in Mary's womb. In perfect submission to the will of the Father (cf. John 5:30), He lived a holy life and died an innocent death upon the cross (*“according to His spirit of holiness”*). Having done all that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, Jesus was then exalted by the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). The glory and power that had always been rightfully His were then restored and He was **“declared as the Son of God in power”** as He rose triumphantly from the dead (cf. Acts 13:29-33). The apostle's language here is fully consistent with Philippians 2 which notes that the Father's exaltation of His Son comes in response to the Son's perfect submission to the will of the Father (**“Therefore God exalted Him...”** vs.9; cf. also John 17:1,4,5).

“Jesus Christ our Lord” - These words are the conclusive climax of Paul's summary of the core of the gospel, as the apostle identifies the Person Who is Himself the gospel. **“Jesus”** fixes His historical identity and emphasizes His role as the Savior of mankind. **“Christ”** is the official title which designates Him as the Anointed One sent by God to deliver His people, whose coming was promised by the prophets of the Old Testament. **“Our Lord”** reflects the exaltation and glory which are His and His alone. The title **“Lord”** (Greek - *“Kyrios”*) is St. Paul's favorite identification for Christ. He refers to Jesus as **“Lord”** 230 times in his epistles. **“Lord”** is the New Testament equivalent of *“Jahweh,”* the sacred name of God in the Old Testament. When Christians used this title in reference to Jesus, they were acknowledging His deity and acclaiming Him as the Holy One of Israel. He is the sovereign Ruler of all and we, as His people, owe Him exclusive and absolute obedience. The **“Lord”** is the Master whom St. Paul acknowledges when he calls himself a slave. The **“Lord”** is the Sender who dispatched St. Paul as his chosen apostle.

Verses 5-6

Through Him, and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

“Through Him, and for His Name's sake, we have received grace and apostleship”

- Jesus is the means, the Mediator, through whom Paul and humanity received the undeserved love of God. This is God's amazing ***“grace.”*** *“Grace”* is one of the basic themes of the letter to the Romans. Paul refers to it twenty-two times in this great letter. *“Grace”* is the essence of the gospel, unmerited, unearned favor in which a believer does not and cannot contribute anything of worth. God loves us because it is His nature to love (1 John 4:16). He graciously extends that love to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior. St. Paul gratefully acknowledges his complete personal dependence upon the undeserved love of God over and over again (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5-7). The apostle uses the plural pronoun, ***“we”***, to include the Roman Christians as recipients of the undeserved love of a gracious God. The same Lord Jesus has bestowed the office of apostle (***“apostleship”***) upon His people, the Church. The fact that the Lord had chosen Paul, ***“the least of all God's people”*** (Ephesians 3:8), and ***“the worst of sinners”*** (1 Timothy 1:16) to serve in this office was an incredible demonstration of divine grace and mercy. He says it best in 1 Corinthians 15: ***“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...”*** (Vs.9-10). The proclamation of this divine grace through Paul's apostolic ministry also takes place ***“for His Name's sake.”*** It gives glory and honor to God as it seeks the salvation of men.

“To call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” - The purpose and goal of the office entrusted to Paul and the grace which he

has been given is to bring the nations to the ***“obedience that comes from faith.”*** The opening words of the NIV text, ***“To call people,”*** do not appear in the Greek original, in which the first seven verses of chapter one form one extended sentence. The Greek simply says *“for the obedience of faith among all nations.”* *“Obedience of faith”* is the key phrase. Paul uses the same words again at the end of the letter where he says: ***“the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.”***

(16:25-26). The apostle's point is simple but of fundamental importance. Obedience is here regarded as the necessary concomitant result of faith. Faith is no mere act of momentary enthusiasm or a flash of emotional intensity, *“but a commitment of wholehearted devotion to Christ and to the truth of His gospel.”* (Murray, p.14) This is not a matter of human works in addition to faith. Lenski (who prefers to translate the phrase as a compound noun, *“faith/obedience”*) offers this meticulous definition with his typically Lutheran sensitivity to the issue of work righteousness:

“But here the obedience lies in the very act of believing and not in the category of works. God's gospel calls on us to acknowledge, receive, and appropriate it as what it is; and doing this by the power and the grace coming to us in the gospel, in full confidence and trust, is this essential obedience of faith.” (Lenski, p.47)

Martin Franzmann's observations are equally helpful:

“The combination of "obedience" with "faith" is a telling one. Paul knows of no obedience, in the religious sense, which is not faith. Faith is created by the proclamation of the gospel of the Son of God, who came in freedom into the flesh and was designated Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead; it is created by the proclamation of a divine action that is none of man's doing or deserving. Faith is therefore pure receiving; faith is pure relatedness to the redeeming act of God, an act present and at work in the apostolic word that proclaims it. But the apostolic Word also proclaims the Son as Lord, with the right and power to rule. His grace lays total claim to men and therefore faith is always obedience.” (Franzmann, p.26)

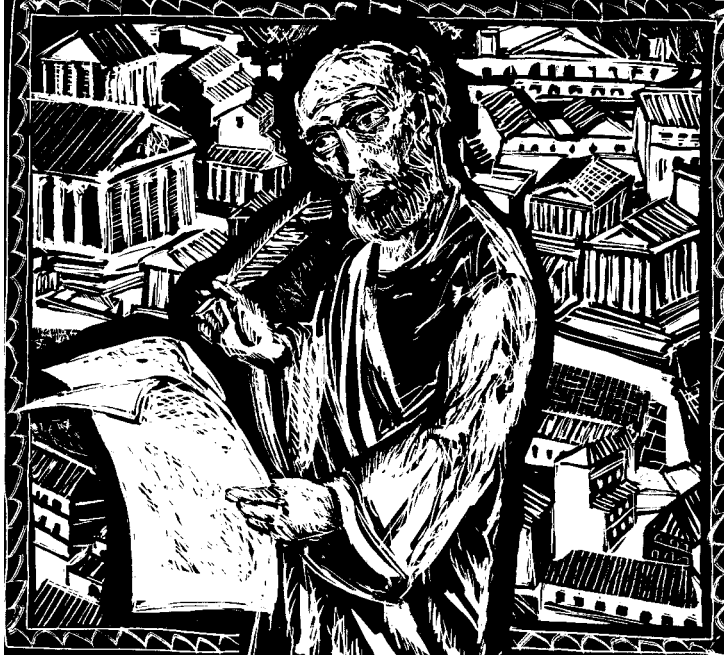
While the NIV's translation *“among all the Gentiles”* is possible, it fails to catch the full scope of Paul's message. This is the same phrase that occurs in the Great Commission, *“Go, and make disciples of all nations...”* (Matthew 28:19), and it describes the universal mission of the Christian Church. Paul is writing to a congregation that includes a significant number of Jewish converts. Surely he would not omit their countrymen from the outreach of the good news. The inclusive *“all”* also serves to support the view that this phrase refers to *“all nations,”* both Jews and Gentiles.

“And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” - Like Paul, and all other believers, the Christians in Rome are people who have been *“called.”* The verb is passive. It is God, in Christ, Who does the calling. That calling is to the faith/obedience mentioned in the preceding verse. By virtue of that

call, all of these Roman believers become a part of the great fellowship of faith that is the Holy Christian Church.

Verse 7

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



“To All in Rome” by Norman Woehrle

“To all in Rome” - After his extended digression about the nature of the gospel, the apostle now returns to the standard salutation formula as he identifies the persons for whom the letter is intended. The designation is terse and to the point. Paul is writing not only to his friends and acquaintances in Rome (cf. Chapter 16), not to Jews or Gentiles as such, but *“to all”* the believers in Rome whether they are known or unknown to him personally.

“Who are loved by God and called to be saints:” - The Greek is a bit more precise than the English. It literally reads: *“beloved of God as called saints.”* The Christians in Rome are people upon whom God has lavished His love (Greek - *“agapetois theou”*). *“Agape”* is the characteristic New Testament term for the love of God. It is unconditional, unselfish, and sacrificial. God loves us not because of who we are, or because of any quality or characteristic within us. God loves us simply because it is His nature to love (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

“We are Christians for one reason only and that is that God has set his love upon us. That is the thing that brings us out of the world and out of the dominion of Satan...And therefore it is not surprising that the apostle here should remind these Christians of this wonderful thing. The world hated them; it persecuted them. They might be arrested at any moment, at the whim of any cruel tyrant who happened to be the emperor, and they might be condemned to death and thrown to the lions in the

arena. They were oftentimes hated of all men, so Paul is anxious that they should realize this, that they are the beloved of God; that they are in Christ, and that God love them in the same way that He loves Christ...Do not rush on to chapters six, seven, and eight, saying: "I want to know about the doctrine of sanctification." My dear friend, if you only realized, as you should, that you are loved by God as He loved His own Son, you would learn the most important thing with respect to your sanctification without going any further." (D.M. Lloyd Jones, p.159,160)

The Christians in Rome are people who the Lord God has called out of the world to live by faith. Hence they are **“saints.”** A saint is one who has been separated from the world and from sin. And yet every believer is *“simul justus et peccator”* (a saint and a sinner at the same time).

"Saints" carries no idea of perfectionism...We are saints because God has made us saints, namely by His call. Our justification of faith constitutes us saints because it has removed our sins from us as far as the East is from the West. The fact that these saints also begin to live holy lives and are thus also separated from all worldlings follows in the nature of the case. Here on earth, these saints still sin daily, and yet daily they are washed by pardoning grace and thus retain their sainthood."
(Lenski, p. 53)

The progression of Paul's thought is logical and concise. The believers are saints by virtue of the fact that they are called by God. The basis for that call is the fact that they are beloved of God.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” - The third and final component in the traditional salutation is the greeting itself. This is the typical formula which occurs in a number of St. Paul's letters (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2). **“Grace”** (Greek - *“charis”*), as previously discussed, is the undeserved favor of God which comes to us as a free gift by faith in Christ. **“Peace”** (Greek - *“eirene”*) is the traditional Hebrew *“shalom.”* It denotes the sense of well-being and security that is the result of being in right relationship with God. The source of these precious gifts is **“God our Father”** who has revealed Himself as our loving heavenly Father in the sending of His Son, **“the Lord Jesus Christ”** (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6).

“In Paul, the more typical greetings of Jew and Greek have become a blessing which combines the strength of the word which perhaps more than any other characterizes his gospel (“Grace”) with the richness of the Semitic greeting (“Peace”) - a prayer

for the unbounded and wholly generous outreaching power of God which makes for humankind's best well-being.” (Dunn, p. 25)

Verse 8

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

The salutation itself is now followed by a few brief introductory comments. Every one of Paul's letters, except Galatians (where the issue in contention was the loss of the very gospel itself), begins with an expression of gratitude for the people to whom the letter is addressed. And so it is also here in the letter to the Romans. This is not merely an example of personal flattery. Paul's thanks are not addressed to the Romans themselves, but to God, whose grace was at work in the lives of these people. The verb is in the present tense, ***“I thank,”*** indicating that even as he begins to write this letter (***“First”***), he is giving thanks to God. For Paul, God is not an abstract theological concept, but a beloved Master ***“through Jesus Christ”*** his personal Savior and Lord. Rome is the first city of the world, the nerve center and capital of a mighty empire. That reality would necessarily result in a position of unique prominence for the Christian community in Rome. The church in Rome was renown throughout the world for its ***“faith.”*** Christians everywhere had heard of and been encouraged by the steadfast faith of the believers in Rome.

Verses 9-10

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

“God...is my Witness” - St. Paul now confirms his declaration of gratitude for the pre-eminence of the faith of the Roman Christians by asserting his eagerness to personally visit with the congregation in Rome. He reverently calls upon God to witness the truthfulness of his constant concern and prayer for the Romans. The apostle regularly utilizes this type of oath (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:23; 11:31; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5). Its use here is indicative of the importance which Paul placed upon assuring the Romans that his failure to visit Rome prior to this time was not indicative of a lack of interest or desire.



“Paul’s Arrival In Rome” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son” - Paul's appeal to God as witness is strengthened by his deeply personal identification with the deity. The Romans may never have met this man, but having read this introduction, they will have learned a great deal about him. In the original, the verb **“serve”** (Greek - *“latreuo”*) carries the connotation of worship. It is the word that describes the official service of a priest before the altar and the formal cultic worship of God's people in the Old Testament. This connotation also carries over into the language of the New Testament (cf. 1:25; Luke 2:37; Hebrews 8:5; 9:1,6,9; 13:10; Revelation 7:15) as the term is broadened to include every form of divine worship, adoration, praise, and prayer. The most significant development in New Testament usage can be seen in the extension of the concept of worship (Greek - *“latría”*) to include the totality of the Christian life as a worshipful response to God's grace in Christ. Romans 12:1,2 is the classic statement of this view.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - which is your spiritual worship (Greek - “latreian”). Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is God's will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Paul considers his service in ***“preaching the gospel of His Son”*** an act of worship, thru which he glorifies and gives thanks to the God Who has called him as an apostle to preach the good news. The intensity of this worship, the depth and sincerity of his service to God, is indicated by the phrase ***“with my whole heart.”*** The text literally says - *“in my spirit”* (Greek - *“en to pneumatic”*). When the word *“spirit”* is used in reference to the non-physical dimension of a human being in the New Testament, it characteristically emphasizes the soul as it relates to or is influenced by the Spirit of God. The point here is that this is not a matter of external, outward conformity with ritual requirements, like the pharisaic observances, but a dedication which has consumed the very essence of Paul's being. The NIV's translation does well to capture the sense of the Greek. John MacArthur effectively summarizes the contrast:

“Paul had been raised and educated in Judaism. He had himself been a Pharisee and was well acquainted with the other Jewish sects, the Sadducees, the scribes, the priests, and the elders. He knew that with few exceptions those leaders served God in the flesh and were motivated by self-interest. Their worship and service were mechanical, routine, external, and superficial. Paul also was well acquainted with the Gentile world and knew that pagan religious worship and service were likewise external, superficial, and completely motivated by self-interest...During the years before his salvation, Paul himself had worshiped and served God in an external, self-interested way (Philippians 3:4-7). But now that he belonged to Christ, and had Christ's Spirit dwelling, he worshiped and served Him in spirit and in truth, with His whole being. Paul was now motivated by a genuine, inner desire to serve God for God's sake rather than his own, in God's revealed way, rather than his own, and in God's power, rather than his own. He was no longer motivated by self-interest or peer pressure and no longer focused on Jewish religious tradition or even on self-effort to keep God's law. He was not interested in trying to please other men, even himself, but only God.” (MacArthur, p.33)

“How constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times” - The truth which Paul affirmed with God's witness is his unceasing remembrance of the Romans in prayer. Those who serve God with power and effectiveness are, without exception, men and

women of prayer. *“Ora et Labora!”* The ancient Latin maxim summarizes the vital combination that must characterize the powerful, productive Christian life. St. Paul was a man of prayer, and the Christians at Rome figured prominently in those prayers.

“And I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.” - The apostle was firmly convinced that the direction of his life and ministry was governed by divine providence. Like the Lord whom he served, St. Paul was fully submissive to the will of the heavenly Father. So here also, Paul's eagerness to visit Rome is directed ***“by God's will.”*** His sole purpose was to do his Father's will, in his Father's way, at his Father's time. While he might pray consistently and vigorously for a particular outcome, he was nonetheless content to allow the will of God to prevail.

Verses 11-12

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong - that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith.

“I long to see you...” - The apostle now explains the reason for his eagerness to visit Rome. His motive is not egocentric or self-serving. He is not contemplating career advancement or personal advantage. He wants to go to Rome to give of himself, not to entertain or indulge himself. The purpose of the anticipated apostolic visit is to ***“impart to you some spiritual gift”*** (Greek - *“pneumatikon charisma”*). A ***“spiritual gift”*** is a blessing of God's undeserved love (Greek - *“charis”* - English - grace) which is spiritual in nature and conveyed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Hodge writes:

“The gifts of which the Holy Spirit is the author include not only the miraculous endowments of which such frequent mention is made in the letter to the Corinthians, and the ordinary gifts of teaching, exhortation, and prophesying (1 Corinthians 12), but also those graces which are the fruits of the Spirit. The extraordinary gifts were communicated by the imposition of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6), and therefore abounded in churches founded by the apostles (1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 3:5). As the church in Rome was not of this number, it has been supposed that Paul was desirous of conferring upon the Roman Christians some of those miraculous powers by which the gospel was in other places attended and confirmed. The following verses, however, are in favor of giving the phrase here a wider signification. Any increase of knowledge, of grace, or of power was a charismata pneumatikon in the sense here intended.” (Hodge, p. 37)

Here, as always, the goal of a “*spiritual gift*” is “*to make you strong,*” that is to build up the body of Christ.

“That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith.” - Edification is by nature a mutual process. As he seeks to strengthen and renew their faith, St. Paul will himself receive a blessing. It is instructive to note that Paul did not consider himself to be above being spiritually edified by other believers. There is no leader in the church, not even the great missionary apostle to the Gentiles, who does not stand in constant need of that mutual encouragement (cf. Hebrews 10:24,25). John Calvin writes:

“Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced believers. He means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress. Ill will and pride, prevent our deriving such benefit from one another.” (Calvin, p. 24)

Paul's eagerness to seek the mutual encouragement of the Roman Christians ought to be a salutary lesson to leaders in the Church. If the greatest theologian who ever lived, saw himself in need of such support, how much greater is our need for that same support. The ministries of all too many have been undermined by the arrogance which leads the pastor to conclude that he has nothing to learn from his people. William Carey, the great 19th century British missionary to India, expressed his earnest desire for the prayers of his people when he asserted: “*I will go down into the pit itself, if you will hold the rope.*”

Verse 13

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

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,” - This formula is a phrase commonly used in the Pauline letters to indicate the importance of that which follows and lend extra weight to the apostle's words (cf. 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corin-

thians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). His identification of the Romans as *“brothers”* makes his remarks all the more personal. He has previously indicated his desire and his prayers in regard to a Roman visit. He now adds that he had actually resolved to make that trip repeatedly (*“many times”*) but that he has always been prevented from carrying out those plans. He repeats this assertion in 15:22 - *“This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.”* The nature of the hindrances which prevented his journey are not specified in either text. Those hindrances may have been providential, the result of circumstances beyond his control, or they may have revelatory as God directly commanded him in another direction (cf. Acts 16:7).

“In order that I might have a harvest among you...”- The purpose of this earnestly desired but often delayed visit to Rome is *“that I might have a harvest among you.”* The noun *“harvest”* (Greek - *“karpos”*) literally means

“fruit.” It is used in the New Testament in three different ways: A. For the attitudes that characterize the Spirit led believer (Galatians 5:22-23); B. For the actions that are to result from a living faith relationship with the Lord (Matthew 3:8; Romans 6:21-22; 7:4; Philippians 4:16-17; James 3:17-18; Hebrews 12:11;13:15); C. In a



“Sowing for the Harvest” by Rudolf Schäfer

mission context for the increase of converts to Christ and their spiritual growth in Him (Romans 16:5; Philippians 1:22; Colossians 1:22). In this instance, the apostle's emphasis appears to be on the numerical and spiritual growth of the Roman Church.

“Just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” - Paul is the thirteenth apostle, the spearhead of God's mission outreach beyond the twelve tribes of Israel to all the world. His eagerness to visit this predominately Gentile congregation in the capital city of the Roman Empire is fully consistent with that great calling.

Verses 14-15

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and to the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

“I am obligated...”- This is a reference to Paul's call from the Lord. His obligation is to preach the gospel to all nations and classes. In 1 Corinthians 9, St. Paul describes that obligation as he declares: ***“Yet when I preach the gospel I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”*** (vs. 16,17). The gospel is for everyone. Social distinctions, ethnic differences, and national differences are irrelevant. Every descendent of Adam and Eve is in desperate need of the salvation which is offered in this gospel alone. ***“To both Greeks and non-Greeks”*** is a diplomatic softening of the original which says ***“To both Greeks and barbarians.”*** The Greeks viewed themselves as the custodians of the highest and most advanced culture in the world. All who failed to adopt that culture were contemptuously dismissed as ***“barbarians.”*** The negative connotation of that word carries over into English very clearly. Paul deliberately uses the sophisticates' own derogatory label to indicate the irrelevance of their pretension. There is no one so cultured or so educated that they do not need Jesus and His gospel. By the same token, no one is so simple and lowly that Jesus does not care for them. Christ died for the ordinary and the extraordinary. The gospel is for everyone! To the Greek, the next phrase ***“both to the wise and the foolish,”*** is simply a repetition of the preceding contrast. They were ***“the wise”*** and everyone else in the world were ***“the foolish.”*** Paul rejects this human wisdom as utterly worthless (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:13). What better place to proclaim this universal gospel than in the capital city of the world?



“I Am Eager to Preach the Gospel in Rome” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verse 16

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

In these magnificent words St. Paul asserts the basic theme of the letter to the Romans. In this thesis statement Paul reveals that which he will unfold and explain throughout the remainder of the epistle. *“In the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of Romans I, we come to sentences which are the most important in the letter and perhaps in all literature. They are the theme of this epistle and the essence of Christianity. They are the heart of biblical religion.”* (Boice, I, p.103)

“I am not ashamed...” - As he writes to mighty Rome, the eternal city, the seat of the greatest empire in man's history, the epitome of worldly power, the apostle boldly declares his steadfast confidence in the gospel. The world has never been receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ or to those who proclaim that gospel. That reality has often led the church to make the fatal mistake of compromising or altering her message to suit the inclinations and preferences of men. When we seek to offer the world what it wants; when fear of criticism or rejection leads us to water down the truth we are called to proclaim - then we are guilty of betraying our Lord and condemning our listeners. Paul's supreme passion was to see men saved. He cared

nothing for personal comfort, popularity, or reputation. He offered no compromise of the gospel because he recognized it to be the one and only way to salvation.

“The unpopularity of a crucified Christ has prompted many to present a message which is more palatable to the unbeliever, but the removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. An inoffensive gospel is also an inoperative gospel. Thus Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends.” (Wilson, p.24)

The rhetorical device that Paul utilizes in this phrase is called “*litotes*” - that is a dramatic understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by a negative of the contrary. Paul is declaring his pride and confidence in the value, the validity, and the veracity of the Gospel. The apostle seeks to decisively dismiss any suspicion on the part of the Romans that his failure to come to Rome was the result of a hesitancy to proclaim Christ's gospel in the world's greatest city. While men may scorn and reject the message of salvation, it remains, nonetheless, the most absolutely essential truth in the life of every human being. Sinful human beings, puffed up by their own intellectual arrogance, have always scornfully dismissed that Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25). The Second Century Greek philosopher Celsus derided Christianity and her gospel as a religion fit only for fools. Christian teachers, he said, prey upon the simple-minded. Their basic guideline is: “*Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent (for such qualifications are deemed evil by us); but if there be any ignorant or unintelligent; or uninstructed, or foolish persons, let them come with confidence.*” He contemptuously concluded: “*It is only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women and children of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts.*” (Origin Against Celsus, ANF, 4, p.483) That same ridiculous arrogance can be observed among the intellectuals of our own day. It appears even within the church itself as learned theologians find themselves unable to trust in the absolute authority of God's inspired and inerrant Word. Jesus had warned: “***Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed of when He comes in His glory.***” (Luke 9:26). There is nothing more tragic than a Christian who is ashamed of Christ - a believer who is afraid or unwilling to boldly confess his dear Lord even in the face of all the world's ridicule and scorn. Joseph Grigg's classic hymn says it well:

*“Jesus and shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee whom angels praise, whose glories shine through endless days*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Sooner far let evening blush to own a star.
He sheds the beams of light divine o'er this benighted soul of mine.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Just as soon, let midnight be ashamed of noon.
'Tis midnight with my soul til He, Bright Morning Star bids darkness flee.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? That dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend?
No, when I blush be this my shame, that I no more revere His name.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may when I've no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no good to crave, no fear to quell no soul to save.*

*Til then nor is my boasting vain - til then I boast a Savior slain;
And oh, may this my glory be, that Christ is not ashamed of me."
(TLH, #346)*

“Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone...” - Two reasons are now provided for the apostle's unshakable confidence in the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel is **“the power of God.”** The Greek word for power in this verse is *“dunamis”* from which our English word dynamite is derived. The explosive, life transforming power of God is present in the Gospel. Lenski writes:

“The gospel is God's power of love and grace towards sinners. It is wholly unmerited by them and is embodied in the gift of His only-begotten Son, John 3:16. It has been well said that love is the strongest power in the world, and God's love in Christ Jesus is the greatest love of all. All this power and love and grace is found in the gospel. God Himself and all His love and grace are ever in the gospel. God and His saving Word cannot possibly be separated from each other. Even omnipotence cannot save sinners, but God's power of grace in the gospel can and does save them. God's grace produced the gospel as the one means by which to reach the sinners's heart in order to bestow salvation upon him.” (Lenski, p. 73)

That power which the good news of the Gospel conveys is identified in the literal words of the text as *“with the effect of bringing about salvation.”* The Greek preposition (*“eis”*) generally denotes purpose, but in this context its intent is stronger as it indicates the result or effect of God's power in the Gospel. The Gospel is itself the power which accomplishes our salvation. Rome was no stranger to power. And yet, not all the might of her great world empire could save one lost soul. Only the gospel, scorned and rejected by the high and mighty of this world, has the power to save. In all the universe there is no other power that can save as much as a single soul.



“The Song of Moses” by Rudolf Schäfer

The noun *“salvation”* (Greek - *“soteria”*) is drawn from the Old Testament. It denotes radical deliverance from a desperate situation. When Israel was trapped by the chariots of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, only a miracle could have saved them from utter destruction. God sent that miracle as He parted the waters before them, and Moses rejoiced: *“The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation.”* (Exodus 15:2). The concept of *salvation*, however, includes more than mere deliverance. It is also the condition of safety and security that results from that act of deliverance. This word is one of the basic terms in Paul's theological vocabulary. He uses it 48 times in his New Testament letters, 13 times in the letter to the Romans. This magnificent *salvation* is the free gift of God's grace by faith - *of everyone who believes.*

The verb “*believes*” is in the present tense indicating action that is currently taking place and will continue indefinitely into the future. Thus Paul's focus is not exclusively on the initial act of faith but also on faith as the foundation and substance of the ongoing Christian experience. The term carries the basic idea of trust and reliance. The New Testament is careful to note that this ongoing trust is not the result of human action or effort. It is the undeserved gift of God's grace. Faith is “*the confidence wrought in the soul by the divine power of the gospel and by this alone. Being saved is simplicity itself: by working confidence in the heart, the gospel bestows salvation.*” (Lenski, p.76) As St. Paul affirms elsewhere: “***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.***” (Ephesians 2:8,9). There is no difference or distinction among men. The text is clearly and unequivocally universal. Faith is the one and only way to salvation for all sinners: “*everyone...first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*”

Verse 17

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

“***A righteousness from God is revealed...***” - “***Righteousness***” (Greek - “*dikaioisune*”) is the key concept in the letter to the Romans. Various forms of this crucial term will occur 35 times in the balance of the epistle. In the Greek text, the phrase begins with these words to emphasize their significance. It is of crucial importance to clearly recognize the “*forensic*” (of, pertaining to, or used in a court of law) nature of this word. The justification of the sinner is a juridical act of God, the divine Judge who pronounces the believer righteous and by that pronouncement places the believer into the status of righteousness. The “***righteousness from God***” (Greek - “*dikaioisune theou*”) is the forensic act of the righteous God the Judge 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. Luther rightly declares the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake to be the crucial heart of Christianity: “*The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter darkness and death.*” (Plass, II, p. 703)



“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit” by Herman Kaulbach - 1910

The German Lutheran Pietist, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, captured the meaning of this all important idea beautifully in a little hymn that became the daily prayer of generations of Lutheran children:

*“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit, das ist mein Schmuck und Ehrenkleid;
Damit will ich vor Gott bestehn, wann ich zum Himmel wird eingehn.*

*Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress,
With these will I stand before God victoriously on the day when I arrive in heaven.*

*Ich glaub' an Jesum, welcher spricht; "Wer glaubt, er kommt nichts in's Gericht,"
Gott lob, ich bin schon absolvirt, und meine Schuld is abgefuhrt.*

*I trust in Jesus who has said, "Whoever believes in me will not come under judgement."
Praise God! I have already been absolved and my guilt has been taken away.*

*Das heilige unschuldige Lamm, das am dem rauhen Kreuzesstamm,
Für meine Sund' gestorben ist, erkenn ich für den Herr und Christ.*

I acknowledge the holy, innocent Lamb, who died for my sin upon the rough wooden beam of the cross, as the Lord and the Christ.

*Ich glaube, daß Sein treues Blut genug für alle Sunden tut;
Und daß es Gottes Schätze fullt und ewig in den Himmel gilt.*

*I believe that His precious blood is a sufficient ransom for all sin;
That it has filled God's treasury to overflowing and will hold good forever in heaven.*

*Drum soll auch dieses Blut allein mein Trost und Meine Hoffnung sein;
Ich bau im Leben und im Tod allein auf Jesum Wunden rot.*

*And therefore, this blood alone is my hope and my trust,
I build upon the red wounds of Jesus alone in life and in death."*

Like the **“wrath of God”** in the verse which follows, this **“righteousness from God”** is **“revealed.”** The former is the Law, the latter, the Gospel. Were it not for the act of divine revelation nothing could be known about this **“righteousness from God”** for by nature man knows only of his own righteousness, the result of his own good works. As the apostle declares in Romans 10:3 - **“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”** (cf. also Philippians 3:9) This justification is appropriated by the individual through faith. Paul's assertion of the instrumentality of faith - **“a righteousness that is by faith from first to last”** - repeats and parallels his earlier emphasis that the gospel is **“the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** The righteousness of God is revealed and offered in the Gospel as a perfect gift. It becomes ours as a result of faith. That faith, of course, is itself a gift of God's grace. Lenski correctly insists:

“Thus faith is in no sense a human work. It is the operation of God wholly and in all its stages. There is absolutely no synergism in either its conception or its continuance. Faith is passive as to its production and its nature; it is kindled, is awakened, and then is kept alive. It is never self-wrought. To think so is an illusion.” (Lenski, p.83)

Faith is the vital combination of three components: knowledge (Latin - **“notitia”**), assent (Latin - **“assensus”**), and trust (Latin - **“fiducia”**). Faith is essentially trust, personal reliance upon the promises of the Gospel and the Savior who offers those promises to His people. It is that trust that sets saving faith apart from mere historical faith. Charles Spurgeon writes:

“Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing; for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation...Faith is the eye which looks; the hand which grasps; the mouth which feeds upon Christ.”
(Boice, p.108)

“Just as it is written: *‘The righteous will live by faith.’*” - This segment concludes with the reminder that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is no innovation. Earlier in this chapter the apostle emphasized the fact that the Gospel **“had been promised beforehand through the Holy Scripture”** (vs.2) and he now quotes from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk (2:4) to illustrate that reality.

Excursus - Martin Luther and Romans 1:17

For Martin Luther the text of Romans 1:17 and a proper of understanding of **“the righteousness of God”** which that text declares were of crucial importance. It is not an exaggeration to assert that this single passage was determinative for Luther's identity, both as an individual Christian, and as a theologian and leader of the Reformation. In his classic *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*, Merle D'Aubigne contends that the inspired words of this short verse became *“the very soul of his theology; his stronghold in every danger; the principle which gave energy to his preaching and strength to his charity; the foundation of his peace; the encouragement of his labors, his comfort in life and in death.”* (II, p.70) In 1518 Luther was deeply involved in a study of the New Testament Epistles of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews in preparation for a series of lectures at the University of Wittenberg. His study chamber was on the third floor of the Tower of the Augustinian Cloister in that city. For this reason Luther's evangelical breakthrough is often described as the *“Tower Experience”* (German - *“Turm Erlebnis”*). His stumbling block was the concept of *“the righteousness of God.”* The Reformer would later recall:

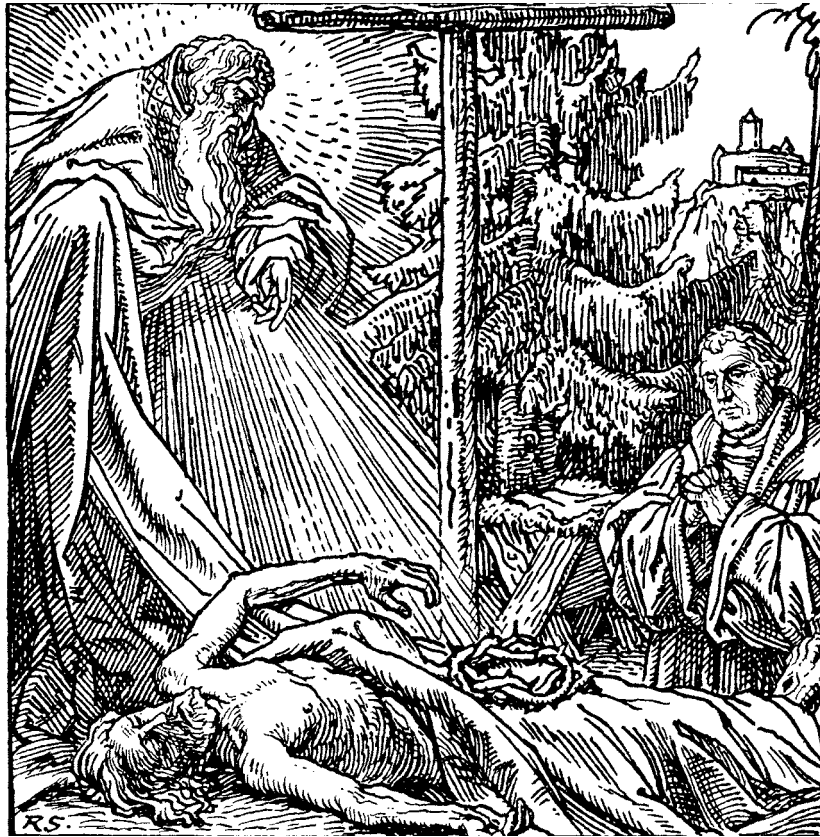
“These words “righteous” and “righteousness of God” struck my conscience as flashes of lightning, frightening me each time I heard them; if God is righteous, He punishes...Certainly I had been possessed by an unusually ardent desire to understand Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Nevertheless, despite the ardor of my heart, I was hindered by the unique word in the first chapter: “the righteousness of God is revealed in it.” I hated that word “righteousness of God” because in

accordance with the usage and custom of the doctors, I had been taught to understand it philosophically as meaning, as they put it, the formal or active righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust...As a monk I led an irreproachable life. Nevertheless, I felt that I was a sinner before God. My conscience was restless and I could not depend on God being propitiated by my satisfactions. Not only did I not love, but I actually hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Thus a furious battle raged within my perplexed conscience, but meanwhile I was knocking at the door of this particular Pauline passage, earnestly seeking to know the mind of the great apostle.”
(Saarnivaara, p.36,37)



“Martin Luther’s ‘Tower Experience’” by Rudolf Schäfer

Tormented by a conscience which would allow him no rest, Luther desperately searched the pages of Scripture. It always came back to that one single idea, *“the righteousness of God.”* Finally the answer came; *“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of Romans 1:17.”* The blessed sweetness of pure Scriptural Gospel swept away the temptations of the enemy (German - *“Anfechtungen”*) which had driven him to the brink of despair. Now the



“Sola Gratia” by Rudolf Schäfer

situation was completely changed. The burden had been lifted from his weary shoulders and he was free from the guilt and fear that had haunted his life. From that moment on, nothing in this world - no hardship, peril, threat, or danger - would ever move him to abandon the wonderful peace that he had been given in the Gospel of Jesus. The words of Romans 1:17 which he once had bitterly hated, now became the sweetest in all of Scripture. This text had become for him an open gate to paradise. These are Luther's own words:

“Day and night I tried to meditate on the significance of these words: ‘the righteousness of God is revealed in it as it is written: ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Then, finally, God had mercy on me and I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely faith, and that this sentence is passive, indicating that the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Now I felt as though I had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise. In the same moment the face of the whole Scripture became apparent to me. My mind ran through the Scriptures, as far as I was able to recollect them, seeking analogies in other phrases, such as the work of God by which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God by which He makes us wise,

the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. Just as intensely as I had before hated the expression `the righteousness of God' I now lovingly praised this most pleasant word. This passage from Paul became for me the very gate to Paradise...Thus my soul was refreshed, for it is the righteousness of God through which we are justified and saved through Christ. These words became more pleasant to me. Through this word, the Holy Spirit enlightened me in the tower.”
(Saarnivaara, p.36,37)

Thus, through the careful study of the Bible, did the Lord prepare the great Reformer of His Church, who was to call Christendom back to the pure Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Protestant Reformation did not find its origin in the intensity of religious piety or devotion, or in the Pentecostal outpouring of visions, signs, and wonders. The Reformation began in the meticulous study of Holy Scripture, the written Word of God. Romans 1:17 is rightly called “*Martin Luther’s Text.*” Seldom, if ever, has one single Bible text served so obviously as the driving, molding force of a great man of God.



Verse 18

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

“*The wrath of God is being revealed...*” - The wonder of God's amazing grace in Christ cannot be understood without a clear recognition of the total depravity of man. Church history makes it abundantly clear that whenever man's sinfulness is minimized or compromised the end result is always a loss of the Gospel. Modern, man-centered Christianity has little to say on the subject of “*the wrath of God.*” Contemporary preachers look down with condescending scorn on the stern puritan preachers of the past like Jonathon Edwards who reduced entire congregations to tears with fiery sermons about “*Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.*” In a misguided attempt to achieve relevance, the Church of today seeks to make the Gospel of Christ attractive to men in a variety of ways:

1. We minister to man's “*felt needs,*” identifying a lack or longing which the listener will acknowledge, which then becomes the point of contact to gain a hearing for the Gospel - presented as an answer to meet whatever your self-perceived need may be. Unfortunately, sinful man

is universally unable to recognize what his needs really are (i.e. Adam and Eve's fig leaves) (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3).

2. We present the Gospel as the promise of earthly, material reward, if only the listener will accept Jesus. Jesus wants to make you wealthy, healthy, and successful, if you will become a believer. The most flagrant example of this approach is the notorious “*prosperity gospel*” proclaimed by prominent TV evangelists who offer untold wealth in return for faith and the appropriate contribution to their ministry.

3. We present the Gospel by the route of personal experience, stress what Jesus has done for us and commend Him to other people so that they might have the same wonderfully fulfilling experience.

Paul takes an entirely different approach which is God-centered, not man-centered. He recognizes that in the end what matters is not whether we feel good or have our felt needs met or receive a meaningful experience. What matters is whether we come into a right relationship with God by faith in Christ. For that to happen we must first come to see things as they truly are. That is the function of the Law which presents the grim reality that we are under God's wrath and in danger of eternal condemnation at His hands because of sin. In his magnificent essay *Law and Gospel*, Dr. C.F.W. Walther writes:



Dr. C.F.W. Walther

“There is nothing kind or comforting on Mt. Sinai...How beneficial is a sermon in which the preacher begins with the Law in all its severity and expounds it spiritually! Many people will think: ‘If what he says is true, I am lost!’ To be sure, some will think: ‘That is no way for an evangelical preacher to act!’ Yes indeed, he must act that way or he is not an evangelical preacher. If the Law does not precede, the Gospel cannot succeed. First Moses, then Christ: first John the Baptist, then Christ. At first some people will think, ‘O, how terrible that is!’ But then the preacher, with eyes aglow, comes to the Gospel. Now the

people are glad and they understand why the preacher first proclaimed the Law, namely so that they could see how polluted they are with sin." (Walther, p.57)

Hence the inspired apostle begins by showing at length that all men are utterly lost and cannot possibly be saved except by the wonderful gospel righteousness of God. The concept of the **"wrath of God"** "is clearly and frequently emphasized in Holy Writ. J.I. Packer writes: *"One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath."* (Packer, p. 134,135) The Old Testament includes nearly 600 important passages on the subject. The **"wrath of God"** is completely unlike the capricious anger or malice of human beings which flares in a fit of temper and then quickly disappears to be replaced by remorse and regret. Human anger is often the result of selfish annoyance or impatience. The **"wrath of God,"** on the other hand, is the necessary result and expression of His essential holiness. This contrast is clearly expressed in the terminology of Scripture. The Greek language has two main words for wrath or anger. One is *"thumos,"* from a root which means *"to rush along fiercely or to be in the heat of violence."* It is typically used in reference to uncontrolled fury, a fit of temper or rage, which flares and then disappears quickly. With the single exception of a verse in Revelation, which describes the final outpouring of God's wrath, *"thumos"* is never used in reference to God in the Bible. The other word is *"orge"* from a root which means *"to slowly increase or gradually ripen."* This is the word which the Bible characteristically uses to describe the **"wrath of God."** The **"wrath of God"** is God's constant, consistent, righteous anger over all that is evil and that thereby denies His nature as a righteous, holy God. God could not be holy and not be angry with sin. Holiness cannot tolerate unholiness (cf. Habakkuk 1:13). John Murray's careful definition is precisely to the point: *"Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is in contradistinction of his holiness."* (Murray, p.35) George Rodgers said it well when he wrote: *"God's righteous anger never rises, never abates: it is always at flood tide in the presence of sin because He is unchangeably and inflexibly righteous."* (Rodgers, I, p.40) Paul uses the term **"wrath"** (Greek - *"orge"*) 10 times in the Letter to the Romans. As James Boice correctly observes:

"His point is not that God is suddenly flailing out in petulant anger against something that has offended him momentarily, but rather that God's firm, fearsome hatred of all wickedness is building up and will one day result in the eternal condemnation of all who are not justified by Christ's righteousness." (Boice, p.132)

Those who flinch from the concept of God's righteous wrath fail to recognize that even among human beings outrage and indignation against cruelty, crime, and vice have always been recognized as essential elements of human goodness. The fact that our modern culture has lost its capacity for outrage and has come to tolerate even the vilest manifestations of evil is the clearest possible indication of our utter moral collapse. God is absolutely intolerant of evil because He is absolutely good. His holy fury against sin is the decisive demonstration of that goodness. Those who have come to soft-pedal the wrath and judgement of God would do well to ponder John MacArthur's penetrating assessment:

“How could One who delights only in what is pure and lovely not loathe what is impure and ugly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin, which by its very nature violates that holiness? How could He who loves righteousness not hate and act severely against all unrighteousness? How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with complacency on virtue and vice equally? He cannot do those things, because He is holy, just, and good. Wrath is the only just response a perfect, holy God could make to unholy men. Righteous wrath is therefore every bit as much an element of God's divine perfection as any other of His attributes.” (MacArthur, p.74)

R.A. Torrey, a great Bible teacher of the 19th century, makes the same point in an even more forceful and comprehensive way when he contends:

“Shallow views of sin and of God's holiness, and of the glory of Jesus Christ and His claims upon us, lie at the bottom of weak theories of the doom of the impenitent. When we see sin in all its hideousness and enormity, the holiness of God in all its perfection, and the glory of Jesus Christ in all its infinity, nothing but a doctrine that those who persist in a choice of sin, who love darkness rather than light, and who persist in the rejection of the Son of God, shall endure everlasting anguish, will satisfy the demands of our own moral intuitions...The more closely men walk with God and the more devoted they become to His service, the more likely they are to believe this doctrine.” (Torrey, p.311)

Having heard the Gospel promise that **“the righteous will live by faith”** (vs.17), we now hear the stern pronouncement of the Law which warns that those who do not live by faith will not live - they will perish **“on the great day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgement will be revealed.”** (2:5). As the Gospel is salvation and life, so the Law is damnation and death. In Verse 17 a **“righteousness from God is revealed in the Gospel.”** The identical verb is used in Verse 18 to indicate that the **“wrath of God”** is also **“being revealed.”** In both instances the verb is in the present tense to



“The Flood” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

describe a process of revelation which is now in constant progress. The *“wrath of God”* over against the evil of sinful man has been *“revealed from heaven”* time and time again since the Fall. The sentence of death was pronounced; the earth was cursed and made subject to the bondage of decay; and fallen man was driven from Paradise. In the waters of the Flood and the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, God has revealed His wrath. The rise and fall of men and nations as the cup of God's wrath was poured out upon them is a part of that same process of ongoing revelation. The universal dominion of death, disease and misery, the cataclysms and catastrophes of nature, and the horror of Christ's suffering and death, have all served to reveal the dreadful *“wrath of God from heaven.”* With Christ's first coming, this weary world finally entered *“the last days”* (Hebrews 1:2). All the revelation of wrath in these last days is what Martin Franzmann has called *“the upbeat of that final dreadful music*

of damnation” (Franzmann, p. 40) which will sound forth when Jesus comes again.

The object of God's righteous wrath is **“all of the godlessness and wickedness of men.”** **“Godlessless”** (Greek - *“asebia”*) refers to a lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God, a failure that inevitably leads to some form of false worship. **“Wickedness”** is a broad term which includes every form of immorality. **“Wickedness”** is the inescapable result of **“godlessness.”** Irreligion always manifests itself in immorality and immorality is the evidence of irreligion.

“Of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” - One of the most basic characteristics of sinful man is an inherent, unyielding opposition to the truth of God. Despite the testimony of conscience, the clear evidence of nature all around us, and the revelation of God's inspired and inerrant Word, man continues to stubbornly and defiantly cling to the lie. R.C.H. Lenski comments:

“Here Paul explains in one little clause how, despite the constant revelation of God's wrath, men go on in their wickedness; whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes them feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing on into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbing voice by argument and denial...These denials and these arguments are not altruistic; they are the efforts of the ungodly to suppress the disquieting truth in the interest of their own ungodliness. They face an inescapable alternative in their moral nature, an either - or; either to yield to the truth and give up ungodliness and unrighteousness, or to hold firmly to these two and then of necessity to squelch the truth.” (Lenski, p. 93)

The verb **“suppress”** (Greek - *“katechein”*) means *“to hold down, restrain, or repress.”* It is an excellent term to describe man's obstinate, willful resistance to the message of Law and Gospel (**“the truth”**). That suppression places sinful man in a state of denial, in conflict not only with the revealed truth of Scripture, but also with his own most basic instincts, and the clear evidence of his environment and experience. Lenski's comments once more are precisely to the point:

“This fact of the wrath from heaven constantly breaks through the clouds of human perversions, false reasonings and philosophies, blatant denials and lies, beneath which men seek to hide in helpless efforts to escape... We must not be confused by the follies of atheists and moral perverts or by heathen blindness concerning God. Man's moral nature remains and instinctively responds to the revelations of this wrath wherever they occur. Conscience makes cowards of us all. It is a hopeless

effort to destroy man's moral nature and to rid him of his reactions to the judgements of God.” (Lenski, p. 91)

Verses 19-20

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

“***Since what may be known about God is plain to them...***” - God has chosen to reveal something of Himself in nature. God, to the extent that He can be known, can be clearly discerned in that which He has made. This visible manifestation of Himself can be universally known by man. Thus the vast majority of mankind has no knowledge of God not because that knowledge is not readily available to them but because they rebel against that knowledge and reject it (“***who suppress the truth by their wickedness***” -vs.18). They are not ignorant of God but rebellious against Him: not atheists, without God, but anti-theists, against God. This assertion of man's natural knowledge of God is linked to the preceding declaration of God's righteous anger at the godless and immorality of man with the explanatory conjunction “***since***” (Greek - “*dioti*”). Men cannot seek to excuse their godless immorality on the basis of ignorance of a God who has hidden Himself from them. On the contrary, the apostle insists, God is constantly revealing Himself to them every day - “***by His whole work of creation, by countless beneficent providences, by ever-renewed retributions, and by man's own mind, especially by his moral nature and his conscience.***” (Lenski, p.96)

“***For since the creation of the world...***” - Paul now explains the means by which the Creator God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creatures. This divine self-disclosure has been available from the beginning of time - “***For since the creation of the world.***” It is universal in its scope, available to each and every human being. When God determined to bring the universe into being from nothing He simultaneously created a natural theology which clearly reveals His identity and His nature. A striking oxymoron (a contradiction in terms) serves to emphasize the apostle's point - “***God' invisible qualities....have been clearly seen.***” That which is invisible, not perceived by the senses, becomes visible in the things which the Creator God has made - “***being understood from that which has been made.***” This natural



“Jahweh at the Burning Bush” by Rudolf Schäfer

revelation is not dim or uncertain for that which it uncovers has *“been clearly seen.”* *“God’s invisible qualities”* are defined in the text as *“His eternal power and divine nature.”* While not comprehensive or exhaustive, this carefully chosen combination serves to highlight the essential characteristics of God. The concepts of eternity and omnipotence are at the core of God’s nature. He is *“Jahweh,”* the Great I AM. He has always been and will always be. He has no beginning or point of origin but is the source of all that is. His omnipotent power is eternal - without beginning

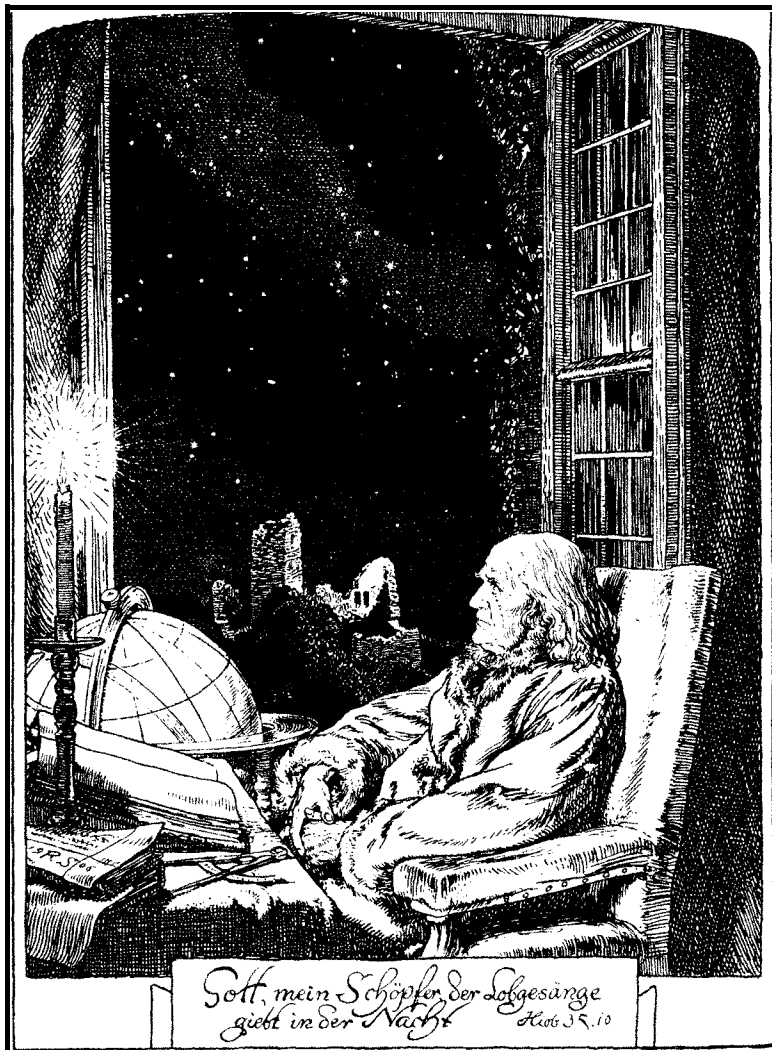
and without end - because He is eternal. Paul’s reference to *“divine nature”* is more general and describes *“the sum of the invisible perfections which characterize God...the totality of that which God is as a being possessed of divine attributes.”* (Murray, p.39) Scripture emphatically and repeatedly affirms this natural knowledge of God as the following sampling of passages indicates:

“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)

“The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him and consumes

His foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim His righteousness and all the peoples see His glory.” (Psalm 97: 1-6)

“We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless idols to the living God who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them...Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” (Acts 14:15,17)



*“God My Creator, Whose Songs of Praise Fill the Night”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

The vast majesty of the natural world and its incredible intricacy proclaim the reality and the glory of the Creator God so clearly and unmistakably that only **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”** (Psalm 14 :1). Therefore, unrighteous, unregenerate man **“are without excuse.”**

*“No human being is infinite. Infinitude belongs exclusively to God. Yet, in spite of our finite nature, human beings do seem to have an almost infinite capacity for some things. One of them is for making excuses for reprehensible behavior...Our text says that in spite of our almost infinite capacity to make excuses, we are all **“without excuse”** for our failure to seek out, worship, and thank the living God.”* (Boice, p.153,154)

Verse 21

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

“For although they knew God...” - Paul now continues his description of the tragic results of man's stubborn rejection of the knowledge of God which all people could possess through God's extensive disclosure of Himself in the works of nature. In Verse 18 we learned that sinful man is guilty of stubbornly suppressing the self-evident truth of God. The problem is not that they do not or cannot know God, but rather that they refuse to know God.

“They neither glorified Him as God” - Fallen mankind exhibits its rejection of God by its refusal to give Him the glory that is His due. A bit of etymology will be most helpful in understanding the intent of the text. The Greek word ***“glorified”*** (*“dokeo”* - *“to glorify”*) originally meant *“to appear”* or *“to seem.”* As for the noun *“glory”* (Greek - *“doxa”*), the term's root meant *“opinion”* - that is, how a person or thing appears or seems to the one observing it (i.e. the English words *“orthodox”* - one who holds the correct opinion; *“heterodox”* - one who holds a different opinion, and; *“paradox”* - a contradictory opinion). Originally the Greek words *“dokeo”* and *“doxa”* were neutral, used in reference to both good and bad opinions, but eventually they came to be used especially and then exclusively in reference to good opinions. From that point, the words evolved to mean *“praise”* or *“honor”* - the glory which was due to one about whom such good opinions were held. This use of the word has come into the English language in the term *“doxology”*, which is a song of praise. With that background, the appropriateness of Paul's use of the word in the context of sinful man's refusal to *“glorify”* God is quite clear. Unregenerate humanity will not *“glorify”* God because it does not hold to a right opinion about Him. It refuses to acknowledge His sovereign power, holiness, and perfect love, and therefore will not praise and *“glorify”* Him. Thus, mankind's refusal to *“glorify”* God is the direct result of its suppression of the truth. John MacArthur writes:

“The worst deed committed in the universe is the failure to give God honor or glory. Above everything else God is to be glorified. To glorify God is to exalt Him, to recognize Him as supremely worthy of honor, and to acknowledge His divine attributes. Since the glory of God is also the sum of all the attributes of His being, of all that He has revealed of Himself to man, to give God glory is to acknowledge His glory and extol it. We cannot give Him glory by adding to His perfection, but by praising His perfection. We glorify Him by praising His glory! As the Westminster



“Adam and Eve After Their Expulsion from Eden” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Catechism eloquently declares, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!" ... But recognizing God's glorious attributes and acts and glorifying Him for them is precisely what sinful man do not do. Millions upon millions of people have lived in the midst of God's wonderful universe and yet proudly refused to recognize Him as its Creator and to affirm His majesty and glory. And for that willful, foolish rejection they are without excuse as they stand under God's righteous judgement." (MacArthur, p. 84)

“Nor gave thanks to Him” - The unbelief of rebellious mankind further results in ingratitude. Like their refusal to **“glorify”** God, so also their failure to give **“thanks to Him”** is based upon a willful unawareness of the most basic facts about God and a deliberate failure to recognize their absolute dependence upon His merciful goodness. Every human being on the face of the earth is totally dependent upon the gracious providence of God every moment of His life. It is God alone who gives you **“rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”** (Acts 14:17) The edifice of natural man's ingratitude is erected upon the foundation of his suppression of the truth and his refusal to glorify His Creator. Thankfulness must be the hallmark of all those who truly know God. In contrast, ingratitude is one of the basic characteristics of those who suppress the truth about God.

“But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” - Choices have consequences. St. Paul now proceeds to describe the dreadful consequences of man's obstinate rejection of the Creator God. Man's rebellion against God robs him

of the reason with which mankind was created in the beginning. The word “*thinking*” (Greek - “*dialogismois*”) refers generally to the working of the human mind but in the New Testament, the word always carries a very definite negative connotation. It could well be translated with the English word “*rationalization*”. No matter how impressive or meticulous, godless reasoning is never more than the rearrangement of error. The rationalizations of unregenerate man are empty and useless. The apostle uses the classic Old Testament term “*futile*” which originally referred to an empty puff of wind (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:2,14; 2:1,11,15,17). Such rationalization leads nowhere; accomplishes nothing; and achieves no real goal. It is utterly and completely worthless. But the empty mind does not remain empty. Sin makes fools of those who have turned their backs on God. “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” (Psalm 14:1; 53:1) Their empty minds and “*foolish hearts*” become like vacuums which draw in falsehood and darkness to replace the truth and light that have been rejected. We flounder helplessly and hopelessly around in the darkness that we have brought down upon ourselves.

Verses 22-23

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

“*Although they claimed to be wise...*” - The moral and intellectual degeneration of sinful man also results in religious degradation. The sheer folly of man's ridiculous pretensions is revealed. The word “*wise*” in the original is the Greek “*sophoi*” from which a large number of English words are derived - i.e. “*sophistry*,” “*sophisticated*,” “*sophomore*,” and “*philosophy*.” The search for wisdom apart from and in defiance of God has been the cause of humanity's downfall since Adam's fateful encounter with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But sinful man fails to recognize that “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” (Proverbs 1:7). The human attempt to replace this genuine wisdom with its own speculations and philosophizing is the ultimate demonstration of foolishness. It is even more pathetic when these futile, foolish, worldly speculations are allowed to infect the church. The sad story of modern theology tells a tragic tale of theologians who have accepted the unfounded foolishness of unregenerate man above the flawless truth of God's inspired Word. The impotence and irrelevance of much of Christianity today is the consequence of their foolishness. Martin Lloyd Jones perceptively observes: “*The whole drift toward modernism that has blighted the church of God and nearly*

destroyed its living gospel may be traced to an hour when men began to turn from revelation to philosophy.” (MacArthur, p.88) The folly of those who are infatuated with this worldly wisdom is described by the Greek verb **“they became fools”** (*“emoranthesan”*). This powerful term means *“to become silly”* or *“foolish,”* It is drawn from the root word *“moros”* which means *“fool,”* as in the English derivative *“moron.”* The greatest fool in all the world is the man who exchanges God's wisdom of truth and light for man's wisdom of deceit and darkness.

“And exchanged the glory of the immortal God...” - Now we come to the climax of this silliness. **“The glory of the immortal God”** is *“the sum total of His attributes as these constitute His essence, the sum of the perfections of His being, but as shining forth to us and revealing what God is to us.”* (Lenski, p. 105) That **“glory”** is made manifest the wonder of creation. Among the Children of Israel, the glory of God was revealed in the *“shekinah”* (Hebrew - *“the One Who Dwells”*) which rested over the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and later the Temple (cf. Exodus 40:34-35; Leviticus 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 5:13). Thus the prophets frequently refer



“The Lord Who Sits Enthroned Between the Cherubim”
by Rudolf Schäfer

to God as *“the Lord enthroned between the cherubim”* (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16; Ezekiel 9:3). This visible manifestation of God's Glory was the assurance of God's presence in the midst of His people. The apostles of the New Testament apply this powerful image to Christ Who *“dwells (literal - tabernacles) among us”* and in Whom we behold the *glory of the Only Begotten of the Father* (cf. John 1:14).

The incredible foolishness of sinful man is further emphasized by the fact that it is the **“glory of the immortal God”** which they recklessly cast aside. Eternity is of the

essence of God. He is above and beyond the limitations of time, without beginning and without end. Amid the change and decay of everything in this world, He alone is forever the same - the constant, unfailing Refuge of those who trust in Him. That confidence is beautifully expressed in Thomas O. Chisholm's classic hymn "*Great is Thy Faithfulness.*"

*"Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord God, our Father!
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be!
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided -
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."* ("HS98 #899)

And what does sinful man receive in exchange for the "***glory of the immortal God?***" He fashions his own false gods - helpless, lifeless idols, created by his own perverted imagination. The ridiculous nature of the exchange is heightened by the text's effective use of contrast. Real "***glory***" is abandoned in favor of empty "***image.***" The "***immortal God***" is replaced by "***mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.***" It is a fool's exchange indeed! The prophets scornfully dismiss the folly of idolaters who bow down before gods which their own hands have fashioned (i.e. Isaiah 44:9-17) St. Paul's language here is strongly reminiscent of a scathing denunciation of idolatry in the Apocryphal "*Wisdom of Solomon*":

"A skilled woodcutter may saw down a tree easy to handle and skillfully strip off all its bark, and then with pleasing workmanship make a useful vessel that serves life's needs, and burn the castoff pieces of his work to prepare his food and eat his fill. But a castoff piece from among them, useful for nothing, a stick crooked and full of knots, he takes and carves with care in his leisure, and shapes it with skill gained in idleness; he forms it like the image of a man, or makes it like some worthless animal, giving it a coat of red paint and coloring its surface red and covering every blemish in it with paint; then he makes for it a niche that befits it, and sets it in the wall, and fastens it there with iron. So he takes thought for it, that it may not fall, because he knows that it cannot help itself, for it is only an image and has need of help. When he prays about possessions and his marriage and children, he is not ashamed to address a lifeless thing. For health he appeals to a thing that is weak; for life he prays to a thing that is dead; for aid he entertains a thing that is utterly inexperienced; for a prosperous journey; a thing that cannot take a step; for money-making and work and success with his hands he asks strength of thing whose hands have no

strength...But the idol made with hands is accursed, and so is he who made it; because he did the work and a perishable thing is named a god. For equally hateful to God are the ungodly man and his ungodliness for what was done will be punished together with him who did it. Therefore, there will be a visitation also upon the heathen idols because, though part of what God created they became an abomination, and became traps for the souls of men and a snare to the feet of the foolish.” (“Wisdom of Solomon,” 13:11-19; 14:8-11)

The idols of this world are powerless delusions. As the French philosopher Voltaire sarcastically observed: “*God made man in his own image and man returned the favor.*” Every form of idolatry is a form of self-worship. And yet the Bible warns that the devil and his demons are all too happy to take advantage of the ungodliness

of men by impersonating the characteristics which the man-made gods are supposed to have, thus, endowing the idol with supernatural power from hell. Through these false signs and wonders Satan encourages and perpetuates the superstitions of foolish men (cf. Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7) In reference to the idol worship of the Gentiles, St. Paul notes: “*The things which Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons.*” (1 Corinthians 10:20). The variations of idolatry within our culture today are endless. The proliferation of the New Age Movement, astrology, and other occultic practices demonstrates that even the coarsest forms of idolatry have maintained their allure among modern sophisticates. Many of our contemporary idols are more subtle and therefore more dangerous. John MacArthur properly denounces the “*pandemic moral and spiritual pollution of modern society*” as “*a degenerative and addictive form of idolatry*” (MacArthur, p.95). As the poet J. H. Clinch wrote:



*“The Idols of Ancient Egypt”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

*“And still from Him we turn away,
And fill our hearts with worthless things;
The fires of greed form the clay,
And forth the idol springs!
Ambition's flame and passion's heat,
By wondrous alchemy transmute earth's dross
To raise some gilded brute to fill Jehovah's seat.”*

Verses 24-25

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - Who is forever praised! Amen.

“Therefore God gave them over...” - The fearful, cumulative, self-reinforcing consequences of sin are now described in grim detail. The very wickedness of men, by which they have suppressed the truth, becomes the means of their punishment. *“Men do what they want to do, but God makes of what they want to do a hell of His imposing...In doing what they want to do they become the executors of God's wrath upon themselves.”* (Franzmann, p. 41)

What follows is the result of what precedes. Each of the three phrases in vs. 24-32 reveal a different dimension of God's judgement upon sin. Each phrase begins with a conjunction (vs.24 - ***“Therefore:”*** vs. 26 - ***“Because of this:”*** vs. 28 - ***“Furthermore”***) which links the penalty to man's rejection of God, described in the preceding verses: that is, man's rejection of God despite God's clear revelation of Himself (vs.19-21); his rationalization of his rejection (vs. 18b,22); and, his creation of substitute gods of his own design (vs.23).

The terrible refrain ***“God gave them over”*** is repeated three times (vs.24,26,28). In each instance, the word order of the Greek text is unusual in that the verb occurs before the subject for special emphasis. *“Give them over did God”* would be a literal translation. The verb ***“gave them over”*** (Greek - *“paradidomi”*) is extraordinarily intense. Paul uses it elsewhere of giving one's body to be burned (1 Corinthians 13:3) and of Christ's giving Himself up to death (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2,25). The term has a judicial flavor and is often used in reference to judgement (Matthew 5:25; 10:17,19,21; 18:34; 2 Peter 2:4) or being sent to prison (Mark 1:14; Acts 8:3). In this

passage the word describes the judicial act of God in which the sinner is completely handed over to his sin and its destructive consequences. This involves first of all, the removal of the restraints which God normally places upon sin through conscience and outward hindrance. Stöckhardt writes:

“Wherein does this divine arrangement consist? Through His Holy Spirit God disciplines and holds sinful man in check, at least outwardly. He instills them with fear and terror of sin. One who has inwardly conceived wicked plans, He warns concerning the actual deed, as He warned Cain before he became a murderer. The Lord admonishes the conscience. In the way of the evil intention, He places all sorts of outward hindrances, and thus attempts to restrain the outburst, or at least the coarse outbursts, of the evil lusts of the heart. If, however, man despises these divine exhortations and increase ungodliness, God completely gives the ungodly up to his sins, so that nothing stands in the way of the gratification of all his lusts.” (Stöckhardt, p.13)

But this action is not merely passive non-interference with the natural consequences of sin. God's wrath is expressed in His abandonment of defiant sinners to more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts. His punitive justice hands the sinners over completely to their sins in an accelerating downward spiral of destruction. Those who have abandoned God are abandoned by God as He uses sin itself to punish the sinner. *“Men who so love the cesspool of sin are sent into it by justice; what they want they shall have.”* (Lenski, p.109) As the Lord declares in the Psalm: ***“Israel did not obey me, so I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart to walk in their own devices.”*** (Psalm 81:11,12) James Dunn offers this helpful assessment:

“But now the spiral of man's sin and sinning is given a sharper twist: God determines the consequences of man's sin. God handed them over; the word denotes a measured and deliberate act, but also the resigning of direct control over what is thus passed on. It is this last aspect which is the clue to what follows. They wanted to pursue the desire of their own hearts, and so God gave them over to what they desired; He did not, it should be noted, give them their desires, rather He gave them to what they desired and the consequences of what they desired. God handed them over to the freedom for which they yearned; not their freedom to them, but them to their freedom. The control of God once removed left them like a faulty rocket plunging out of control. For what this vaunted liberty consisted in was nothing other than freedom to indulge in immorality which insulted themselves and their bodies. The desire to be independent of God in achieving its end showed itself to be nothing higher than the desire for a degrading impurity.” (Dunn, p.73)

“In the sinful desires of their hearts for sexual impurity...” - The spiritual condition of man is not determined by his outward circumstances but by the inner condition of his heart. Sin is not merely what we do. It is what we are by nature. The individual transgressions of God's Law which we commit are the symptoms of the spiritual disease with which we are afflicted. They are not the disease itself. Accordingly, Scripture tends to focus its warnings against sin on the lusts in which the actions originate - ***“the sinful desires of their hearts.”*** The term ***“of their hearts”*** refers to an individual's identity and personality, including mind, feelings, and will. Using the term in this way, wise King Solomon once advised: ***“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”*** (Proverbs 4:23); and sadly noted: ***“The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.”*** (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Jesus declared: ***“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.”*** (Matthew 15:19-20) The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed: ***“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.”*** (Jeremiah 17:3)



“The Wisdom of Solomon”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

The word which the NIV renders as ***“sexual impurity”*** (Greek - ***“akatharsia”***) is a general term for uncleanness, often used in reference to decaying matter, especially the contents of a grave. In an ethical context the word usually referred to or was closely associated with sexual immorality. Paul uses the word nine times in his New Testament epistles. Those who indulge in such ***“sexual impurity”*** diminish and degrade themselves.

Human sexuality was designed by the Creator God as the physical expression of the love and commitment between a man and a woman within holy marriage. This uniquely human capacity was the direct result of our creation in the image of God with the ability to love (cf. Genesis 2:18-25). When human sexual activity becomes the pursuit of mere physical pleasure, the Creator's intent is frustrated and our identity as creatures originally fashioned in the image of God is denied. Sexual activity is then just one more egocentric effort to satisfy my own physical needs and emotional desires. Those whom I use to achieve those selfish goals become mere sex objects through which I attain my own satisfaction. The inescapable result of this approach to human sexuality is personal degradation - ***“for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”*** This is what the apostle has in mind when he warns the Corinthians against the unique personal damage potential of sexual sin - ***“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”*** (1 Corinthians 6:18; cf also vs.12-19). When we demean our sexuality, we are tampering with a crucial component in our nature as creatures originally fashioned in the image and after the likeness of God.

“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...” - The underlying cause of mankind's godlessness is re-emphasized. At the root of humanity's sinfulness, and God's judgement upon that sin is a fundamental rejection of the Creator and His truth. A deliberate, voluntary trade has taken place - ***“they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”*** God and His Word have been cast aside and thrown away as worthless. Through His prophet Jeremiah, God had warned apostate Judah, ***“You have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood.”*** (Jeremiah 13:25) Fallen mankind is captivated by falsehood and lives in bondage to Satan who is the ***“Father of Lies”*** (John 8:44). The Greek text actually says ***“the lie”*** referring not to falsehood in general but to the specific lie of idolatry, the worship of ***“created things rather than the Creator.”***

“Who is forever praised! Amen.” - This doxology is a spontaneous outburst of adoration evoked by the mention of God as ***“the Creator.”*** It comes as a blessed interruption in the midst of this sordid description of mankind's' perversity. ***“Perhaps unable to continue discussing such vile things without coming up for air, as it were, Paul inserts a common Jewish doxology about the true God.”*** (MacArthur, p.104) It is a natural and irrepressible tribute of reverence toward the God whom men have dishonored by their idolatry. The apostolic affirmation of the blessedness of God is sealed with a solemn ***“Amen.”*** This is a transliterated Hebrew word which means *truth* and came to be used in a number of other languages as an emphatic expression

of the speaker or writer's confidence in the verity of that which has been said. The role of the “**Amen**” in Jewish and Christian prayer and praise was well established even at this early date. Its usage is quite common in the Pauline epistles (cf. Romans 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 1 Corinthians 16:24; Galatians 1:5; 6:18; Ephesians 3:21; Philippians 4:20; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16; 2 Timothy 4:18). Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains the development of this important term in this way:

“In the OT the word is used both by the individual and the community (1) to confirm the acceptance of a task allotted by men in the performance of which there is need for the will of God, (2) to confirm the personal application of a divine threat or curse, and, (3) to attest the praise of God in response to a doxology. In all these cases, "amen" is the acknowledgment of a word that is valid, and the validity of which is binding for me and then generally in this acknowledgment. Thus "amen" means that which is sure and true. In Judaism the use of Amen is widespread and firmly established. An extraordinary value is attached to its utterance. In synagogue, though not in temple worship, it occurs as the response of the community to the detailed praises which the leaders utters with the prayers or on other occasions and to each of the three sections into which the priests divided the Aaronic benediction of Numbers 6:24-26. It was the confession of the praise of God which was laid on the community and which the community was to affirm by its answer. And it was the confession of the blessing of God which was pronounced to the community and which the community was to make operative by its Amen...There is a shift in meaning in the few instances in which it is a concluding wish at the end of one's own prayers. In such cases it is not so much a confirmation of what is, but rather hope for what is desired...In the New Testament and the surrounding Christian world the Hebrew is usually taken over as it stands. It is used in three ways: (1) It is a liturgical acclamation in Christian worship... (2) Christian prayers and doxologies mostly end with Amen...It expresses the fact that in divine service prayer and doxology have their place before the people whose response they evoke or anticipate...Christ Himself can be called "the Amen" in Revelation 3:14. He Himself is the response to the divine Yes in Him. And to the extent that in Himself He acknowledges and obediently responds to the divine Yes which is Himself, He is the reliable and true Witness of God. (3) Jesus uses the Amen before his sayings 49 times in the Gospels to show that as such they are reliable and true and that they are so because Jesus Himself in His Amen acknowledges them to be His own sayings and thus makes them valid.” (TNDT, 1, pp. 335-337)

Verses 26-27

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

“Because of this...” - This phrase parallels the ***“Therefore”*** of verse 24 and links the perversions now described with the godlessness and suppression of the truth which introduced this section. For the second time the ominous phrase ***“God gave them over”*** is heard. But whereas he first spoke of godlessness and uncleanness in general he now advances to ***“shameful lusts”*** and forcefully demonstrates his point with specific application to the most shameful of these passions. Homosexual abominations are cited as the most overt evidences of the degeneracy to which God in His wrath had given over the nations. In Verse 24, Paul warned of ***“sinful desires.”*** The escalation of evil which the apostle has in mind is signaled by the use of a much stronger word in this phrase. ***“Desire”***(vs.24, Greek - *“epithumia”*) means a single evil yearning which may yet be controlled. ***“Lust”*** (vs.26, Greek - *“pathe”*) means a constant burning passion, a conflagration that overwhelms all constraint and controls a man completely. Yearning mutates into lust; lust metastasizes into compulsion; and soon an entire lifestyle had been engulfed in evil. Lenski observes:

“God removed all constraint so that desires grew to passions, and from the desires He gave them up to these passions. The judgement is increased. Base desires carry men into acts of vileness, but reaching their climax in passions, they not only plunge men into scattered vile acts, they drown them in vileness.” (Lenski, p.113)

“Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.” - Lesbianism, the practice of female homosexuality, begins the presentation of these ***“shameful lusts.”*** Charles Hodge explains: *“Paul first refers to the degradation of females among the heathen, because they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost.”* (Hodge, p.42) The apostle indicates the degrading nature of this perversion in that he does not use the Greek word *“gune”* which is the ordinary term for women, but rather *“theleia”* which simply means the female of the species and may be used in reference to any animal life form. The same linguistic shift is also present in the following phrase which describes male homosexuality. Those who indulge in such things have



*“The Creator” Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder
From the 1534 Edition of Luther’s Bible*

descended to brutish level of being nothing more than creatures of sex, without the most basic dignity of a human being. The term “*relations*” here refers to sexual activity and specifically to the act of intercourse. For the third time in this section (cf. vss. 23,25) the verb “*exchanged*” occurs to indicate the deliberate action of reciprocal giving and receiving. “*Natural relations*” are given up and replaced by “*unnatural ones*” just as “*the glory of the immortal God*” was given up and replaced by “*images made to look like mortal man*” (vs. 23) and, “*the truth of God*” was given up and replaced by “*a lie*” (vs.25). From beginning to end, man's downfall is a series of horrible trades

in which that which is good, right, and true is cast aside in favor of that which evil, wrong, and false. The contrast between “*natural*” and “*unnatural*” is crucial for a correct understanding of this passage. In the immediate context of Romans 1 Paul has argued that knowledge of God is plainly available to men in the world of nature which God has created. Therefore man's failure to glorify God and his suppression of the truth of God are inexcusable. In the following chapter, the apostle will further argue that every human being possesses an instinctive recognition of right and wrong in the natural law, or conscience, written by God in the hearts of men. In this context,

Paul's understanding of the words “*natural*” and “*unnatural*” is clear.

“In the New Testament, the “natural” pertains to the created world, and its present general order as ordained by God, ranging from ordinary living things such as animals or plants or biological processes to the fundamental, original condition of things, without artificial intervention - either their innate characteristics or inherited condition. God has ordained the natural function for sexual relations in His creation order; the normal, and normative, pattern of male and female becoming one flesh. God’s creation ordinance, with the specific distinction between male and female, intended for heterosexual relations to be “natural.” Man’s inherited condition, and ordinary biological process, the essential character of his sexuality where there is no artificial intervention and willful reorientation, is therefore heterosexual. This information is clearly known from creation and conscience even by those who disorder the natural function of sex (Romans 1:32). There is, in the Biblical perspective, no such thing as “natural homosexuality.” It is always, at base, a perversion of the created order.” (Bahnsen, p.56,57)

“In the same way, men also abandoned natural relations with women...” - The practice of male homosexuality receives the same scathing denunciation as its female counterpart. It is difficult to imagine how the language of the text could be any stronger or more straightforward. This unequivocal denunciation is completely consistent with every other Biblical text on the subject of homosexuality (cf. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11) The opening words of Paul's comments on male homosexuality closely parallel his stern critique of lesbianism. As lesbians “*exchange natural relations for unnatural ones*” so also male homosexuals are guilty of having “*abandoned natural relations with women.*” Homosexual activity is contrary to nature itself, as the natural order reflects the Creator's design and intent.

“Were inflamed with lust for one another.” - Homosexual passion is presented as an uncontrollable blaze which consumes and destroys those who indulge in it. The Greek words used in this phrase do not occur elsewhere in Scripture. A similar passage in the Old Testament Apocrypha warns:

“Let neither gluttony nor lust overcome me, and do not surrender me to a shameless soul...The soul heated like a burning fire will not be quenched until it is consumed; a man who commits fornication in the body of his flesh will never cease until the fire burns him up. To a fornicator all bread tastes sweet; he will never cease until he dies.” (Sirach 23:6,16,17)

Paul paints a grim picture of perversion that turns in upon itself in a tightening spiral of self-destruction. One is reminded of the Sodomites who were so passionately consumed with their lust to rape Lot's guests that even after they were struck with blindness they still "*wearied themselves trying to find the doorway*" into Lot's house (Genesis 19:11). The compulsive nature of male homosexuality in modern America, where it is not unusual for homosexuals to have scores of different sexual partners a year, is indicative of the accuracy of the Biblical indictment. Men who engage in sexual intercourse with other men are guilty of having "*committed indecent acts.*" The Greek text literally says - "*males with males committing that which is shameless.*" These same terms are used in the Greek Old Testament in reference to the vilest abominations and defilements of the Canaanites for which the penalty among the people of God was death (cf. Leviticus 18).

"And received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." - The judgement of God is never arbitrary or capricious. The punishment always fits the



*"The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah"
Woodcut from the 1534 Edition of Luther's Bible*

crime. Throughout this segment the theme has been the abandonment of defiant sinners to the consequences of their sin. Those who have chosen to live in sin are ever more enslaved by those sins as the divine Judge “*gives them over*” to the punishment which they have decreed for themselves. This is particularly true in specific reference to homosexual behavior. The text notes that the “*penalty*” which they have “*received in themselves*” is precisely that which is “*due...for their perversions.*” Long before the advent of AIDS, the 19th century commentator W.J.T. Shedd described that penalty as “*the gnawing, unsatisfied lust itself, together with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of debauchery.*” (Murray, p.48) Pestilence sweeps through the homosexual community today, spilling over to strike down IV drugs users and hemophiliacs. It is difficult to dispute John MacArthur's grim conclusion: “*The appalling physical consequences of homosexuality are visible evidence of God's righteous condemnation. Unnatural vice brings its own perverted reward. AIDS is frightening evidence of that fatal promise.*” (MacArthur, p.107)

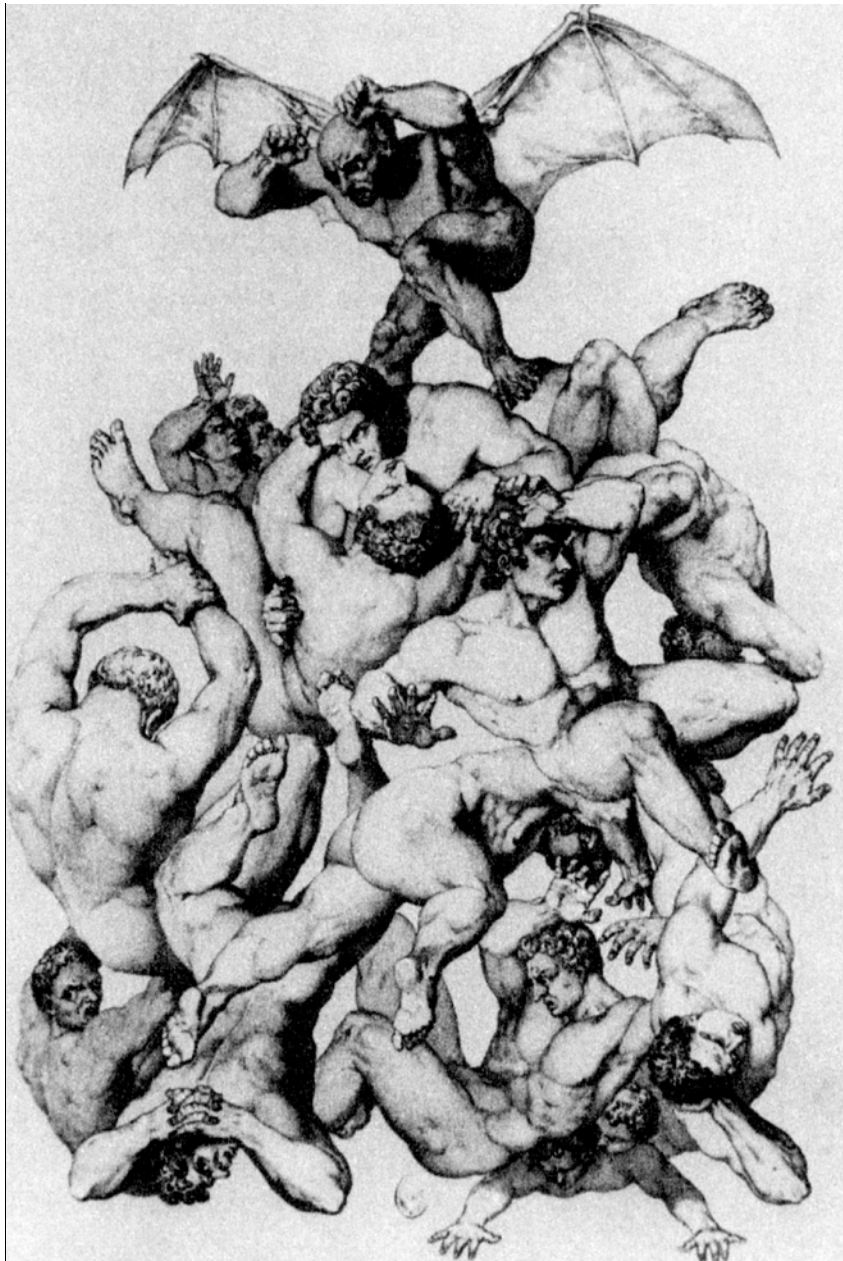
Verses 28-32

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, greed, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, they also approve of those who practice them.

“*Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile...*” - The grim catalog of “*the godlessness and wickedness of man*” (vs.18) against which “*the wrath of God is being revealed*” (vs. 18) comes to its dreadful climax in these verses. To gaze upon the reality of man's total depravity, here graphically described, is, as one commentator remarked, like “*lifting the lid of hell*” (Boice, p.186).

The apostle reiterates the essence of the problem as he repeats the basic accusation against sinful mankind for the fifth time in this segment - “*they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*” (cf. vss. 18,21,23,25). Paul leaves no room for doubt about the direct link between humankind's rejection of God and its

disordered state. All of the chaos and confusion with which humanity struggles every day all stems from the basic refusal to recognize God. The verb **“think”** (Greek - *“dokimadso”*) means to *“test, examine, prove by testing, or accept as proved.”* It was often used in reference to coins which were carefully tested on a scale and only those having full weight of gold or silver were accepted. The rest were disapproved, rejected, and cast aside.



“The Fall of the Damned” - 19th Century French Engraving

“The implication then is of a deliberate act of disqualification. It was not simply a case of humans being distracted by something else and losing sight of God: they gave God their consideration, and concluded that God was unnecessary to their living...They tested God and found him wanting. They discounted God as a factor in shaping their lives.”
(Dunn, p.66)

“He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done.” - For the third and final time God's judicial abandonment of impenitent sinners to pronounced. Man has chosen to exclude God from his life. That choice to be free of God has been at the root of all evil since the very beginning (cf. Genesis 3:5). The thrice repeated **“they exchanged”**

clearly underscored humankind's responsibility for the sad state of affairs in which they find themselves. But the creature cannot exclude the Creator. This is clearly evidenced by the threefold repetition of the awesome ***“He gave them over.”*** God remains in control and rebellious humanity cannot escape His righteous judgement upon sin. Righteousness through faithful dependence on the Creator leads to salvation. Unrighteousness through self-deceitful pride and self-indulgent desire leads to the wrath of God and self-destruction. The tragic irony of man's disqualification of God in the preceding phrase (Greek - *“dokimadso”*) is emphasized by the use of the adjective ***“depraved”*** (Greek - *“adokimon”*) in reference to man's mind. The term comes from the same Greek root and literally means *“disqualified.”* Man tested God and decided that He failed the test. Only a mind that is itself substandard, disqualified, would have considered making God the subject of such a test. The mind of the creature depends upon the light of God to function properly. When that mind scorns God and is abandoned by Him it is inadequate, unqualified for the task of understanding reality. The mental incapacity of the mind that fails to stand the test reveals itself in unacceptable behavior - ***“to do what ought not be done.”***

“They have become filled with every kind of wickedness...” - In the preceding paragraph the description of divine retribution upon sin had been restricted to sexual perversion. With the catalog of sins which follows, the apostle reminds us that the judgement of God falls upon all sin. The moral corruption of men is pervasive. We do not dabble in sin - we are completely immersed in it - ***“filled with every kind.”*** The list is not exhaustive but representative. It includes 21 vices, three times the perfect seven. The vices mentioned appear to have been chosen at random. John Murray notes:

“The apostle's mind ranges freely over the vices which came within his own observation in his contact with the various races and conditions of men. And no doubt his mind also ranged freely among the many sources of information available to him respecting the moral state of the nations in his own generation and in those that preceded. We are impressed with the length of the list and with the variety of vice. But after all, this is only a selection.” (Murray, p.50)

“Wickedness” (Greek - *“aidkia”*) is a generic term for unrighteousness of every sort, everything that is opposed to divine law and holiness. ***“Evil”*** (Greek - *“poneria”*) refers to maliciousness and viciousness. ***“Greed”*** (Greek - *“pleonixia”*) literally means *“a desire to have more.”* It is strongly negative term used for insatiable



“The Triumph of Death” by Pieter Bruegel - 1562

covetousness and ruthless self-assertion. There is, of course, a proper and necessary kind of ambition. But when that ambition becomes a compulsive need to succeed and always have more no matter who gets hurt, then ambition has become sinful **“greed.”** **“Depravity”** (Greek - *“kakia”*) means badness and ill will - a deliberate wickedness that delights in doing other people harm. **“Envy”** (Greek - *“phthonos”*) is the word used by Aristotle to describe the person who takes everything in the worst possible way. Someone who is consumed by a jealousy provoked by the success and happiness of others.. **“Murder”**(Greek - *“phonos”*) is defined as the senseless, wanton killing of human beings. **“Strife”** (Greek - *“eris”*) means contentiousness and rivalry. The root of this Greek word means *“to debate.”* **“Deceit”** (Greek - *“dolos”*) is the self-serving treachery which is often accompanied by **“malice”** (Greek - *“kakoethia”*), spite and bitterness. The Greek is a combination of the two words *“evil”* and *“habits.”* The malicious person is one who is set against other people and is out to harm them. **“Gossips”** (Greek - *“psthiristas”*) is a colorful word which means whisperer, rumor-monger, or tale-bearer. **“Slanderers”**(Greek - *“katalalous”*)

is a somewhat more negative term used in reference to malicious back-biters. There is some debate among scholars as to whether “**God-haters**” should be understood in an active sense (those who hate God) or a passive sense (those who are hated by God). The Greek word in the original text is actually passive. Our list of moral undesirables continues with three closely related terms: “**insolent**” (Greek - “*hubristes*”) - the intolerable pride that sets a human being up against God, “**arrogant**” (Greek - “*huperephanos*”) - a feeling of personal superiority that causes one to look down upon others with contempt, and “**boastful**” (Greek - “*alazon*”) - seeking the admiration of others with false claims about what you are or have done. Man, who has spurned the Creator, is himself creative only in a negative sense. As sin's self-perpetuating momentum carries on, fallen humanity demonstrates a deadly creativity in constantly devising innovative ways to practice unrighteousness - “**they invent new ways to do evil.**” One of the hallmarks of the end times is the blatant disregard for the basic structures through which God orders His creation (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2,3). At the center of all human society is marriage and the family. Those who are “**disobedient to parents**” are the bitter fruit of a culture that has spurned the will and the way of God. “*Godless parents raise godless children and thus get to taste the bitter fruit of their own sowing in their own offspring.*” (Lenski, p.122) In a closing quartet of corruption we are told that by nature men are “**senseless**” (Greek - “*asynetous*”) - without moral understanding, stupid as to the things of God; “**faithless**” (Greek - “*asynthetous*”) - drawn from a root which means to break a covenant or commitment - these are people who cannot be trusted; “**heartless**” (Greek - “*astorgous*”) - without the natural affection which is to distinguish human beings from brutish animals particularly within the family, i.e. a patricide or matricide, or a parent that abandons or kills their own children; “**ruthless**” (Greek - “*aleneenomas*”) - without mercy, delighting in cruelty and exalting in the use of power to exploit others.

“**Although they know God's righteous decree...**” - All of the aforementioned vice and viciousness is not committed in innocent ignorance. Human beings know better. The reality of God and the revelation of His righteous wrath are evident throughout creation. In addition to this natural revelation of God, the apostle will shortly add the witness of conscience, the natural law in every man's heart (cf. 2:14,15). Truly, “**men are without excuse.**” (vs. 20). People do not recognize God because they do not want to recognize Him. They instinctively “**suppress the truth in unrighteousness**” (vs.18). Listen to the stern words of Christ:

“Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: light has come into the world but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:18-20)

“They not only continue to do these very things but also continue to approve of those who practice them.” - At the bottom of this wretched pit of degradation is the consensus of men in pursuit of iniquity. Our eagerness to encourage others in the commission of the same damnable sins that we are committing demonstrates the completely willful nature of our actions. To justify our own sins is bad enough, but to approve and encourage others to sin is immeasurably worse. Murray asserts:

“To put it bluntly, we are not only bent on damning ourselves but we congratulate others in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in damnation. We hate others as we hate ourselves and render therefore to them the approval of what we know merits damnation.”
(Murray p. 53).

Our modern culture's willingness to tolerate, sanction, and encourage any and all behavior, no matter how deviant or perverse it may be is indicative of the pathetic moral depths to which we have fallen.

Dr. George Stöckhardt wrote the following prophetic denunciation of the decadence of western culture over a century ago. His words were true then and they are infinitely more applicable today!

“Since Paul speaks of natural man estranged from God, this description of morals also fits the generation of our day. One cannot better characterize the religious and moral condition of our civilized world than with these words of the apostle. It is a God-forgetting, idolatrous generation which lives upon the earth. Who thanks God for His goodness, to which men owe their life and all blessings? The religion, the pseudo-religion of the world is the deification of the creature. The world deifies her great men, her heroes, deifies herself, her own power, wisdom, excellence, and achievements. The philosophical contemplation and adoration of God are nothing else than changing God into the image of weak, mortal man. Man view God and divine things according to human standards. The generation of this age is an adulterous one. The world feasts her eyes upon and delights in the lusts of the flesh,

shame and filthiness. Man's carnal desires are no longer satisfied by common adultery but long for the unusual, the refined enjoyment. The unnaturalness and unchastity of the apostle's time have today only assumed another form and appearance. It is a murderous generation in which we live. Avarice, insatiable envy, is the mainspring of commercial life. Man has no consideration for his neighbor. Everyone strives to rise in the world and thus ruins and tramples upon others. It is idle scorn and mockery when the world writes humanitarianism or universal love upon her standard. And this stream of destruction rushes incessantly forward. One can no longer check and restrain this disgraceful state of things. In vain are all attempts at reform. Men are, as it were, chained to unrighteousness by iron fetters. And why? A destiny rules over the activities of the children of men. God has given them up to their corrupt ways. Knowledge of God and morality has not altogether ceased. Man still hears proclaimed what is right before God and men. But whatever exists of truth serves only to call forth opposition, to goad men on to do the opposite of what is right. Therefore, men have no excuse. The world is continually driving herself forward to the abyss, to the Day of Wrath and the righteous judgement of God." (Stöckhardt, p.17)



*“Death and His Demons Tormenting the World”
Woodcut by Hans Weidnitz, 1533*



*“The Pharisee and the Publican”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

Romans Chapter 2

Verse 1

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

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else” - Having condemned the blatant immorality and crass wickedness of mankind in no uncertain terms, the apostle now directs his attention to moralists, those who might

well have agreed with his condemnation of the world in general, but who would, at the same time, have exempted themselves from that condemnation. His words apply with equal force to stoic Gentiles and self-righteous Jews both of whom labor under the illusion that their own high-minded ethical sensitivity sets them apart from the great majority of mankind which fails to measure up to their lofty moral standards. In fact, the innate human tendency to cling to the pretense of self-righteousness poses one of the most deadly threats to the only way to deal with the reality of man's unrighteousness, the righteousness of God by faith in Christ. This delusion must be destroyed if the Gospel is to stand. Martin Franzmann correctly notes: *“As long as man still has the righteousness and pride and strength to judge his fellow man, he is not ready for the beggary of faith, he is not ready to receive the radical rescue of the righteousness of God.”* (Franzmann, p.44,45)

The verse begins with the connective **“Therefore”** which links the entire previous section with that which follows. This term is typically used in Greek to denote an inference or conclusion drawn from that which went before. That linkage is further indicated by Paul's repetition of his earlier word **“without excuse”** (cf. 1:20. These two references are the only times in the New Testament that St. Paul uses this word. Greek - *“analogetos”*). In this instance the assertion of excuselessness comes in the dramatic form of a personal challenge, **“You, therefore, have no excuse, you...”** so that anyone who might have thought himself exempt from the preceding indictment may now recognize its application to him.

The moralist mind-set inevitably leads to relative righteousness and judgmentalism. Hence the apostle identifies the moralist as **“you who pass judgment on someone else.”** The concept of **“judgement”** is crucial in this segment. Forms of the word (Greek *“krino”*) occur eight times in the chapter. It is used in the typical judicial sense of passing judgement upon someone or something. The concept is strongly reminiscent of Christ's admonition in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Do not judge or you too will be judged, for in the same way that you judge others, you too will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** (Matthew 7:1,2; cf. also Mark 4:24; Luke 6:36,37). In this regard, William Hendrickson offers a very important distinction:

“Does this mean that all manner of judging is absolutely and without any qualification forbidden, so that with respect to the neighbor we are not allowed to form and/or express any opinion whatever, at least that with regard to him we must never voice an adverse or unfavorable opinion?...It is clear that no such wholesale

condemnation of forming an opinion about a person and expressing it can have been intended... What then did Jesus mean?...The Lord is here condemning the spirit of censoriousness, judging harshly, self-righteousness, without mercy, without love. To be discriminating and critical is necessary; to be hypercritical is wrong.”
(Hendrickson, p.356,357)

The hypocrisy of the moralist, who condemns others in self-righteous disdain, is revealed in that **“you who pass judgement do the same things.”** Those who indulge in self-righteousness make two very serious mistakes. First of all, they underestimate God's standard of righteousness, failing to recognize that the demands of the holy Law of God are absolute, not relative. This is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew.5-7). Secondly, they underestimate the depth of their own sinfulness. Human beings have an incredible ability to overlook our own faults while exaggerating the faults of others. To use our Lord's image, we might call this tendency the speck and beam syndrome (cf. Matthew 7:3-5).



*“The Summons to Judgment”
by Rudolf Schäfer - 1932*

Verses 2-3

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

“Now we know...” - The apostle now expresses a matter of common knowledge. The basis in ***“truth”*** for the judgment of God is obvious to all and beyond reasonable dispute. That which God does is true by definition. Unlike the judgment of human beings, which is subject to error, God is not capable of doing that which is not right or saying that which is not true. This is axiomatic. The personal favoritism which enables the moralist to condemn others for things of which he himself is guilty does not apply to the absolutely impartial judgment of God. Here precisely the same standard will be applied to all. That dreadful impartiality ought to strike terror into the heart of every moralist. No ***“mere man,”*** particularly one who has presumed to sit in judgement on his fellow men, could dare to stand before the judgment seat of the Almighty. God knows all things. The carefully concealed hypocrisy of men is fully revealed to Him. None will ***“escape God's judgment.”***

Verse 4

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

“Or do you show contempt...” - The moralist considers himself safe and secure, resting comfortably on his own ethical achievements. He wrongly perceives the ***“kindness, tolerance and patience”*** of God to be indications of divine approval. Thus he is guilty of showing contempt these gracious attributes of God. The NIV's translation, ***“you show contempt,”*** is an apt rendering of the original. The Greek verb ***“kataphroneo”*** - literally means ***“to look down upon”*** something or someone and to underestimate their true value. It often carries the connotation of disregarding or even despising. Man sees permissiveness and toleration in God's forbearance. This is a fatal misreading of the divine purpose. God's longsuffering is meant to give man time for repentance. Peter offers a more accurate assessment of the situation:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our brother Paul wrote you with the

wisdom that God gave him.” (2 Peter 3:9,15)

Three attributes of God are cited, **“kindness, tolerance, and patience.”** **“Kindness”** (Greek - *“chrestotes”*) refers to God's goodness. Our English word **“God”** originally meant **“The Good.”** All goodness there is comes from God. As the Apostle James reminds us: **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”** (James 1:17). The classic theologians of the Middle Ages correctly referred to God as **“summum bonum,”** that is the chief or the highest good. The second attribute of God in our text is **“tolerance”** (Greek - *“anoches”*). The term's root meaning is **“to hold back.”** It is often translated as forbearance or delay. Sin justly deserves punishment and yet God holds back His righteous wrath so that fallen man may be given time to repent. Man foolishly misunderstands this forbearance as permissiveness and often persists in his sin. Finally, Paul cites the **“patience”** of God. The Greek word is **“makrothymia.”** This intriguing term actually means long suffering. It is sometimes used of a powerful ruler who does not exercise his right to vengeance against the enemy who has wronged him.

The goal of God's **“kindness”** in these matters is **“repentance”** (Greek - *“metanoia”*). This crucial concept refers to a basic change of heart and mind. In the moral realm it refers to a basic change of mind about sin - a change from loving sin to renouncing it and returning to God for forgiveness. Biblical repentance includes the following components: 1. recognition of sin; 2. contrition, that is, sorrow for sin; 3. faith in forgiveness for Christ's sake; 4. willingness, wherever possible to undo the damage caused by the sin; and 5. conscientious resolve not to repeat the sin in the future.

Verse 5

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgement will be revealed.

“Because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart...” - To toy with the patience of God is to court disaster. Such recklessness is pure folly, the result of **“stubbornness and your unrepentant heart.”** The word **“stubbornness”** translates the Greek **“sklerotes”** which means **“to become hardened.”** The hardening of the heart is a

regular theme in Scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Matthew 19:8; Mark 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Hebrews 3:8,15; 4:7). Sin desensitizes man spiritually. The progressive impact of unrepented sin makes man more resistant to the will and Word of God. The **“unrepentant heart”** eventually becomes as hard and unresponsive as stone (cf. Ezekiel 36:26). In the English language, the medical term **“sclerosis”** is based on this same Greek word. **“Arteriosclerosis,”** for instance, refers to the hardening of the arteries. **“The hardening of the arteries may take a person to the grave, but the hardening of his spiritual heart will take him to hell.”** (MacArthur, p.120)



“The Day of Judgment”
1493 Woodcut by Michael Wohlgemut

“You are storing up wrath against yourself...” - The apostle had introduced the concept of God's **“wrath”** in 1:18 (**“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”**) The righteous anger of a holy God against the sinful corruption of humanity is not merely a future threat: it is present reality. That **“wrath”** is already being revealed as the devastation of sin wreaks its havoc throughout the world every day (cf. pp.33-37). Paul uses the effective image of the

miser who slowly, painstakingly accumulates his treasure. James Boice observes:

“There is an interesting image suggested by Paul's language at this point, for Paul speaks of the stubborn and unrepentant person "storing up wrath" for the day of God's judgment. It is the image of a greedy individual, a miser, who has been storing up wealth which, contrary to his expectations, is destined to destroy him. I think of this man as storing up a great horde of gold coins, placing them in an attic above his bed where he thinks no one will find them and where they will be safe. He keeps this up for years, amassing a great weight of gold. But one day, while he is sleeping and oblivious to his danger, this great weight of gold breaks through the ceiling of his bedroom, comes crashing down onto his bed, and kills him. He thought of his wealth as salvation, but it was death.” (Boice, p.220)

The day is coming when God's **“kindness, tolerance, and patience”** will come to an abrupt and eternal end. On that day the **“wrath”** that has slowly accumulated through all of the ages will be poured out upon rebellious mankind. The Lord's **“righteous judgment”** will be **“revealed”** before the eyes of every human being who had ever walked upon the face of this earth. For those whose sins have not been cleansed in the blood of Jesus it will be a grim and horrible day of reckoning. The ancient prophet Zephaniah provides what may be Scripture's most vivid description of that day:

“That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.” (Zephaniah 1:15-18)

The greatest hymn of the medieval era, *“Dies Irae,”* (*“The Day of Wrath”*) was written on the basis of this text, every word of which breaks like a clap of thunder upon the conscience of the sinner. Its author was Thomas de Celano, friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi. Never has the dreadful nature of the final judgment been more effectively expressed. The text has inspired many of the great composers of classical music. Scores of versions appear in works of the master



*“The Final Judgment”
17th Century Bible Illustration by Matthäus Merian*

composers. This hymn also appears in virtually every historic hymnal of the Christian Church.

*“Day of Wrath”
by Thomas de Celano*

*Day of wrath, O day of mourning! See fulfilled the prophet’s warning;
Heaven and earth in ashes burning.
Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth, through earth’s sepulchers it ringeth,
All before the throne it bringeth.
O what fear man’s bosom rendeth when from heaven the Judge descendeth
On Whose sentence all dependeth.
Death is struck and nature quaking, all creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.
Lo, the book, exactly worded wherein all hath been recorded,*

Thence shall judgment be awarded.
When the Judge His seat attaineth and each hidden deed arraigneth,
Nothing unavenged remaineth.
What shall I, frail man, be pleading, who for me be interceding
When the just are mercy needing?
King of Majesty tremendous, Who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of Pity, then befriend us.
Righteous Judge, for sin's pollution grant Thy gift of absolution
Ere the day of retribution.
Faint and weary Thou hast sought me, on the cross of suffering bought me,
Shall such grace be vainly brought me?
Think, good Jesus, my salvation caused Thy wondrous incarnation;
Leave me not to sin's damnation!
Guilty now, I pour my moaning, all my shame with anguish owning:
Hear, O Christ, Thy servant's groaning.
Bows my heart in meek submission, strewn with ashes of contrition;
Help me in my last condition!
Worthless are my prayers and sighing; yet, good Lord, in grace complying,
Rescue me from fires undying.
Thou the sinful woman savedst; Thou the dying thief forgavest;
Thus to me true hope vouchsafest!
With Thy favored sheep then place me, nor among the goats abase me,
But to Thy right hand upraise me.
While the wicked are confounded, doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
Call me with Thy saints surrounded.
To the rest Thou didst prepare me on Thy cross, O Christ, upbear me.
Spare, O God, in mercy, spare me."

The language of the Apostle is most helpful in understanding the purpose and significance of the great Day of Judgment. Popular impressions to the contrary notwithstanding, the purpose of Judgment Day is not to decide who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. For the overwhelming majority of humankind that will have already been decided at the moment of death. In fact, the souls of the dead will have already been in either heaven or hell, depending upon their spiritual condition at the moment of death. Neither those who are alive and remain unto the coming of our Lord to be snatched up with Him together in the clouds nor those who greet His coming with desperate fear and frantic but futile attempts to escape will be in any doubt whatsoever as to their eternal fate. The purpose of Judgment Day is not the announcement of a decision as to anyone's salvation or damnation. Instead, the Day of Judgment will demonstrate the perfect righteousness of God, the Judge. That is clearly indicated by the unusual Greek syntax of this verse. The phrase St. Paul

uses in reference to Judgment Day is literally translated “*God's righteous judgment's revelation day.*” Before the entire universe of men and angels the verdict will be announced, and all will know and acknowledge that verdict as righteous and true. Lenski notes:

“The last day and its final judgment will clear up everything, answer every question, dissipate every doubt. The righteous judgment of God will be revealed and no creature will find even the least flaw in its perfection. This is strange in a way and yet true. Every judge, by virtue of being a judge, is himself judged by any and every verdict. Any unjust verdict of his condemns, first of all himself as being guilty for pronouncing it; any just verdict acquits him in the same way. The fact that God should apply this to himself, that he should be concerned about his judgments and the verdict that he renders upon himself by means of them, may seem strange, and yet it is not, for he is righteousness itself. The fact that on the last day not a soul will even question a judgment of his will be due to the revelation God makes and of the moral nature of those to whom it makes it when they stand at last face to face with him. (Lenski, p. 144)

Verses 6-8

God will "give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking, and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

“God will “give to each person...” - What now follows has been rightly described as “*the lightning stroke that kills all moralism, root and branch*” (Lenski, p.146). Paul here expounds the Law in all of its mortal severity and Judgment Day as the culmination and fulfillment of the Law's just demands. No man can endure it and live. The false hopes of those who dream of earning their own salvation are revealed as delusion and self-deception. The demands of the Law are absolute. Those who would earn their own salvation must obey the Law perfectly.

Scripture is completely consistent in describing the evidentiary role of works on the Day of Judgment (cf. Isaiah 3:10-11; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 16:27; 25: 31-46; John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8; Revelation 20:11-15). This is the result both of the nature of faith which invariably reveals itself in the deeds of love which are the result of our experience of the love of God in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-24,26) and the nature of Judgment Day as the revelation of the righteous



*“God Will Give Each Person According to What He Has Done”
1540 Woodcut by Hans Holbein*

judgment of God. Good works are empirical, while faith is not. Hence the good works which are the fruit of faith serve as the public evidence in this public judgment. In the individual secret judgment of each man during his life and at the moment of death, faith and unbelief alone are decisive. In order, however, to demonstrate the rightness of this judgement in public, before all of creation, works serve as the evidence which can be seen by all. Good works, deeds of love that flow from the love of Christ are the unmistakable evidence of faith. Evil works, deeds of selfishness and sin, are the unmistakable evidence of unbelief. Thus judgement, not salvation is by works. John MacArthur summarizes:

“Salvation is not by works, but it will assuredly produce works. The presence of genuinely good deeds in a persons life reveals that he has truly been saved, and in God's infallible eyes those deeds are a perfectly reliable indicator of saving faith. In the same way, the absence of genuinely good deeds reveals the absence of salvation. In both cases, deeds become a trustworthy basis for God's judgment. When God sees works that manifest righteousness, he knows if they come from a

regenerated heart. When he sees works that manifest unrighteousness, he knows if they come from an unregenerated heart...Paul's point in the present passage is that a person who possess the life of God will reflect the true character of God, and that it is on the basis of that reflected godly character that he will be judged. It is just as impossible for a person having eternal life to indefinitely fail to reflect God's character as it would be for him to indefinitely hold his breath. Eternal life induces spiritual breathing just as surely as physical life induces bodily breathing. John Murray succinctly noted that "works without redemptive aspiration are dead works. Aspiration without good works is presumption." (MacArthur, p. 130,132)

The perfect justice of God's judgment is affirmed with quotations from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12: ***“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.”*** (Psalm 62:12) ***“If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?”*** (Proverbs 24:12)

The righteousness of God's judgment can be seen in that every human being, without exception, will be judged on the completely objective basis of their own deeds. No one will be passed by. No one will be allowed to slip through. The basis of judgment will be the same for all for the justice of God is perfect.

“To those who by persistence in doing good...” - All of humanity falls into one of two categories, the saved and the damned. The former are here categorized by a life of ***“persistence in doing good.”*** The deeds in question in this section, whether good or evil, are not isolated actions but consistent lifestyle patterns. All Christians sin, but sin cannot be allowed to have dominion in the heart where Christ is Lord. The Christian life is a daily struggle to put our faith into practice, to overcome the ever present temptations of devil, the world, and our own sinful nature as we move on toward the goal. The word ***“persistence”*** means to ***“endure”*** or to ***“stand firm.”*** Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 24: ***“But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*** (Matthew 24:13). It literally means ***“to remain under”*** and describes carrying a burden or bearing a load. Its use here emphasizes the struggle that is the Christian life. Lenski observes:

“In a wicked world we are constantly tempted to throw off the burden, to remain under it no longer, to run free in the false freedom of those who do evil as they please. Only those who hold out shall be saved. It is faith, faith alone, that holds

out; Paul kept the faith. The continuance in faith is evidenced by the endurance in the good work.” (Lenski, p.150)

The aspirations of the Christian in that daily struggle are summarized with three important nouns. The first is **“glory”** (Greek - *“doxa”*). The highest goal of a believer is to live a life that glorifies God. **“Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** (1 Corinthians 10:31). At the same time, we eagerly anticipate the glory that will be God's gift to us in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:4). The believer seeks not the fading glories of this transitory world (*“Sic transit gloria mundi.”*) but the everlasting glory of the eternal God. Secondly, the Christian seeks **“honor.”** Once again, the term is used not a self-serving, worldly way but in reference to the honor that comes from God. Those who have fought the good fight and finished their course will be honored by the heavenly Father as He says one day: **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”** (Matthew 25:21). Finally, the true believer seeks **“immortality,”** the long awaited day when the



“The Resurrection of the Dead” 16th Century Engraving by Giorgio Ghisi

ancient curse of death will be lifted. ***“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:53). The gift of God to those who live by faith is ***“eternal life.”*** This is one of the most beautiful and powerful words in the New Testament. ***“Eternal life”*** in the Bible is a matter of quality not quantity. Every human being, even the damned, will have eternal existence. But for those who are unsaved that eternal existence will mean the endless torment of Hell. ***“Eternal life”*** can be realized only in Christ, as by faith we are restored to the abundant life of harmony with the Creator for which mankind was created in the beginning. Jesus defined that life perfectly when He said: ***“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*** (John 17:3)

Verses 8-9

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile;

“But for those who are self-seeking...” - Now comes the other side of the contrast as the characteristics of those in the second category are presented. The life of the believer is characterized by ***“persistence,”*** the willingness to stand firm, struggle, and patiently endure. The life of the unbeliever is characterized by ***“self-seeking.”*** The NIV translation is a bit weak. The Greek word (*“erithia”*) literally means ***“selfish ambition, the desire for complete and immediate gratification of my own desires.”*** The root meaning of the term refers to a hireling or a mercenary who does what he does simply for money. As long as he gets paid he doesn't care what he does or for whom he does it. It is a most fitting designation for the dilemma of sinful men. The devil uses man's love for immediate gratification as the bait in the trap of temptation. We are lured into evil by glittering promises of pleasure with no thought of the implications or consequences of our actions. The endless cry of sinful man is ***“I want what I want and I want it now!”*** The life that is lived to scratch our every itch and satisfy our every desire as quickly as possible masquerades as freedom. But in reality it is ever increasing bondage as we become slaves to our own selfish pleasures and needs. The shackles of that slavery will drag us down into the depths of Hell. Paul has already informed us that the unrighteous ***“suppress the truth by their wickedness”*** (1:18). He now returns to that theme. The ***“self-seeking”*** are those who ***“reject the truth and follow evil.”*** The ***“truth”*** about God is clearly revealed in nature

and in His Word. That **“truth”** is spurned in favor of **“evil.”** Note once again the implication of a deliberate act of choosing. The alternatives are weighed. A decision is made. **“Truth”** is cast aside and replaced by **“evil.”**

The fourfold consequences of that fatal mistake are detailed. First **“wrath”** (Greek - **“orge”**) the strongest kind of anger; anger burning at a fever pitch. This is the personal, passionate anger of the holy God. It includes, to use Martin Franzmann's phrase **“the high and sober majesty of the Judge”** (Franzmann, p. 47). **“Wrath”** is coupled with **“anger.”** The Greek (**“thumos”**) represents agitated, vehement indignation - from a root which has to do with moving rapidly: the violent breathing of an enraged man in pursuit of an enemy. The consequences for **“every human being who does evil”** are **“trouble and distress.”** **“Trouble”** (Greek - **“thlipsis”**) originally described the exertion of extreme pressure and is sometimes translated as **“affliction, anguish, or persecution.”** Revelation 14 uses the term in its original sense to describe the crushing of the grapes of wrath in the winepress of God's judgment (Revelation 14:18-20). **“Distress”** (Greek - **“stenochoria”**) literally means a place of confinement or extreme constriction, to be hemmed in with no way of escape. The combination of the two terms here calls to mind the sort of desperation described by Christ's warning to the women of Jerusalem of the coming judgment when doomed sinners would cry out **“to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”** (Luke 23:30). Under the absolute justice of the Divine Judge these consequences will fall without exception upon **“every human being who does evil.”** This horrible punishment will come **“first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.”** The Children of Israel were the firstborn of God, the beloved **“apple of His eye”** (Deuteronomy 30:10). They were the recipients of God's promises and the witnesses to the fulfillment of those promises. But now, having abused their place of priority in the grace of God, the Jews have a priority in punishment. The prophet Amos had written: **“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all of your iniquities.”** (Amos 3:2). Israel must stand first and foremost under the judgment of God. Those who were first in salvation opportunity will also be first in judgment responsibility. The **“Gentile”** (Greek), however, is not exempt from that punishment. He too will be judged and condemned.

Verses 10-11

But glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

“But glory, honor and peace...” - The dreadful punishment of the wicked was described only once but the gift of God's grace is presented twice in this segment. The words ***“glory”*** and ***“honor”*** which appeared earlier (vs. 7) are now repeated for emphasis. In this instance the blessing of ***“peace”*** is added. This is the equivalent of the Hebrew ***“shalom,”*** the sense of invincible security and well-being which is God's gift to all who place their trust in Him. The order of salvation is also re-emphasized, - ***“first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”*** - in the same way that the apostle had earlier emphasized the order of judgement. The phrase here echoes Paul's previous usage in chapter one: ***“for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile”*** (1:16). So that no one will mistake his basic point the apostle concludes with the universal generalization - ***“For God does not show favoritism.”*** All will be saved on the same basis, and all will be judged on the same basis. Neither the Jewish legalist nor the Gentile moralist can expect special treatment on the basis of their own self-perceived advantages. God absolutely does not play favorites. The Greek word (***“prosopolemptes”***) literally means ***“to receive a face,”*** that is to give special consideration to a person because of who he is (cf. Acts 10:34; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17). That why justice is symbolically presented as a blindfolded woman who cannot see those who appear before her so that all may receive the same treatment. Unfortunately such impartiality is seldom experienced within the justice systems and courts of men. Partiality is the way of the world. God does not play favorites. Those who presume to stand before Him on the basis of who they are or what they have done will find themselves sadly disappointed.

Verse 12

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

“All who sin...” - The moralist operates with the law as a means of escape from God's judgment. This false sense of security is deadly folly. That is revealed in this verse which describes two routes that lead to the same goal. ***“All who sin”*** will experience the same fate. Sin is the great leveler. Everyone who sins will stand before God condemned. Men are to be judged on the basis of the revelation which God has given them. Hodge correctly notes: ***“The ground of judgment is their works; the rule of judgment is their knowledge.”*** (Hodge, p.80) Those who have received the special revelation of God's written law, the Law of Moses, will be judged on the basis of that law. Those who have not received the written law will be judged on the



“Moses Receives the Law on Mount Sinai” by Rudolf Schäfer

basis of the revelation which God has given them in nature and conscience. But all will be judged and every sinner will *“perish.”* The Law of Moses was the chief identity factor and the boundary marker for the distinctiveness of Israel. Devout Jews prided themselves in the fact that they were the people of the Law and they scorned the Gentiles as those who were without the Law. But the possession or absence of the Law is not the crucial factor. It is sin that is decisive, not the presence or absence of the Law. All who sin will *“perish”* with or without the written Law. *“Perish”* (Greek - *“apollumi”*) is a strong word. It means to be destroyed but not annihilated. It is used in reference to both physical and eternal death. Jesus uses the same word in John 3:16 - *“For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

Verse 13

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

“For it is those who hear the law...” - The moralist judge cannot avoid being self-condemned by the very law to which he clings. If the attempt is made to be justified on the basis of law, then that justification must take place not on the basis of mere possession of the law, but on the basis of obedience to it. The verse does not use the ordinary Greek word for hearing (“*akouo*”), but rather a more intense verb (“*akroates*”) which is used in reference to those whose business it is to listen carefully and attentively. James sounds a similar theme: ***“For if anyone was a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”*** (James 1:23-24; cf. also Matthew 7:24-27) The law demands complete conformity. ***“Those who obey the law will be declared righteous.”*** The standard of judgment before the law is actual compliance. Only ***“those who obey,”*** perfectly and without exception, can ever hope to stand before God under the law. This is the first instance in which the key verb ***“to be declared righteous”*** (Greek - *“dikaioun”*) is used in the Epistle. It appears fifteen times throughout the letter. The forensic (relating to the court) sense of the term is clearly indicated here.

Verses 14-15

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law...” - The parentheses around verses fourteen and fifteen in the English text indicate that these two verses constitute a digression from Paul's basic argument, as he pauses to demonstrate specifically how Gentiles who are not aware of the written Law can still justly be held accountable to the law before God. In the preceding chapter (1:18-20) the apostle has asserted the excuselessness of all mankind on the basis of God's self-disclosure in nature. That argument is now taken a step forward as Paul contends that while the Gentiles do not possess the specially revealed Law of Moses (***“who do not have the law”***), nevertheless they are not entirely without the law. The law of God is, in fact, made

known to them and brought to bear upon them in another way. Therefore, they are not exempt from responsibility to the law but have become ***“a law for themselves.”*** When we speak today of men who are *“a law unto themselves”* we are usually referring to lawless men who recognize no standard other than their own will or desire. In this text, the meaning of the phrase is exactly the opposite. Every human, by reason of what has been implanted in our nature by God, is subject to the law.

“Do by nature the things required by the law...” - As we observed in chapter one (1:26, p.53), when Paul refers to ***“nature,”*** or to that which is ***“natural,”*** he is reflecting the conviction that God is the Creator of everything and that the order of the created world as it has been ordained by God reflects the will and purpose of the divine Creator. Accordingly, when the text indicates that the Gentiles ***“do by nature the things required by the law”*** we are being told that God has provided a moral sensitivity which is an inherent part of what we are as human beings. John Murray comments: *“What is done “by nature” is done by native instinct or propension, by spontaneous impulse as distinguished from what is induced by forces extraneous to ourselves.”* (Murray, p.73) The Gentiles' knowledge of the law's demands was neither taught nor acquired by exposure to the Law of Moses. It is instinctive, unlearned knowledge, the vestige of the image of God in which mankind was first created (Genesis 1:26-27). The basic standards of human decency which have characterized every human culture and civilization since the dawn of time bear witness to the reality of the natural law within man.

“Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts...” - Paul; now proceeds to explain how this could be possible. The two verses are linked together with the preposition ***“since,”*** indicating that Verse fifteen will explain the basis for that which had been asserted in Verse fourteen. ***“Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature the things required”*** because God has caused ***“the requirements of the law to be written on their hearts.”*** The Law of Moses was ***“written”*** by the finger of God upon two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). But the moral law had existed long before Mt. Sinai, written by God upon the heart of every descendant of Adam and Eve. The Ten Commandments are merely a summary and application of that moral law for the nation of Israel. The verb, ***“are written,”*** is passive to emphasize that God is the source and author of the law. ***“Their hearts”*** denotes the inward person, the identity and personality of the individual. The language is reminiscent of Jeremiah 31:33 where the prophet foretells a time when ***“I will write my laws on their hearts.”***

“Their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing...” - The word **“conscience”** (Greek - “*suneidesis*”) literally means “*knowledge with*” or “*co-knowledge*.” Conscience is not the law written in man's heart. It operates on the basis of that inner law but is distinct and separate from it. This is emphasized by the word **“also”** in the text. Conscience is part of what I am and yet at the same time it is not merely the equivalent of my “*consciousness*.” Lenski observes: *“I myself know, and conscience too, knows. This is especially apparent when conscience blames me, when I should like to hush it up but find myself unable to do so and may even be driven to desperation by my conscience.”* (Lenski, p. 167) Franz Delitsch offers the following exhaustive definition:

“The conscience, therefore, is man's natural consciousness of the law in his heart. It is the religious/moral determination of his self-consciousness dwelling in the human spirit. Conscience even operates against the will in all forms of the life of man. It is the ethical side of the general sense of truth which remained in man even after his fall; the knowledge concerning what God will and will not have. That knowledge manifests itself progressively in the form of impulse, and judgment, and feeling. The conscience gives witness to the inward law, and therefore thoughts are called forth within a man by the testimony of conscience appear and arise within a man which either excuse or accuse him. These excuses and accusations are in controversy with one another like opponents in a court of law. This process arises both in response to individual actions and overall condition. With this law written on his heart, with this continuous attestation of it by conscience, the Gentile, as says the apostle to the Gentiles, comes to stand eventually before the judgment of God which He executes through Jesus Christ, the Savior not only of man but of humanity.” (Delitsch, 164,165)

The words **“accusing”** and **“defending”** are technical legal terms which describe the judicial process of bringing charges against someone and then making a defense against those charges in court. Conscience functions both negatively and positively. When the action in question is contrary to the law, then conscience accuses, provoking guilt and fear. On the other hand, if the action in question is not contrary to the law, then conscience may serve not as prosecutor but defender. It must also be noted that in either case the conscience of sinful man is never completely or consistently reliable. Franz Pieper emphasizes:

“But since the Fall the conscience does not give a fully reliable testimony concerning the will of God. There is such a thing as an erring conscience. Fallen man regards certain things as permitted, yea, even commanded, which God has forbidden. He will commit idolatry (Galatians 4:8), submit to the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:11),

or, murder Christians (John 16:2). And fallen man regards as forbidden what God has permitted. He will, for instance, abstain from certain foods (Romans 14:1ff.). Therefore since the Fall the knowledge of God's immutable will is gained with certainty only from God's revelation in His Word, namely in Scripture.” (Pieper, I, p. 532)



“The Last Judgment” by Rogier van der Weyden - 1443-1451

Verse 16

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

“This will take place...” - The apostle now resumes the main thrust of his argument.

In Verses twelve and thirteen, prior to his digression on conscience, he had made reference to being “*judged by the law*” or being “*declared righteous*.” He now returns to that theme as he warns once again of the coming of the great Day of God's Judgment. All moral judgment takes place in anticipation of the Judgment Day. “*Cancel this day, and the keystone is broken out of the arch of all moral reasoning, all moral responsibility, all moral impetus to do the things of the law.*” (Lenski, p. 172) Every time conscience acts to accuse or defend it is in anticipation of the Final Judgment. Thus conscience is, in Martin Franzmann's words, “*a secret miniature of the Last Judgment*” carried about in the heart of every man (Franzmann, p.51). The typical word order is reversed in the Greek, with the verb preceding the subject to emphasize the action of judgment. Thus literally - “*Judge will God!*” The twisted deliberation of human conscience will be replaced on that day by the absolute certainty of divine deliberation. Nothing will be hidden or concealed. All of “*men's secret thoughts*” will be revealed. The awesome reality of absolute judgment is hurled against the self-confidence of the moralist. All hidden motives and every secret thought and desire will be laid bare before the Almighty Judge who alone knows all things. As one of the ancient collects of the communion liturgy acknowledges: “*Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit...*”(cf. Isaiah 66:18; Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrews 4:13).

“*Through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*” - The fact that God will judge the world through Jesus Christ is repeatedly attested in Scripture (cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1). The “*gospel*” which Paul proclaims declares the reality of that judgment. This is not Gospel in the narrow sense in contrast to the Law, but Gospel as the entire message of salvation, “*a message of divine grace which can forgive and overcome sin but cannot ever compromise with sin. The Christ who is the content of the gospel as the Savior of mankind appears in that Gospel also as the Judge of man.*” (Franzmann, p.51) . This “*gospel*” recognizes that grace is not cheap. The holy God could not tolerate or overlook sin. And so our salvation was purchased by the payment of an awful price in the blood of God's only Son. Nor is that grace cheap in the lives of God's people. It demands of us what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “*the cost of discipleship.*” Bonhoeffer denounced “*cheap grace*” as “*the deadly enemy of our church.*” “*Cheap grace*” is “*the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. Baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and*

incarnate.” (Bonhoeffer, pp. 35-36)

Verses 17-20

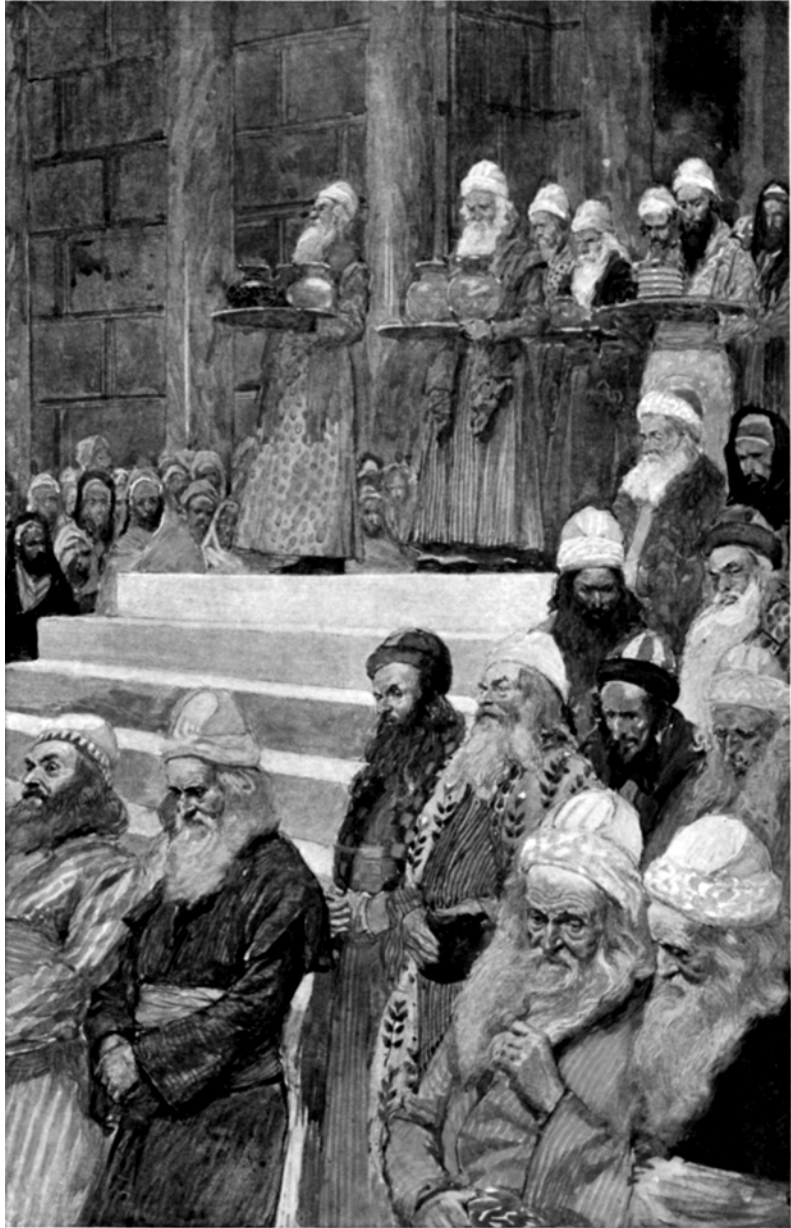
Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship with God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth -

Having addressed the problem of moralism in general, the apostle now turns his attention specifically to the moralistic legalism of the Jews, the covenant people of God. Paul lists the advantages which the Jews perceived themselves to have and demonstrates the manner in which these blessings from God have been distorted into self-righteous barriers to the righteousness of God which is by faith. John Murray points out that this tragic segment shows “*how close lies the grossest vice to the highest privilege and how the best can be prostituted to the service of the worst.*” (Murray, p.82) Lenski aptly compares this series of phrases to a cluster of boxes within boxes. Each statement contains the next. “*Open the first box and you see the second; open the second and there is the third; and so on to the last.*” (Lenski, p. 179)

“Now you, if you call yourself a Jew;” - The children of Abraham had originally been called *Hebrews*, because they came to Canaan from the Mesopotamian city of Haran beyond the Euphrates River, and were descended from Eber of the line of Shem.(cf. Genesis 14:13; 10:21). They had also been called “*Israelites*” or the “*Children of Israel*” designating them as the descendants of Jacob whose name God had changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). By New Testament times, a descendant of Abraham was typically referred to as a “*Jew*” (Our English word “*Jew*” is derived from the Greek - “*Ioudaios*” and the Latin - “*Judaeus*”). The term is derived from the name of the tribe of Judah. Its usage is rare until after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom at the end of the period of the divided monarchy. From that time on, the designation “*Jew*” is used to mean a member of the Jewish people or a practitioner of Judaism. The Jews themselves used the term to distinguish themselves, as descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, from the other races and nations of men, all of which were lumped together under the heading “*Gentile*”(Latin - “*gentes*” nations). The Hebrew name “*Judah*” means “*One who is Praised*” (Genesis 29:35) and the Jews of Paul's day bore that name as a badge of

great honor and pride. They believed themselves to be a unique and specially favored people of God. The name “**Jew**” was associated in their own minds with all upon which they prided themselves.

“If you rely on the Law” - The Greek verb “*epanapauo*” (“*you rely on*”) has the basic sense of “*rest upon.*” It suggests comfort, contentment, and complacency. The phrase thus captures the Jewish attitude toward the Law which Paul intends to criticize - the sense of confident security that enabled the Jew to consider himself superior to others because of his possession of the Law. Texts like Psalm 147:19-20, (“***He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws.***”) which were intended to praise the God's amazing grace, became the basis for on-going



“The Chief Priests and Treasurers in the Temple”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

national self-congratulation. Despite the prophets' repeated warnings to the contrary (cf. Jeremiah 7:3-7), the majority of Israel came to believe that they were safe from God's judgment simply because God had chosen to entrust His Law to them. The “**Law**” here means the whole Mosaic system and the way of life which resulted from it, the civil and religious polity of the Jews which created their distinctiveness among the nations. The Jewish apocryphal book 2 Apocalypse of Baruch, written during the intertestamental period, typifies this attitude:



“The Pharisee and the Publican”

“In you we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us, and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes. We shall always be blessed; at least, we do not mingle with the nations. For we are all a people of the Name; we, who received one Law from the One. And that Law which is among us will help us, and that excellent wisdom which is among us will support us.” (48:22-24)

Charles Hodge offers this pointed observation:

“This they relied upon; the fact that they were within the Church, were partakers of its sacraments and rites; that they had a divinely appointed priesthood, continued in unbroken succession from Aaron, and invested with the power to make atonement for sin, was the ground upon which they rested their hope of acceptance with God. Within that pale they considered all safe; out of it, there was no salvation. Such was the false confidence of the Jews; such has been, and is, the false confidence of thousands of Christians.” (Hodge, p. 92)

“And brag about your relationship to God;” - This verb is used thirty-seven times

in the New Testament and often carries the negative connotation of excessive or self-righteous boasting. When the Jews boasted of their relationship with God, in truth they were bragging about themselves, and the rights and privileges which they enjoyed with God because of who they were. They were convinced that their nation monopolized God's favor and that all the other nations were His enemies. He loved them and them alone. Martin Franzmann summarizes the entire verse in this way:

“The Jew knows the will of God; there is no doubt of that, least of all in the mind of the Jew himself. He wears with pride the name that sets him apart from the nations, he rests in high confidence upon the Law, which God had declared to him alone (Psalm 147:19f.), he exults in the God who is particularly his God, the God of Israel, and clings to Him with a tenacity that both amazes and irritates the nations among whom he dwells.” (Franzmann, p. 52,53)



“A Sadducee”

19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

“If you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed in the law” - Superior knowledge was another of the special distinctions of the Jews. God had indeed entrusted the special revelation of **“His will”** to Israel. The attitude in question is a sort of *“I know something you don't know!”* sense of superiority. The apocryphal Baruch rejoices: *“Happy are we, Israel, because we know what is pleasing to God!”* (4:4). Paul uses the same word **“approve”** in 1:28. In both instances it carries the idea of testing something in order to determine its value, such as precious metals (cf. p. 55). The verb **“instructed”** (Greek - *“katecheo”*) is the term from which *“catechism”* is derived. It is used in reference to any form of oral instruction, especially associated

with the learning by repetition which was the characteristic method of religious teaching among the rabbis of Israel.

“If you are convinced that you are...” - Israel is well aware of its privileged position. Some commentators suggest that the phrases which follow are axioms and slogans by which Saul the Pharisee once lived. Four times, a distinction is drawn between the more privileged and the less. In each instance, the distinction is not an expression of concern or compassion for the disadvantaged, but an assertion of Jewish superiority. They are the ***“guide,” “light,” “instructor,”*** and ***“teacher.”*** The Gentiles, in contrast are the ***“blind,” “those who are in the dark,” “the foolish,”*** and ***“infants.”*** The profound blessing that God had graciously bestowed upon Israel, having given them ***“in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth,”*** had been twisted instead into a source of self-righteousness, superiority, and pride.

Verses 21 -24

You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

“You, then, who teach others...” - To set yourself up as a teacher of others and yet not apply the very principles which you teach to yourself is not only inconsistency but arrogance and hypocrisy. The psalmist sternly denounces such blatant hypocrites:

“What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in you lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander you own mother's son...Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces with none to rescue.” (Psalm 50:16-20,22)

Paul may well have had in mind our Lord's stinging rebuke of Israel's religious leaders, recorded in Matthew 23. This extended denunciation is Christ's strongest condemnation of the legalism and hypocrisy of the Jewish religious establishment. At the heart of that condemnation is the charge that these moralists fail to apply the



“The Pharisees Accusing Jesus” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

same rigorous standard to themselves which they apply to others:

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do for they do not practice what they preach...Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to...Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides!... Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence...Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on

the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness...You snakes, you brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Matthew 23: 2-3, 13-16, 24-28, 33)

To possess the law; to know the law and even to teach the law to others is not enough, for God judges by the truth; not by appearance or profession but by actual deeds. Whether the sin was *“stealing,” “adultery,”* or idolatry, the law demands perfect obedience (cf. the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:17-7:28). The teaching of truth (*“orthodoxy”*) in the absence of living the truth (*“orthopraxy”*) is sheer hypocrisy. The contradiction between profession and practice serves to discredit both God and his truth in the eyes of the world.

Israel's failure to fully obey the law which had been entrusted to them, and the divine judgment which that failure brought upon them had frequently resulted in the scorn and derision of the nations in the past. The heathen misunderstood God's judgement upon His people in the form of defeat and captivity as a sign of the weakness of Israel's God. They failed to recognize it for what it was, a sign of God's justice. Paul argues that Israel's contemporary inconsistency also serves to discredit God before the Gentile world. The Jews claimed to be the custodians of the God's holy Law. And yet they often failed to observe that Law in their own lives. The apostle's words here are based upon Old Testament texts from Isaiah and Ezekiel.

“And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, “These are the Lord's people and yet they had to leave his land.” I had concern for my holy name which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore say to the house of Israel, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.” (Ezekiel 36:20-22)

“And now what do I have here?” declares the Lord. “For my people have been taken away for nothing and those who rule them mock,” declares the Lord. “And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.” (Isaiah 52:5)

Verses 25-27

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

“*Circumcision has value if you observe the law...*” - “*Circumcision,*” the removal of the foreskin of the penis, was instituted by God in Genesis 17:9-14. It was the single most important act which established the covenant between the Lord and the descendants of Abraham.

“Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household, or those bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'”

Circumcision was not merely symbolic action. According to the command and promise of God, divine power was at work here to apply and seal the covenant of divine grace (cf. Romans 4:11). Thus, Lutheran theologians affirm that circumcision was a genuine means of grace, one of the “*sacraments of the Old Testament.*” Dr. P.E. Kretzmann writes:

“Thus circumcision was a sacrament, a means of grace in the Old Testament, a rite through which God transmitted the blessings of His covenant to the children of Abraham...Above all, circumcision was the seal of the righteousness of faith, Romans 4:11, and a type of Holy Baptism, the corresponding sacrament of the New Testament. Through the water of Baptism, as an external sign, the righteousness of

God, the forgiveness of sins, is sealed unto us.” (Kretzmann, I, p.37; cf. also Pieper,III, p. 214)

However, those who spurn that grace through unbelief and disobedience, forfeit the blessing that God has graciously conferred upon them. Old Testament circumcision, like New Testament Baptism, is not some magical ritual which guarantees salvation simply by going through the proper motions, “*ex opera operata*”. Hence the prophets sternly warned complacent sinners not to trust that the fact of their circumcision would save them despite stubborn and defiant disobedience of God and His Will. Moses wrote: “***Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.***” (Deuteronomy 10:16 cf. also Jeremiah 4:4). Just a few moments before his murder by a Jewish mob, Stephen declared: “***You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!...You always resist the Holy Spirit.***” (Acts 7:51)

It is just this attitude, which viewed circumcision as a mark of superiority and an automatic guarantee of salvation, to which Paul directs his criticism in this segment. Rabbinic Judaism expressed that tragically misplaced confidence in the *Mishnah* with comments like these: “*No circumcised Jewish man will see hell.*” and, “*God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised would be sent to hell. Abraham sits*



“God’s Call of Abram” by Rudolf Schüfer

before the gate of hell and never allows any circumcised Israelite to enter.” (MacArthur, p. 160). It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this ceremony for the first century Jew. James Dunn notes: *“Circumcision was fundamental to the typical Jew's self-understanding, the mark of his religious distinctiveness, the badge of national privilege, the seal of God's covenant favor to Israel as His chosen people.”* (Dunn, p. 127) During the Intertestamental Period, under intense persecution, circumcision became a crucial test of covenant loyalty and a mark of Jewish national distinctiveness (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:48,60-61; 2:46). That sense of uniqueness was heightened by the negative reaction to the practice within the prevailing Greek culture which viewed the circumcision as a distasteful disfigurement of the body.

Paul is careful not to deny the benefit of circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace. However, when one who has been circumcised rejects the faith and obedience which was the substance of that covenant, to lay claim to the promises of grace and the privileges of the covenant was presumption and mockery. Martin Franzmann correctly emphasizes:

“Circumcision is the sign both of God's gift to the Jew and His claim upon the Jew; the covenant of which it is a sign puts a man under both the promise and the commandment of God; the Jew speaks his Amen to the promise by obeying the law of God...Circumcision is no magic spell but the dealing of the living God with responsible man. If man breaks the law, his circumcision cannot save him; it indicts him.” (Franzmann, p. 55).

Physical circumcision avails for nothing when the heart remains defiant and disobedient. In such circumstances, it is ***“as though you had not been circumcised.”*** Centuries before, the prophet Jeremiah had scornfully lumped the Jews together with their pagan neighbors as men who were ***“really uncircumcised,”*** despite their careful observance of the ancient ritual.

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh - Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole House of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.” (Jeremiah 9:25-26)

“If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements...” - The physical

act of circumcision is not decisive. It is the obedience of faith that truly matters. The Gentile who obeys the requirements of the law will stand before God on the same basis as the Jew, despite the fact that he is not circumcised. The absence of physical circumcision will not be a disadvantage in the eyes of the Lord. To the orthodox Jew, this assertion would have been positively scandalous!

“The one who is not circumcised physically...” - Yet the apostle goes on to press the point even further. Not only will the uncircumcised Gentile who obeys the law stand before God on the same basis as the circumcised Jew; but the Gentile's obedience will also ***“condemn”*** the disobedience of the self-righteous Jew who has broken the law despite all of the advantage which he has enjoyed.

“The charge is sharp indeed! By resting on the law, in the false confidence that what the law requires is a strict observance of the practice of circumcision and the maintenance of the cult with its attendant laws, the devout Jew is actually transgressing the law. He has missed the point of the law and of circumcision. What he counts as doing the law, Paul counts as transgressing the law! In consequence it will not be a case of the faithful Jew passing judgment on the lawless Gentile, but rather a case of the law-fulfilling Gentile (by his faith and life) passing judgment on the law-transgressing Jew.” (Dunn, p.127)

Verses 28-29

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision only outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.

“A man is not a Jew...” - Membership in the Israel of God is not, and has never been, a matter of ethnic descent. To be a Jew ***“inwardly, by the heart,”*** and ***“by the Spirit”*** is a matter of faith not bloodlines. From the beginning it was God's purpose to bless all the nations through the Descendant of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:2-3). The blessing which God graciously showered upon the Jewish nation always served His consistent purpose for the salvation of humanity. To cherish a single nation, while consigning all the rest to perdition would have been unworthy of God - a total denial of His essential nature. God declared His universal purpose to the Messianic Servant in Isaiah 49: ***“It is too small a thing for you to be my Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for***

the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6) Hans LaRondelle summarizes God's purpose in the selection of the Jews as the chosen people in this way:

“Israel's election did not imply the rejection of the other peoples, but rather their inclusion. Israel was chosen, not just for its own salvation, but to lead the whole world to share in her saving knowledge and blessing. In short, Israel was chosen to represent the attractive character and saving will of Yahweh to the Gentiles.”
(LaRondelle, p. 92)

John the Baptist sternly warned the Jews of his day not to rely upon the false security of their identity as the blood descendants of Abraham: ***“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). The recognition that membership in the Israel of God is a matter of faith, not birth is of central

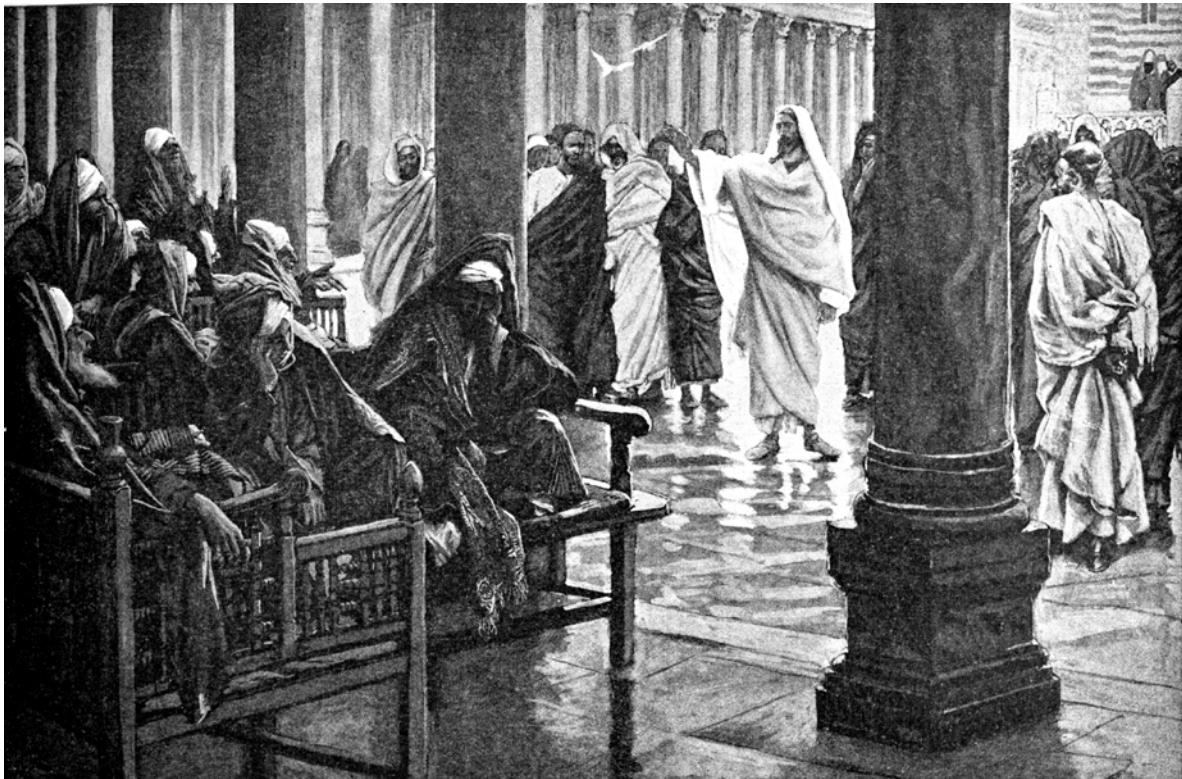


*“The Preaching of John the Baptist”
19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

importance in Romans. The apostle will return to this basic theme many times in the course of the Epistle. For example, in Chapter 9, verse six, he writes: ***“They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”***

A preoccupation with external forms and ritual is generally indicative of an absence of spiritual vitality and faith. First century Judaism's obsession with outward conformity to ritual and law was symptomatic of the decline of true religion among the Jews. Charles Hodge writes: *“Whenever true religion declines, the disposition to lay undue stress on external rites comes to the fore. The Jews, when they lost their spirituality supposed that circumcision had the power to save them.”* (Hodge, p. 102)

“Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.” - As noted above, the name “Jew” was derived from the Old Testament tribe of Judah. Judah is drawn from a Hebrew root which means “praise.” St. Paul's closing remark in this segment thus becomes a pointed reminder of the misplaced spiritual priorities of those who believed themselves to be worthy of praise because of their proud lineage. He who is ***“inwardly”*** a Jew, whose ***“circumcision is circumcision of the heart,”*** and who lives ***“by the Spirit, not by the written code”*** seeks praise not from ***“men”*** but from ***“God.”***



“Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees!”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot



"The Life-Giving Word of God" by Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 3

Verses 1-2

What advantage is there then in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

"What advantage is there then in being a Jew..." - The apostle had demolished Jewish overconfidence in the privilege of being God's chosen people and legalistic reliance upon circumcision as the authenticating badge of covenant membership. Paul now anticipates and rebuts Jewish objections to his argument. If, indeed, membership in the people of Israel counts for so little, was God's entire relationship

with His Old Testament people pointless? Absolutely not! In rejecting covenant presumption, Paul had not rejected the whole idea of the covenant. In no way did he turn his back on his heritage as a Jew and he now strongly affirms the value God's covenant with Israel (***“Much in every way!”***). To be among the chosen of God was a great blessing. Later in the Letter, Paul details those blessings in this way: ***“Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh.”*** (9:3-5).

“First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” - The introductory phrase - ***“First of all”*** - usually implies the beginning of a list in which other items will follow. In this instance that is not the case. The phrase here signifies priority in the sense of importance or significance. The blessing specified here is not the entirety of the ***“advantage...in being a Jew,”*** but it is first and foremost on the list.

The verb ***“have been entrusted”*** (Greek - *“episteuthesan”*) means *“to place something of great value, a treasure, in someone's custody for safe keeping.”* The treasure does not belong to the custodian, but has been given over to his care by its owner. The priceless treasure in this instance is ***“the very words of God”*** (Greek - *“ta logia tou theou”*). The reference in this passage, as in the other three occurrences of the term in the New Testament (cf. Acts 7:38; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11), is to the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The Greek noun *“logia”* is the diminutive form of the term *“logos”* (*“word”*). Its use in reference to the Old Testament is of profound theological significance. In Classical Greek the noun refers to *“an utterance inspired by God, a divine oracle.”* The great Princeton theologian Benjamin Warfield writes on the classical use of the term:

“No lower sense can be attached to “logia” in these instances than that which it bears uniformly in its classical and Hellenistic usage; it means not “words” barely, simple “utterances,” but distinctively “oracular utterances,” divinely authoritative communications, before which men stand in awe and to which they bow in humility; and this high meaning is not merely implicit, but is explicit in the term. It would seem clear again that there are no implications of brevity in the term; it means not short, pithy, pregnant sayings, but high, authoritative, sacred utterances...It characterizes utterances which are emanations from God.” (Warfield, p.387)

St. Paul's use of this term in reference to the Old Testament Scriptures clearly reveals that he regarded the prophetic writings to be the very Word of God Himself. As

Warfield insists, we have in this text conclusive evidence *“that the Old Testament Scriptures, as such, were esteemed by the writers of the New Testament as an oracular book, which in itself not merely contains, but is the utterance, the very Word of God...nothing other than the crystallized speech of God.”* (Warfield, p.404). Those who assert that the Bible is not, in and of itself, the Word of God but merely contains the Word of God or conveys a divine message to the hearts of believers, must do so in defiance of this clear passage and others.

To have been *“entrusted with the very words of God”* was an unimaginably great privilege as well as an equally immense responsibility. As the poet William Cowper wrote:

*“They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Savior of us all.”*

Verses 3-4

What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

“What if some do not have faith?” - The difficulty still remains. Having dismissed Pharisaic legalism as just one more form of worthless moralism which cannot justify man before the righteous God, Paul must still contend with the reality that Israel has rejected her Messiah. Despite the fact that the Jews enjoyed the *“advantage”* of having been *“entrusted with the very words of God,”* the great majority of the nation had consistently denied and defied their Lord. As Stephen declared shortly before his martyrdom:

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers; you always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him - you who have received the Law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.” (Acts 7:51-53)

Note that Stephen also emphasizes the great gift of God's revelation to highlight the obstinacy and ingratitude of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. They were the nation which had *“received the Law that was put into effect through angels”* and yet they would not believe. They scorned and rejected the prophets and their message. Ultimately they repudiated and crucified the Messiah whom God had sent to deliver them.



“The Giving of the Law at Sinai”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?” - But the unfaithfulness of men does not and cannot invalidate the faithfulness of God. God has kept His covenant with Israel despite Israel's persistent refusal to honor and obey Him. The delicate wording of Paul's question serves as a reminder that not all Jews had rejected the Gospel. *“But what if some did not have faith?”* The Lord always preserved unto Himself a faithful remnant that had not *“bowed the knee to Baal”* (1 Kings 19:18).

“Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar.” - The exclamation *“Not at all!”* is the strongest negative expression possible in the Greek language. It carries the

connotation that that which is being denied is absolutely out of the question, utterly impossible. The thought that the faithfulness of God could be undone by the unfaithfulness of man is inconceivable to the apostle. The validity of God's promises and the faithfulness of His truth cannot be determined by a public opinion poll. The majority of Israel has rejected the truth of God. It remains true nonetheless. In fact, if every man on the face of the earth rejected the truth of God it would still remain the truth. The truth of God must be affirmed even in the face of universal denial. If that affirmation reveals all of humanity to be liars, then so be it. The truth of God must stand. *"His Word holds, whatever else may break. Where His will and the will of man collide, it is for faith axiomatic that the will of man is false."* (Franzmann, p.59) The connection between truth in this phrase and faithfulness in the preceding phrase is significant. God is faithful because He is true.

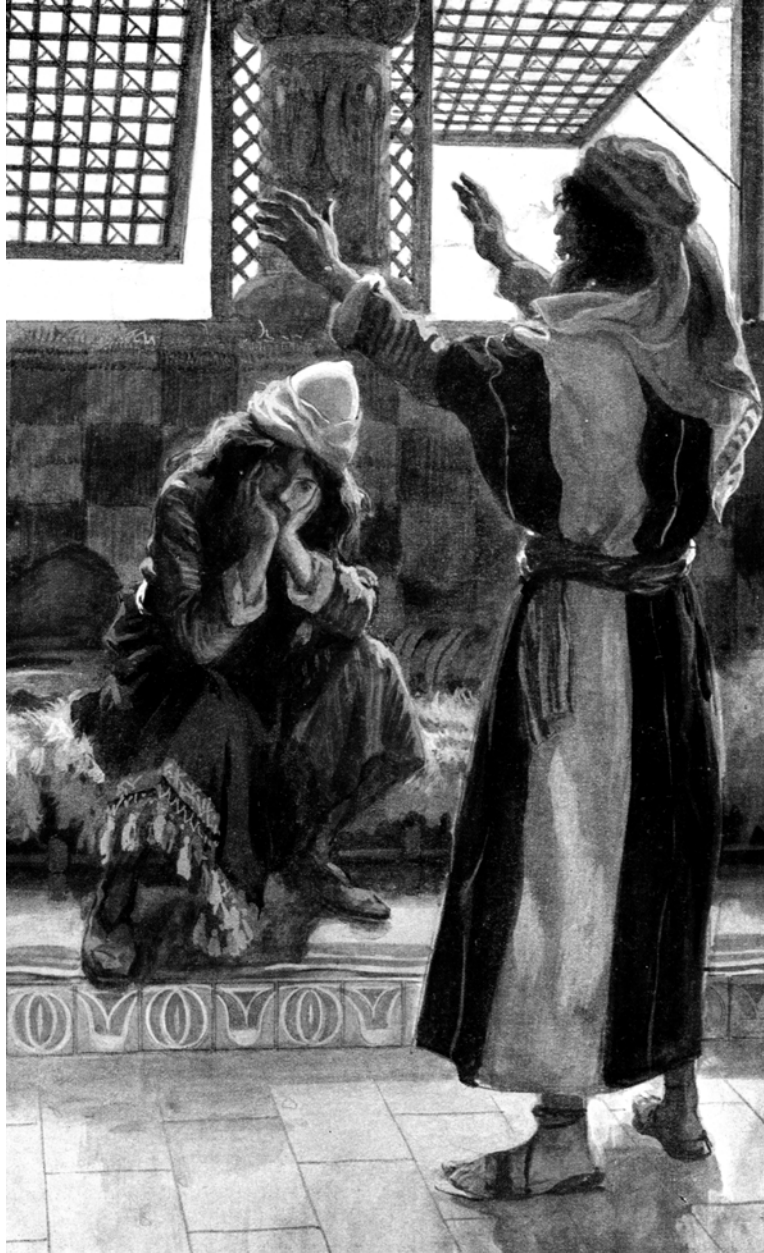
"As it is written: "So that you may be proved right..." - Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4, the great penitential psalm of David, to illustrate his point. At the moment of his deepest degradation David rejects any pretense of self-justification and makes no attempt to conceal or excuse his sin with Bathsheba so that the righteous judgment of God may be revealed to all. He is completely willing to accept the personal consequences of his action so that God may be seen to be righteous and just.

Verses 5-8

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say - as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say - "Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

"But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly..." - The convoluted reasoning of sinful man can excuse, justify, and rationalize anything. Paul *argument.*") According to this perverted logic if God's just judgment of the sinner serves to glorify Him then we ought to sin all the more so that God can receive greater glory. Furthermore, if our sinning and God's judgment upon it actually benefits Him then why should we be condemned for our sins? Paul will deal with this theme more explicitly later in the Epistle (cf. 6:1-4). The example, however, is not merely hypothetical. This produces one more example of this twisted thinking

(“*I am using a human* is a charge which has actually been raised against the apostle by his enemies (“*We are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say.*”). It should come as no surprise that the great teacher of salvation by grace through faith without the works of the Law would have been accused of



**“The Prophet Nathan Denounces King David”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot**

jewelry on a piece of black velvet so the contrast makes the gold appear even more elegant and beautiful. You are charging God with using man's sin to bring glory to Himself, and that is blasphemy. You are impugning the righteous purity of God. Not only that, but if man's

encouraging immorality and lawless living. In the language of theology this position is called “*antinomianism*” (literally - against the law). His legalistic enemies believed that the apostle was encouraging men to sin so that good might come from their sinning. Those who distort and deny the Gospel in this way are consigned to the damnation they will most certainly receive (“*Their condemnation is deserved.*”).

Implicit in this impertinent and blasphemous argument is the accusation that Paul is insinuating that God is unrighteous and that His judgment is unjust. John MacArthur effectively paraphrases the charge in this way:

“If God is glorified by the sins of Israel, being shown faithful Himself despite the unfaithfulness of His chosen people, then sin glorifies God. In other words, Paul, you are saying that what God strictly forbids actually brings Him glory. You are saying that God is like a merchant who displays a piece of expensive gold

unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say about God's judgment? If what you say is true, why does God punish sin? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?" (MacArthur, p.173)

Paul rejects this nonsense in the strongest terms possible, "***Certainly not!***". He repeats the same emphatic Greek expression "*me genoito*" which he had used earlier in Verse 4. This idiocy is absolutely impossible. It is not worthy of serious consideration! To challenge the righteousness of God or the justice of His divine judgment is completely out of the question. Any argument which presumes to do so is presumptuous and blasphemous. It must be rejected out of hand. The creature never has the right to sit in judgment over the Creator. That which our limited human reason cannot comprehend must simply be accepted by faith.

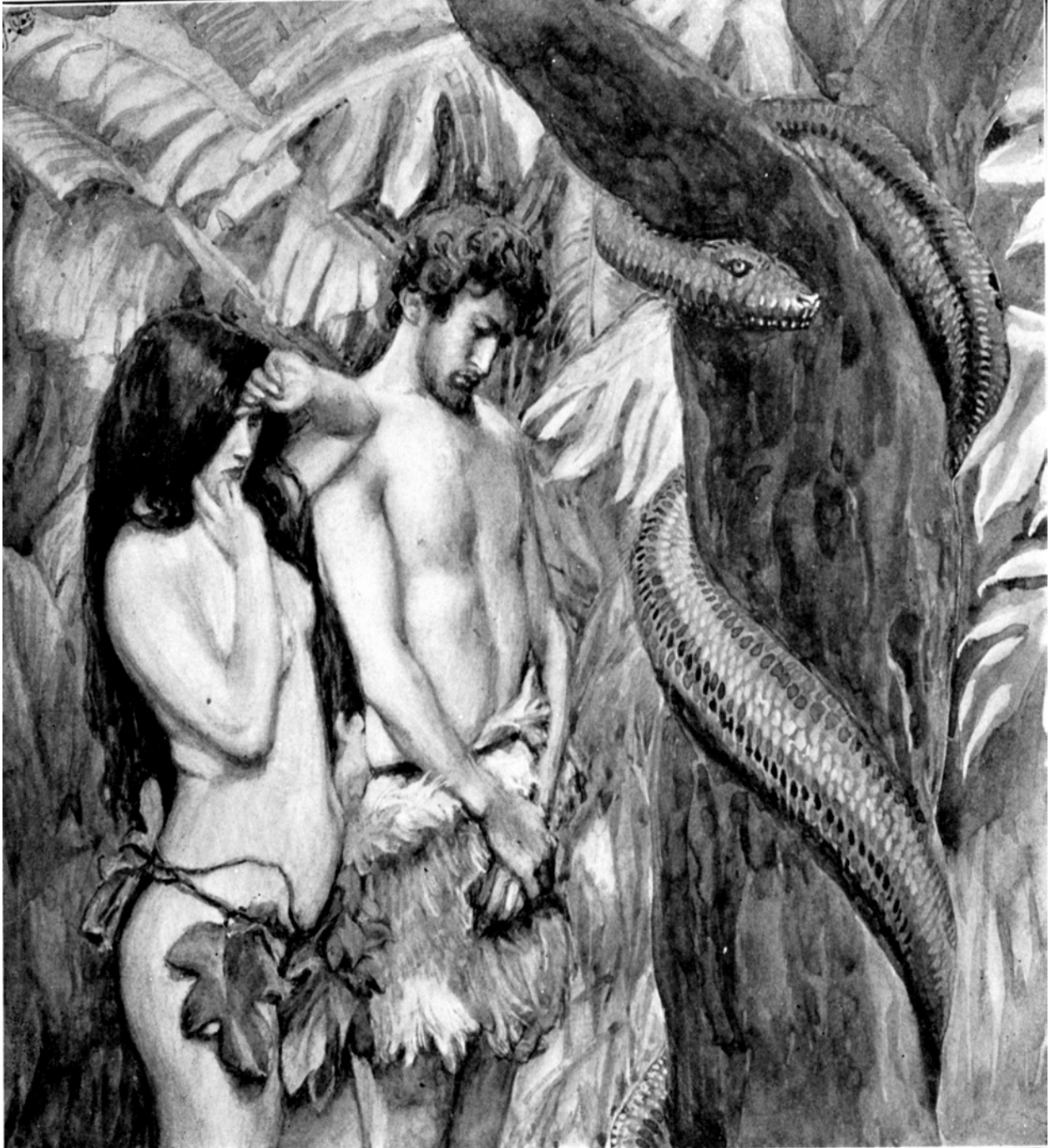
Verses 9-18

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

"What should we conclude then?" - Paul has thus far eliminated any and every possibility of self-justification. Ignorance is no excuse because of the self-disclosure of God in nature (1:18-23) and the law written in the heart of every man (2:14-16). The immorality of those who have been given over to sinful desire (1:21-32) has been condemned along with all of the pretensions of moralism (2:1-11). Jewish reliance upon ethnic identity, possession of the written law, and the external rite of circumcision has also been rejected (2:17-29). The unavoidable conclusion is that no man can justify himself before God.

"Are we any better? Not at all!" - This universal indictment knows no exceptions. Paul includes himself and all the members of the congregation in Rome, "***Jews and Gentiles alike,***" among those who are subject to the dominion of sin, and thus under the wrath and judgment of almighty God. The NIV translation fails to reflect the forensic nature of the language used in the original. The phrase they have rendered

“Are we any better?” actually says **“What then do we plead in our own defense?”** The use of this courtroom jargon then carries through into the next phrase, **“We have already made the charge,”** where the verb **“made the charge”** (Greek - **“proaitiaomai”**) is a technical legal term used to indicate a person previously indicted for a given offense.



“The Curse of Sin” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

“Are all under sin.” - In the Greek text **“all”** is placed at the beginning of the phrase for particular emphasis since the apostle's basic point is the universal scope of the indictment. In the verses which follow, Paul makes the same point by using the negative contrast **“none”** six times in referring to man's absolute lack of righteousness before God. The preposition **“under”** (Greek -“ *hupo*”) does not simply mean to be beneath but to be totally under the power, authority, or control of someone or something. It is often used in Greek to describe the absolute power of King over his subjects or a master over his slaves. Paul's use of the term here is intended to convey the concept that man is completely subservient and in bondage to the dominion of sin. The noun **“sin”** (Greek - *“hamartian”*) is singular. The individual transgressions of the law, the sins, which men commit are not the root of man's moral dilemma. **“Sin”** is not merely unfortunate habits or bad behavior. It is a malignant, evil, power which holds humanity in its deadly grasp. **“Sin”** is what we are by nature. The particular sins that we commit are only the symptoms of the moral disease which infects us, not the disease itself.

“As it is written...” - Paul now introduces a series of Scriptural proofs to demonstrate the total depravity of man. Dr. James Dunn comments on the effectiveness of Paul's use of the Hebrew Old Testament to demolish Jewish pretentiousness:

*“The final nail in the coffin for any special pleading or defense is provided by a powerful string of quotations from the Jewish Scriptures - entirely appropriate, since the only defense in view is the Jewish claim to special status and consideration before God...No defense remains. As soon as these Scriptures are read without the blinkers of Jewish presumption of privilege, they become a devastating indictment of all peoples, Jews as well as Gentiles...When such Scriptures assert that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good, no one fears God, the mean **no one!**”* (Dunn, p. 151)

Six Old Testament texts are cited; Psalm 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; and, Psalm 36:1. The quotations are freely cited with some adaptation from the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament. This grim catena of condemnation can be subdivided into three basic segments: 1. the sinful condition (vs.10-12); 2. the sinful life (vs.13-15); and, 3. the sinful source (vs.17-18). The verb **“it is written”** is the standard formula for the introduction of Old Testament Scripture, not only in the Book of Romans, but throughout the New Testament (cf. Romans 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 15:3,21). It translates the Greek perfect tense which indicates action completed in the past with ongoing significance for the present

and the future. The revelation of God's Word in Old Testament Scripture is an accomplished fact. That which has been written is permanently valid and binding for every believer. This is the same powerful word which our Lord used three times during His temptation to banish the trickery of the Evil One (cf. Matthew 4:1-11).

“There is none righteous..” - The indictment begins with a paraphrase of Psalm 14:

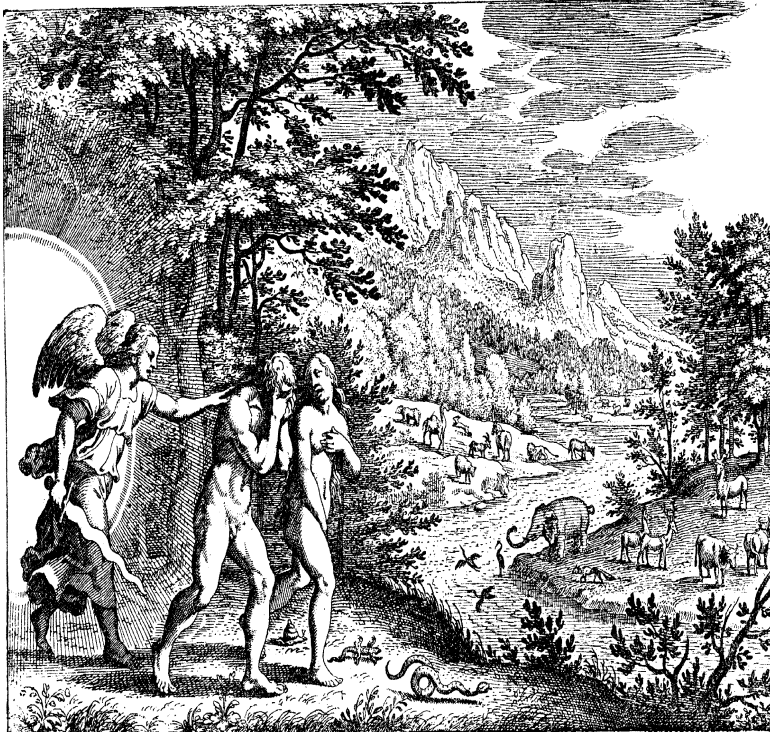
“The fool says in his heart, “There is not God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Psalm 14:1-3; cf. Psalm 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20)

We have previously noted that righteousness is a major concern in the Letter to the Romans (cf. p.26f.). It is to that great theme that the apostle now returns as he begins his grim description of the natural condition of every human being apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the term ***“righteous”*** in its ordinary forensic sense - to be declared not guilty before the bar of divine justice. To assert that ***“There is none righteous”*** is not to say that no one ever does anything that is morally right. The subject of the text is not specific actions or even general patterns of behavior. The apostle's concern is the righteousness which enables a man to stand before God justified. That perfect righteousness is found only in Christ.

The negative assertion is repeated three times for unmistakable emphasis: ***“no one righteous, not even one...no one who understands, no one who seeks God...no one who does good, not even one.”*** James Boice observes:

“If God says something once we should listen to what He says very carefully. If He says the same thing twice, we should give Him our most intense and rapt attention. What if He repeats Himself a third time? Then surely we should stop all else, focus our minds, seize upon each individual word, memorize what is said, and ponder the meaning of the saying intensely, attempting to apply the truth of God's revelation to our entire lives.” (Boice, I, p.306)

There is absolutely no possibility of righteousness other than the declarative act of God in Christ. Nor can there be degrees or levels of righteousness. One is either completely righteous in Christ, or completely sinful without Him. There can be no



*“Adam and Eve Driven from Paradise”
Bible Illustration by Matthias Merian - 1630*

in between. That righteousness which is not perfect must be judged to be unrighteousness by the holy God.

The unrighteousness of man is revealed in humanity's inability to understand the things of God. Perfect knowledge and understanding of God were at the heart of the divine image in which our first parents were created. With the fall into sin, the divine image was lost. Our understanding has been tragically twisted and distorted by sin. Paul warns the Corinthians:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

The apostle goes on to make his assertion even more emphatic in the following chapter. The dilemma is not merely that men do not understand - they are completely incapable of understanding. The *cannot* understand. *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Corinthians 2:14)

No one seeks God... As Adam and Eve fled from their Creator in the cool of the evening, so their descendants have consistently sought to evade and avoid God. All of man's desperate attempts to devise his own religion and all of the ridiculous idols which he has fashioned for himself are indications of our obstinate determination to spurn the love of the Creator and replace Him with false gods more to our liking.

Every one of these efforts is doomed to failure, as pathetic as our first parents fig leaves.

“All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” - Fallen mankind ***“All have turned away.”*** The Greek verb in this phrase is *“ekklino”* which means *“to deviate,” “to wander,”* or *“to depart from the right way.”* In a military context the word refers to soldiers who have turned to run away from the enemy and desert the field of battle. The phrase recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah: ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*** (Isaiah 53:6). Instead of believing in and following Jesus who is ***“the Way, the Truth and the Life”*** (John 14:6), humanity chooses to walk ***“in the way which seems right to a man but whose end is the way of death”*** (Proverbs 14:12). The adjective ***“worthless”*** (Greek - *“echreothesan”*) carries a strongly negative connotation. It is used to describe that which is completely useless and without value. Its Hebrew equivalent was often used in reference to milk that had turned sour and rancid. The Greek word sometimes refers to the senseless laughter of a moron. Paul uses the term in the same way in Titus 1:16 in reference to corrupt and deceitful men: ***“They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”*** Jesus combines the two closely related meanings of this word (spoiled and useless) when in the Sermon on the Mount He speaks of Christians as the ***“salt of the earth”*** and warns: ***“But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled upon by men.”*** (Matthew 5:13) The emphasis in the original text is on ***“all”*** and ***“together.”*** This malignant pattern is universal. It applies to every segment of humankind. ***“As respects well-doing there is not one; as respects evil-doing there is no exception.”*** (Murray, p.104) The closing phrase of the series is perhaps the most devastating of them all - ***“There is no one that does good, not even one.”*** The Greek verb *“chrestotes”* (***“does good”***) refers to that which is upright, specifically to that which is morally correct. No human being can measure up to God's absolute standard of right and wrong.

Karl Barth, the leader of modern neo-orthodoxy, forcefully argued that the Biblical doctrine of man's total depravity is not only foundational to Christianity but is also demonstrated by the entire course of human history. Barth viewed this text as the decisive expression of the doctrine of man's total depravity in Scripture. He argued that without this crucial insight, neither man nor his history could be properly understood.

*“If all the great outstanding figures in history, whose judgements are worthy of serious consideration, if all the prophets, psalmists, philosophers, fathers of the church, reformers, poets, artists, were asked their opinion, would one of them assert that men are good or even capable of good? Is the doctrine of original sin merely one doctrine among many? Is it not, rather, according to its fundamental meaning **the doctrine that emerges from all honest study of history?** Is it not the doctrine which, in the last resort, underlies the whole teaching of history? Is it possible for us to adopt a different point of view from that of the Bible, Augustine, and the reformers? What then does history teach about the things that men do or do not do? Does it teach that some men at least are like God? No, but that - **There is none righteous, no not one.** Does it teach that men possess a deep perception of the nature of things or that they have experienced the essence of life? No, but that - **There is none that understandeth.** Does it provide a moving picture of quiet piety or of fiery search after God? Do the great witnesses of truth furnish a splendid picture, for example of prayer? No - **There is none that seeketh after God.** Can it describe this or that individual and his actions as natural, healthy, original, right minded, ideal, full of character, affectionate, attractive, intelligent, forceful, ingenuous, of sterling worth? No - **They have all turned aside. they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one.**” (Boice, I, p.308)*

"Their throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit." - Having decisively described the sinful condition of all men, the apostle now proceeds to document the manifestation of that condition in the sinful life of all men. The first of the three quotations in this verse comes from Psalm 5:9. ***“Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.”*** A person's character is invariably revealed in his conversation. Thus the apostle uses a striking series of references to the organs of speech - ***throats, tongues, lips, and mouths.*** Jesus declared: ***The mouth speaks of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*** (Matthew 12:34-35; cf. also 15:18). The Psalmist laments:

“Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Their venom is like that of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears and will not heed the tune of the charmer however skillful the enchanter may be.” (Psalm 58: 3-5)

The throat is to the heart as ***“an open grave”*** is to the decaying corpse within. As the



*“The Wicked Are Like A Cobra That Will Not Heed the Charmer’s Tune”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

stench of death pours out of the open grave so the foulness of spiritual death is constantly revealed by the speech of unregenerate man. The hallmark of sinful man's communication is deceit. The Greek term *“douliao”* (*“speak deceit”*) has the basic meaning of luring someone into a trap. It is the tempting bait which conceals the deadly hook. The tense of the verb in the original is imperfect which denotes continuously ongoing action. Deceit is the native language of sinful man, a habitual and normal part of his life.

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.” - The next quotation comes from Psalm 140:3 - *“They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.”* The text literally says that the poison of vipers is *“under”* their lips, thus rendering a vividly accurate picture of these deadly snakes. The fangs of a viper normally lie folded back into the snake's upper jaw. When the creature thrusts his head forward to strike the hollow fangs drop down and the venom is injected through them into the hapless victim. Luther remarks that this is a most fitting description of the lies and deceptions fostered by false teachers. *“But the poor wretches do not even recognize this poison as the death of their souls. Therefore he uses the expression “under the lips” as if to say, death lies subtly hidden while outwardly it appears as life and truth in the very words of their doctrine.”* (Luther, AE 25, p.230) .

The deadly lie is carefully concealed beneath the semblance of truth, as they tell people what they want to hear and thus lead them to death and destruction.

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." - The quotation is from Psalm 10:7 - ***"His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue."*** ***"Cursing"*** (Greek - "*ara*") is a word for the most intense malediction, that is desiring the worst for a person and expressing that desire through open condemnation and defamation. Luther comments:

"This "cursing" is a matter of openly attacking a person with insults, denunciations and blasphemies, and of wishing him evil...They do not do this slothfully, but as I have said, with great zeal. For he uses the expression "their mouth is full," that is, abounding in curses." Luther, AE 25, p.231)

"Bitterness" (Greek - "*pikria*") does not refer to physical taste but to strong hostility and anger against an enemy. The root of this bitterness is jealousy, for as Luther aptly observes *"jealousy is the bitterness of the heart just as love, on the other hand is the sweetness of the heart."* (Luther, AE 25, p.231) David describes such people in Psalm 64:3-4: ***"Those who have sharpened their tongue like a sword...aimed bitter speech as their arrow, to shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot him and do not fear."***

"Their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery marks their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." - Wicked words now escalate to violent and destructive deeds. The excerpt is from Isaiah 59:7-8:

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

Like a moth inexorably drawn to the flame, sinful man is obsessed by death. The children of Cain have reaped a bloody harvest throughout human history. We have come view death as a panacea, the solution to our problems, the means to the achievement of our goals and desires. 19th Century Scottish Evangelist Robert Haldane wrote: *"The most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger as man destroys of his fellows to satiate his ambition,*

his revenge, or his greed.” (MacArthur, p. 190). We are *“swift to shed blood.”* There is an irresistible eagerness to the killer instinct in man that seems to be increasing as time progresses. One in every three children conceived in the United States is slaughtered before birth in the bloody holocaust of abortion. A baby born in any one of America's fifty largest cities today faces a greater risk of being murdered than the risk faced by an American soldier in WW II of being killed in combat. Human life is cheap in this world as sin leaves *“ruin and misery”* in its wake. Lenski agrees:

“Where those feet have trodden this is what they leave in their trail. How true the graphic picture is thousands of cases under our own observation show; ruthless, devastating feet crushing and shattering, leaving wails of misery to tell where they have been; a history full of broad bloody trails, and the countless little cruelties as miniature copies.” (Lenski, p. 235)

The prophet Jeremiah had denounced the self-serving leaders of Israel who offered



“Ruin and Destruction Mark Their Ways” 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

their people false reassurance and cried: "**Peace! Peace!**" *where there is no peace.*" (Jeremiah 6:14) The root cause of humanity's relentless violence is sin. As long as men are in bondage to sin there will never be lasting peace for as Paul observes; "**the way of peace they do not know.**" Our failure to recognize sin as the source of our personal problems and the difficulties of society makes it impossible for us to deal with those problems in a substantive way. John MacArthur quotes the following gripping description of sin:

"It is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, poison, a serpent, a sting; everything that man hates, it is; a load of curses and calamities beneath whose crushing most intolerable pressure, the whole creation groaneth...Who is the aged grave-digger that shovels away the dirt for a grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is the sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? - SIN. Who with icy breath blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? SIN. Who, by a more hideous metamorphosis that Ovid ever fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocents? SIN. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who lights the torch of war, and bears it blazing over trembling lands. Who by divisions in the Church, rends Christ's seamless robe? SIN. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazirite asleep and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who with winning smiles on her face, honey flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair siren is this who seated on a rock by the deadly pool smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arm around our neck to leap with us into perdition? SIN. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne, and impels sinners, mad a Gadarene swine, down the precipice into a lake of fire? SIN."
(MacArthur, p.191,192)

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." - The apostle's grim documentary of depravity concludes with a quotation from Psalm 36:1 - "**An oracle from my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: there is no fear of God before his eyes.**" The "**fear of God**" is one of the great concepts of the Bible. Solomon rightly declares that "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**" (Proverbs 9:10). Luther indicated his recognition of the central importance of this idea in his *Small Catechism* in that he began each of his explanations to the Ten Commandments with the words "*We should fear and love God that...*" In this positive sense, for the believer, the "**fear of God**" is not "*fright*" or "*terror.*" It is, instead, the reverential awe of the

creature in the presence of the holy and almighty Creator. It is the realistic and right frame of mind for man before God. It is closely linked in Scripture to worshipping God, obeying Him, and departing from evil. To fear God above all things enables us to conquer all of our other fears. William Dahlmann writes:

"And if we so fear Him, we shall rise superior to all other fears, we shall then have nothing else to fear, and be entirely free of all the fear, worry, and bitterness that otherwise galls our life...The fear of God makes fearless men; docile children to God, but unconquerable heroes to the world. The fear of God made little David the victor over giant Goliath; the fear of God made Daniel look into the jaws of the lions rather than close his windows toward Jerusalem; the fear of God made three Israelites walk into the fiery furnace rather than bend the knee to the image of Nebuchadnezzar; the fear of God made Joseph walk into prison rather than sleep with Potiphar's wife; the fear of God made John the Baptist rebuke wicked King Herod though it cost him his head; the fear of God made Peter and John stand up before the court and say: "We must obey God rather than men!" though it would cost them dearly. The fear of God made Luther, the solitary poor monk, face the spiritual and temporal powers of the world and say: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me. Amen!"...Luther rightly calls this fear of God a virtuous heroine that will not be frightened by man's fuming, storming, and threatening, but when she must offend either God or man will say: "We must obey God rather than men." (Dahlmann, p.36,37)



"Here I Stand" - 19th Century Engraving by Gustav König

For the unregenerate sinner, who neither loves nor honors God, fear in its ordinary sense of dread and terror, is an entirely appropriate reaction to the frightening reality of God's wrath. Rebellious man would do well to be afraid of the Lord's judgment and restrain his conduct accordingly. But man's sinful nature is such, that even this reasonable restraint is absent from his character. Blind to the fatal consequences of his actions, he obstinately

persists down the decline to destruction for *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Verses 19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

“Now we know...” - This pair of verses brings the first major portion of the Epistle to the Romans to a decisive conclusion. **“Know”** (Greek - *“oida”*) refers to knowledge that is certain, self-evident, and complete. It is the verb typically used to introduce an obvious or inescapable conclusion. The noun **“law”** refers to the entire Old Testament and the message of law and gospel which it clearly conveys. **“Those who are under the law”** include every human being, both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has already demonstrated that all of mankind is subject to God's law: the Gentiles through God's revelation of Himself in nature and conscience, and the Jews through God's revelation of Himself in sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. Therefore all are without excuse *“so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”* The phrase *“so that every mouth may be silenced”* indicates the absence of objection or argument in the face of overwhelming evidence. Like Job in the presence of his Creator, no man will be able to speak in his own defense before the almighty Judge: *“I am unworthy. How can I reply to You? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once but I have no answer - twice, but I will say no more.”* (Job 40:4-5) The language here is thoroughly forensic. The accused stands in the dock before the bar in the court of divine justice without one shred of evidence to offer in his own defense. The NIV's translation of the phrase **“the whole world held accountable”** muddles the courtroom flavor of the language. The Greek word which this phrase translates is a *“hapaxlegomenon”* (a word which only occurs once in the Bible). It literally means *“subject to judicial action”* or *“liable to punishment from the court.”*

“Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in His sight...” - Verse 20 begins with the Greek conjunction *“dioti”* (**“Therefore”**). This is the strongest word in the Greek language to express the logical linkage between the preceding reasoning and the conclusion which now follows. The argument which began in Romans 1:18 now comes to its decisive conclusion - **“No one will be declared righteous in His sight**

by observing the law.” This conclusion is absolutely categorical. The negative is all-embracing, allowing for no exceptions whatsoever. Not one human being can ever be justified before God as the result of his own good works or obedience of the law. The *“works of the law”* can never secure God's favorable verdict - neither for the Jews with their moralistic, self-righteous use of the written law of the Old Testament, nor for the Gentile moralists who strive to conform to the natural law written in their hearts. James Dunn stresses the pivotal importance of this text:

*“This verse delivers the **coup de grace**, the final and fundamental reason which actually serves as the basic theological underpinning of the whole argument. All this must be so (the whole world answerable to God for its unrighteousness) because “by works of the law shall no flesh be justified before Him.” Its importance for Paul is confirmed by his use of the very same assertion in Galatians 2:16, where it clearly fills the same role of expressing a fundamental axiom of Christian thought.”*
(Dunn, p.158)



“The Law and the Gospel” - Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder - 1529

“Rather, through the law...” - The law is intended by God to accomplish exactly the opposite of justification namely the realization or conviction of sin.

“This Word abolishes forever all moralistic delusion that after all we sinners might be justified because of works of law that are in some way wrought by ourselves...The moralistic teaching and following are prominent today, entire denominations are swept away by them, to say nothing of the pale moralism of the secret orders and of worldly ethical preachments...It is obvious what application this finds today while the voice of the modernist, the rationalist, and the ethical reformer finds so many ears.” (Lenski, p.245, 242)

The law functions as a mirror which reveals the spiritual condition of man in hideous reality. Thus *“lex semper accusat,”* the law always accuses. It cannot comfort or save, it can only condemn. Yet, even this negative purpose serves the cause of salvation in a profoundly important way for only the man who is fully convinced of the totality of his own sinfulness can fully understand his absolute need for a Savior. In this sense, the law prepares the way for the gospel. Martin Franzmann writes:

*“It is no mere chance that the “clearest gospel” of the Letter to the Romans is prefaced by the fullest, the most profound, and the most incisive proclamation of wrath and judgment that the New Testament contains. The Gospel is the power of God for **salvation** to everyone who has **faith**. Neither “salvation” nor “faith” can be understood aright unless they are seen against the dark background of the wrath of God on all ungodliness and wickedness of men, as 1:18-3:20 proclaims it. This proclamation makes it clear that all men, Gentile and Jew, are in desperate need of deliverance, of the absolute miracle of salvation, and that they can only **receive** it passively, in faith. The old status of man under sin and under wrath is, for man, irrevocable and fixed. If he is to have a new status, he can obtain it only if God, his Judge, creates it.”* (Franzmann, p. 63)

Verse 21

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

“But now...” - D.M. Lloyd-Jones calls these two little words *“the great turning point”* in God's dealings with the human race. For two and a half chapters Paul has painted the grim portrait of God's wrath over against the unrighteousness of mankind with relentless realism. The darkness gathered and grew deeper with every word. **“But now”** comes the great turning point. Everything that the apostle has stated up

to this point is completely and absolutely true. But, thanks be to God, that's not the whole story! A stunning beam of glorious gospel light pierces sin's darkness as Paul announces God's "*great nevertheless in the face of man's failure*" (Stedman). Those who have failed to understand the darkness in which it appeared will never fully appreciate the brightness of that light. Our hopeless cry of despair now becomes a joyful shout of victory. What man could never have done for himself, God has done Himself on our behalf. In the breathless silence that follows the pronouncement of our doom, the Lord declares: "*You deserve to die but I will give you life! You have earned an eternity of damnation but I will give you everlasting salvation!*" Biblical Christianity is unique among all the religions of man in that it is a religion of divine accomplishment rather than human achievement. Every other religious system, based in one way or another on what men can do or merit for themselves, stands on the other side of this great turning point. Thus, in the end, there are only two kinds of religion - grace religion and works religion. Sadly, the faith of a good many of those who consider themselves to be Christians falls into the latter category.

"A righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known..." - The apostle returns once again to the concept of the "***righteousness of God***" (This translation of the phrase as a subjective genitive - "***righteousness of God***" - is preferable to the NIV's translation as an objective genitive - "***righteousness from God.***") which is the basic theme of the entire Letter to the Romans. This term occurs thirty-six times in the Epistle and when related verbs and adjectives are considered, the total number of references exceeds sixty. Dr. Stöckhardt's carefully worded definition is most helpful.

*"Righteousness of God points to man's position or relation to God, designates the relation of being righteous in which man is placed by God's act of declaring righteous. Therefore the **righteousness of God** is the imputed righteousness, the righteousness which avails before God. This righteousness of God, that counteracts sin, guilt, and wrath, is truly not our own righteousness, not something good in us, but a righteousness that rests outside of us in God. It rests in God's judgment and so it is as firm and immovable as God Himself. What God says, judges, and decrees, is valid in time and in eternity. He who God declares righteous is righteous, even though all the world and all devils condemn him, even though his own conscience pronounces him guilty and judges him." (Stöckhardt, p.39)*

The phrase "***apart from the law***" precedes the subject in the original for particular emphasis. This "***righteousness of God***" has nothing whatsoever to do with anything

and everything in the nature of law and its works (vs.20). Man contributes nothing. All that the law can do is cause the realization of sin and convince man of his own inability to contribute to his own salvation in any way (“**through the law we become conscious of sin**” - vs.20). John Murray rightly declares:

*“When Paul says **without the law** the absoluteness of this negation must not be toned down. He means this without any reservation or equivocation in reference to the justifying righteousness which is the theme of this part of the epistle. This implies that in justification there is no contribution, preparatory, accessory, or subsidiary, that is given by works of law. This fact is set forth both by the expression itself and by its emphatic position in the sentence.”* (Murray, p. 109)

This “**righteousness of God has been made known.**” In 1:17, Paul declared that “**in the gospel a righteousness from God has been revealed.**” He now adds that this revelation is not novel or recent but that the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures, “**the Law and the Prophets,**” bear witness and testify to it. The apostle's use of courtroom jargon remains consistent. The verb “**testify**” (Greek - “*marutroumene*”) literally means to offer testimony in the law court as a witness. The perfect tense of the main verb (“**has been made revealed**”) indicates action that began long ago and continues in the present. This is an important affirmation of the unity of the two Biblical Testaments and of the ongoing validity and importance of the Old Testament for the Christian. This is not a new gospel dispensation which has arrived to replace an outgoing law dispensation. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. Adam, Abraham, and all the believers of the Old Testament were recipients of the same grace by which we are being saved today. “*Paul does not contrast the Christian era to the pre-Christian era, nor is the contrast merely that of the revelation of the Gospel to that of the Law, but rather the condition of the Christian to that of the non-Christian.*” (Stöckhardt, p.30).

Verses 22-24

This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

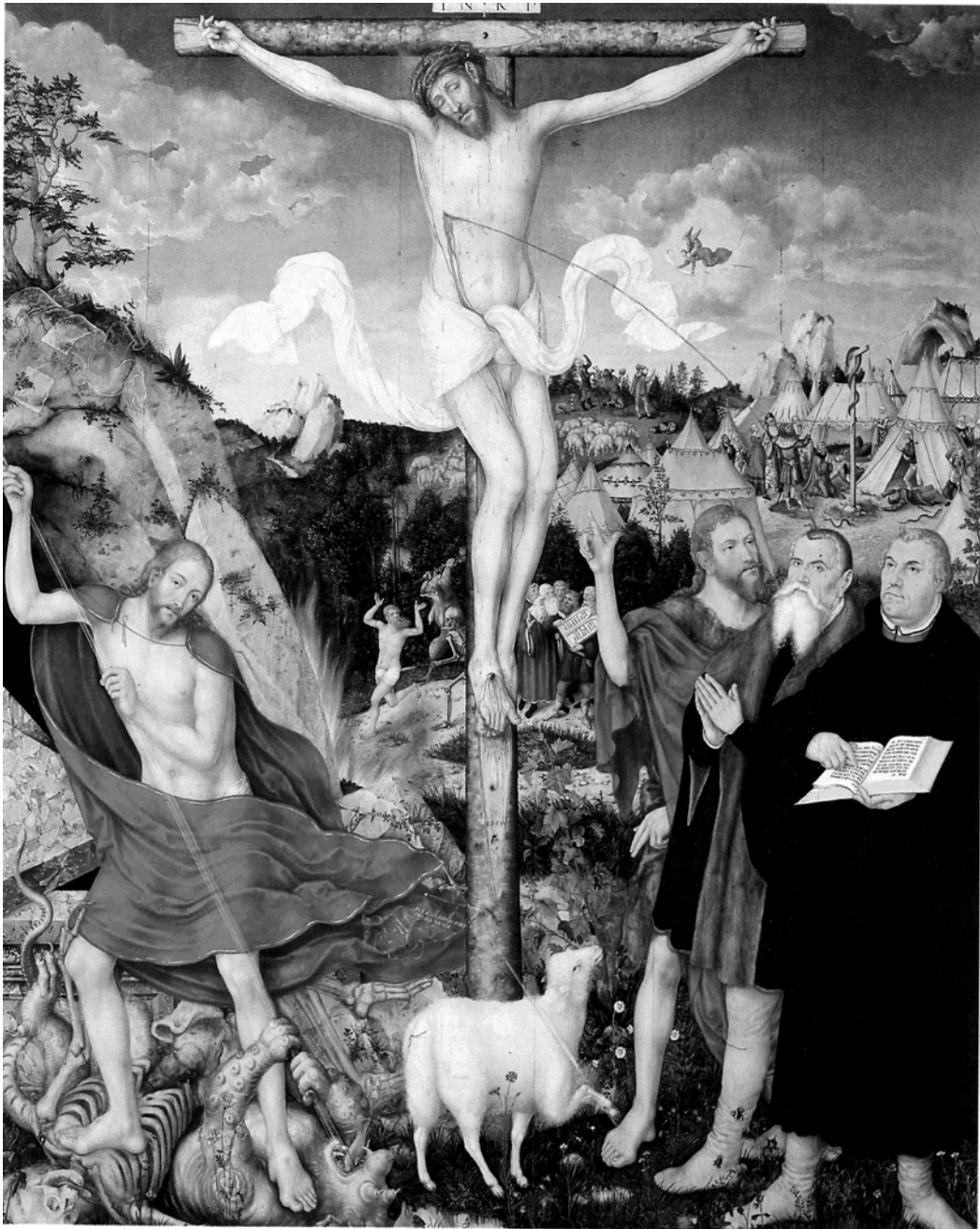
“***This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ...***” - Once again, the language parallels the wording of 1:17 - “***a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.***” This “**righteousness of God**” which is absolutely separate from the works of the

law, ***“comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*** Lenski explains:

“Faith and Jesus Christ are ever combined like a cup and its contents. Faith is the heart's trust embracing Christ, and by so embracing Christ it is the subjective means for making ours the status of righteousness created by God's declaration. Or, beginning, with God: His righteousness, the bestowal of the judicial declaration: "I declare thee righteous!" is ours where and when faith is ours, faith in Jesus Christ.”
(Lenski, p.247)

Paul is no advocate of *“fideism,”* generic faith which simply believes in believing. The optimistic conviction that sincerity saves - it doesn't make any difference what you believe in so long as you believe in something - may be comfortably consistent with the arrogant individualism of our age, but it is not consistent with the Bible. Nor is a general, non-controversial faith in God sufficient. Saving faith in Scripture is faith in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Paul uses both the personal name (***“Jesus”*** - Hebrew: *“Savior”*) and the official title (***“Christ”*** - Greek: *“the Anointed One, the Messiah”*) to designate the object of faith. *“These titles are redolent of all that Jesus was and is personally, historically, and officially.”* (Murray, p.111) This faith is the only way that the ***“righteousness of God”*** comes to anyone. It comes ***“to all who believe because there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** The apostle has clearly demonstrated the totality of sin's corruption of the race. No one has escaped this deadly spiritual infection. All are sinners. The text merely repeats that which has already been clearly proven. Every other distinction, no matter how crucial it may seem to be in the eyes of men, is completely irrelevant - Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (cf. Galatians 3:28). In the eyes of the holy God there are only two categories of humanity - the saved: those who have received the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ and the damned: those who have not.

“And are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” - The apostle now proceeds to discuss the all important doctrine of justification by grace through faith in detail. The verb ***“are justified”*** (Greek - *“dikaioumenoi”*) is closely related to the ***“righteousness”*** (Greek - *“dikaiosune”*) language of the preceding verses. Thus, to justify refers to the judicial action of God in declaring the sinner to be righteous - the pronouncement of a verdict of ***“Not Guilty!”*** The grace of God is the motive in our justification. The emphasis on the gratuitous nature of justification can be clearly seen in the Greek text of the phrase which literally reads: *“being justified as a gift without payment by His grace.”* The



“Christ the Redeemer of the Word” - Center Panel of the Altarpiece of the City Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Weimar. Painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, completed after his death by his son, Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1555. The painting depicts Christ crucified to redeem mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The artist himself is portrayed at the foot of the cross between Martin Luther and John the Baptist. Blood from the wound in Christ’s side spurts down upon Cranach’s head. John the Baptist, Christ’s forerunner, directs the artist’s attention toward Jesus upon the cross. The figure of the Lamb at the foot of the cross recalls John’s recognition of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” These words are inscribed in Latin on the banner held by the Lamb. Luther holds an open Bible with his finger pointing to the text of Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 1 :7; and John 3:14-15. To the left of the cross, the victorious Christ has risen from the tomb to crush death and the devil beneath His feet. The center background depicts the power of the Law to accuse and damn., Moses holds the Ten Commandments while death and the devil drive sinful man toward the fires of hell. The scenes behind Luther, Cranach, and the Baptist present the message of the Gospel, prefigured by the brazen serpent in the wilderness encampment of Israel and announced by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem. In this masterful work of art, with its profound message of Law and Gospel, Lucas Cranach offers his own personal confession of faith, acknowledging Jesus Christ as his Redeemer.

term “*dorean*” (a gift without payment) is used to refer to gifts of particular value that are given without thought of repayment or benefit to the giver. The NIV reflects this word with the adjective “*freely*.” The combination of this term with the crucial noun “*grace*” (literally - “*as a free gift by His grace*”) emphasizes the unconditional nature of God's action on our behalf. “*Grace*” (Greek - “*charis*”) is one of the most important theological words in the New Testament. “*Grace*” is undeserved, unconditional love - the favor of God toward sinners because of Christ (“*favor dei propter Christi*”).

“God's justifying act is not constrained to any extent or degree by anything we do which could be esteemed as predisposing God to this act. And not only is it the case that nothing in us or done by us constrains to this act but all that is ours compels to the opposite judgment - the whole world is brought in guilty before God. This action of God's part derives its whole motivation, explanation, and determination from what God Himself is and does in the exercise of free and sovereign grace. Merit of any kind on the part of man, when brought into relation with the doctrine of justification, contradicts the first article of the Pauline doctrine and therefore of his gospel. It is the glory of the Gospel of Christ that it is one of free grace.” (Murray, p. 114)

“Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” - As grace is the motive for our justification so **“the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”** is the means through which that justification is accomplished. The just and holy God could not simply overlook man's sin. The penalty for that sin had to be paid in full. Man could never have paid that penalty for himself so God paid it for him in the innocent blood of His only-begotten Son. **“Redemption”** (Greek - “*apolutrosis*”) refers to the payment of a ransom in order to liberate a captive or set free a slave. Mankind was held in bondage to sin. Dr. Stöckhardt declares:

“Christ redeemed us from all our sin and from God's wrath by paying a price, a ransom...By payment of a ransom, men were wont to free prisoners of war or slaves from captivity or slavery. So Christ, by payment of a high price ransomed sinful men, held in bondage because of their guilt. And what is this price, this ransom? It is He Himself, His own life, His own blood. In Christ we have redemption through His blood. Because of their abominations, men are worthy of death, have forfeited their lives. However, Christ came and in their stead pledged His own life and shed His own blood for them. Thus, sinful men became free from sin, death, and damnation. Christ Jesus is the Son of God. And the life, the blood of the Son of God, yes, God's blood, God's martyrdom, God's death - that is indeed the payment and ransom for the whole world.” (Stöckhardt, p.41)

Verses 25-26

God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.



*“The High Priest Within the Sanctuary”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement” - It is God who acts to establish the basis for man's justification. The typical word order is reversed in the original to emphasize this fact (literally - *“presented did God”*). That which had always been done secretly within the sacred confines of the *“Holy of Holies”* is now *“presented”* publically for all the world to see. Paul uses the graphic language of the tabernacle and the ritual of *“Yom Kippur,”* the great Day of Atonement to explain that which God has done. A brief review of the sequence of events on *“Yom Kippur”* will help to clarify the meaning of the text.

The Day of Atonement was the highest and most holy of all the sacred festivals of Israel. It occurred on the tenth day of the month of Tishri, the seventh month of

the Hebrew calendar. Seven days before the festival the High Priest left his home and lived in the Temple. Throughout that week he underwent a series of ritual cleansings and carefully rehearsed the services he was to perform. On the eve of the festival he swore an oath before the elders of Israel that he would perform the ritual without omission or alteration. Just before dawn, he underwent the first of the five ritual baths included in the ceremony. After the ordinary morning sacrifice, the High Priest set aside the golden vestments of his office and appeared before the Lord in plain robes of pure white linen. A perfect young bull and two goats were placed before the Lord at the entrance to the Tabernacle (later the Temple). Lots were drawn to designate one of the goats for sacrifice and the other as “*Azazel*,” the scapegoat. A small piece of scarlet cloth was attached to the scapegoat's head and he was positioned facing the people in the courtyard of the temple. A strip of scarlet cloth was tied around the throat of the sacrificial goat. The bull was sacrificed for the sins of the high priest and the sons of Aaron. The High Priest then entered the Holy of Holies with burning coals from the altar and frankincense. Once inside, he placed the incense on the burning coals so that the smoke would fill the Holy of Holies. As the cloud of incense surrounded the ark, the High Priest returned to the courtyard for the blood of the bull. Re-entering the Holy of Holies for the second time, he sprinkled the bull's blood over the ark and on the floor around it. The blood on the ark was for the atonement of the sins of the High Priest and the priesthood. The blood poured out on the ground was for the cleansing of the Holy of Holies. When this ritual was complete he went back to the courtyard and killed the ram selected as the sin offering. Re-entering the Holy of Holies for the third time, he repeated the sprinkling of the blood on the cover of the ark, this time for the sins of the people, and on the floor in front of it, to cleanse the Holy of Holies from those sins. Then the remaining blood of the bull and the ram were mingled together used to cleanse the Holy Place and its furnishings along with the altar of burnt offerings. At the dramatic conclusion of the day's rituals, the people's sins were ceremonially placed upon the scapegoat and it was driven out of the camp into the wilderness. In the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, the “*Shekinah*” glory of God was visible between the outstretched wings of the golden cherubim over the cover of the ark. This shining glory was the sign of God's presence in the midst of His people. The blood of the sacrifices sprinkled on the ark signified that the sins of the people were covered in the eyes of God. Thus the cover of the ark came to be known as the “*Mercy Seat*” (Hebrew - “*kapporeth*”). Luther translated the word with the German “*Gnadenstuhl*” (Seat of Grace). The sacrificial system of the Old Testament did not forgive sins in and of itself (Hebrews 10:4). Rather it was designed to point forward to the one great sacrifice of the perfect

Son of God upon the cross. Paul draws on the rich ceremonial heritage of the Day of Atonement to explain the redemptive work of Christ as he uses the Greek title for the “*Mercy Seat*” (“*hilasterion*”) to refer to Jesus. The text literally reads: “*God presented Him as the Mercy Seat.*” The golden “*Mercy Seat*” of the Old Testament, covered by the blood of the sacrificial offering, prefigured Christ and His work of redemption. The NIV’s translation of “*hilasterion*” as “*a sacrifice of atonement*”



“*The Scapegoat*” by Rudolf Schäfer

is inconsistent with the other uses of this term in Scripture and obscures the powerful imagery of Day of Atonement. Lenski also emphasizes the appropriateness of the fact that the Ark of the Covenant contained the two tablets of the Law, inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

“Not this or that single Jewish sacrifice is here referred to but “the highest and most perfect expiatory act of the Old Testament” (Keil), the one that was most completely typical of Christ’s expiation, yea, its very type, prophecy, and promise. Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the Jewish High Priest, and he alone took blood from the great altar of burnt offering and went into the Holy of Holies, into which none dared enter but he and he only for the purpose of this function and sprinkled that blood on the kapporeth, the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, called the Mercy Seat, in order to cover the sins of the whole people. In the Ark were deposited the tables of the law, that law which condemned these sins. The kapporeth covered those tables; but only when it was thus sprinkled with expiatory blood did it cover the sins of the people from God and from His punishment.” (Lenski, p. 256)

“Through faith in His blood” - The blood of the bull and the ram as a sin offering on the Day of Atonement pointed forward to the ransom which God would pay for mankind in the blood of His Son upon the cross. Peter writes: ***“You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19) Continuing the imagery of the Day of Atonement, Christ is simultaneously the eternal High Priest, the Mercy Seat, and the perfect sacrificial offering.

“He is at one and the same time the offering and the priest. He gave His life into death; He shed His own blood in the stead of sinful men, who were worthy of death. With His holy precious blood He appeared before God Himself. He is our Mediator at the highest throne. He pleaded His blood before God and once and for all atoned for the sins and the guilt of the whole world. He turned God's wrath into pleasure. Marked and covered with His own blood, He stands as the New Testament Kapporeth between sinful men, the transgressors, and the great, holy God and covers all our sins, guilt, shame, and weakness before God, so the He no longer reckons them to our account. Therefore men are completely and forever free from their sins, rid of all their transgressions and impurities. That is what propitiation in His blood includes.” (Stöckhardt, p.44)

The writer to the ***Hebrews*** notes:

“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary...Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the golden ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the place of atonement...He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood having obtained eternal redemption...But the heavenly things themselves are better sacrifices than these for Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the Most holy Place every year with blood that is not his own...But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Hebrew 9:1-5, 12,23-26)

As always, *“faith”* is the means by which that which Christ has done is appropriated by the individual. The classic theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy distinguish between grace as the *“causa interna movens et impulsiva”* (the internal cause which moves and impels) of justification; Christ and His blood as the *“causa externa et meritoria”* (the external cause which merits); and faith as the *“medium apprehendens”* (the means which apprehends).



“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle” by J. James Tissot

In these few short phrases, Paul has presented the entire Scriptural doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. This is the heart of the Letter to the Romans and indeed of all of the Bible. James Montgomery Boice has outlined the foundational truths of these verses in a helpful diagram which he calls *“The*

Salvation Triangle.” At the three points of the triangle are God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Christian. Each of the lines which connect the three represent one of the great salvation doctrines in this section. The line across the base of the triangle represents *Redemption*. The arrow points from Christ to the Christian because it describes what Christ has done for us. He is the subject of the action. We are the objects. Jesus has redeemed us, paying the ransom price which buys us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil with his own lifeblood. The line on the left side of the triangle, linking Jesus with God the Father stands for *Propitiation*. The arrow points from Christ to the Father because it represents what Jesus did for us in relationship to His Father. *Propitiation* means the turning away of anger by the offering of a gift. The wrath of the holy God against man's sin needed to be turned aside. That work was beyond the capability of man. Jesus who is God, turns God's wrath aside by the offering of His innocent life. The final line of the *Salvation Triangle* connects God the Father with the Christian. It represents *Justification*. The arrow points from God to man. God, who declares us righteous is the subject of the action. We who are justified are the object of God's declarative act.

“He did this to demonstrate His justice” - If God were to have overlooked man's sin He would have been guilty of injustice. By the sacrificial death of His Only Begotten Son, God met the demands of justice in full. In Christ's innocent death the demands of the covenant were fulfilled. God kept His Word to His people. Sin has been fairly punished. The justice and righteousness of God has now been demonstrated for all the world to see.

“Because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand go unpunished” - From the moment of the Eden's Fall mankind deserved nothing but death and damnation (***“When you eat of it you will surely die.”*** Genesis 2:17). The fire of judgment could rightly have fallen upon mankind at any time since then. But it has not. The patient ***“forbearance”*** of God through all the long centuries that followed has been misconstrued by many as an indication of weakness or permissiveness. Peter warns:

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say: “Where is this coming He promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

What fools perceive as impotence is actually the patient longsuffering of a merciful heavenly Father: ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** (vs.9) The NIV's translation of the verb in this phrase is literally correct. The Greek word *“paresis”* means *“to withhold punishment”* or *“to delay judgment.”* The psalmist marveled at the patient forbearance of God: ***“Yet He was merciful; He atoned for their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time He restrained His anger and did not stir up His full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.”*** (Psalm 78:38,39)

“He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time” - Paul now restates his assertion of divine justice. The just punishment, so long withheld throughout the centuries of the Old Testament era, was fully inflicted upon the crucified Christ. No longer could anyone question the justice of God. He Himself met the Law's stern demands with the life blood of His only begotten Son. By so doing, ***“at the present time,”*** He demonstrated His righteous justice to all of humanity. By paying that penalty Himself God not only proved that He is just, but that ***“He is the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.”***

Verse 27

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

“Where then is boasting?” - Before God's magnificent plan of salvation no room is left for self-glorification. God has done it all. Man has done nothing. As St. Paul declares in Galatians 6:14 - ***“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.”*** The great Christian hymnist Isaac Watts said it well when he wrote:

*“When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.”*

The rejection of human pretension is emphatic and absolute - ***“It is excluded.”*** One commentator offers the paraphrase - ***“It is shut out once and for all.”***

“On what principle? On that of observing the Law? No, but on that of faith.”- The

utter incompatibility of faith and works is one of the fundamental themes of the New Testament. No compromise or combination is possible. Murray explains the difference in this manner:

“We are required to ask how the principle of faith is so rigidly exclusive of and antithetical to the works of law in the matter of justification. The only answer is the specific quality of faith as opposed to that of works. Justification by works always finds its ground in that which the person is and does; it is always oriented to that consideration of virtue attaching to the person justified. The specific quality of faith is trust and commitment to another; it is essentially extraspective and in that respect is the diametric opposite of works. Faith is self-renouncing: works are self-congratulatory. Faith looks to what God does; works have respect to what we are. It is this antithesis of principle that enables the apostle to base the complete exclusion of works upon the principle of faith.” (Murray, p.123)

Yet, at the same time, great care must be taken so that faith itself does not become a good work. Our faith is not the result of our own effort or decision. Faith is a gift of our gracious God. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones provides this very necessary disclaimer on the nature of faith:

“Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which this righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which inks us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.” (Lloyd-Jones, p.120)

Verse 28

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the observance of the law.

“For we maintain...” - “Here we have the perfect summary of the doctrine of



"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by Rudolf Schäfer

justification put into the form of a confession." (Lenski, p.268) The language of the text is reminiscent of that of the Lutheran Confessions which introduce each of the articles of the evangelical faith with the powerful words: *"We believe, teach, and confess."* The Greek verb *"logizometha"* is used to express the universal opinion among all the Christian communities. This is an especially powerful word used to describe an important conviction with direct practical consequences. This is not merely an abstract theory but a concept with immediate application that is at the center of Christian life and hope. The core conviction at issue here is the crucial belief that *"a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."* The passage closely parallels its counterpart in Galatians 2:16 - *"We know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."* Without this there is no Christianity and no salvation. This is the magnificent *"Sola Fide"* of the Reformation. Luther's insertion of the Latin word *"sola"* in the text at this point was completely consistent with the meaning of the passage. Stoeckhardt argues that Luther's *"sola"* is not only consistent with the context, but is, in fact *"required by the text itself"* (*"sondern von Text selbst gegeben"*). (*Römerbrief*, p. 165) In agreement with this view, the *"Formula of Concord"* insists:

“We believe, teach, and confess that if we would preserve the pure doctrine concerning the righteousness of faith before God, we must give special attention to the "exclusive terms," that is to those words of the holy apostle Paul which separate the merit of Christ completely from our own works and give all glory to Christ alone. Thus the holy apostle Paul uses such expressions as "by grace," "without merit," "without the law," "without works," "not by works," etc. All these expressions say, in effect, that we become righteous and are saved "alone by faith" in Christ.” (F.C. Ept. III,10)

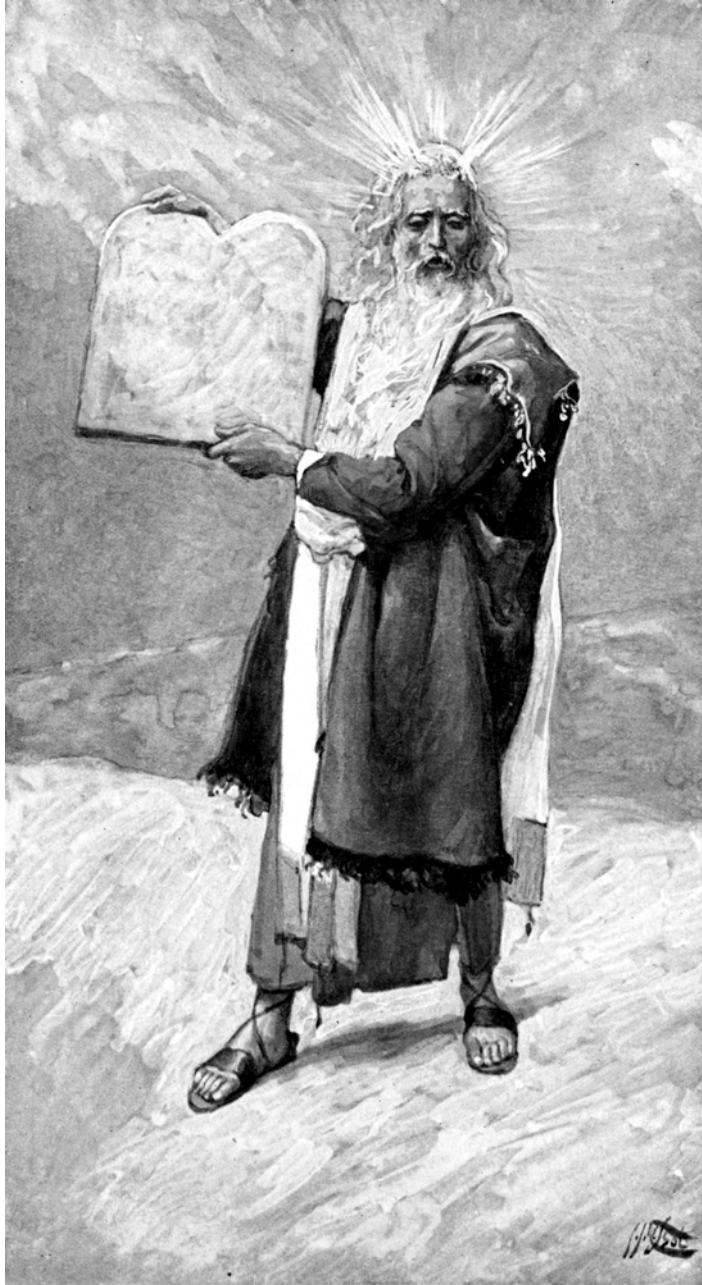
Dr. Stöckhardt's application of the verse is still more explicit:

“In this manner the apostle excludes each and every human deed and conduct from justification. All that man thinks, desires, and does, no matter what it is, is excluded. Even faith itself as the source and driving power of good works. It is a radical distortion of the teaching of justification to hold that God, when He justifies man, already sees in faith, the seed, the full fruit. Not faith as an act of the human will, not the act of apprehending, but the thing which faith apprehends justifies man. What induces God to declare man just is alone what faith accepts, namely the merits of Christ. Therefore if we wish to stand before God in time and in eternity, if we wish to be justified and saved, we must put far from our eyes all works, also the best works, all our own thoughts, feelings, desires, deeds, and efforts, no matter whether they are the best Christian virtues. We are lost if we reflect upon what we have done.” (Stöckhardt, p. 48)

Verses 29-30

Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of 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.

“Is God the God of the Jews only?” - The core conviction of Judaism was an absolute commitment to strict monotheism (Deuteronomy 6:4). That commitment had mutated into what has been accurately described as *“a degenerate theocratic exclusiveness.”* Many Jews scorned the Gentiles and believed that the God who had chosen Israel also scorned Gentiles. Paul now uses the very monotheism which was the unique distinctive of Jewish religion as a compelling argument in favor of the universal application of salvation by grace through faith. If there is one God and one God alone He must be the God of all men. Charles Hodge summarizes the thrust of the argument very well:



*“Moses With the Ten Commandments”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

*“We have here the second result of the gospel method of justification: it presents God as equally a God of the Gentiles and of the Jews. He is such, because **there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by the same faith.** He deals with both classes on precisely the same principles; He pursues, with regard to both, the same plan, and offers salvation to both on exactly the same terms. There is, therefore, in this doctrine, the foundation laid for a universal religion, which may be preached to every creature under heaven, which need not, as was the case with the Jewish system, be confined to any one sect or nation. This is the only doctrine which suits the character of God and his relation to all His intelligent creatures upon earth. God is universal and not a national God, and this is a method of salvation universally applicable.” (Hodge, p.101)*

Paul's argument leaves the genuine monotheist no avenue of escape. It there is only one God, who is the God of all, then the one God's plan of salvation must apply equally to all men.

Verse 31

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

“Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith?” - One final objection must be answered before Paul concludes this magnificent presentation of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Does this teaching ***“nullify the Law?”*** The verb ***“nullify”*** (Greek - *“katargeo”*) means *“to abolish,” “do away with,”* or *“render ineffective.”*

Paul's rejection of this charge is stated in strongest possible language - *“Not at all!”* The NASB expresses the sense of the Greek more forcefully as it translates - *“May it never be!”* In fact, exactly the opposite is true. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith restores the Law to the purpose for which it was originally intended by the God who gave it. It *“upholds the Law”* by rescuing it from the legalistic abuse to which it had been consigned by the self-righteousness of both Jewish and Gentile moralists. Grace religion upholds the Law in three ways: by the full payment of the Law's righteous demands upon the cross; by restoring the Law to its genuine purpose of leading sinful men to recognize the impossibility of self-justification; and, by creating the possibility of new obedience in those who have been born again to new life in Christ Jesus.



“Put on the Full Armor of God” by Rudolf Schäfer



"Abram's Entrance Into Canaan"

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Romans Chapter 4

Verses 1-3

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."

"What then shall we say" - This rhetorical question connects the extended illustration which follows with the classic presentation of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ in the preceding verses. This linking phrase occurs regularly in the Letter to the Romans (cf. 3:5; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30)

"That Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?" - Paul had earlier declared that *"the Law and the Prophets testify"* to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith (3:21). This truth is not a novelty or an innovation. It has been

the essence of the plan of salvation from the beginning. Abraham, the father and founder of the Hebrew nation, is now cited as the prime illustration of justification by faith. John MacArthur comments on the perfect appropriateness of Paul's selected illustration:

“By using Abraham as the supreme Scriptural example of justification, or salvation, by faith alone, Paul was storming the very citadel of traditional Judaism. By demonstrating that Abraham was not justified by works, the apostle demolished the foundation of rabbinical teaching - that man is made right with God by keeping the Law, that is, on the basis of his own religious efforts and works. If Abraham was not and could not have been justified by keeping the Law, then no one could be. Conversely, if Abraham was justified solely on the basis of his faith in God, then everyone else must be justified in the same way, since Abraham is the Biblical standard of a righteous man.” (MacArthur, p. 233)

Jewish tradition has elevated Abraham to lofty heights. Unlike the Book of Genesis, which realistically portrays Abraham as a man afflicted with the same weaknesses and flaws of other men, the writings of the Jewish Apocrypha had exalted Abraham to the level of sinless perfection.

“For Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the Lord and was pleasing through righteousness all the days of his life.” (The Book of Jubilees 23:10)

“Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the laws of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh and when he was tested, he was found faithful.” (Sirach 44:19-20)

“Therefore, thou, O Lord, God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin against thee, but thou hast appointed repentance for me who am a sinner.” (The Prayer of Manasseh, vs.8)

Those who proudly claimed the distinction of descent from Father Abraham believed they had no need for the salvation which John the Baptist and Christ Himself proclaimed to them. The Baptist warned them: ***“Do not think that 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; cf. also John 8:31-41) In contrast to this distortion, Paul's presentation of Abraham as a beneficiary of justification by grace becomes all the more compelling. The patriarch is described

as ***“Abraham our forefather.”*** With these words Paul identifies with the Israel of God and affirms his ongoing relationship with the founder of the Hebrew nation and the father of believers. Abraham is ***“our”*** forefather the apostle declares.

In the Greek text, the next phrase literally reads *“according to the flesh”* (Greek -*“kata sarka”*). In the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul, the term *“flesh”* refers to man or human activity apart from God. The NIV chose to translate the phrase *“kata sarka”* as ***“in this matter.”*** While this translation is linguistically



“God’s Promise to Abraham”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

possible, it is unlikely in the context and serves to weaken the thrust of the apostle’s argument. The question that Paul is posing could be paraphrased in this way: *“What shall we then say about what Abraham our forefather found to be the case so far as his own human ability was concerned?”*

The specific meaning of the Greek verb *“eurekenai”* (NIV - ***“discovered”***) in this phrase is also significant. The word refers to *“finding grace or mercy.”*

Abraham himself uses the term this way in the Septuagint’s

translation of Genesis 18:3 - ***“If I have found favor in Your eyes, My Lord.”*** The concept the word conveys is that of being granted a favored standing before someone who has the power to withhold or bestow the favor as he chooses. Thus the very word that the apostle has selected foreshadows the thrust of the argument to come which insists that Abraham’s status before God was an act of divine favor by grace.

“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works” - If any man would ever have had the right to boast about his own good works, that man would have been Abraham, who left his home at God’s command and raised the knife to sacrifice his only son (cf. James 2:20-24). ***“But there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (3:22,23). Even Father Abraham falls under that condemnation. The

fact of the matter is that not even Abraham “*was justified by works*”. Therefore “*boasting is excluded*” (3:27), for Abraham and for all. Not even the man whom God Himself called “*My friend*” (Isaiah 41:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7) could boast of his own works “*before God.*”

“*What does the Scripture say?*” - The possibility of boasting about good works before God is excluded and God Himself is now called upon to testify to that effect. Paul appeals to the Old Testament, the inspired and inerrant Word of God, as the conclusive authority in this matter. The Scriptural citation is Genesis 15:6 - “*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*” Abraham was the quintessential man of faith. In the roll call of the heroes of faith in the Letter to the Hebrews we read:

“By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
(Hebrews 11:8-10)

In the parallel reference in Galatians Paul asserts: “*Therefore, be sure that those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham.*” (Galatians 3:6-7). That faith was gloriously fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. “*Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.*” (John 8:56)

Genesis 15:6 is a most significant passage. It figured prominently in Judaic discussion of the role of Abraham. However, among the rabbis, the focus was on faithfulness, not faith, thus perverting the verse into a proof text for work righteousness. 1 Maccabees, in the Jewish Apocrypha, paraphrases the passage to that effect: “*Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?*” (1 Maccabees 2:52) Given that abuse, Paul's citation of the passage here becomes all the more compelling. Stoeckhardt calls Genesis 15:6 “*the classic passage of the Old Testament for the teaching of justification.*” (Stoeckhardt, p.50) James Montgomery Boice goes so far as to contend that “*from the viewpoint of the doctrine of salvation this is the single most important verse in the entire Bible.*” He explains his contention in this way:

“This is because in Genesis 15:6 the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth for the first time. It is the first reference in the Bible to (1) faith, (2) righteousness, and (3) justification...This is the first time that any specific individual is said to have been justified.” (Boice, I, p.433)

“Abraham believed God” - God promised Abraham that despite the fact that in his old age he still had not had a son, his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4-5) and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Abraham trusted in and relied upon that divine promise all the external evidence to contrary notwithstanding. That was the substance of Abraham's faith. Luther explains: *“Thus the expression “Abraham believed God” is equivalent to saying that he considered God truthful, for to believe God means to believe Him always and everywhere.” (Luther, 25, p.255).*

“And it was credited to him as righteousness.” - The key word in this text is the verb **“credited”** (Greek - *“logizomai”*). The word is actually a bookkeeping term from the world of accounting which Paul figuratively applies to this divine transaction. It might literally be translated *“booked to his credit.”* Lenski quotes this precise definition:

“Something is transferred to the subject person in question and reckoned as his, which he, in his own person, does not have...It is accounted to the person “per substitutionem”; the object present (faith) takes the place of what it counts for (righteousness), it is substituted for it.” (Lenski, p. 289)

The image depicts God as a bookkeeper recording debits and credits in a ledger. Thus, God took the sin of Abraham



*“Abraham and Isaac on the Way to Mount Moriah”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

from the debit side of the ledger book of Abraham's life and transferred it to the ledger book of Christ, who had died for the sins of the world. So also He took the righteousness of Christ from the credit side of the ledger book of Christ's life and transferred it to that of Abraham. Faith is the channel through which this transfer takes place for each believing individual. The great Renaissance scholar Erasmus used the legal term “*impute*” (Latin - “*imputatum est*”) in his Latin translation of this phrase. This word came to have crucial significance in Lutheran formulations of the doctrine of forensic justification. “*Imputed righteousness*” is righteousness that is attributed to man by the declarative act of God based upon the vicarious satisfaction of Christ. This righteousness is not inherent in us. It is not the result of our mode of living or our good deeds. It is a righteousness outside of man in the heart of God. Luther declares:

“All of our good is outside of us, and this good is Christ...The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly. I use the term “inwardly” to show how we are in ourselves, in our own eyes, in our own estimation; and the term “outwardly” to indicate how we are before God and in His reckoning. Therefore we are righteous outwardly when we are righteous solely by the imputation of God and not of ourselves or of our own works. For His imputation is not ours by reason of anything in us or in our own power. Thus our righteousness is not something in us or in our power.” (Luther, AE, 25, p.267, 257)

On this point the reformers were in complete agreement with one another. John Calvin affirmed:

“It is entirely by the intervention of Christ's righteousness that we obtain justification before God. This is equivalent to saying that man is not just in himself, but that the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment.” (Sproul, p.93)

The beauty of Paul's image lies in the clarity with which it presents the unilateral nature of God's action in justification. Listen once again to Lenski's careful definition:

“When Abraham believed he was in his own person no more righteous than before he believed, but God counted his faith as righteousness for him. God's accounting did not make him righteous, it did not change Abraham, it changed his status with God. Although he was not righteous, God counted him as righteous

nevertheless...This is not an arbitrary, not an unjust reckoning. "Perish the thought!" Only our crooked minds could harbor such an evil thought. Faith is not righteousness. It is counted or reckoned as being righteousness. The believer is really never in and of himself righteous, he is righteous only in God's accounting. What is there in his faith that God can account for righteousness in the believer? No virtue or merit of either the believer or of his faith, nothing of this sort to the end of his life; something else entirely, namely the contents of his faith, Christ, His ransom, His merit. The faith that holds these God counts for righteousness and no other faith. The substitution takes place right here. Christ's merit and righteousness is His own; God counts it as though it were the believer's. Faith only lays its hand upon it. God Himself moves it to do so. The by grace and altogether gratuitously God reckons faith with its content as righteousness for him who believes." (Lenski, p.290,291)

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this fundamental concept. A righteousness that is in no way our own, an “*alien righteousness*” to use Luther's terms, is credited to us by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake. R.C. Sproul explains Luther's language in this way:

“Martin Luther and the other reformers insisted that the righteousness by which we are justified is a "iustitia extra nos," a "righteousness outside of or apart from us. When Luther spoke of this righteousness "extra nos" he understood that the extra becomes ours in the sight of God by faith. Again, the focus is on the grounds of our justification. The righteousness by which I am declared righteous is one that was achieved and merited before I was even born. It is the righteousness of another, even Jesus Christ, the Righteous. His righteousness is not my righteousness intrinsically. It becomes mine only by forensic imputation. It is a righteousness that counts for me, and is reckoned to my account, but it was neither achieved nor wrought by me. In like manner, Luther argued that the righteousness providing the ground for our justification is an "iustitia alienum," an "alien righteousness." This is the righteousness of another, one who is a "foreigner" to us. He is foreign to us, not in the sense that he is unknown to us or that he remains a mysterious stranger to us, but in the sense that he is ever and always distinguishable from us, even though, by faith, we are "in" him and he is "in " us.” (Sproul, 107)

For the New Testament, and for the Protestant Reformers, this concept is the essence of Christianity. This is literally, as the Lutheran dogmatists declare, the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls (“*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*”). Luther insists:

“If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. And all the people in the world who do not hold to this justification are either Jews

or Turks or papists or heretics; for there is no middle ground between these two righteousnesses; the active one of the law and the passive one which comes from Christ. Therefore, the man who strays from Christian righteousness must relapse into the active one, that is, since he has lost Christ, he must put his confidence in his won works...Without this article the world is utter death and darkness...This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour...This is the heel of the Seed that opposes the old Serpent and crushes its head. That is why Satan, in turn, cannot but persecute it.” (Plass, p. 703,704)

This is precisely the point at which Rome and Wittenberg parted company in the 16th Century. Roman Catholicism taught, and teaches, that the grace of God in Christ is infused into the individual thus enabling him to do good works. On the basis of those good works the individual is then declared by God to be justified. The reformers rejected this view as a clear denial of salvation by grace through faith alone. Each side condemned the other's position on justification as *apostasy*, that is, a falling away from the Christian faith. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent unambiguously declared:

“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema. (Canon 9) If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5), and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.” (Canon 11)

John Calvin aptly responded to these decrees by saying: *“It is not us that these Tridentine Fathers anathematize so much as Paul, to whom we owe the definition that the righteousness of man consists in the forgiveness of sins.”* (Sproul, p.115) The classic response of Lutheranism to the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent was written by Martin Chemnitz in his monumental four volume work *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Chemnitz insists that the disagreement on justification is not merely an argument over terminology:

“We are by no means such troublemakers that we are opposed to a true, solid, and salutary concord and so greedy for contentions that even if a true, godly, and salutary agreement were established concerning the matters themselves, we would still look for things to fight about from battles about words...The dissension and strife in the article of justification is not only about words, but chiefly about the matters

themselves.” (Chemnitz, I, p.168)

What is at issue here, Chemnitz argues, is not some peripheral point or obscure theological distinction but the very heart of the Christian gospel of salvation.

“For this is the chief question, this is the issue, the point of contention, namely what that is on account of which God receives sinful man into grace; what must and can be set over against the judgment of God, that we may not be condemned according to the strict sentence of the Law; what faith must apprehend and bring forward, on what it must rely when it wants to deal with God, that it may receive the remission of sins; what intervenes, on account of which God is rendered appeased and propitious to the sinner who has merited wrath and eternal damnation; what the conscience should set up as the thing on account of which the adoption may be bestowed upon us, on what confidence can safely be reposed that we shall be accepted into life eternal; whether it is the satisfaction, obedience, and merit of the Son of God, the Mediator, or, indeed, the renewal which has begun in us, the love, and other virtues in us. Here is the point at issue in the controversy which is so studiously and deceitfully concealed in the Tridentine decrees.” (Chemnitz, I, p. 468)



Dr. Martin Chemnitz

The argument was not over the importance of good works in the Christian life. Lutherans freely acknowledged that believers were to walk in newness of life, expressing and demonstrating their faith in deeds of love. However, Lutherans categorically rejected the Roman insistence that these good works became at least a part of the basis for our justification. Is the ground of our justification to be found in us or in Christ? This is the fundamental question upon which the Reformation occurred and on this question no compromise was possible. Chemnitz clarifies this point with meticulous care.

“On this hinge the controversy between us and the papalists chiefly turns in the article of justification, namely, whether the regenerate are justified before God to life eternal on account of their newness and

works. *But I repeat what has already been said a number of times: We acknowledge that renewal is a very great benefit of the Son of God, the Mediator, through the Holy Spirit in us. We teach that new obedience must follow after reconciliation; and we give to it, in its place, that which the Scripture gives to it, as we shall show later when we speak about good works. However, we have learned from Scripture that this dignity and glory, that they are our justification before God to life eternal, must not be given to our renewal and good works. For this dignity and glory belongs to the obedience, or righteousness, of the only-begotten Son of God, our Mediator, imputed to us through faith. So far we have shown how the Scripture denies to us and takes away from us the justification before God to life eternal, so that it demonstrates by a division or enumeration that there is nor inheres neither in nature nor in life nor in qualities, habits, or works of men in this life, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, regenerate or unregenerate, that by which they can so stand in the judgment of God that on account of it they may be justified to life eternal. And this division, whether there is or inheres in any part of man, or in his actions, something by which he can be justified before God, was instituted by Paul...And for the doctrine of justification solely through the grace, or mercy, of God, it is necessary that it be removed and taken away completely from all the things which are, or inhere, in man, whether he be Jew or Gentile, regenerate or unregenerate.”* (Chemnitz, I, p.492)

As it was for Father Abraham, so it must be for everyone else - ***“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”***

Verses 4-5

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

“Now when a man works...” - Having used an accounting term from the business world to describe God's justification of Abraham, the apostle now draws upon an axiom from everyday world of work and wages to demonstrate that the justification of Abraham, and of every believer, is absolutely by grace. The laborer who does his work well earns his wages. They are not ***“credited to him as a gift.”*** He simply gets what he has coming to him as the result of his effort. This can in no way be considered a ***“gift”*** (Greek - *“kata charin”* - *“as a favor, out of goodwill”*). It is instead an ***“obligation.”*** The workman may rightly demand that which he has earned. Works and grace cannot be combined. Either one has earned that which he receives, or he has not. If he earned it, it's not a gift. If it is a gift, then he did not earn it.

“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God...” - Great care must be taken not to view faith itself as a good work which merits the favor of God. Faith is not our work but God's. It is not the basis for our salvation, but only the God-given

means through which we receive that which God has done for us in Christ. *“Likewise it be comes clear again that faith for Paul is something qualitatively distinct from any human-originated endeavor. We believe, but we can take no credit for it.”* (Moo, p.264) The **“righteousness”** which was **“credited”** to Abraham was not a matter of wages paid for work performed. Paul insists that the man who **“trusts God”** is a man **“who does not work.”** Working and trusting are placed in contrast to one another with the adversative conjunction **“but.”** In this way the apostle clearly indicates that faith is not to be viewed as a good work performed by man which in any way contributes to or merits his salvation. *“The believer has given up working because he knows that all hope by way of works is vacuous, that all claims which men make upon God for pay in accord with obligation are deadly fiction; he simply believes and trusts.”* (Lenski, p.292) It should be noted that Paul's strong contrast between faith and works does not suggest that it is unnecessary for the believer to actively put his faith into practice. The point here is not that the Christian need not do good works, but that we may never depend upon those good works for our standing before God.

The object of the believer's trust is **“God who justifies the wicked.”** This startling paradox is advanced in language that was, no doubt, deliberately provocative. The **“wicked”** (Greek *“asebe”* - literally the *“ungodly,”* *“one who refuses to worship”*) in traditional Jewish thinking were those whose actions put them outside of the covenant, Gentiles and religiously non-observant Jews. Paul uses this terminology to re-emphasize the gracious nature of God's justification. The phrase boldly highlights the nature of God, loving, freely giving, incapable of being put under obligation to any human being. Above all else, our God is a God of full and free grace. It is that grace which is the object of faith. *“Faith looks to God, the gracious Reckoner, for that which is “legally” impossible; it looks to Him for righteousness “apart from the law.”* (Franzmann, p. 78) To such a man, the believer who trusts in the undeserved grace of God, **“his faith is credited as righteousness.”** The great Puritan preacher-theologian Jonathan Edwards observes that the point of this verse is:

“that God, in the act of justification, has no regard to anything in the person justified, as godliness or any goodness in him; but that immediately before this act, God beholds him only as an ungodly creature; so that godliness in the person to be justified is no so antecedent to his justification as to be the ground for it.” (Moo, p. 265)

This incredible point becomes all the more important because it is made in reference to Father Abraham himself. As St. John Chrysostom remarks: *“For a person who*

had no works to be justified by faith was nothing unlikely. The necessity of grace there is plain to see. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from these, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder and to see the power of faith in a strong light.” (Moo, p.265)

Verses 6-8

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

“David says the same thing...” - It was customary among the teaching of the rabbis to offer primary proof for a theological point from the *“Torah,”* the Five Books of Moses, and then to add a secondary witness from the *“Writings”* or the *“Prophets.”* It would seem that Paul is following that traditional rabbinic pattern in this instance. Having cited the example of the founder of the Jewish nation from the Book of Genesis, the apostle proceeds to demonstrate that the greatest of the Hebrew kings also clearly understood and affirmed justification by grace through faith from the Book of Psalms. The quotation is from Psalm 32: 1-2. The language of the Psalm closely parallels the Genesis text previously cited. Both passages utilize the key verb *“to credit”* or *“to count.”* Paul rightly contends that in this verse David proclaims ***“the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.”*** ***“Blessedness”*** (Greek - *“makarismos”*) means happiness or good fortunate. The word usually carries the connotation of being the privileged recipient of divine favor. This is also the word used in the beloved *“Beatitudes”* of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:1-12).

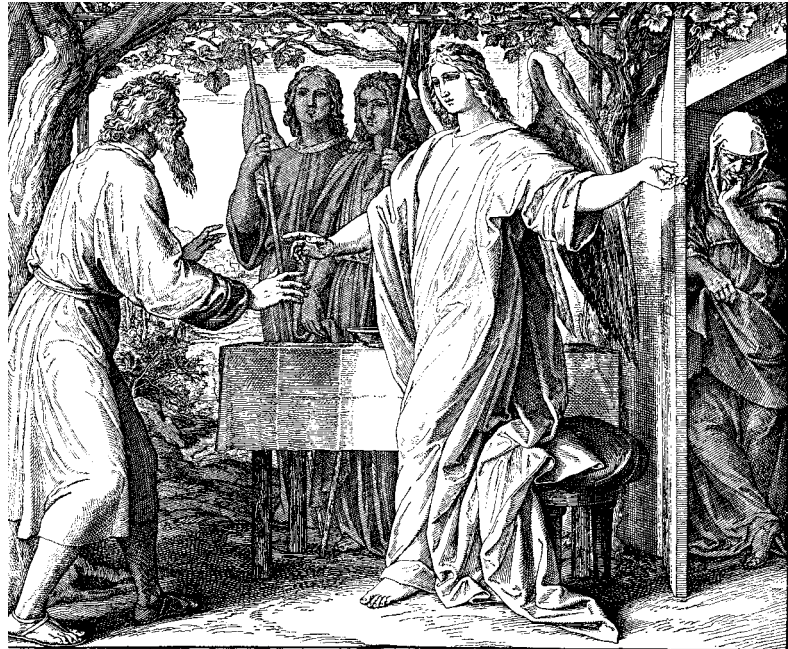
Paul's citation of this passage reveals that the forgiveness of sins is a basic component in justification. Joachim Jeremias asserts *“Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness!”* (Dunn, p.206) David employs three terms for sin and correspondingly, three terms for its removal. First, ***“transgressions”*** (Greek - *“anomia”*) which means lawlessness, drawn from a root meaning revolt or rebellion against a government. Second, ***“sins”*** (Greek - *“hamartia”*) which means *“to miss the mark.”* Lenski amplifies the meaning of the word in this context:

“This "missing the mark" does not have a connotation of one earnestly trying to hit the mark and missing it only because of weakness and ignorance. The contrary is

true...This is criminal refusal to come up to the divinely set mark, the mark set by God's Law. It is the godless, rebellious action of abolishing such a mark, of setting up that pleases the sinner better, setting it up, not merely by word of mouth, but by deed.” (Lenski, p.297)

In the Greek text, “*hamartia*” is repeated in the third line, but in the original Hebrew a different, third term is used. The Hebrew word is “*havon*” which means to deliberately turn aside or turn away. The prophet Isaiah uses the same word to describe Israel's obstinate rejection of her divine Messiah: “***We have turned everyone to his own way.***” (Isaiah 53:6) The cumulative effect of these three powerful words is devastating in its presentation of the total depravity of fallen sinful, rebellious man.

But just as these three words convey the darkness and despair of sin with grim realism, the three terms used to describe the removal of guilt and blame convey the light and hope of the Gospel with equal power. Together, they reveal the wonder of justification in all of its blessedness. First, man's “***transgressions are forgiven.***” The Hebrew verb (“*nasa*”) means “*to dismiss*” or “*to send away.*” E. Koenig explains the word in this way in his Hebrew dictionary:



“God Promises Abraham a Son”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Nasa” means to take away or to carry away...to take away all of man's sin and guilt, the whole frightening, stinking, deadly, damnable mess, to remove it from him and carry it away so far that it will never be found; “as far as the East is from the West” (Psalm 103:12), “into the depths of sea (Micah 7:19)...Forgive and forgiveness, the English renderings are too pale.” (Lenski, p.298)

The verb is in the aorist tense indicating a past definite fact with permanent significance: literal translation - “*dismissed once and for all!*”

The second verb is “**are covered**” (Greek - “*epekaluphthesan*”). This is the only instance in the New Testament where the term occurs. The thrust of the verb is that man's sins are covered forever and will never be exposed to the sight of God. The allusion is to the blood of the sacrificial offering covering of the Mercy Seat upon the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. Hence the reference fits the flow of Paul's argument beautifully given his earlier reference to Christ as our Mercy Seat (cf. 3:25).

Finally, the third verb is the crucial word “**will never count against**” (Greek - “*logisetai*”) which repeats the previous use of the verb by Moses in Genesis 15:6 (cf. vs.3). In verse 3 the term was used in a positive sense as righteousness was “**credited**” to believing Abraham. David used the word negatively to make exactly the same point when he promised that a man's “**sin...will never count against him.**”

Paul, Moses, and David all teach the same thing on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. The apostolic witness is reinforced by that of the prophet and the psalmist. God has done it all! An early 20th century hymn by James Procter, based upon Christ's dying words from the cross, express this foundational truth in a most touching way.

"IT IS FINISHED"

by James Procter, 1922

1. Nothing, either great or small - nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all, long, long ago.
2. When He, from His lofty throne, stooped to do and die,
Everything was fully done, hearken to His cry!
3. Weary, working, burdened one, Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing, all was done long, long ago.
4. Till to Jesus' work you cling by a simple faith,
"Doing" is a deadly thing - "Doing" ends in death.
5. Cast your deadly "Doing" down, down as Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone, gloriously complete.
6. "It is finished!" Yes, indeed, finished every jot;
Sinner, this is all you need, tell me, is it not?
(Sacred Songs and Solos # 142)

Paul's quotation of David's inspired words from Psalm 32 serve to emphasize, once again, the apostle's strongly forensic understanding of justification.

“He uses this quotation to compare justification to the non-accrediting, or not “imputing” of sins to a person. That is an act that has nothing to do with moral transformation, but “changes” people only in the sense that their relationship to God is changed - they are acquitted rather than condemned.” (Moo, p. 266)



“Abraham Called on the Name of the Lord” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 9-12

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised...” - St. Paul now returns to the topic of circumcision (cf. 2:25-29) to demonstrate beyond any shadow of a doubt that Abraham's salvation was completely by grace and in no way the result of his own efforts. Since it is Abraham whom Paul is using as his model of justification it is not unreasonable to anticipate the suggestion that the great patriarch's righteousness before God is at least partially the result of his own faithfulness. His participation in the rite of circumcision is a prime example of that faithful obedience. Many among the Jews had come to believe that God's love and His plan of salvation was reserved only for the circumcised descendants of Abraham. The Jewish Intertestamental Book of Jubilees declares that circumcision is the indispensable and indelible mark of God's favor:

“The law is for all generations forever, and there is no circumcision of the time, and no passing over one day of the eight days; for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tables. And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction; nor is there, moreover, any sign upon him that he is the Lord's, but he is destined to be destroyed and slain from the earth.” (Jubilees 15:25-28)

The author of the Book of Jubilees goes on to directly connect the Jews loss of the Promised Land with their failure to consistently follow the practice of circumcision.

“And now I will announce unto thee that the children of Israel will not keep true to this ordinance, and they will not circumcise their sons according to all this law; for in the flesh of their circumcision they will omit this circumcision of their sons, and all of them, sons of Belial, will have their sons uncircumcised as they were born. And there shall be great wrath from the Lord against the children of Israel, because they have forsaken His covenant and turned away from His Word, and have provoked and blasphemed as they have not observed the ordinance of this law; for they treat their members like the Gentiles, so that they may be removed and rooted out of the land. And there will be no pardon or forgiveness for them” (Jubilees 15: 29-31)

The role of circumcision as a mark of God's favor was so absolute among the Jews that the rabbis taught that a Jew who practiced idolatry would have his circumcision undone before he was consigned to Hell. Dr. David Scaer describes *“the Judaistic perversion”* of the rite of circumcision in this way:

“The Jews, who had lost control of the Promised Land, had turned circumcision into a racial, nationalistic badge. It had become a magical ritual and even worse, a

prideful, human-centered expression of the law through which they thought they could merit God's favor "ex opere operato." The Jews had lapsed into a formalism in which race, not grace, was the criterion for salvation. The prophets of long ago had warned Israel of this kind of formalism, urging them not to throw away the worship forms but to carry them out in the right spirit. In any event, the New Testament speaks out against circumcision as it had been abused. Having rejected the Spirit given in true circumcision, the Jews were uncircumcised in heart and ears (Acts 7:51)." (Scaer, p.24)

Continuing to use Abraham as his model the apostle clearly proves that ***"This blessedness,"*** the gift of having been declared righteous by grace through faith alone, is not limited to or contingent upon the rite or circumcision. It is not ***"only for the circumcised"*** but ***"also for the uncircumcised."***

"We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."
- To make his point, Paul cites the text of Genesis 15:6 once again, in this instance introducing it with the emphatic verb *"legomen"* (literally - *"we maintain"*). Paul proposes that the circumstances of that *"crediting"* be examined in greater detail, specifically with reference to its timing in regard to Abraham's circumcision. ***"Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?"*** The time sequence is of crucial significance if we are to properly understand the relationship between Abraham's justification and his circumcision. Which came first, justification or circumcision? The sequence of events in Genesis is clear. The declaration of Abraham's justification takes place in chapter fifteen in connection with the renewal of God's promise of a son. At that time Abraham is uncircumcised. The rite of circumcision is not instituted until Genesis seventeen. In the rabbinical traditions of the Jews, twenty-nine years separated those two events. These facts are so well known that they need not be proven. Therefore the apostle is content to simply assert them as common knowledge. ***"It was not after but before!"*** Abraham's justification before God could not have been the result of his circumcision because he had not yet been circumcised.

Circumcision is not rejected but its proper role within God's plan of salvation is carefully explained, using the unique example of Father Abraham's experience. To emphasize that circumcision was a gift of God, not a meritorious good work performed by Abraham himself, Paul reminds his readers that ***"he received the sign of circumcision."*** The verb indicates that Abraham is a passive recipient, not an active initiator. In Genesis 17:11, circumcision is called ***"the sign of the covenant."***

Paul builds upon that language here as he describes the rite as *“the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness which he had by faith.”* The *“sign”* (Greek - *“semeion”*) and *“seal”* (Greek - *“sphragis”*) terminology is very important

and frequently misunderstood.



“Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah” by S. Solomon

A *“sign”* is that which represents, reveals, or signifies something else. It is not the thing itself, but an emblem of it. However, we must recognize that signs in Scripture are not merely empty external symbols which are able to accomplish nothing. This is the sense in which classic Calvinism and Arminianism use the term to rob the New Testament's sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, of their unique ability to offer and convey, faith, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Understood in this false sense, the sign is once again perverted into a human work, something that we do in response to

God's ordinance and command. No, it is the God from Whom we have *“received”* the sign Who is at work in that which He has established. There is real power here, the power of God's grace at work in the Word of His promise.

“The word “sign,” suffice it to say, participates in the reality which it makes visible, the “signum” (Latin - “sign”) is not to be divorced from the “res signata” (Latin - “that which is signified”). The covenant sign is not merely an outward sign of inward grace. Nor does the sign point only to an external act which demands to be

taken figuratively. The sign is wrapped up in concrete acts. In both Testaments, "signs and wonders" are the real acts of God in history, not mere pictorial illustrations which point toward real acts. As real actions themselves, signs can also simultaneously set future actions into motion, and thus they are normally connected with the Word of God." (Scaer, p.13)

That becomes even more clear as St. Paul uses the term “*seal*” to explain the “*sign of circumcision*.” Circumcision did not merely signify something, it was God's own “*seal*” of attestation and approval. In this divinely ordained action, God Himself was at work. The apostle's use of the term in this context is most appropriate. The prayer pronounced during Judaism's circumcision ceremony says: “*Blessed be He Who sanctified His beloved from the womb, and put His ordinance upon his flesh, and sealed His offspring with the sign of a holy covenant.*” At the conclusion of the ceremony, the rabbi declared: “*The seal of circumcision is in your flesh as it was sealed in the flesh of Abraham.*” On a royal decree, the seal of the king was the certification of authenticity and the guarantee that all of the monarch's power and authority lay behind a decree which bore the royal seal. In the same way, circumcision carries with it the full power and authority of God, His seal of attestation upon the flesh of Abraham and all his house.

Luther points out that a distinction must be maintained between the significance of circumcision for Abraham, through whom God originally instituted the practice, and the significance of circumcision for all of Abraham's descendants. In a sense, Luther suggests, this distinction parallels the difference between the baptism of Jesus, through which the sacrament was instituted, and the subsequent baptisms of all of the followers of Christ: “*Christ is baptized not in order to be made righteous...but as an example, so to speak, for us in order that He may precede us and we may follow His example and also be baptized.*” So also Abraham, already justified on the basis of his faith in God's promise, is circumcised in order that his descendants may come to faith and be made righteous through circumcision. Luther writes:

“Circumcision was given to Abraham in order that through him this sign of the covenant might be transmitted to his entire posterity. Therefore there was one reason for circumcision in the case of Abraham and another reason in the case of Abraham's descendants. God was the God of Abraham before this time, as Moses clearly testifies. Accordingly it was not through circumcision that Abraham began to be a son of God. Nevertheless, because God commanded that he be circumcised, he was in duty bound not to offer an resistance whatever to the will of God. But for the descendants of Abraham circumcision was a symbol that they were heirs of the

promise which had been given to Abraham before he was circumcised...Thus circumcision was enjoined upon Abraham in order that for his descendants it might be a sacrament through which they would be made righteous if they would believe the promise which the Lord had attached to it. In the case of Abraham, who had already been made righteous, there was a different reason for this work, although for him it was also a seal of righteousness.” (Luther, AE, 3, p.86-87)

Paul's point here, in regard to Abraham, is completely valid. The patriarch was justified by grace through faith long before the institution of circumcision. This truth, however, should not lead us to underestimate the importance of circumcision as a genuine means of grace for Abraham's posterity. Listen again to Luther's careful words:

“Paul is an excellent definer and an expert dialectician; for he defines circumcision as a sign or a seal of the righteousness which Abraham had before he was circumcised, in fact, as a sign imprinted on the very flesh of Abraham and of all males who descended from him (Romans 4:11). But if someone calls circumcision a ceremony, he will concede in spite of this that it differs from the rest of the ceremonies in that it, like Baptism, is a passive ceremony. Furthermore, when it is determined that circumcision is a sign which did not make Abraham righteous, but indicates the righteousness that Abraham already has, the question arises whether this seal was an empty sign or something that was implemented with the seal. My answer to this question is that in Abraham's case circumcision is a mere sign without implementing anything; that is, it is a sign in such a way that it does not implement what it signifies, but merely signifies. For the argument with which Paul proves that Abraham was righteous before he was circumcised is irrefutable. Hence, circumcision is a sign which merely signifies righteousness but does not confer it, for it finds Abraham already righteous. It does not make him righteous. But the situation with Abraham's descendants was different. Circumcision does not find them righteous, like Abraham. Therefore it is a seal of righteousness in such a way that righteousness was implemented by it.” (Luther, AE, 3, p.101-102)

Dr. David Scaer asserts the classic Lutheran understanding of circumcision as a means of conveying and offering the grace of God:

“For the Old Testament people of God circumcision was a means of grace in the fullest sense of the term. Circumcision was the "locus," the effector, the causative instrument, of God's gracious covenant. Circumcision was an Old Testament sacrament, that is, an action commanded by God, involving visible means (a permanent mark at that!) and bestowing the blessing of God. For the Old Testament individual there was only one covenant God knew, the covenant of circumcision (cf. Acts 7:6).” (Scaer, p. 15)

Accordingly, Scaer contends, circumcision as a sacrament of the Old Testament closely parallels its New Testament counterpart, baptism. This parallel is so close that circumcision may properly be called ***“the circumcision done by Christ.”*** (Colossians 2:11).

“Both circumcision and baptism are means of grace...Circumcision is also an efficacious “sacrament.” Both are commanded by God and employ visible means. Both are tied to the unilateral prevenient promises of God. Both bring to bear on individual people the saving acts of God in history...Both of them bundle up into one package the Word of God and the visible means...Both circumcision and baptism are the locus and vehicle of God’s redemptive work...Both baptism and circumcision have to be performed only once. When God is the actor and is granting everything that pertains to salvation, it dare not be repeated...Both circumcision and baptism stress human passivity. In both God Himself is the one who is “doing the doing.” Both acts involve receiving a new identity as the passive subject is received into the Name of God and all that it means...Both acts effect one’s incorporation into the Church. Of course, God is the one doing the incorporating; neither circumcision nor baptism are merely the avenue by which a man “joins” the Church...Both circumcision and baptism confer the forgiveness of sins, forgiveness through Jesus Christ which is the only forgiveness there is...Circumcision and baptism stand in the same relationship to faith. Regarding baptism, Luther speaks of “faith which trusts such Word of God in the water;” accordingly, an unbelieving rejection of the blessings of circumcision deems the act as only a “circumcision of the flesh.” (Scaer, p.16ff.)

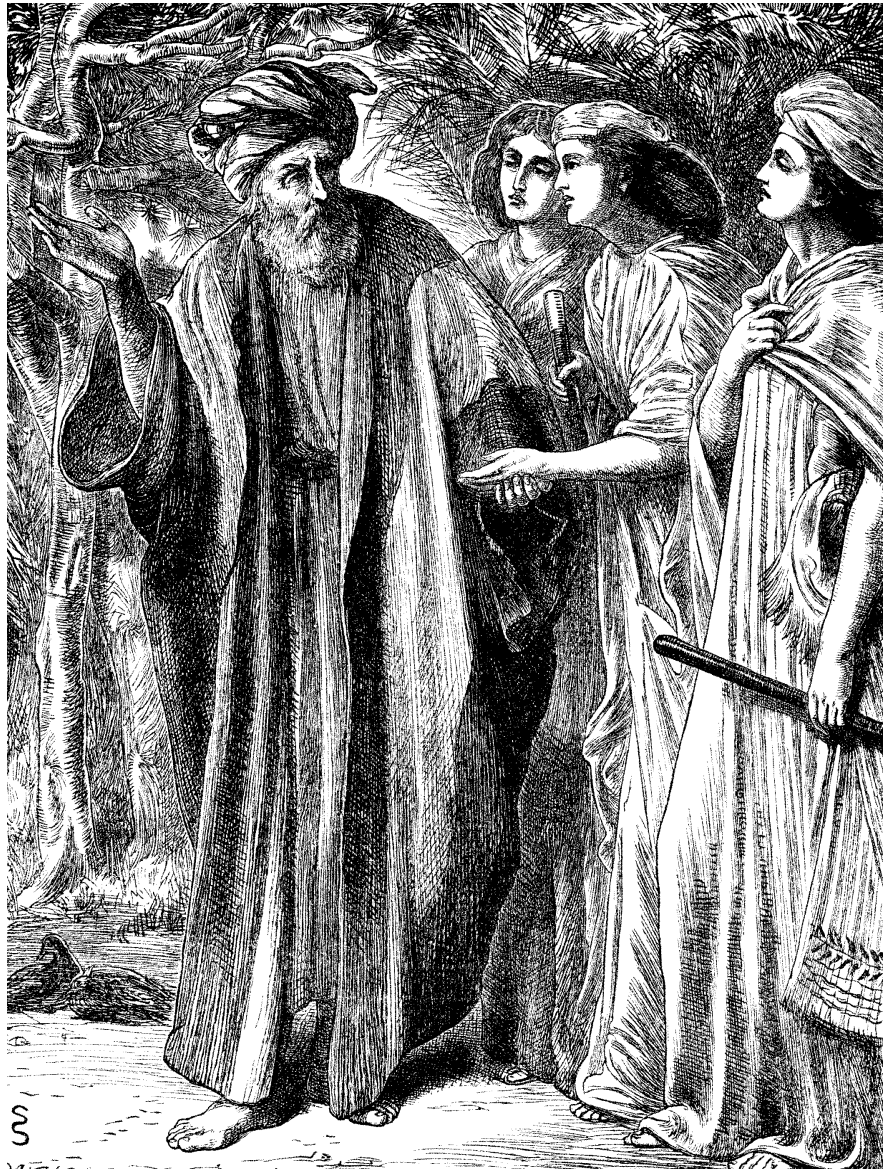
In this way, the sacraments of the New Testament are both prefigured and reflected in the sacraments of the Old Testament: Holy Baptism in the rite of Circumcision, and Holy Communion in the great Feast of the Passover.

“So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised...”- In an ironic way, Abraham was a Gentile when he was justified by grace through faith. He could not claim a racial heritage before God, nor had he yet participated in the rite of circumcision, for neither the Jewish nation nor circumcision had yet come to be. Thus, to the consternation of the proud, self-righteous Jew, Abraham is declared to be the spiritual father of all uncircumcised believers! As Paul contends in Galatians 3:7 - ***“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”*** Lenski concludes: *“Here is our charter of full spiritual relationship with Abraham; all of us Gentile believers today are his children in the fullest sense of the word, the same righteousness being reckoned to us as to him, foreskin notwithstanding.”* (Lenski, p.304, 305)

“And he is also the father of the circumcised, who not only are circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith...”

Circumcision is not decisive. It is faith that is decisive. Abraham is not the father of all those Jews who are circumcised, for this is not a matter of ethnic descent or ritual observance. He is only the father of circumcised Jews who *“walk in the footsteps of faith.”* This interesting phrase does not simply mean *“to walk.”* Instead it means *“to stand in line in position”* like soldiers in ranks in a military formation. The language implies that faith can be empirically observed in the life of a believer, it leaves its tracks, so to speak. The paragraph concludes with a reminder of the basic fact

that Abraham's faith preceded his circumcision - *“the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”*



“God Visits Abraham” by S. Solomon

Verse 13

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

“For it was not through the law...” - The new paragraph begins with the word

“For” (Greek - “*gar*”) which indicates that what follows serves to explain that which came before. Paul has clearly demonstrated that Abraham's status of justification before God did not depend upon his compliance with circumcision. He now broadens the argument to demonstrate that Abraham's status of justification before God did not depend upon his observance of the law in any way. The noun **“law”** lacks the definite article in this verse, indicating that Paul does not have the specific Law of Moses, the Law, in mind, but rather law in general, any kind of law by which man might seek to justify himself before God. Hence this rejection of legalism applies not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. The core component in this argument is the assertion of the complete incomparability of faith and works in the matter of justification - **“not through the law...but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”**

“The reason that faith has no value if one is living by the law principle is that faith and law are opposites, and if a person is choosing one, he or she is inevitably rejecting the other. It is as impossible to be saved by both faith and works as it is to be setting out from Kansas in the direction of California and New York simultaneously...To put it another way: Law is man-directed (it points to human abilities), while faith is God-directed (it points to God's accomplishments). So if you are approaching salvation by trusting man, you cannot be trusting God - and vice versa.” (Boice, I, p.472)

Abraham's fidelity to the law was axiomatic among the Jews. Without denying that faithfulness, Paul contends that law had nothing whatsoever to do with the patriarch's justification.

“Abraham and his offspring received the promise...” - **“Promise”** (Greek - “*epaggelia*”) is a key word in this passage. In classical Greek this word simply meant “*announcement.*” But in Biblical literature the word takes on the connotation of a “*promise*” or a “*pledge.*” This was a time of intense messianic expectation among the Jews and this is the word that is used in reference to the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus uses this word to refer to the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4), and it is used regularly by the apostles about the prophetic promises that were fulfilled in Christ (i.e. Acts 13:32). The content of the **“promise”** is **“that he would be heir of the world.”** There is no Old Testament prophecy with this specific wording but Paul's language is aptly reminiscent of Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.”** (Matthew 5:5) God's promise to Abraham included three key provisions: that he would be the father of many nations, that he would possess the

land of Palestine, and that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-2). The promise is not only to Abraham as an individual but to **“his offspring”** (Greek - *“spermati”*). In Galatians 3:16-18, Paul emphasizes the Christological significance of this term, but here the reference is more general, to all those who are sons and daughters of Abraham by faith.

Verses 14-15

For if those who live by the law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

“For if those who live by the law...” - The concept of *inheritance* was a basic part of the Jewish understanding of their covenant relationship with God. Legalistic Jews (***“those who live by the law”***) make the proud claim that they are the children, the ***“heirs”*** of Abraham. But that cannot be. For is this a matter of living ***“by the law”*** then ***“faith has no value”*** (literally - *“believing has been emptied of its meaning”*) and ***“the promise is worthless”*** (literally - *“the promise has been nullified”*). It cannot possibly be both/and. It must be either/or. ***“Faith”*** and the ***“promise”*** cannot be combined with ***“law”*** and works. They cancel out one another. *“One can hardly apply the word “promise” to something that a person has a right to; not is faith, in the Pauline sense of absolute trust in God, an appropriate word to use for one’s birthright or wage.”* (Moo, p.275) Paul’s colorful description ***“those who live by the law”*** (literally - *“the dependents of the law, the vassals of the legal system”*) says it well.

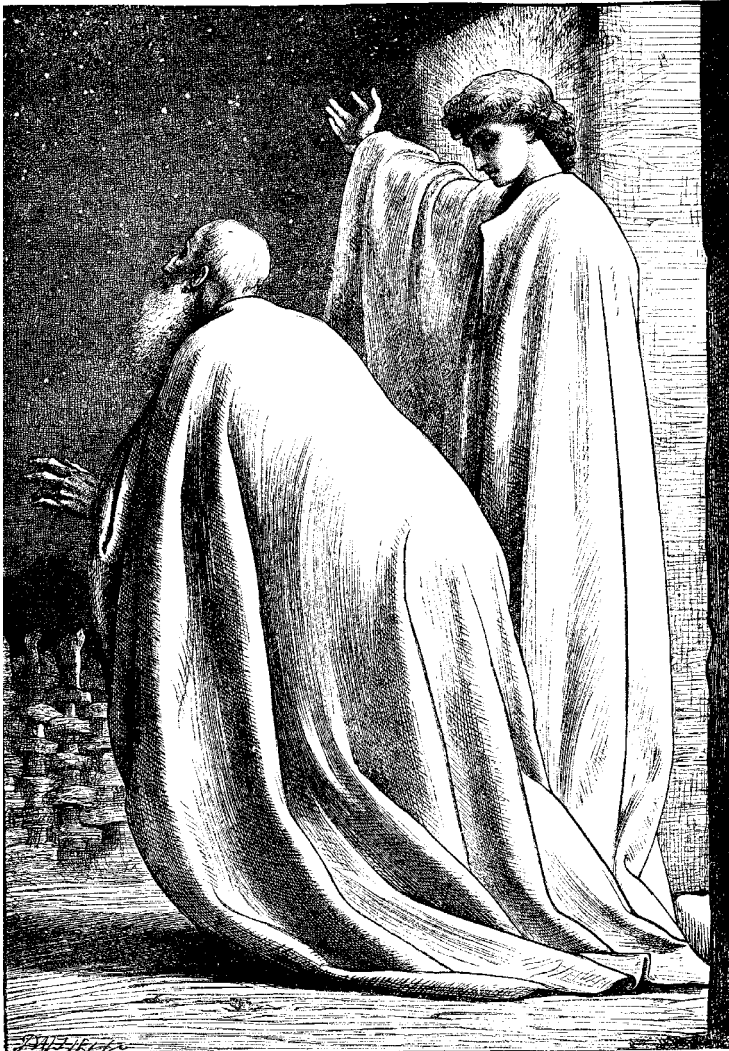
As the preceding chapters have indicated, ***“law brings wrath.”*** The verb is in the imperfect tense indicating continuously ongoing action - *“the law keeps on producing wrath.”* The righteous anger of God is being poured out from heaven upon a world full of sinners who have failed to measure up to the perfect obedience which the law demands. The law is not connected to the promise. It is connected only to the wrath and judgment of God. The law does not save. It can only condemn.

“And where there is no law there is no transgression.” - The word ***“transgression”*** (Greek - *“parabasis”*) means the direct violation of a written code, to deliberately step across a clearly defined line. When a man sins without the law, his wrongdoing is still sin. Paul has already shown that no one has any excuse before the judgment

of God. However, when sinful man is confronted with the specific demands of the written law, and he still chooses to defiantly disobey, his sin escalates into transgression. Thus while all transgression is sin, not all sin is transgression. The rebellion inherent in deliberate disobedience compounds the spiritual damage of the action itself. John Calvin writes: *“He who is not instructed by the written law, when he sins, is not guilty of so great a transgression as he who knowingly breaks and*

transgresses the law of God.”

The law renders people even more accountable to God than they were without it.



*“Your Offspring Shall Be As the Stars in the Sky”
by Sir Frederic Leighton*

Verses 16-17

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

“Therefore the promise comes by faith...” - Because the law's nature is such that it is only capable of producing wrath and judgement *“the promise comes by faith.”*

Once again, the intimate connection between *“faith”* and *“grace”* is emphasized. From man's point of view the promise is a matter of faith, the trust which is solely the gift and work of God. From God's point of view the promise is a matter of grace, love that is absolutely unconditioned and unearned. Each necessitates the other. *“God's*

plan was made to rest upon faith on man's side in order that on God's side it might be a matter of grace." (Barrett) Because justification is by grace through faith it is **"guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring."** The benefit here is twofold. First of all, the promise is **"guaranteed"** (Greek - *"bebaios"*). The word is used in a technical sense to denote a legally guaranteed security. It means *"reliable," "dependable,"* and *"certain."* The promise is not dependant upon man or his works, but upon God and therefore the fulfillment of that promise is certain. Secondly, it is **"guaranteed to all,"** without restriction, limitation or exclusion.

"Not only to those who are of the law..." - The **"offspring"** of Abraham are to be determined by faith alone. Both Jewish believers (**"those who are of the law"**) and Gentile believers (**"those who are of the faith of Abraham"**) are included. It is faith, not ethnic origin or possession of law, which is decisive here. Therefore no discrimination is permissible. The Gentiles enjoy full equality with the Jews for Abraham **"is the father of us all."** He is the spiritual forefather of every believer. Stöckhardt notes:

"There is a great, holy family upon earth, at whose head stands Abraham, the father of faith. This is the congregation of all believers from the Jews and Gentiles, all sinners justified by faith. The patriarchs before Abraham also belonged to this congregation. The first believer was Adam. Nevertheless, since Scripture especially extols the faith and justification of Abraham, he is esteemed the father of believers. By natural descent, also according to circumcision, Abraham was the father of Israel, God's Old Testament people. However, God's true people, to whom also the believing Israelites belong, are all believers gathered from all people of the earth. It is a comforting and uplifting thought for every individual believer that he, through justification by faith, belongs to the great family of Abraham's children, of God's children on earth." (Stöckhardt, p.55)

"As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations.'" - The quotation comes from Genesis 17:5. It is used to substantiate the preceding assertion that Abraham is the father of all believers. Scripture itself had prophesied that this would be the case. This is also clear from Genesis 12:3. As Paul declares in Galatians: **"Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify Gentiles through faith, preached the Gospel aforetime to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all nations be blessed.'"** (Galatians 3:8).

"He is our Father in the sight of God..." - The family of faith is not a kinship which may empirically observed. In the eyes of men believers are separated from one

another by countless barriers of race, gender, language, etc. But in the sight of God we are all one family of believers together and Abraham is our father.

“The God who gives life to the dead...” - Nothing is impossible for the God in whom we believe. There are no constraints upon His power. In the following verse Paul will explain this reference to the miracle of Isaac's conception and birth in greater detail. The mighty God alone is capable of creation, that is to make something from nothing (*“creatio ex nihilo”*). The NIV's translation of the second part of this phrase (***“who calls those things that are not as though they were”***) understates the wonder that is being described. The text literally reads *“and calls into being things that exist not.”* The allusion is to Genesis 1 and the creation of the universe by the power of God's almighty Word. This understanding of the text is completely consistent with the linguistic usage of the period. The 2 Apocrypha of Baruch, written during the Intertestamental Period asserts: *“From the beginning of the world, You have called into being things that did not previously exist...With a word, You call to life what was not, and with mighty power you hold back what has not yet come to be.”* This is the God, the Lord of Life and Death, the Almighty Creator, in whom Abraham placed his trust.

Verses 18-21

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief concerning the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...” - The paradox is powerful indeed! The phrase literally reads; *“Against hope, on the basis of hope, Abraham believed.”* As St. John Chrysostom observes: *“It was against man's hope in the hope which is of God.”* Contrary to all human expectation, a one hundred year old man believed God's promise that he would yet father a son. He trusted in the divine promise when every circumstance denied that promise. His hope flew in the face of all the evidence of reason and common sense, but still he hoped. His faith was not an existential *leap into the dark*, some sort of personal irrationality without foundation. It was instead

“a leap from the evidence of his senses into the security of God's Word and promise” (Moo, p.283). Paul's point is simply this: instead of relying upon himself, Abraham relied upon God by faith and that faith was not disappointed. *“When one believes, there is no room for self-reliance.”* (Fitzmyer, p. 387)

The promise was fulfilled, just as God had said, *“So shall your offspring be.”* The citation is from Genesis 15:5 where God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

“Without weakening in his faith...” - As the years passed, and Abraham grew older one might expect that his confidence would have been shaken. But that was not the case. As his biological clock continued to tick away and he aged passed the point of sexual potency, *“He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead.”* Sarah, his wife, was also well beyond her childbearing years, *“Sarah's womb was also dead.”* But the promise upon which he relied had come from the God *“who gives life to the dead”* (vs. 17). Genesis reports that not only Isaac was born to Abraham in his old age, but after Isaac's birth, he was further blessed with six other sons. (cf. Genesis 25:1-2) The writer to the Hebrews reports:



“The Sacrifice of Isaac”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“By faith, Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and countless as the sand on the seashore.” (Heb.11:11-12)

“Yet he did not waver...” - Some commentators object that Paul's assertion of

steadfast faith on the part of Abraham is contradicted by Genesis 17:17 - **“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”** Stöckhardt replies:

“The words of Abraham's reply to the Lord's promise are not those of one who doubts but of one who is astonished and leaps for joy. His laughter shows the boundless joy in his heart...And afterwards from this laughter and unspeakable spiritual joy he derived the name of Isaac, as an everlasting remembrance and sign of such a beautiful, steadfast, and certain faith.” (Stöckhardt, p.58)

The Intertestamental Book of Jubilees supports this view, indicating that after the Lord's visit and promise of Isaac's birth **“Both of them rejoiced very greatly.”** (16:19) John Calvin notes the similarity of Abraham's situation to ours:

“Let us also remember that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham. All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God: He promises us immortality, we are surrounded with death and corruption. He declares that He counts us just, we are covered with sins. He testifies that He is propitious and kind to us, and yet outward judgments threaten His wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all thing connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.” (Moo, p.284)

Faith is not the absence of all doubt and fear. It is, instead, the ultimate willingness to trust in God and believe even in the face of those doubts. Paul's choice of words in this phrase is helpful: literally - **“he did not doubt in the attitude of unbelief.”** The word **“unbelief”** (Greek - *“apistia”*) is more than the opposite of faith. It denotes the deliberate refusal to believe. In this specific instance it would mean the renunciation of the promise of God that had been given. Paul is not suggesting that Abraham was free of the momentary hesitations and fears that prey upon every believer, but that he avoided a deep seated and permanent attitude of distrust and denial toward the Word and promises of God.

“But was strengthened in his faith...” - This was true because Abraham did not trust in his own power, but in the power of God which **“strengthened him in his faith”** and enabled him to persevere through the long years of waiting. That reliance upon a strength greater than his own sustained him through many dark and difficult days. In grateful recognition of his dependance upon God's power, the patriarch **“gave glory to God.”** Abraham gave credit where credit was due; **“soli deo gloria!”** The

base line for Abraham's faith is the confidence that His Word is sure. He has the power and ability to do all that He has said - ***“being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised.”***

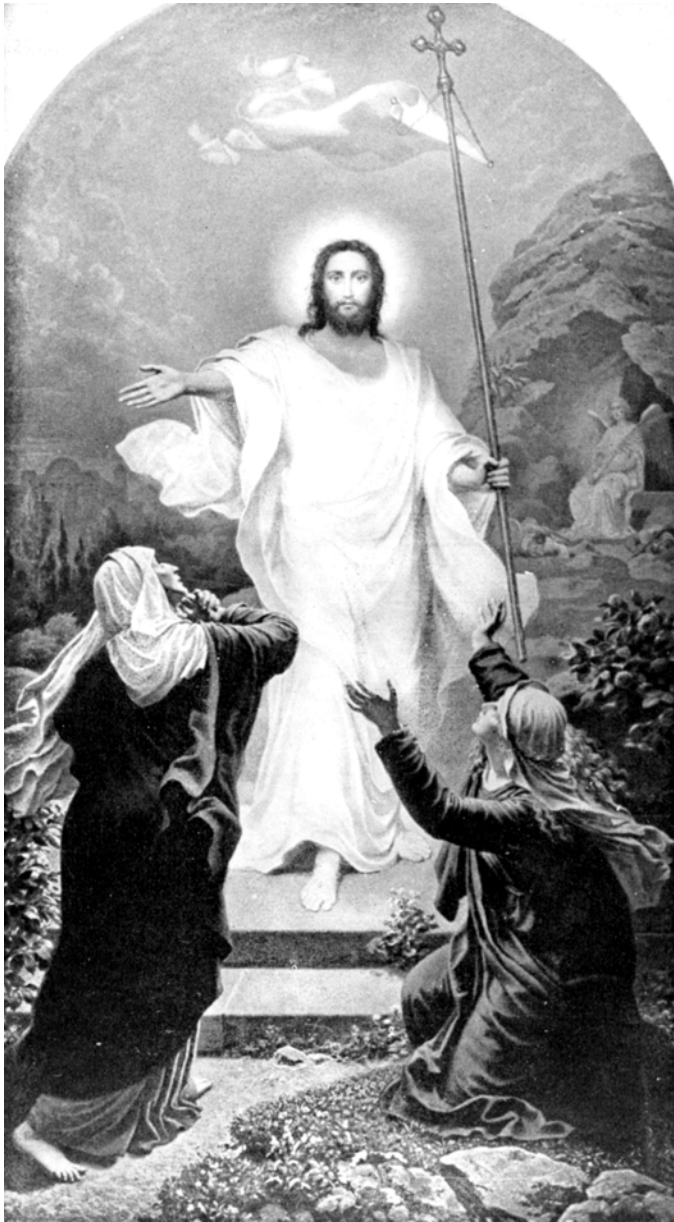
Verses 22-25

This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

“This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.” - Paul returns to the crucial words of Genesis 15:6 for the third time in this chapter to assert once more that a man can be justified before God only through faith. This verse is identified as the conclusion of that which precedes it with the Greek conjunction *“dio,”* ***“That is why.”*** Having summarized and concluded his discussion of Abraham's justification by faith, Paul is now ready to proceed to directly apply this truth to his Christian readers.

“The words "it was credited to him" were not written for him alone” - That which has been implicit in the text from the beginning of this discussion is now explicitly presented. It is Paul's consistent conviction that the Old Testament is profoundly relevant for Christians. Later, in 15:4 he writes: ***“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 examples and experiences of the saints of the Old Testament were recorded with us in mind. ***“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) Those who would consign the Old Testament to oblivion and irrelevance do so at their own peril. They are guilty of spurning an important spiritual resource which God has graciously provided.

Our justification is no different than that of Father Abraham. When Abraham's faith was booked to his credit he became the prototype, so to speak, of all those who would be justified by faith. His faith ***“was credited to him as righteousness”*** apart from circumcision, apart from the law, apart from sight. This reckoning was totally by



“Resurrection Morn” by Adolphe Bouguereau

grace! These carefully chosen words *“ were not written for him alone.”* They also apply to *“us,”* for like Abraham we are also people *“to whom God will credit righteousness.”* Paul uses the first person plural pronoun in order to include himself along with the Roman Christians among those who have been justified.

Our faith and that of Abraham are the same. Abraham's faith rested in a God *“who give life to the dead”* (vs.17). So does ours in that we believe in Him *“who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”* The faith of Abraham and the Old Testament was one of anticipation, eagerly looking forward to an event that had not yet taken place in time. Ours is a faith of affirmation, rejoicing in that which God has done for all believers in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” - Paul has already plainly declared the doctrine of the *vicarious atonement* of Christ in 3:25.

The lifeblood of Jesus, shed for us upon the cross, is the ransom price of our redemption. Christ's death and resurrection are here joined together in beautiful literary parallelism. The dual use of the Greek preposition *“dia”* (*“for,” “because of,”* or *“for the sake of”*) makes this clear. The atonement was accomplished upon the cross. Forgiveness for the sins of mankind had been won, once for all. In the resurrection of Jesus, God declared that His death had fulfilled its purpose, that sin was atoned, and that the sacrifice of His own Son had been accepted. The resurrection is God's stamp of approval upon the crucifixion.



“The Justification of Adam and Eve” - Woodcut by Jacob Lucius - 1556. This masterful presentation of the Biblical concept of forensic justification was designed and printed by Jacob Lucius shortly after his arrival in Wittenberg from his native Transylvania in 1556. Lucius presents the three members of the Holy Trinity as magistrates seated behind the Judge’s Table in an open-air courtroom. God the Father is depicted in the lavish robes and ornate crown of the sovereign with the historic emblems of royal power, the golden orb and scepter, in His hands. God the Son, the incarnate Christ, is seated at His right hand, on the left side of the image. Christ also bears the golden scepter of royal power to signify that in His exaltation the Son rules and reigns with the Father in heaven. God the Holy Ghost hovers above His counterparts in the form of a somewhat anthropomorphized dove. The Trinity is surrounded by the traditional aureole of divine glory, the blazing light and cloud of the Old Testament “Shekinah.” The Glory/Cloud is populated with a crowd of cherubim, the cherubs depicted in the customary artistic convention as “putti,” that is, little children with diminutive wings. The four living beings that surround the throne of God in heaven are positioned as cherubs on the four corners of the Judge’s Table. Adam and Eve, representing fallen mankind, stand before the bar of divine justice. They cower in shame and fear - averting their eyes, hiding their faces, and blushing. Their naked bodies are covered with the pathetic fig leaves of Eden’s Fall. The accused are manacled together by a twisting serpent held by the devil. Satan is depicted as a grotesque chimera, a humanoid, reptilian bird of prey, bearing a fiery sword and surrounded by the flames of hell. His clawed talon upraised, he appears before the divine Judge as an indignant prosecutor demanding conviction and damnation. The caption from his beak reads: “O Lord Judge, I accuse Adam and Eve!” Lucius structures the scene around the dialectic of Law and Gospel, the two great themes of Lutheran theology. The right side of the image (at the left hand of God the Father since judgment and condemnation are God’s “opus alienum”) presents the message of the Law. A sword is placed alongside the Trinity on the Law side of the image as the traditional symbol of God’s Word of judgement. Before God the Father on the left side of the Judge’s Table are

the Ten Commandments. Their two tablets rest upon a leering skull as a reminder that the Law brings death. Standing before the bar on the Law side are the personifications of "Iusticia" ("Justice") and "Veritas" ("Truth"). Each bears her emblem and makes a demand. Justice holds the scales which are out of balance indicating man's guilt. Her caption reads - "Whoever sins must also suffer punishment." Truth carries the square and reminds the tribunal of the warning of Genesis - "You shall die on the day that eat from the Tree." The angelic putti in the Glory/Cloud are weeping and wailing over the judgment which mankind has brought upon itself. In the background to our right, Lucius pictures Eden's Fall into sin as Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit in the upper corner, and mankind plunging into the gaping jaws of Hell in the lower corner. The Gospel side of the image, to God's right and our left, presents an entirely different message. Here, the counterpart of the sword of judgment on the law side, is the lily of purity and pity. Another pertinent flower is found at the center of the Judge's Table, the messianic rose, representing all of the Old Testament promises of the coming Savior. The caption proceeding from God the Father reads - "Yea, as I live, I do not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that man turn from his way and live." Jesus holds a placard which proclaims the message of the Gospel - "The righteous must die for the unrighteous." and "The Seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent." Kneeling in humble petition beside the bar of justice - in contrast to the standing, demanding figures of Justice and Truth - are the personifications of "Misericordia" ("Mercy") and "Pax" ("Peace"). Mercy pleads - "O Lord, when You return, remember your mercy" while Peace beseeches the Judge to recall that which the Lord Christ has done. The angelic putti in the Glory/Cloud on this side of the image are smiling and applauding in joyful affirmation of God's plan of salvation. The background scenes on the Gospel side are Christ's death on the cross as the Redeemer of the world, and the risen Christ triumphantly leading the people of God (with Luther and Duke Frederick the Wise prominently in their midst) through the open gates of heaven.

Romans Chapter 5

Verses 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.

"Therefore, since we have been..." - Beginning with the Greek particle "oun" ("**Therefore**"), the apostle proceeds to describe the blessed consequences of justification in the life of the believer. The segment breathes an air of joyful confidence. Luther notes: "*The apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy.*" First, the foundational fact is restated: "***we have been justified through faith.***" The passive verb "***we have been justified***" is in the aorist tense indicating an action in the past, once for all, that is now complete.

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" - First and foremost in this list of blessings is "***peace with God.***" Here, as is regularly the case in the New Testament, the Greek word "*eirene*" ("**peace**") is the equivalent of the Hebrew term "*shalom.*" The peace in question is not the mere absence of conflict but the security and serenity of the believer who know full well that his salvation has been fully accomplished in Christ. It is not primarily an inner sense or feeling but the outward situation of being in a relationship of peace with God through Christ, thus the NIV's translation "***peace with God.***" Fitzmyer writes:

“When human beings enjoy a correct relationship with God, their condition may be one of inner calm and quiet composure, of undisturbed conscience, but the essential thing is the experience of God-given salvation and the hope of glory. Those who are now at peace with God are no longer objects of wrath, for them Christ has removed all wrath. Reconciliation has been provided by God.” (Fitzmeyer, p.395)

Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, in the Father's plan of salvation. Through His sacrificial death in our place the redemption price has been paid in blood, and the righteous anger of God against sin has been propitiated. God the Creator, and man, the fallen creature are reunited in Christ. St. Augustine said it well when he noted: *“You made us for Yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You.”* (Boice, p. 504)

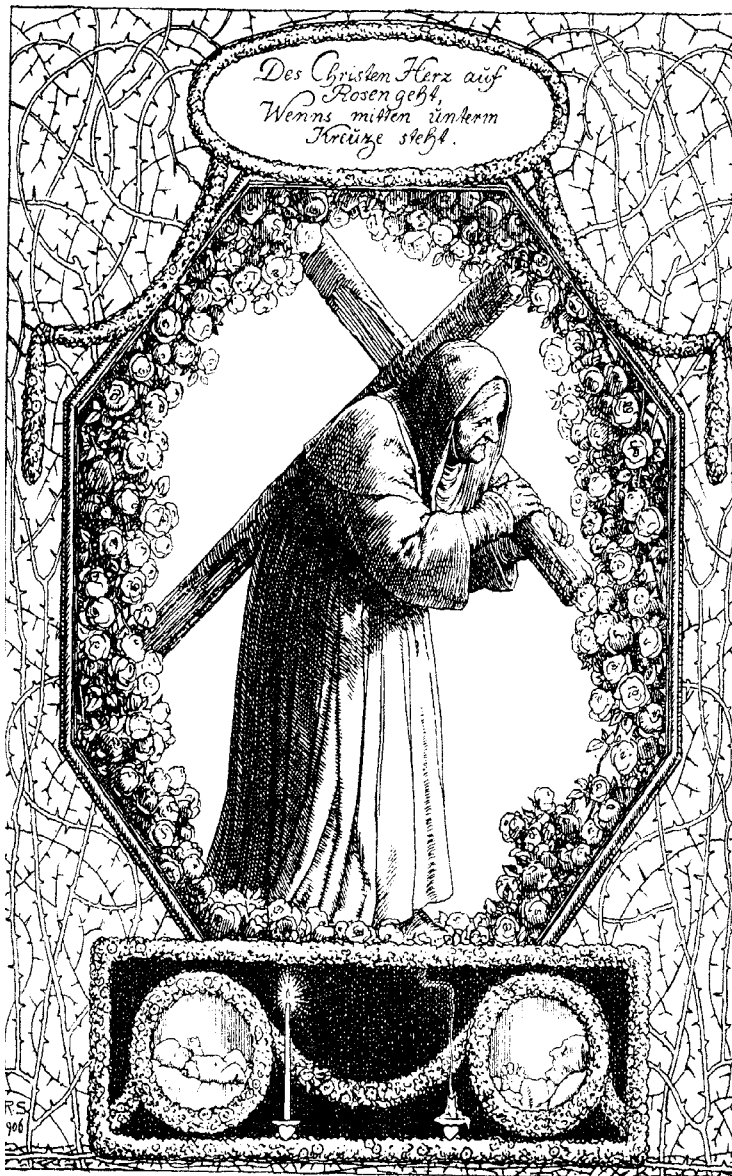
“Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace...” - ***“We have gained access”*** carries the connotation of being escorted into the royal audience chamber of the king. In this instance, Christ, the divine Son, ushers us into the presence of His Father. We stand before the royal throne and enjoy the favor of the King for Christ's sake. Having been declared *“Not Guilty!”* through the undeserved love of God in Christ we now ***“stand”*** in ***“this grace.”*** This is use of the term ***“grace”*** as a sphere or state of being into which one enters is somewhat unusual in the New Testament but is fully consistent with the Pauline concept of God's undeserved love at work in the lives of sinful men. Thus to depart from this status would be to ***“fall from grace”*** (Galatians 5:4).

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” - The first blessed consequence of justification is ***“peace.”*** Next comes ***“hope.”*** The verb which NIV translates here as ***“rejoice”*** (Greek - *“kouxometha”*) literally means *“to boast.”* The word suggests confidence, joy, and jubilation. Previously, St. Paul had excluded the boasting who depended on their own identity or merit (cf. 2:17,23; 3:27-31; 4:2). But now boasting is presented in a positive light and commended, for it is not based upon human achievement but divine grace. A Christian need not fear the future because Jesus Christ is our ***“hope”*** (1 Timothy 1:1). We can celebrate because in Christ our destiny is to share in ***“the glory of God.”*** This ***“hope”*** is every bit as gratuitous as ***“faith”*** itself. It does not rest in us or upon anything that we do but relies solely upon God and what He has done for us in Christ. Thus when we celebrate our share in the glory to revealed we are not bragging about ourselves but rather celebrating that which God has done.

Verses 3-5

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

“Not only so....” - This confident boasting in the Lord does not merely focus on the glory that will be revealed in the future. This “*hope*” is a blessing and a resource that



“Rejoicing in Suffering” by Rudolf Schäfer

is applicable to our present circumstances, no matter how difficult or unpleasant they may be. We need not flee in terror or despair from the troubles of this world. The undeserved love of God which is the firm foundation of our hope is much stronger than all the troubles of this life. “*Sufferings*” (Greek - “*thlipsis*”) is a general term which means hardship, trouble, and affliction of every sort and description. The term comes from a root which means “to press down,” or “to crush.” It is often used, as in this case, to refer to the ordinary distress brought on by outward circumstances in everyday life. To the unbeliever, the troubles of life are nothing more than a penalty and a punishment for sin. But for the believer that bane is turned into a blessing. It is possible for us to “*rejoice in our sufferings*” because by God’s grace they can serve to draw us closer to him. “*Suffering and affliction become precisely the*

point at which hope is encountered and proves itself. The function of hope in the Christian life is to motivate and develop conduct, endurance, and character.” (Fitzmyer, p. 397)

“Because we know that suffering produces perseverance...” - The apostle leads us through a careful step by step process which takes us from the present reality of our lives and ultimately arrives at **“hope”** fulfilled. Sequences of this kind, in which **“suffering”** begins a chain of linked virtues are also found in 1 Peter 1:6-7 and James 1:2-4. Paul's goal is to lead believers to view **“suffering”** from a proper perspective rather than trying to avoid or escape it. In the end, the believer who learns to view affliction in this way will find that it strengthens **“hope”** rather than threatening or weakening it. **“Suffering produces perseverance.”** **“Hypomone”** (**“perseverance”**) literally means *“a remaining or living under something,”* that is persistent patience in time of trial. Trench calls it *“a noble word that always suggests manliness and bravery.”* It is the courage and confidence to remain under the load of affliction without faltering or complaint, continuing on no matter how overwhelming the load may become. The pattern of strengthening must begin with a willing to endure the suffering. In the parlance of modern physical conditioning, Paul's basic message is *“No pain - No Gain.”*

“Perseverance, character;” - **“Character”** (Greek - *“dokime”*) literally means *“the quality of being approved.”* The word is uniquely Pauline in the New Testament. In classical Greek it is regularly used to describe the testing process which determined the gold or silver content in a coin. In this context it refers to personal character that has been tested and tried, as metal is tested in the fire and purged of its impurities. **“Suffering”** is the fire that burns away the weakness and proves and matures the individual who is able to endure.

“And character, hope.” - The climax and culmination of this process is **“hope.”** Godet is quite correct when he observes that *“Hope is the hinge upon which the entire paragraph turns.”* The English noun **“hope”** lacks the power of its Greek counterpart *“elpis.”* The English word suggests the desire that things will turn out in a certain way while the Greek word expresses the certainty that that which we do not yet possess will one day be ours. We can't see it now, but we are sure that it's coming. (cf. Hebrews 6:9-20)

“And hope does not disappoint us...” - The result of false hope, believing in that

which does not come to pass is shame and disgrace. The prophets of the Old Testament affirm repeatedly that those whose hope is in the Lord need not fear such an outcome (Cf. Psalm 22:6; 25:3,20; 31:1,17; 71:1; Isaiah 28:16; 50:7; 54:4; Joel 2:26-27). Those who hope in the Lord will be vindicated for this is the **“hope”** that **“does not disappoint us.”** The focus of this hope is the final vindication, complete salvation, and a favorable verdict in the Last Judgment. *“Christians need not fear that the judgement will “put them to shame,” in the sense that the foundation on which they have built their lives and hope for eternal blessing should prove inadequate.”* (Moo, p. 304). The final clause in Verse 5 is causal, that is, it explains the basis for the confident hope which has been expressed. The phrase is linked with the Greek particle *“hoti”* (**“because”**) which indicates the causal connection. Our **“hope”** is confident and secure **“because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”** Every believer has received the **“love”** (Greek - *“agape,” “undeserved, unconditional, gracious love”*) personally and individually (**“poured out...into our hearts”**) by the work of the **“Holy Spirit whom He has given us.”** The picturesque verb **“poured out”** (Greek - *“ekkexutai”*) is used to refer to an abundant, extravagant effusion. This is not a barely adequate trickle, but an overflowing flood tide of love. The same word is used in Acts 2:17,18 to describe the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Thus our hope for the future does not rest upon us or our love for God. It stands, instead upon the firm rock of the faithful God's love for us and therefore it is certain for time and for eternity. The presence of the **“Holy Spirit”** is not only the proof but also the medium of the outpouring of God's love (cf. 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6). In 2 Corinthians 1:22, Paul says that God **“has put His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”** The word literally means *“a down payment”* or *“first installment payment”* of the heavenly glory that will one day be revealed. That is exactly the role which St. Paul assigns to the Holy Spirit in this text.

Verses 6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

“You see, at just the right time...” - In the verses which follow Paul presents the incredible nature of the gracious love of God for fallen mankind. That love was not

contingent upon anything in us. It is spontaneous and absolutely gratuitous in nature. God loves us simply because God is love. Indeed, the gleaming brilliance of His amazing grace is presented here against the black background of human sinfulness. At the moment of our greatest need, at the point at which we were totally incapable of helping or saving ourselves, precisely then, **“at just the right time,”** God acted on our behalf. In Christ, He did for us that which we could never have done for ourselves. In the sacred person of His only begotten Son, God Himself became our substitute. Paul uses a series of highly negative words to describe the natural condition of every human being. First, we were **“powerless”** (Greek - *“asthenes”*). The English versions translate the word as **“helpless,” “without strength,” “feeble,” “sluggish in doing right,”** etc. Boice is correct in noting: *“Only the strongest terms will do in this context, since the idea is that, left to ourselves, none of us is able to do even one small thing to please God or achieve salvation.”* (Boice, p.536) This adjective is commonly used to refer to the debilitation of physical illness (Philippians 2:26-27; Galatians 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 Corinthians 11:30). For St. Paul, the word is typically used to characterize the complete inability of natural man in matters spiritual (i.e. 1 Corinthians 5:43). This lack of strength persists even in the redeemed life on this earth (2 Corinthians 11:21-13:9). It is altered only by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

But our spiritual dilemma is infinitely more profound than the mere absence of strength. We are actively opposed to God and His will. Paul characterizes those for whom Christ died as **“the ungodly”** (Greek - *“asebeis”* - literally *“without reverence for God”*). This is a strong pejorative term reminiscent of the rebellion described in chapter one (cf. 1:18). The state of rebellion here described applies without exception to all of humanity. The apostle explicitly includes himself in this blanket condemnation when he says **“While we were still sinners.”** Mankind is by nature in a state of fierce opposition to the Creator God.

“God is sovereign, but they oppose Him in His sovereignty. They do not want Him to rule over them; they want to be free to do as they please. God is holy and they oppose Him in His holiness. This means that they do not accept His righteousness and proper moral standards; they do not want their sinful acts and desires to be called into question. . . God is omniscient and they oppose Him for His omniscience. They are angry that he knows them perfectly, that nothing they think or do is hidden from His sight. They also oppose Him for His immutability, since immutability means that God does not change in these or any of His other attributes.” (Boice, p. 537)

In Romans 3:23 Paul had declared, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** He now reminds us that those from whom Christ died were not ***“good”*** or ***“righteous”*** men but those who have fallen far short of the righteous demands of God's holy law. The incredible love of God can only be fully understood in contrast to the helplessness, godlessness, and sinfulness of man. We do not, and could never have deserved that which God has done for us in Christ.

“Christ died for us” - The redemption price has been paid in full on the cross. The tense of the verb is aorist indicating the once for all nature of the historic fact of Christ's substitutionary death. ***“Christ died for us”*** - this is the incredible, incomprehensible good news which Paul proclaims. The fact of Christ's death for the sins of mankind is asserted both at the beginning (***“Christ died for the ungodly.”*** - vs.6) and the end (***“Christ died for us.”*** - vs. 8) of the sentence for particular emphasis. The result of this emphasis is, once again, to highlight the absolutely gratuitous nature of God's love for humankind. The classic hymn by F.M. Lehman says it well:

*“The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell.*

*The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His only Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled and rescued from his deadly sin.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade;*

*To write the love of God above would drain the mighty ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, tho stretched above from sky to sky.*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless, how wide and strong!
It shall forevermore endure - proclaimed in saints and angels song.”*

(HHH, #301)

“But God demonstrates His own love for us...” - The death of Christ for sinful humanity is the decisive demonstration of God's unconditional love. ***“There is no quid pro quo in the love manifested; divine love is spontaneously demonstrated toward sinners without a hint that it is repaying a love already shown. The death of Christ is for us, sinners, precisely the proof of God's love for us.”*** (Fitzmyer, p. 400) There is a beautiful Trinitarian symmetry in this paragraph. The love of God the

Father is shown forth in the death of God the Son and that love is “*poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit*”(vs. 5). All three Persons of the Godhead operating together as one for us and for our salvation.

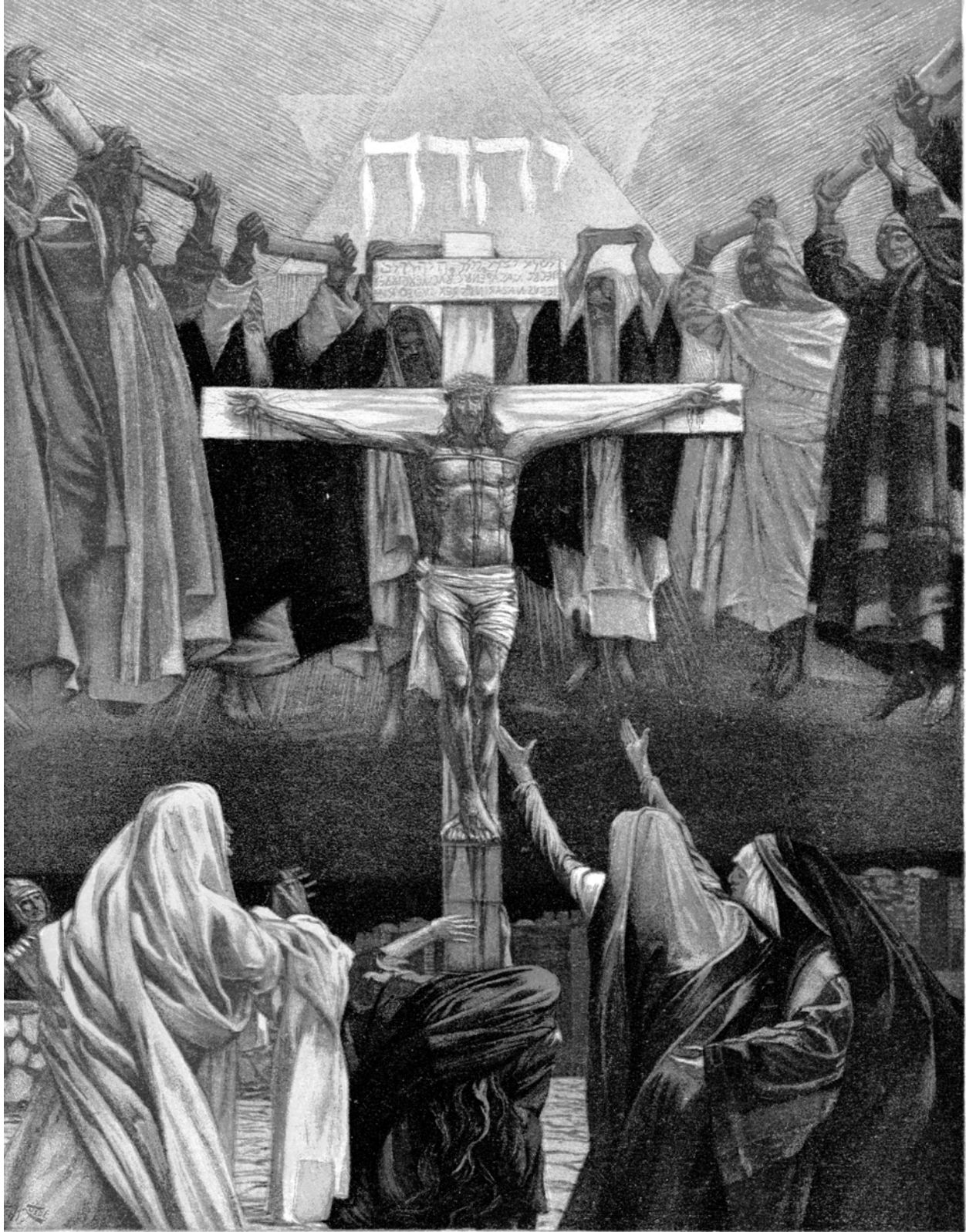
Verses 9-10

Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!

“*Since we have now been justified by His blood...*” The form of argument in each of these two verses is a reversal of the typical rabbinic teaching device known in Hebrew as “*qal way'yomer*” (English - “*From light to heavy*”). (cf. Matthew 7:11) In Western tradition the logical sequence is known as “*a minori ad maius*” (English - “*From the lesser to the greater*”). In both phrases Paul contends that since God has already accomplished the greater or more difficult task (“*we have now been justified by His blood*” - vs. 9; “*when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son*” vs. 10), there can be no doubt that He will also accomplish the lesser or easier task (“*shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him*” - vs. 9; “*shall we be saved through His life*” - vs. 10).

The cause which merits (“*causa meritoria*”) our justification is the blood of Christ shed for us upon the cross. Lenski correctly argues that “*Blood is specifically used to denote a sacrificial death, and Christ died by shedding His blood, he could not have died another kind of death.*” (Lenski, p. 350) We who have been “*justified in His blood*” can confidently await the great day of Christ's return. We need not fear the awesome “*wrath*” of God which will be revealed on the Day of Judgement for we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. In the sacrificial death of Christ our righteousness has already been established. Our deliverance from wrath on the Last Day is the result of that which Christ has already accomplished for us. Accordingly, it is possible for us to “*wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath*” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

“*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him...*” - Sinners are not merely “*ungodly*” and “*powerless,*” but have actually become the “*enemies*” of



“It Is Finished” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

God. James Dunn writes:

“The picture is clearly of a sharp hostility between God and humanity; the human condition independent of God is not simply a state of human weakness, disregard for God, and responsiveness to sin; it is also a state of actual rebellion against the creaturely role of complete dependence on the creator. Man needs to be weaned away from that delusion about “standing on his own feet,” which is really nothing more mature than a childish tantrum.” (Dunn, p. 268)

The concept of “reconciliation” (Greek - “*katallassein*”) is one of Scriptures' most important descriptions of that which God has done for us and for our salvation in Christ. Reconciliation refers to the restoration of friendly relationships and of peace where before there had been alienation and hostility. It implies the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. In Scripture it refers to God's action in removing the barrier of sin which separated Him from fallen mankind by the substitutionary death of His Son.. The innocent Christ takes the place of the guilty mankind and offers His death as our substitute (“*Vicarious Atonement*”). The other two great reconciliation texts of the New Testament are 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Ephesians 2:13-16.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation...We implore you on Christ's behalf; be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-16)

The close parallel between the justification language of verse 9 (“*Since we have now*

been justified by His blood”) and the reconciliation language of verse 10 (“*We were reconciled in Him through the death of His Son*”) demonstrates the close similarity between these two verbal images of that which God has done for the salvation of fallen mankind. Reconciliation and Justification are indeed “*theological equivalents*.” James Dunn is quite correct when he states: “*The temptation to press for a clear distinction between "justification" and "reconciliation" should be avoided...Paul regards the one as the equivalent of the other.*” (Dunn, p.259) In this regard, Professor Kurt Marquart hails what he describes as “*Luther's grand equations*” as characteristic of the evangelical emphasis of Lutheran theology.

“Grace equals forgiveness equals justification equals redemption equals reconciliation equals propitiation. These are theological not philological equivalents. Of course the words "propitiation," "redemption," and the rest, mean different things - but they refer to the same theological reality, though from different angles or aspects of it. This is not scholarly carelessness on Luther's part, but pastoral meat and potatoes orientation. Impatient with everything frilly and pedantic, Luther concentrates massively on the Gospel essentials -- and with him, the Lutheran Church.” (Marquart, p.42)

This act of reconciliation is objective, in the sense that it takes place not within man or as the result of anything man has done, but within the heart of God Himself. The great Lutheran dogmatician Franz Pieper writes:

*“Scripture teaches the objective reconciliation. Nineteen hundred years ago Christ effected the reconciliation of all men with God. God does not wait for men to reconcile Him with themselves by means of any efforts of their own. He is already reconciled. The reconciliation is an accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world. Romans 5:10: "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." When Christ died, God became reconciled. As Christ's death lies in the past, so also our reconciliation is an accomplished fact. 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling" (namely, when Christ lived and died on earth) "the world unto Himself. The **katallassein** of Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 does not refer - let this fact be noted - to any change that occurs in men, but describes an occurrence in the heart of God. It was God who laid His anger by on account of the ransom brought by Christ. It was God who had at that time already in His heart forgiven the sins of the whole world, for the statement: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" means - and that is not our, but the apostle's own interpretation - that God did not "impute their trespasses unto them." And "not imputing their trespasses" is, according to Scripture (Romans 4:6-8) synonymous with "forgiving sins," "justifying" the sinner. The resurrection of Christ is, as Holy Writ teaches, the actual*

absolution of the whole world of sinners. Romans 4:25: "Who was raised again for our justification." At that time we were objectively declared free from sin." (Pieper, II, p.348)

"Through the death of His Son." - Justification in Verse 9 is accomplished ***"by His blood"*** (Greek - "en"), and now reconciliation is accomplished ***"through"*** (Greek - "dia") ***"the death of His Son."*** The atonement price was paid in full on the cross and the innocent death of God's own Son becomes the means through which reconciliation is accomplished. It is God who is at work here, not man. The verb ***"we were reconciled"*** is passive. We are reconciled to God by God. R.C.H. Lenski asserts:

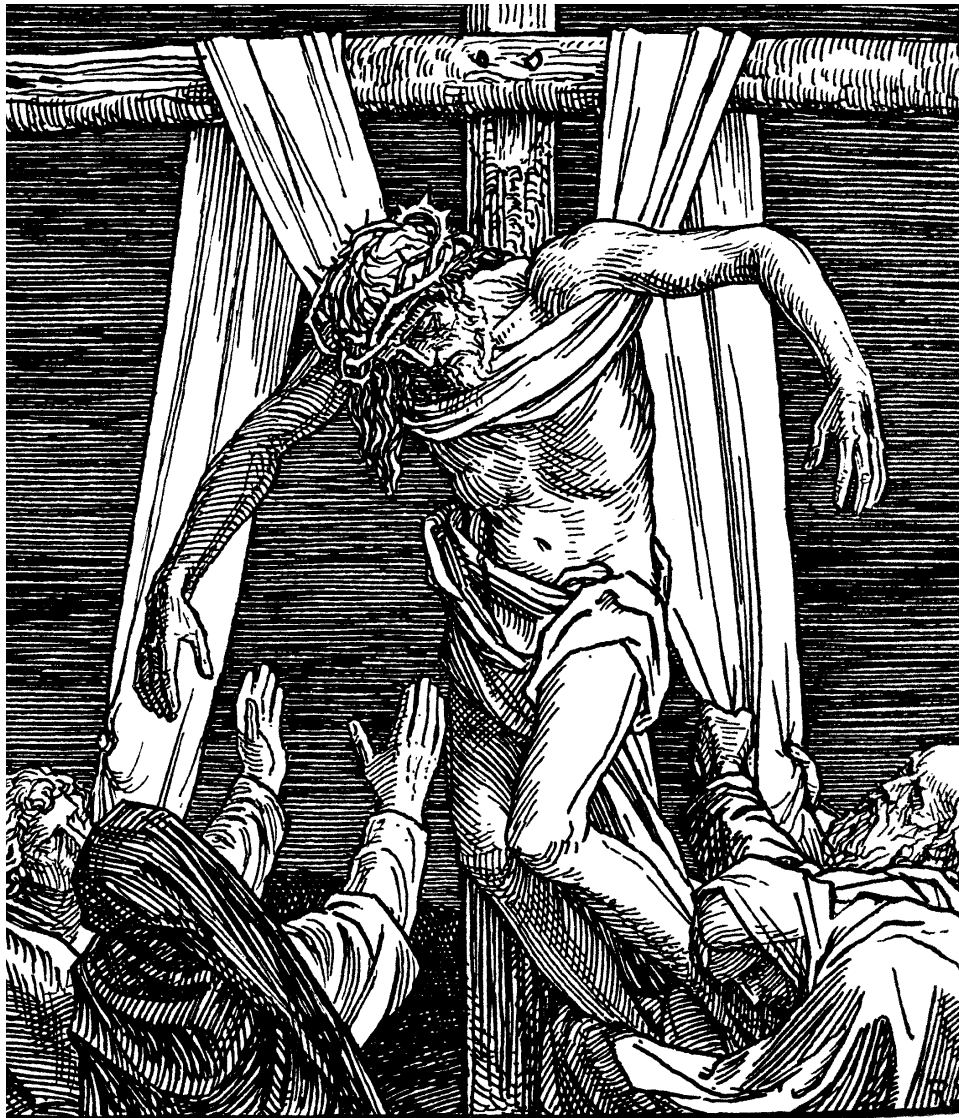
"God always loved the world (John 3:16). It was this love which dated from all eternity that caused Him to give His Son into death for the ungodly world. God needed no reconciliation, nothing to change Him - why should He change? The whole trouble was with us, with what we had made ourselves (enemies), with the state into which we had placed ourselves (sin, godlessness)...We were wrong, we alone; a change had to take place in our case, and we could not make it ourselves, God had to make it. It took the sacrificial death of His Son to do it...This is an objective act. It wrought a change with or upon these enemies, not within them. It, as yet, did not turn their enmity into friendship, nor did it make the world the kingdom. It changed the unredeemed into the redeemed world. The instant Christ died the whole world of sinners was changed completely. It was now a world for whose sin atonement had been made and no longer a world with unatoned sins...Even all the damned in hell were thus reconciled to God. Not as men who were never reconciled are they damned but as men who spurned God's reconciliation through Christ." (Lenski, p.352,353)

"How much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" - Once again the argument flows from the greater to the lesser (*"a maiori ad minor"*). If God in Christ has indeed accomplished the reconciliation of the holy God with sinful mankind, then there can be no doubt that the triumphant Lord who lives and reigns at the right hand of God in heaven will restore His people to the life for which they were created in the beginning. In Verse 9, salvation referred to deliverance from the wrath of God's judgment on the Last Day That is also the point of reference here. Our salvation will be consummated when Christ returns in glory to lead His people into the joy of life eternal. He who was dead is alive and his life is our promise of immortality. He is the ***"firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20) and because He lives we know that we too shall live.

Verse 11

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

“Not only is this so...” - For the third time in the chapter the apostle expresses his confident joy in the Lord - *“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God”* (vs. 2) and *“we also rejoice in our sufferings”* (vs. 3). But there is still more! The Christian can exult not only in the hope of glory, and in temporal afflictions that have become in Christ a source of blessing, but also in God Himself who has accomplished this great



*“Surely He Has Borne Our Grievs and Carried Our Sorrows”
by Rudolf Schäfer, 1932*

reconciliation on our behalf. St. John Chrysostom writes: “*And so the fact of His saving us, and saving us too when we were in such a plight, and doing it not merely by His Only-begotten, but by His blood, weaves for us endless crowns to glory in.*” (Moo, p.314)

Verses 12-14

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

“***Therefore, just as sin entered the world...***” - Lenski marvels at the scope and power of the paragraph which now begins:

“Starting with himself and the Romans, Paul sweeps through the world age, from Adam to the last day, from one border of eternity to the other, Christ being in the center. This is theology indeed! With a sure hand fact is placed beside fact, and the one paragraph is enough. Where save in Holy Writ is there a paragraph to compare with this? The detailed discussion on various points must not be allowed to confuse the student, must not dim his vision of the immensity which Paul here causes to tower before him.” (Lenski, p. 357)

Dr. Douglas Moo asserts that these verses are among the most theologically significant in the entire Epistle to the Romans. “*Paul paints with broad brush strokes a "bird's eye" picture of the history of redemption. His canvas is human history, and the scope is universal.*” (Moo, p.314)

The paragraph begins with the linking word “***Therefore***” (Greek - “*dia touto*” - literally, “*for this reason*”). In the preceding verses Paul had demonstrated the gratuitous nature of God's action in the justification and reconciliation of sinners. He now demonstrates why all men were sinners and thus in absolute need of that divine action on their behalf.

Most commentators agree that this sentence is grammatically incomplete. (Grammarians call this an “*anacoluthon*.”) Paul introduces a comparison with the words “***just as***” (Greek - “*hosper*”). However, he then digresses into an extended

explanation of the first part of that comparison and never grammatically returns to complete his thought. The expected conclusion finally comes in Verse 14, but without the grammatical structure which would normally introduce it and connect it to that which had come before. The apostle's point is clear nonetheless: Adam and Christ are the pivotal figures upon whom the eternal fate of humanity turns.



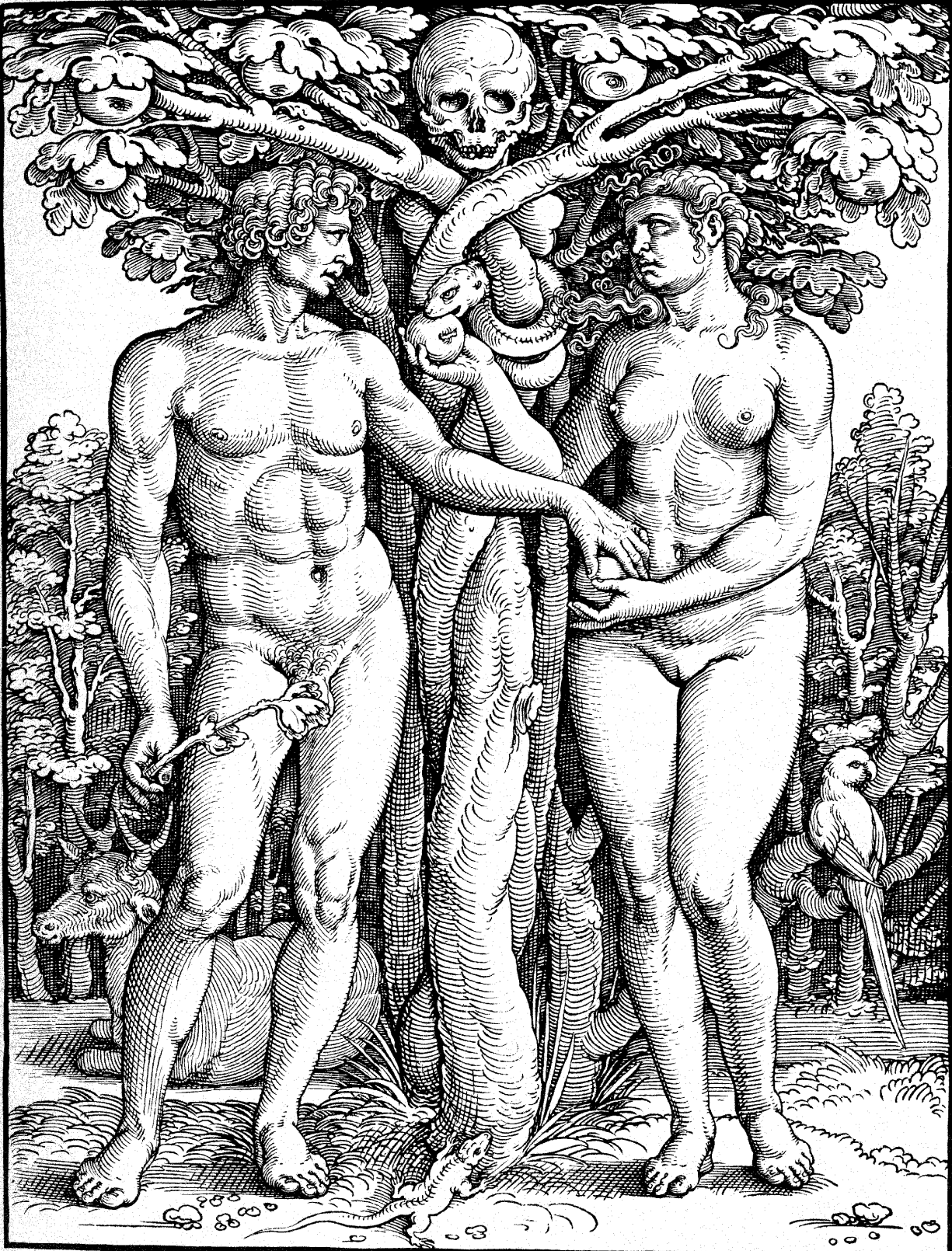
“The Fall Into Sin” - Woodcut from the “Lübecker Bibel” - 1494

“Sin entered the world through one man...” - Reference to *“sin”* in the singular, with the definite article, is typical of the Letter to the Romans. Paul does not view *“sin,”* in the first instance as individual actions or misbehavior. Instead it is a basic reality, a malignant, malevolent force which *“reigns”* (5:20), can be *“obeyed”* (6:16-17), pays wages (6:23), seizes opportunity (7:8,11), *“deceives”* and *“kills”* (7:11,13). *“In a word, he personifies sin, picturing it as a power that holds sway in the world outside Christ, bringing disaster and death on all humanity.”* (Moo, p. 319) *“Sin”* was not a part of the world which God created (cf. Genesis 1:31). The perfect world which the Lord God had fashioned for man was destroyed by the willful disobedience of Adam, the first man, the father of the human race. Through Adam's *“breaking a command”*(vs.14), *“trespass”*(vs. 15), and *“disobedience”*(vs. 19), *sin entered the world.* Sin strides onto the stage of human history as Adam takes and eats the forbidden fruit. The verb *“entered”* suggests the intrusion of evil into the goodness of God's creation. The phrase echoes the language of the Apocryphal book *“The Wisdom of Solomon”* which sadly notes: *“Through the devil's envy death entered the world.”* (2:24). Adam stands alone in his responsibility for mankind's downfall. The phrase *“through one man”* is repeated twelve times in this paragraph for

unmistakable emphasis. Although Eve sinned first, mankind did not fall until the sin of Adam. Adam was the “*head*.” His was the responsibility/authority. When Eve acted, she did so as an individual, for herself alone. When Adam acted he did so on behalf of humanity. In Adam's action, the nature of mankind was changed forever. Paul's argument is clearly based on the assumption that the text of Genesis Chapter 3 is an accurate account of actual historical events. No other understanding of these verses is possible. Those who would challenge the historicity of the Genesis account must do so in contradiction to Scripture's clear interpretation of itself. Furthermore, the comparison which Paul draws here in Romans 5 reveals the enormous theological implications of the historicity of the Fall account in Genesis 3. A denial of the Fall is not merely an unimportant debate about an obscure and insignificant Old Testament text. Our understanding of the entire plan of salvation is at stake. John MacArthur correctly notes:

“The fact that Adam and Eve were not only actual historical figures but were the original human beings from whom all others have descended is absolutely critical to Paul's argument here and is critical to the efficacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If a historical Adam did not represent all mankind in sinfulness, a historical Christ could not represent all mankind in righteousness. If all men did not fall with the first Adam, all men could not be saved by Christ, the second and last Adam.”
(MacArthur, p.294)

“And death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.”
- At the time of his creation, God had warned Adam, **“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”** (Genesis 2:16,17). Death is the inevitable result of sin: the inescapable wage which must be paid (Romans 6:23). Man, who was created for immortality, is doomed to death because of his willful disobedience of the Creator God. At the moment of Adam's sin, death became an inescapable part of the human reality. From that time on, Adam's condition, and that of all his descendants, was terminal. Although he was to live for more than 900 years thereafter, death was his companion every day. It was exactly as God had warned Adam it would be: **“By the sweat of your brow you will earn your food, until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”**(Genesis 3:19)The sixteenth century Reformation artist Hans Sebald Beham graphically depicts this fatal reality in a 1533 woodcut entitled *“The Fall.”* Beham was an artist in the German city of Nuremberg, a student and protege of



"The Fall Into Sin" - Woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham -1533

the famous Albrecht Dürer. He captures the crucial moment as Eve stands before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her right hand accepts the apple held in the serpent's gaping jaws while her left hand extends to share another with her husband. Adam passively reaches out to take the forbidden fruit offered by his wife. A leering death's head sprouts from the center of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree's branches become skeletal arms stretching out from the skull to enfold the doomed pair in a fatal embrace. The woodcut presents link between Adam's sin and death's entrance into the world of men with chilling clarity.

In the Greek text the noun “*death*” like its counterpart “*sin*” has the definite article. “*Death*” is thus presented not as an abstract force, but as the personification of a destructive power that would drag all of humanity down into the depths of the grave. The connection between the action of “*the one man*” and the fate of “*all men*” is unequivocally asserted. The classic Lutheran hymn by Lazarus Spengler says it well:

*“All mankind fell in Adam's fall, one common sin infects us all;
From sire to son the bane descends, and over all the curse impends.*

*Thro' all man's powers corruption creeps and him in dreadful bondage keeps;
In guilt he draws his infant breath and reaps its fruit of woe and death.*

*From hearts depraved, to evil prone, flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;
God's image lost, the darkened soul nor seeks nor finds its heavenly goal.”* (TLH #369)

The link between Adam's sin and its consequences for his posterity was clearly understood among the people of the Old Testament era as the following quotations from the apocryphal books of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra indicate:

“With the Most High no account is taken of much time and of few years. For what did it profit Adam that he lived 930 years and transgressed that which he was commanded? Therefore, the multitude of time that he lived did not profit him, but it brought death and cut off the years of those who were born from him.” (2 Baruch 17:3)

“For when Adam sinned, death was decreed against those who were to be born, the multitude of those who would be born was numbered. And for that number a place was prepared where the living ones might live and where the dead might be preserved.” (2 Baruch 23:4)

“O Adam, what did you do to all who were born after you? And what will be said of the first Eve who obeyed the serpent, so that this whole multitude is going to corruption. And countless are those whom the fire devours.” (2 Baruch 48:43)

“For although Adam sinned first and has brought death on all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment.” (2 Baruch 54:15)



“The Generations of Adam” by Hans Sebald Beham - 1530

“O sovereign Lord, did you not speak when you formed the earth - and that without any help - and commanded the dust and it gave you Adam... And you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants...For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent.” (4 Ezra, 3:4,7,21)

In the language of theology, the legacy of Adam's disobedience is called *“original sin.”* Original Sin is the sinful nature inherited by every naturally born descendant of Adam as the result the first man's transgression. Original sin includes hereditary guilt. The guilt of Adam, the father and head of the human race, would be imputed to all who were to come from him. Hans Beham depicts this truth in a 1530 series of woodcuts entitled *“The Patriarchs of Genesis.”* The first family in the series is that of Adam. The father of the race stands next to his wife with his children at his feet. Behind Adam and Eve stands the grim figure of death in the form of a decaying corpse whose skeletal arms reach out to enfold them all. Through Adam's sin *“Death came to all men.”* Lutheran

theologian Adolf Hoenecke correctly defines the relationship between Adam and all of his descendants in this way:

“The sole reason why all men born since Adam are already at their birth in the state of corruption, into which Adam plunged by the Fall, is this, that God regards the deed of Adam as their deed, charges them with its guilt, and sentences them to be born in the miserable state of hereditary corruption as one deserved by themselves.”
(Pieper, I, p.539)



“Death from Eden’s Tree and Life from the Tree of the Cross” - 15th Century Illumination

Adam's sin is not merely that of a private individual. *“He is regarded as the common parent, head, root, stock, source and representative of the whole race”* (Schmid, p. 239). As our source, he stood in our place. Adam was, in that sense, a corporate figure, a personification of the race, both biologically and representatively (cf. Hebrews 7:10). All those who were to come from him, lived in him. When he sinned, we sinned along with him. When he fell, mankind fell too. The guilt of his sin was imputed to all of his progeny. As the modern Lutheran hymnist Martin Franzmann says it: *“In Adam we have all been one, one huge rebellious man. We all have fled the evening voice that sought us as we ran.”* The Hebrew text which expresses this concept

most explicitly is 4 Ezra 7:118 - *“O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants!”*

But original sin is more than mere guilt. When Adam sinned, what it meant to be human mutated into a grotesque caricature of the perfection of God's original creation. The seed of man was impure from that tragic moment on. The divine image was lost, replaced by a profound hereditary corruption which the Lutheran Confessions describe with these grim words:

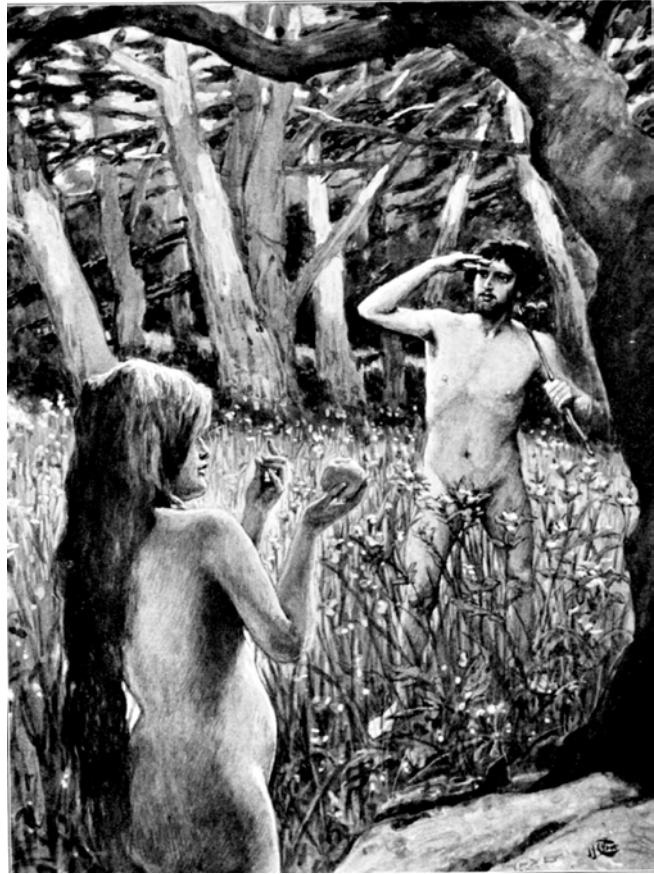
“A deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, inscrutable, and unspeakable corruption of the entire nature and all its powers, especially of the highest, principle powers of the soul in the understanding, heart and will so that now, since the Fall, man inherits an inborn wicked disposition and inward impurity of heart, evil lust and propensity; that we all, by disposition and nature inherit from Adam such a heart, feeling, and thought as are, according to their highest powers and light of reason, naturally inclined and disposed directly contrary to God and his chief commandments, yea, that they are enmity against God, especially as regards divine and spiritual things.”
(Formula of Concord, SD I, 3)

Scripture does not define the specific manner in which this hereditary corruption perpetuates itself and is passed from generation to generation (Latin - *“propagatio peccati”*). Martin Chemnitz cautions: *“How the soul contracts that sin we need not know, since the Holy Spirit has not been pleased to disclose this in certain and clear Scriptural testimonies.”* However, while refraining from specific definitions, the fathers of the Lutheran Church reject the speculation of those who believe that God creates a new soul at the conception of every human being as contrary to Scripture. John Andrew Quenstedt, one of the great theologians of the age of orthodoxy, carefully summarizes the Lutheran view in this way:

“The soul of the first man was immediately created by God; but the soul of Eve was produced by propagation, and the souls of the rest of men are created, not daily, nor begotten of their parents as the body or souls of brutes, but by virtue of the divine blessing (Genesis 1:28), are propagated, “per traducem,” (Latin from traductio - through trans-mission or transfer) by their parents ... As human reason, not enlightened by Holy Scripture, knows little that is certain concerning the departure of the human soul from the body, and its condition after its departure, so also it can define nothing certain concerning the origin of the human soul in or with the body. We distinguish between traduction, or the propagation itself of the soul, and the mode of traduction or propagation. That the soul is propagated by parents

procreating children, and that souls are not immediately created or infused by God, is sufficiently manifest from the Holy Scriptures; but the mode has not been defined, and therefore, we refrain from its determination and definition.” (Schmid, p.166,167)

The fatal result of Adam's transgression spreads to every single human being - **“death came to all.”** The particular violations of the law of God which men commit, the individual sins (**“all sinned”**) are the result of the sinful nature which we inherit from the first sinner and his original sin. The NIV's translation of the conjunction *“eph ho”* as **“because”** is inconsistent with Paul's line of thought. The conjunction here is not causative, it is consecutive. It should be translated as *“with the result that.”* We sin because we are sinners. Before Adam's sin man was immortal and righteous. After Adam's sin man was mortal and sinful. **“Death came to all”** with the sinfulness that Adam brought upon us. All the individual sins which we commit are the result of that deadly sinfulness.



“Temptation” by J. James Tissot

“For before the law was given, sin was in the world” - **“The law”** in this phrase is the written law of Moses. Even without the written law, **“sin was in the world.”** The deadly power of sin was immediately in evidence when Cain, Adam's firstborn son murdered his brother Abel. Thus even in the absence of the written law **“death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses.”** Once again Paul notes that the basic function of the law is to make us aware of sin (cf. 3:20, 4:15). The final phrase in Verse 13, **“But sin is not taken into account where there is no law,”** is a virtual repetition of Romans 4:15. When man sins without the law, his wrongdoing is still sin, but he is not guilty of *“transgression,”* that is, a deliberate act of disobedience in defiance of a specific prohibition.

“When one transgresses a command of law, that law charges this up as a transgression. In other words, law shows the gravity of sin, shows it as transgression, charges it up as such. This is one of its functions. But death reigns through sin just the same whether some code of law or some specific command does this charging up or not.” (Lenski, p.365)

Adam was guilty of breaking a specific command which he had received directly from God. Once the law had been given at Sinai, mankind was again confronted with specific directives from God which served to reveal and define man's godlessness, unrighteousness and rebellion. The law stood as man's accuser (*“lex semper accusat”*). But sin and death still prevailed **“even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam.”** Sin and its consequent death are not dependent upon the law.

“Adam who was the pattern of the one to come.” - The apostle now resumes the main thrust of his argument and turns from the first Adam, the death-bringer, to the second Adam, the life-giver. The Greek noun is *“typos”* which means a *“type”* or *“pattern.”* The word *“type”* denotes those Old Testament persons, institutions, or events that have a divinely intended function of prefiguring realities to be revealed in Christ and His New Testament. Adam, the first man, and Christ, the Second Adam, correspond to one another as men whose actions have had universal impact upon humanity. The effect which the Second Adam had upon mankind is exactly the opposite of the effect which the first Adam had. In fact the Second Adam came for the specific purpose of undoing that which had been done by the first Adam. In the verses which follow, the apostle will explain both the parallel and the difference. Lenski insists that this insightful comparison is foundational for all of Christian theology:

“Adam's fatal act typifies Christ's act of deliverance in a certain vital way. The latter had to undo the former, and it is thus that Adam typifies Christ. Paul now presents the entire correspondence. It is so vital because it goes to the bottom of both sin and deliverance from sin. All else that is said in the Scriptures regarding either or both rests on what is here revealed as the absolute bottom. All of our teaching ought to go back to this essential paragraph in Paul's epistle.” (Lenski, p. 366)

Paul draws the same crucial comparison in 1 Corinthians 15 as he discusses the victory of life over death in the resurrection of the body and the glorified bodies of the saints in heaven:



“The Raising of Lazarus” by Rudolf Schäfer

“So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” (vss.45-49)

Verses 15-17

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the grace that came by the gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many? Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much

more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.



“But the gift is not like the trespass.” - The paragraph begins with the adversative conjunction **“But,”** because Paul is now defining and qualifying the contrast within the parallel between Adam and Christ. They are alike in that the actions of both are determinative for mankind but they are also different in the nature of their actions and their consequences. These three verses present the two basic contrasts between the work of Adam and that of Christ. That contrast is heightened by the language of the text. That which Christ has done is called **“the gift”** (Greek - *“charisma”*). The term is based on the Greek word *“charis”* which means *“grace.”* A *“charisma”* is a gift of God's grace, an embodiment of the undeserved love of God, *“the concrete expression of God's generous and powerful concern for His creation...a medium through which God's graciousness is experienced in*

Christ.” (Dunn, p. 30) Adam's act, on the other hand, is labeled as **“the trespass”** (Greek - *“parabasis”*). In this context it carries the connotation of *“transgression,”* the crossing of a clearly defined line, a deliberate breach of the law.

“For if the many died by the trespass of the one man...” - Each contrast is presented

with the formula ***“For if...how much more.”*** The first part of the contrast describes the consequence of Adam's action. In the preceding phrase Paul used the Greek noun *“parabasis”* which means *“transgression”* or *“trespass.”* In this phrase, however, and slightly different word, *“paraptoma,”* is used. The word means *“false step,” “slip,”* or *“blunder.”* It is a strong term which brings out the full gravity of Adam's deed. Lenski translates the word as *“fall”* and comments: *“It excludes all excuse, it brings out the full gravity of the act that constitutes the “Fall.” So grave was the inexcusable fall of Adam that it killed all men so that the hope of deliverance seemed to be gone forever.”* (Lenski, p.368) Those impacted by ***“the trespass of the one man”*** are called ***“the many”*** (Greek - *“hoi polloi”*). Paul's use of this phrase is rooted in the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 53, where its Hebrew equivalent is used inclusively as a reference to everyone or to all. That is certainly the intended sense here. The consequence of Adam's action was that all men died.

“How much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?” - The superlative quality of God's undeserved love is suggested by the double reference to ***“grace”*** in this sentence. That undeserved love comes to us freely through the act of ***“the one man, Jesus Christ.”*** Once again, as in the preceding phrase, the recipients of the one man's action are ***“the many,”*** namely, namely mankind. Lest there be any misunderstanding that Paul merely equates Adam's action with Christ's, the apostle uses a verb that conveys the sense of overabundant surplus (Greek - *“perisseuein”* - ***“overflow”***). *“The fullness of Paul's language matches the content: on the side of Christ there is an “abounding,” an overflowing, an overwhelming and triumphant “much more.”* (Franzmann, p.100). Stöckhardt's summary is helpful:

“There is, however, a difference in the parallel. The offense effected the many, but “much more” the free gift. If one accurately compares the offense with the free gift, there is on the side of the free gift a plus sign, a plus of evidence and certainty. What Paul contrasts to the offense is the grace of God, the gracious disposition which God shows, and the gift which consists in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, in the grace which Jesus Christ has shown. In the grace of that one Man, Jesus Christ, God's grace manifests itself. And the grace of God is an altogether different power, is much greater, stronger, and effectively more powerful than the transgression of the one man. For that reason it is said of the grace of God and Jesus Christ, not only that it came unto the many, but that it “abounded” unto many, was richly poured out upon them. Therefore, since the boundless grace of God in Christ lies in the balance, all who suffer under the evil effect of Adam's sin can and should be all the more certain that they also share in the free gift of Christ.” (Stöckhardt, p.70)



*“Death Rides Forth as a Conqueror from the Jaws of Hell”
1496 Woodcut by Nicholas le Rouge*

“Again, the gift of God is not like the one man's sin...” - The second contrast is now introduced. This time the contrast is between the gift that comes through Christ and the condemnation which was the result of Adam's sin.

“The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” - As in the preceding segment the apostle proceeds to elaborate the contrast. Paul uses the forensic language of the law court on both sides of the contrast. The *“one sin”* of Adam results in *“judgment”* (Greek - *“krima”*), the act of a judge in rendering a verdict. That verdict is *“Guilty!”* and brings *“condemnation”* (Greek - *“katakrima”*) upon all of humanity. In Greek the second term is an intensification of the first (*“krima”* and *“katakrima”*). It denotes

not only the pronouncement of the guilty verdict but the consequent execution of the sentence. Thus, in this one word Paul reminds his readers not only of Adam's sin itself but also of the death which came upon mankind as a result of that sin. On the other hand, the gracious **“gift”** of God becomes all the more magnificent with the recognition that it does not merely follow one sin but all the sins of mankind, the **“many trespasses”** down through the centuries. *“That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment, this is perfectly understandable; that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension.”* (Cranfield, cited by Moo, p. 338) The result of that which Christ, the Second Adam, has done is **“justification”** (Greek - *“dikaioma”*). The language is again forensic, courtroom talk. **“Condemnation”** means the pronouncement of a guilty verdict by the judge. **“Justification”** is its positive counterpart, the pronouncement of *“Not Guilty!”*, the judge's declaration of an acquittal.

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man...” - The **“For if...How much more”** structure of Verse 15 is here repeated, using many of the same terms from the earlier verse. This verse is the summary and climax of the contrast which has already been presented. **“Death reigned”** over all of humanity because of **“the trespass of the one man.”** Adam's original sin was the instrument through which death has exercised its fatal dominion throughout all of human history. **“death reigned through the one man.”** The use of the aorist tense in the verb **“reigned”** is designed *“to present the whole sweep of Adam's epoch as summed up in the one instant of the death to which all must bow the knee.”* (Dunn, p. 281)

“How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace...” - Now comes the exposition of the other verdict. The apostle's language builds in superfluous repetition in a deliberate effort to reflect the superabundant quality of the grace given and received. God is the active agent here; He alone is the Giver. **“Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace”** are believers, the passive recipients of that which God has done for them in Christ. Dr. Stoeckhardt rightly emphasizes both the crucial role of faith and its passive nature:

“Along with Luther and the majority of other commentators, we translate “hoi lambanontes” as “those who receive,” not as “those who accept.” Thus, life is not dependant upon the act of acceptance but upon the gift of righteousness. The individual, therefore, becomes the recipient of this gift for his own person, and receives it as his own. That takes place through faith. Thus the expression



"Life by the One Man - Jesus Christ" by Rudolf Schäfer

“lambanein” is used whenever a person comprehends as a recipient anything that has to do with the concept of faith. However faith does not come about as something done by the individual who takes the gift for himself. Instead, through faith he comes into personal possession of the gift, which he applies to himself. It is only believers who will “de facto” rule in life in the days to come. To be sure, “dikaioma” (justification) is for the many, that is for all men. And as a result of this, heaven is open to all men. Salvation has been prepared for all men. Nonetheless, only he who appropriates the gift of righteousness by faith, and thereby receives it as his own, will actually obtain life. Those who spurn and despise this “diakaioma” (justification) go out empty and deprive themselves of the benefits and fruits of this eternal salvation. However, it is not merely the gift of righteousness which appears here as the object of “lambanein,” but “ten periseian tes charistos kai tes doreas tes dikaiosunes.” The emphasis lies upon the expanded definition of this object. The grace of God, His gracious disposition was manifested and at work. And it is an abundance of this grace and righteousness which we receive, or which we who are in the faith can now say we have received. Boundless grace and righteousness is our lot.” (Stöckhardt, Römerbrief, p. 255)

The verdict of condemnation was perfect justice. The trespass of the one man, Adam, resulted in the reign of death over all of his posterity. That which sin deserved, it received, *“quid pro quo.”* That which had been earned was decreed, nothing more or less. There is, however, no comparable equivalence in the verdict of justification. Here, instead, is what Lenski describes as *“unrestrained abundance.”* Rather than the minimum legal requirement, the divine response to man's dilemma is **“God's abundant provision of grace”** and **“the gift of righteousness.”**

Just as death reigned through the trespass of one man, so those who receive God's undeserved love and the gift of justification by faith will **“reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”** The saved are not merely delivered from death, they are carried over to the triumphant reign of life eternal with God in Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 4:8; Revelation 20:4; 22:5). The opposite to the cold and crushing rule of death is boundless enjoyment of life everlasting, the regal life of a king. This is the goal of justification and the purpose for all that which Christ has done. He is **“the one man”** who as Adam's counterpart, will undo the fatal damage that was done in the first man's fall. The **“reign of life”** comes only **“through”** (Greek - *“dia”*) him, the one Mediator between God and man.

Verses 18-19

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made



“Life for All in Christ” by Rudolf Schäfer

sinner, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

“Consequently....” - The summation, the final deduction of Paul's argument, now arrives introduced by the conjunction *“consequently”* (Greek - *“ara oun”*). *“Examination will show that every element of Verse 18 is already present either implicitly or explicitly in the preceding verses.”* (Murray, p. 199) The familiar formula is repeated again *“just as...so also”* to present the correspondence between Adam and Christ as type and antitype.

“The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men,” - Dunn describes this phrase as *“a masterly compression of the different*

aspects picked out in the preceding verses” (Dunn, p.283). The Greek text is elliptical, that is, abbreviated, lacking words which must be supplied by the reader. The text literally reads - *“through the mediation of one man's fall - for all men a verdict of condemnation.”* Once more, the direct link between the sin of Adam and the inherent sinfulness of all those who come from Adam is clearly asserted. When Adam sinned, all mankind became sinful and fell under the verdict of condemnation.

“So also the result of the one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.” - In contrast to the **“one trespass”** of Adam which brought condemnation, Christ's **“one act of righteousness”** (Greek - **“dikaioma”**) results in **“justification that brings life for all men.”** The **“one act of righteousness”** is the factual basis on the basis of which the divine verdict of righteousness (justification) is rendered. In this instance, the **“one act of righteousness”** does not refer to a specific isolated action but to the entirety of our Lord's substitutionary life and death. Stoeckhardt notes:

“Christ was obedient unto death and the cross, and He demonstrated His obedience by dying on the cross. But the content of the "dikaioma" of Christ goes still further, including all of the obedience which Christ rendered to God in life, suffering and death, the "obedientia activa et passiva." Christ fulfilled all the righteousness of the law; He fully satisfied the righteousness of God, not only its punishments but also its demands. Christ's entire walk upon this earth, culminating in His death, was a single unified act of righteousness ("recte factum").” (Stöckhardt, *Römerbrief*, p.260)

The **“trespass”** of Adam condemned mankind to death. The **“act of righteousness”** carried out by Christ restores man to life again. It is, as Paul correctly describes it, **“justification that brings life for all men.”** Life is the whole point and purpose of justification. Man was created for life in the beginning. Instead, the disobedience of the first man brought on the reign of death. The purpose of justification is to restore mankind to the eternal life with God for which we were intended. The parallel between the universal significance of these two diametrically different actions could not be more clearly drawn. James Dunn emphasizes the profound theological importance of the **“Adam Christology”** presented in this paragraph:

“At this point the features of Adam Christology are most sharply drawn, with Christ's work described precisely as the antithesis to Adam's - the deed which accords with God's will set against the trespass which marked humankind's wrong turning, the act defined as obedience precisely because it is the reversal of Adam's disobedience. The inaugurating act of the new epoch is thus presented as a counter to and cancellation of the inaugurating act of the old. Christ's right turn undoing Adam's wrong turn. Paul may well intend to suggest the idea of Christ's role as a retracing that of Adam, a recapitulation or rerunning of the divine program for man in which the first Adam's destructive error was both refused and made good by the last Adam, thus opening the way for the fulfillment of God's purpose for man (Hebrews 2:6-15).” (Dunn, p. 297)

“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many...” - This is the climax of the extended comparison between Adam and Christ. Verse 19 restates and elaborates the basic point of this segment using the same structure as Verse 18 (***“just as...so also”***), but with slightly different wording. Paul reverts to the Hebraism of Verse 15 to designate those who are affected by the actions of Adam and Christ. ***“All men”*** (vs. 18) again become ***“the many”*** (vs.15) As previously noted, the Hebrew phrase is an inclusive reference to everyone (cf. Notes, p.192) which in this case is consistent with the purpose of Verse 19 as a reiteration of Verse 18. At the same time, the clear parallelism of the text in Verse 19 requires that both references to ***“the many”*** within the Verse be understood in the same way. The ***“many”*** who were made sinners through the ***“disobedience”*** of the first Adam and the ***“many”*** who are justified through the ***“obedience”*** of the second Adam are identical. In both instances the reference is to all mankind.

Paul's choice of words is crucial. Adam's action had been previously described as ***“breaking a command”*** (vs. 14), the ***“sin”*** (vs.16), and the ***“trespass”*** (vs.15,17,18). Each of these terms carries its own unique connotation. Now Adam's deed is labeled as ***“the disobedience of the one man.”*** (Greek - *“parakones tou enos anthropou”*). The word emphasizes the voluntary nature of Adam's act and naturally recalls the Genesis account of God's instruction to Adam (2:16-17) and the man's deliberate disregard for God's word (3:1-6). Adam chose to disobey. He was not coerced or deceived (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14). The result of ***“the disobedience of the one man”*** is that ***“the many were made sinners.”*** The verb ***“were made”*** (Greek - *“katesthatesan”*) means ***“were constituted,”*** or ***“were caused to be.”*** It refers to the judicial act by which one is placed in a state or condition. Fitzmyer correctly comments: ***“Adam's disobedience placed the mass of humanity in a condition of sin and estrangement from God; the text does not imply that they became sinners merely by imitating Adam's transgression; rather, they were constituted sinners by him and his act of disobedience.”*** (Fitzmyer, p.421)

“So also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous...” - The ***“disobedience”*** of Adam and its grim consequences for his posterity are overwhelmed and undone by the action of Christ, the second Adam. His willing ***“obedience”*** is the exact opposite of its counterpart in the text. As in the preceding phrase, the terminology emphasizes the issue of volition. Adam chose to disobey. Christ chose to obey. The importance of Christ's voluntary submission to the Father's will is presented in Philippians 2:5-11 where the essence our Lord's

action on behalf of fallen humanity is captured in these powerful words: ***“He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”*** (vs. 8).

The influence of Christ is overwhelming and knows no bounds. Jesus' obedience to the will of His Father has had an effect on the destiny of all human beings. The result of ***“the obedience of the one man”*** is that ***“the many will be made righteous”***. The use of the future tense here (***“will be made righteous”***) is an expression of the logical



“The Temptation of Jesus” by Rudolf Schäfer

theological implications:

“Genuine Lutheran theology counts the doctrine of general justification among the

sequence of events which Paul describes. The justification of ***“the many”*** is the logical result of, that which follows from and thus happens after ***“the obedience of the one man.”*** Hence the use of the future verb tense in this phrase. All of humanity, ***“the many,”*** are justified by that which Christ has done for humankind. Jesus is truly ***“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29). In the historic language of Lutheran theology the conviction that Christ won forgiveness, reconciliation and justification for every human being upon the cross is called ***“objective, general, or universal justification.”*** Writing in ***“Lehre und Wehre”*** in 1888, Dr. George Stoeckhardt clearly defined this crucial concept and its

statements and treasures of its faith. Lutherans teach and confess that through Christ's death the entire world of sinners was justified and that through Christ's resurrection, the justification of the sinful world was festively proclaimed. This doctrine of general justification is the guarantee and warranty that the central article of justification by faith is being kept pure. Whoever holds firmly that God was reconciled to the world in Christ, and that to sinners in general their sin was forgiven, to him the justification which comes from faith remains a pure act of the grace of God. Whoever denies general justification is justly under suspicion that he is mixing his own work and merit into the grace of God...We must be well on our guard that we do not lose what we possess. The article of justification remains pure, firm, and unshaken if we keep in mind the statement of doctrine and faith concerning general justification, if we hold firmly that the entire world of sinners has already been justified, through Christ, through that which Christ did and suffered.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” pp. 44-45)

Dr. Stöckhardt contended that without a recognition of objective justification a subtle but decisive shift will occur in our understanding of the significance of faith. Our faith inevitably becomes the basis for our justification. We receive forgiveness because we believe. According to this view, we believe in that which Christ has done and our sins are forgiven as a result of our faith. The central focus shifts from Christ and what He has done to me and what I do by believing. Thus the certainty of salvation is destroyed. Stöckhardt concludes:

“Thus faith is no longer only a means, only a hand which receives the gift of God. Instead an action of man, this very accepting and grasping of the merit of Christ, becomes that which effects something, which brings into being something that was not there before, namely the forgiveness of sins. Faith is then, basically, a successful performance. In accordance with the Biblical concept of merit, it is a meritorious work. And precisely thereby the comfort of this justification is built upon sand. When a sinful man wants to become certain of this - that God counts him as righteous, that He forgives him his sins, then it does not help him if he looks to Christ and to the gospel. For in Christ, that is in the Gospel of Christ, he finds only the possibility of the forgiveness of sins or justification. Man must then look into his own heart to see whether he finds that behavior which transforms possibility into reality. And if he is in anguish, tortured by his sins and experiencing the wrath of God, faith will flee from his feeling and awareness. At that moment he will not find the crucial faith which he is seeking within his own inner consciousness. Then woe, for the lifeline slips away and is torn from his hands. Then he despairs and goes down to destruction in spite of all the possibilities of salvation.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” p. 44)

The reality that the forgiveness of sins, the justification of the world is an accomplished fact is objective in the sense that it is not dependant upon anything within man. God has done it all in the person of His Son. Stöckhardt cites Romans

5:18-19 as the central proof text for this fundamental teaching of Holy Scripture.

“This is a clear, certain doctrine of Holy Scripture. The locus classicus for this doctrine is the second half of the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. What St. Paul has taught from Romans 1:16 on concerning justification, he sums up in chapter 5, verses 12-21, as in a recapitulation. And the sum of this section is again given in the two verses, 18 and 19...Two men, Adam and Christ, are here held in juxtaposition. Of the one man Adam, it is said - we translate literally: "Through the transgression of one man damnation has come about for all men." Adam has sinned, has transgressed the divine commandment, has been disobedient. And thereby, by this act, the many who descend from Adam have all been set forth as sinners, transgressors before God. The transgression, the disobedience of the one has already been accounted to the many, to all people. All men are now accounted before God as transgressors, as disobedient. They have all sinned, in and with Adam (Verse 12). And in consequence of the disobedience of the one, which is now the disobedience of all, the many - that is all men - are subject to damnation and death. Christ is the counterpart of Adam...As certainly as the first thing is the case, that the many through the deed of the one man (Adam) have been set forth as sinners - it is equally certain that the other thing takes place, that through the deed of the one man (Christ) the many are set forth as righteous...The apostle is explaining what in the case of the one, in the act of the one, has happened to the many. Thus Christ, the one man, has fulfilled all righteousness, has rendered obedience. His entire life, suffering, and death was the fulfillment of righteousness, was one great act of obedience. And precisely through this act the many, those who through Adam's sin had become condemned sinners, have all been presented as righteous before God. The righteousness, the obedience of the one has been accounted to the many, to all people. All men are now accounted before God as righteous, obedient. They all have a share in justification...The Scripture text before us is a clear passage, as clear as sunlight. Paul testifies clearly and plainly here that all men who were condemned through Adam's sin have been justified through Christ and that precisely because Christ fulfilled all righteousness and rendered obedience all men are actually justified, not only potentially.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” pp. 44-47)

The great Lutheran theologian argues that objective justification in no way militates against or denies the central article of the Christian religion, namely justification by faith. But faith, he insists, must be understood Biblically so that *“it retains its special concept and character according to which all merit and work of man is excluded.”* Dr. Stöckhardt summarizes the role of faith in this way:



Dr. Karl Georg Stöckhardt

“Faith receives, accepts. Faith appears throughout as a means, by which we accept and make our own everything which belongs to justification - the fullness of grace, the obedience of Christ, and the justification itself. Faith does not come into consideration from any angle as a work of man, by which something is brought into existence which was not there before. It is not our faith and accepting which determines the judgement of God, which turns the judgement unto damnation into the opposite, which first creates the relation in which God now stands to sinners. No, it is God's abundant grace alone and the obedience of Christ, of this one man, which directs and moves God to declares us free of sin and damnation - indeed, has long ago directed God to justify sinners and the entire sinful world. This judgement of God has been established long ago.

This new relation of God to sinners has been brought about through the obedience of Christ. God's grace, Christ's obedience, the gift of righteousness is prepared before our faith and acceptance, and is offered and presented for acceptance and is offered and presented for acceptance, as St. Paul teaches, in the Word, in the Gospel, to all men who perceive the Gospel. And through faith, when we believe the Gospel, we now appropriate the reconciliation, the justification, the righteousness, which have been promised to all sinners, for our person. Through our faith then, we, for our person, step within this justifying judgement of God, which God has already declared over all sinners in general, into this new relation of grace, founded through Christ, and are thus accounted righteous before God and can declare with joy: Now we have become righteous through faith. Thus through faith the general justification becomes a special justification. We draw and guide the justifying judgement of God upon our head, upon our person. Those who do not believe, reject Christ and the Gospel, though they also have been justified through Christ's obedience. They place themselves outside of that relation of God to sinners which has been established and have validity only in Christ and which is declared to sinful men only in the Gospel. He who believes does not make reality of something that God has only made possible, but recognizes and confirms what, on the side on of God, was long truth and reality. He who does not believe renders impotent and invalid what was already reality.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” p. 48)

As is so often the case in Christian theology, this is a matter in which we must rely upon the clear teaching of the Word of God rather than rather than our own reason. Every human being is already justified before God in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And yet, those who do not believe and thus spurn this forgiveness are condemned. Their sins have been forgiven but they have refused to receive this forgiveness and are thus lost and damned. Despite the fact that their sins have been forgiven it is proper and necessary to regard them as lost and condemned creatures. Accordingly we rejoice when a man is converted and comes to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once I was lost, not in God's grace, but now I am found. Once I was not forgiven, under the wrath and judgement of God, but now I have been forgiven by God's undeserved love in Christ. The apparent logical contradiction between these truths must remain unresolved for both are clearly taught in Scripture. It is an essential part of the dialectic between Law and Gospel.

“Just as it is necessary and Scriptural, according to the Gospel, to speak of God as having declared the whole world to be justified for Christ's sake and by raising Him from the dead, it is also necessary and Scriptural, according to the terms of God's Law, to speak of impenitent sinners as not justified and forgiven, but condemned.”
(CTCR, *Theses on Justification*, p.17)

We would do well to heed Dr. Stöckhardt's wise counsel: *“This matter we cannot solve according to reason. We refrain therefore from systematizing justification. What Scripture says concerning justification, that we accept, that we hold fast and allow not one word of it to be apocated or distorted.”* (Stoeckhardt, *“Objective Justification,”* p. 48)

Verses 20-21

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just a sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” - This segment concludes with an additional observation about the role of the Mosaic Law. In legalistic Judaism the Law played an all important, even salvific role. The meticulous observance of the Law had come to be the essence of Judaism and the basis for the chosen people's relationship with God. The essentially negative function of law is a



"Sola Gratia" by Rudolf Schäfer

consistent emphasis in Paul's theology (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:14; 7:7-13; Galatians 3:19). Law is not the crucial issue. The Law is not the unique element of Christianity. It is the common property of many man-made religions. Heinrich Bornkamm paraphrases Paul's thought in this way: *"The law has therefore no epoch making significance, but only has the function of actualizing and radicalizing the crisis of Adamic human existence."* (Moo, p. 348) This perspective is emphasized by the verb used in this phrase - *"the law was added"* (Greek - *"pareiserxomai"*). The term carries a definite negative connotation. Its only other use in the New Testament comes in Galatians 2:4 where it describes Judaizers who have

"sneaked in" to deprive Gentile Christians of their freedom. The NIV's translation (*"was added"*) fails to reflect this negative emphasis. In Verse 12 we were told that *"sin"* and *"death"* have *"entered the world."* Now law is placed in the same category, lumped together with them. Like them, the Law *"came in from "off stage" to reinforce the power of sin and death over Adam's race."* (Dunn, p.299)

Those who focus upon the Law or who emphasize the Law as an equal partner to the Gospel create a theology that is fundamentally distorted. The pronouncement of the Law is God's *"opus alienum,"* His alien work. It does not express the essence of His divine nature. That is revealed only in the Gospel, God's *"opus proprium,"* His

proper work. God in Christ is the Savior of sinners, not a Lawgiver or Teacher of morals. Herman Sasse cogently argues that this insistence upon the primacy of the Gospel and of the subordination of the Law to the Gospel is

“the basic theological idea which dominates the whole teaching of the Lutheran Church and which distinguishes it from the Reformed. It is the basic idea of the Lutheran Reformation that the whole Bible is to be understood from the standpoint of the Gospel, and that the Gospel is the message of the sinners justification by faith alone.” (Sasse, p.142)

“So that the trespass might increase.” - The noun **“trespass”** (Greek - **“paraptoma”**) alludes to Adam's fall in Eden (cf. Verse 15). The effect of that original sin has not been decreased by the law but rather intensified. It is now given a new dimension as rebellion against the revealed, detailed will of God. Because **“law was added,”** sin escalates into transgression (cf. 4:15; 5:14). *“We may say that the law has the function of turning those it addresses into “their own Adam:” as a sinner who transgresses known law.”* (Moo, p.348) Were it not for sin, law would never have been necessary. The law only serves to increase what is already there, namely sin and death.

“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” - The power of sin and death are great indeed. The damning accusations of the Law radicalize the power of sin and condemn all of humanity. But the love of God is infinitely more powerful. The rescuing power not only equals the damning power but towers above it and overwhelms it. The Greek text uses the superlative form to emphasize the total triumph of God's undeserved love. Sin increased but grace super-increased. Julia H. Johnston's classic hymn, based upon this verse, captures the sense of the text.

*“Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sins and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

(Refrain)

Grace, grace, God's grace; Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin.

*Sin and despair like the sea waves cold, Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold, Points to the refuge, the Mighty Cross.*

(Refrain)

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide, What can avail to wash it away?

*Look! There is flowing a crimson tide; Whiter than snow you may be today.
(Refrain)*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace believe?
(Refrain) (Smith, #416)*

“So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign...” - The argument now surges to its triumphant crescendo. The **“just as - so also”** structure which has prevailed throughout this segment appears for the last time, restating and concluding basic themes. In Verse 17 we had been told **“By the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man.”** Paul returns to that theme here and reminds us that the dominion of death over humanity is the result of sin. The posterity of Adam dwells within the realm of death because of the first man's fall into sin. All of mankind now lives and dies in bondage to sin. But through the second Adam, **“Jesus Christ, our Lord,”** the reign of sin and death has been broken. In Christ, a new era has come where **“grace”** not **“sin”** prevails and reigns. In Christ we have received God's declaration of righteousness (cf. 1:17; 3:21,22) the result of which is **“eternal life.”** James Dunn writes:

“The first act of the human drama ends in darkest tragedy - sin reigning with death the final word. The Gospel of Christ for Paul is that that power has been broken; God's grace has more than matched the intensification of sin through the law and so given sure promise of life beyond the cold grasp of death...As sin and death encompass the whole of the old epoch, so grace encompasses the whole of the new...And always through Christ Jesus as Lord; if the agency of Adam's trespass gave free reign to sin and death, it is precisely the force which continues to come through the one man who defeated sin and death, which sustains the believers against their continuing claims upon him and which will prove finally triumphant. The one man who lost his way condemned those like him to fall short of the destiny intended for man; the one man who refused the wrong turning and completed man's intended destiny thereby made it possible for those who come after him to fulfill that destiny too through the grace which was and is preeminently His.” (Dunn, p.300)

As we come to this incredible chapter we cannot but marvel with R.C.H. Lenski, **“Who but an inspired writer could put such a volume of saving truth into twenty-one short verses?”** (Lenski, p.386)



“The Baptism of Jesus” by Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 6

Verses 1-2

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

“What shall we say then?” - This formula is a regular feature of Paul's style in the letter (cf. 3:5; 4:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30) . The question serves as a transition and enables Paul both to deal with anticipated objections and follow thru on logical inferences from the preceding material. It is, in a sense, an acknowledgment that what has been said may be controversial and that further clarification is necessary to avoid misunderstanding.

“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” - In 5:20 Paul had asserted - **“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”** The apostle's intent in that verse had been to affirm that even in the era of the law with its radicalization of sin, God did not abandon His people, but poured out His undeserved love upon them all the more in the promise of the Messiah. But a superficial reading of 5:20 does seem to suggest that the increase in grace was the result of the increase in sin. If that is true, isn't it logical to suggest that we ought to sin all the more so that we can increase the manifestation of God's grace. There is a certain twisted logic at work here, as Martin Franzmann notes,

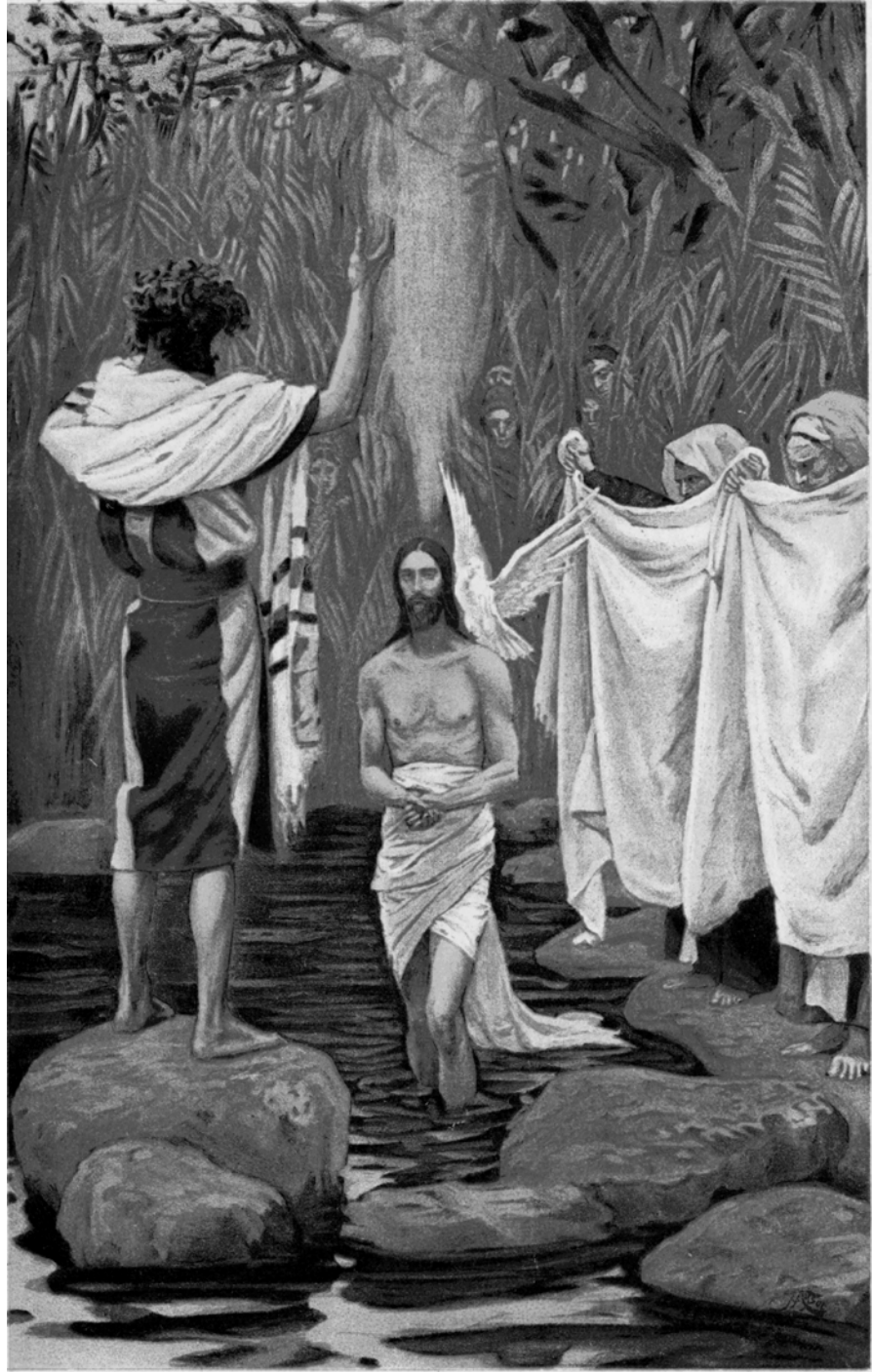
“But it is a cool, Satanic logic; there is in it the Satanic suggestion that we should exploit God, make His grace serve our selfish will, use His gifts to support us in our rebellion against God. It is the logic which the Tempter used on Jesus: “If you are the Son of God and enjoy a Father's favor, then get some good out of it; eat, insure your risks with His providence, compromise and reign - anything but obey!” (cf. Matthew 4:1-11)” (Franzmann, p.108)

Historically, critics of Christianity's grace religion have always objected to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. If you remove the coercive power of the law, they say, you will destroy the basis for all morality and decency. This view, as the apostle will now demonstrate, represents a fundamental misunderstanding of sanctification.

“By no means!” - Paul's denial of the view that the Christian should sin more in order to obtain more grace is most emphatic. The Greek (*me genoito*) carries the connotation of indignation and repugnance. It is often used in the context of religious horror in the face of blasphemy. Lenski comments:

“Perish the thought!” Paul exclaims. There are thoughts and reasonings which in spite of their show of logic are so abominable that the Christian mind instinctively turns from them and refuses even to think them. There are also such thoughts and reasonings outside of Christianity, in all departments of knowledge and of life, that are instinctively rejected by mankind and entertained and acted on only by men who are morbid, slightly unbalanced, badly defective in natural morality, pitifully obsessed by the vicious follies they cannot cast off. Paul's exclamation, “Perish the thought!” is the reaction of a mind that is mentally, spiritually sound, and the apostle utters this exclamation in place of all his readers.” (Lenski, p.388,389)

“We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” - The thought of continuing to live in sin is unthinkable for the Christian because in Christ “We died to sin.” The concept of death in this instance serves to indicate a decisive and final break in one’s state of being. In Christ we are outside of the realm of sin and beyond the reach of sin’s power. When a man dies he ceases to respond to external stimuli. He is no longer subject to physical sensation. He feels neither pain nor pleasure. He cannot be coaxed, threatened or commanded. A corpse is incapable of response or reaction. The sphere in which he once moved is his sphere no longer. The same is true for the Christian in the spiritual realm. Once, we by nature were all subject to the power and dominion of sin. But then, in Christ, we received grace and new life. And everything changed. Dying to sin is not something we have done. It is something that has been done to us.



“The Baptism of Jesus” by J. James Tissot

“What happened to us makes any further connection with sin impossible. Sin cannot be our life element any longer; it cannot be the compelling impulse of our wills and the controlling bent of our desires as it once was (cf. Colossians 3:7) for dead men have no will and no desires.” (Franzmann, p. 109)

Origin, the early church father, said it well: *“To obey the cravings of sin is to be alive to sin; but not to obey the cravings of sin or succumb to its will, this is to die to*



*“The Baptism of Jesus in the Presence of Luther and Duke Frederick the Wise”
1548 Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Younger*

sin...If then, anyone, chastened by the death of Christ, who died for sinners, repents in all these things...he is truly said to be dead to sin through the death of Christ.” (Fitzmyer, p.433)

The idea of dying to sin is an important element in the apostolic teaching of St. Paul. He uses the concept in four different, closely interrelated ways: (1) the juridical sense: justified Christians have died to sin in the sight of God the judge, when Christ

paid the penalty of the law in our place (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14); (2) the baptismal sense: in the water of Holy Baptism the Christian personally becomes a participant in the death and resurrection of Jesus and receives the sign and seal of God; (3) the moral sense: justified Christians are called to freedom from the coercion of the law and to mortify their sinful bodies; (4) the eschatological sense: for the believer death becomes the gateway to life eternal; on the last day they will be raised to live and reign with Christ forever.

This thought is closely related to the Adam/Christ contrast in the preceding segment. The first man brought sin and death. The second man brings forgiveness and light. Christians are delivered from the dominion of sin and death and restored to righteousness and life. ***“How can we live in it any longer?”*** Living in sin and dying to sin are placed in direct contrast to one another. They are exact opposites. As a corpse has no place in the world of the living, so the Christian has no place in sin's kingdom any longer. Living in sin does not simply refer to committing sins, for every Christian continues to sin throughout his earthly life. Rather, living in sin means to live as though sin still reigned, as if sin continued to dominate and rule in my life. The reference is to a lifestyle or habitual practice, not to individual actions. Sin's power is broken for the believer, this must be evident in life and practice (cf. James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:6,9)

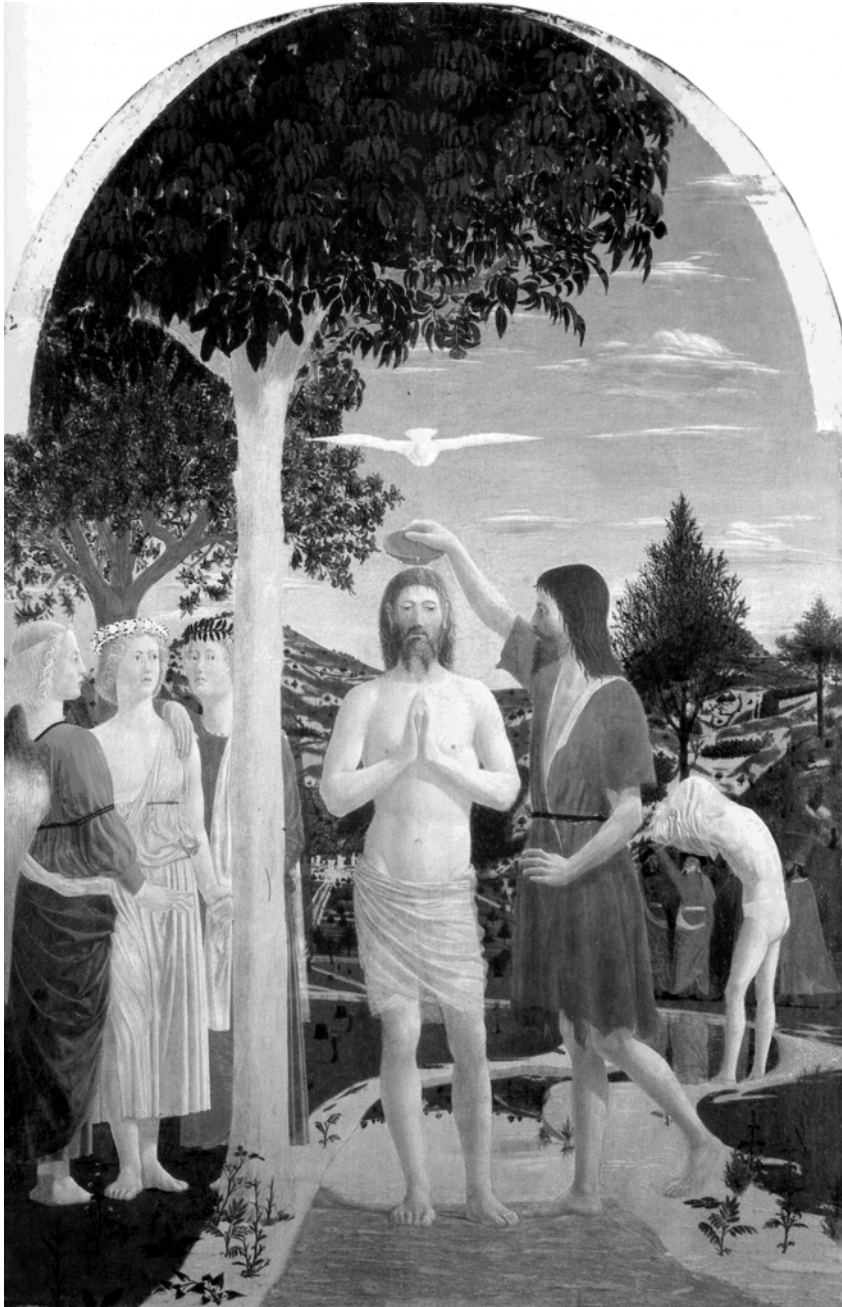
Verses 3-4

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

“Or don't you know?” - The literary device Paul utilizes here is called *“litotes”* (an affirmative expressed by a negative of the contrary). By posing the question Paul is indicating his confidence that the Christians in Rome are already well aware of this information about baptism and the Christian life. The appeal is to a well known and familiar tradition within the Christian community. These believers experienced the death to sin in the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

“All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus...” - Baptism is the crucial event which unites the child of God with Jesus Christ. The passive verb is particularly

significant - *“all of us who were baptized.”* Baptism is not essentially human action. It is divine action on our behalf. We are not the active agents. We are the passive



“The Baptism of Jesus” by Piero della Francesca

recipients of that which God does in the water and Word of the sacrament which He has instituted. Baptism, as the rite of Christian initiation, had been the universal practice of Christianity since our Lord spoke the Great Commission: *“Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19). Already, at this early date, Paul can address the Christians at Rome with the assurance that they are fully aware of Baptism and its significance. Paul’s own baptism, in Damascus by Ananias in the aftermath of his conversion, is reported in Acts 9:18 - *“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.”*

Paul would later recall the urgent words of Ananias, who served as God’s messenger to blind Saul. Ananias announced: *“And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”* (Acts 22:16) Hence, it

comes as no surprise that the apostle now includes himself among the baptized members of the household of God - ***“all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus.”***

The phrase ***“baptized into Christ Jesus”*** has elicited a great deal of discussion among the commentators. The phrase may be an abbreviation for the more familiar phrase ***“into the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Fitzmyer suggests that the abbreviation is a deliberate theological statement, *“an image drawn from bookkeeping - to the name, account, of Christ. Baptism would be regarded as establishing Christ's proprietary rights over the baptized person, and the name of the baptized person would be booked in the ledger to the account of Christ.”* (Fitzmyer, p.433) In any case, the preposition ***“into”*** (Greek - *“eis”*) indicates the joining of the believer with Christ Jesus in baptism, the initial movement of introduction or incorporation by which one is born to life in Christ.

“Were baptized into his death” - The sacrament of Holy Baptism causes the believer to become an actual participant in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. When Christ died, we who are baptized died with Him. This is not the language of symbolism but of actual reality. The preposition ***“into”*** (Greek - *“eis”*) carries the connotation of movement into something in order to become involved with or part of it. There is a close parallel to this language in Galatians 3:27 which further explains Paul's thought: ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** Our involvement in the death of Christ is personal and direct. Martin Franzmann links this thought to the other New Testament passages on the death of Christ and baptism when he writes:

“We know that we were baptized “into Christ.” Our baptism effectually committed us to Him, “clothed us in Him” (Galatians 3:27), incorporated us all in Him (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). One baptism gave us one Lord (Ephesians 4:5). He is the Lord of all in the power of His divine love; that love made His death a “death for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Therefore, baptism “into Him” is a baptism into His death.” (Franzmann, p. 109)

We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death...” - We who have become participants in the death of Christ have also become participants in His burial. The Greek verb in this phrase is *“synthaptein,”* a combination of the noun *“grave”* (Greek - *“taphos”*) and the preposition *“with”* (Greek - *“syn”*). Thus the word literally means *“to be placed in the tomb alongside of.”* Fitzmyer suggests the English compound *“coburied.”* It is clear, once again, that the text is not referring

to merely symbolic action. Lenski describes the language of this verse as “*mystical*.” He explains:

“What occurred in a physical way in the case of Christ is predicated of us in whom it occurred in a spiritual way, in fact, the two are made one: “entombed were we with him” and this “by means of our baptism in connection with his death”...Here we have no figures or symbols, no verbal beauties, but concentrated facts. Here more is said than that Christ died for us, that God reckoned his death as ours, as though we had died, or even that by baptism and faith all the benefits of his sacrificial death were made personally ours. The spiritual effect in ourselves is at once included. By connecting us with Christ’s death baptism so joined us to it that we ourselves died to sin. It was a dying together, this death of Christ of and of ourselves, a being entombed together as dead. The interval of time vanishes. The difference between Christ’s death as sacrificial and vicarious and ours as escape from sin and its dominion is fully conserved.” (Lenski, p. 392,393)



“The Burial of Christ” by Albrecht Dürer

Those who rob the sacrament of its regenerative power (John 3:5; Titus 3:5) and reduce baptism to empty symbolism also tend to focus on the method of baptism (namely immersion) as critically significant. They perceive the apostle's point in this verse to be nothing more than symbolism - by being lowered into and then being raised up from the water we are symbolically reenacting the burial and resurrection

of Christ. But the language of the text itself does not permit this symbolic view. When Paul asserts that we are **“buried with Him”** he is describing the participation of the believer in Christ's own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism. In the water of baptism, by the power of the divine Word, the believer is actually set alongside Christ Jesus in His tomb (*“synthaptein”*). The crucial role of baptism in this entombment is expressed by the Greek preposition *“dia”* (through) which is used to express the instrument through which something happens or occurs. Baptism is the means through which God has chosen to accomplish this reality. Once again, Lenski's observations are precisely to the point:

“The moment baptism becomes for us what it is, its mode ceases to dominate our thinking. Even in a symbol, we need no picturing, no duplication. A few drops of water symbolize as well as, yea better than, a lake or an ocean. Baptism by immersion and submersion becomes no more symbolic than sprinkling or pouring. But the function of this sacrament is not to picture or to symbolize - whatever of that character we see is minor. Its function is to act as a most effective divine, spiritual means, one that derives its power from connection with Christ and his atoning death, one that effects in us a death to sin and a new life, regeneration (John 3:5; Titus 3:5) or new birth; and thus newness of life forever.”
 (Lenski, p.393,394)

The effective link between baptism, being born again, and new life in Christ is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. Martin Franzmann summarizes as follows:

“We know that we were baptized “into Christ.” Our baptism effectually committed us to Him, clothed us in Him (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). One baptism gave us all one Lord (Ephesians 4:5). He is the Lord of all in the power of His divine love; that love made His death a



**“Baptism - the Fountain of Life”
 by Rudolf Schäfer**

death for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Therefore, baptism "into Him" is a baptism into His death. His death was a real human death. His burial makes that plain; all the evangelists are at pains to emphasize the reality of Jesus' death by recording, in considerable detail His burial. Our participation in His death is also full reality; we share His burial through our baptism into His death." (Franzmann, p. 109)



*"Christ Was Raised from the Dead"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

"In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead..."

- The apostle now defines the purpose of our participation in the death and burial of Christ. The phrase is introduced with the Greek preposition "*hina*" ("*in order that*"). We share in Christ's death and burial so that we might also share in His resurrection. The agent of Christ's resurrection is described as "*the glory of God the Father.*" This is characteristic Old Testament language where the great miracles are typically ascribed to the glory of God (i.e. Exodus 15:7,11; 16:7, 10). The Bible interchangeably asserts that Christ was raised from the dead and that He Himself arose. Both are true and there is no conflict between the two concepts. The Father placed His divine seal of approval

upon the sacrificial death of His Son by raising Him to life again, and in so doing God guaranteed the atoning efficacy and sufficiency of that which Christ has done for humankind.

The comparison between Christ's resurrection and our new way of life is presented with *"hosper"* ("just as") - *"houtos kai"* ("so also") language that was used throughout the Adam/Christ comparison of the preceding chapter. Thus the apostle reminds us that the transformation which takes place within the believer is, in effect, a transition from the old epoch of Adam, under the dominion of sin and death, into the new era of Christ and the reign of righteousness and life. Because of that transition, death could not hold the Lord, and Christ's triumphant resurrection from the grave is the indication that the new age has begun. Baptized believers participate in the resurrection of Christ in the same way that they participate in his death and burial. Paul sounds the same theme elsewhere.

"In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:11-12)

"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-7)

"We too may live a new life." - The result of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ is a pattern of life that reflects the values of the new age. The Greek text literally says, *"that we might take up a new way of walking."* The verb *"walk around"* (Greek - *"peripatein"*) is often used in the Old Testament to describe a lifestyle pattern (cf. Exodus 18:20; 2 Kings 20:3; 22:2; Psalm 86:11; Proverbs 8:20; 28:18).

Verses 5-7

If we have been united with Him in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.



“The Burial of Christ” by Heinrich Hoffmann

mortification of their flesh, together with the working of His resurrection in the vivification of their spirit.” (Moo, p. 367)

***“If we have been united with Him in His death...”** - The colorful language of the text literally says, “if we have become grown together with Him” (Greek - “symphytos”). The imagery is horticultural, the young branch is grafted into the tree and grows together with it in organic unity, sustained and nourished by its life-giving sap. John Calvin explains the image in this way:*

“By these words he not only exhorts us to follow Christ as if we are admonished through baptism to die to our desires by the examples of Christ's death and to be aroused to righteousness by the example of His resurrection, but He also takes hold of something far higher; namely, that through baptism Christ makes us sharers in His death, that we may be engrafted in it. And, just as the twig draws substance and nourishment from the root to which it is grafted, so those who receive baptism with right faith truly feel the effective working of Christ's death in the

Paul has previously asserted that baptism is the means through which we have become participants in the death of Christ (cf. vs. 4) and he reaffirms that reality now as the foundation for what follows. In the washing of baptism we were grafted into Christ and have been **“united with Him in His death.”** Because we have become participants in the death of Christ **“we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.”** Dr. Stöckhardt explains the apostle's thought in this way:

“From this fact follows that we also in baptism are planted together in Christ's resurrection. In Christ death and resurrection are closely connected. Christ is the Crucified and the Resurrected. And he who shares in His death shares also in His resurrection. The new life of the Christians not only has a likeness in the resurrection of Christ but springs and flows from it. In baptism we share in Christ's resurrection and in the new life that He entered at His resurrection. In baptism Christ's new life after the resurrection is planted in us. Hence, we are flesh of His

flesh, bone of His bone (Ephesians 5:30). And so, we are born again to a new life. In this manner we Christians received the new life wherein we now live.”
(Stöckhardt, p. 80)

The shift in verb tense (“***we have been united with Him in His death - we will be united with Him in His resurrection***”) indicates the progressive nature of this reality throughout the life of the believer culminating in the resurrection on the last day.

“For we know that our old self was crucified with Him...” - Verses 6 & 7 restate and elaborate the basic argument presented in the preceding verses. The phrase ***“For we know”*** introduces this summary. The subject of the sentence is ***“our old self”*** (Greek - *“o palaios hemon anthropos”* - literally - *“our old man”*). The reference is to that which we once were, the self that belongs to the old age, dominated by sin and subject to wrath. This is our entire being as it existed before regeneration, completely helpless and hopeless. The adjective ***“old”*** is typically used to point back to that former existence. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:22) In contrast, that which we have become in Christ is called ***“the new man”*** (Ephesians 4:22-24) or the ***“new creature”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:5). Paul here uses the third of the *“syn”* verbs in this segment to describe our participation in the events of Christ's death and resurrection (vs. 4 - buried with; vs. 5 - united with). In this instance we participate in the crucifixion itself - *“synestaurōthe”* (*“crucified with”*). Douglas Moo offers this assessment of Paul's thought:

“The believer who is “crucified with Christ” is as definitely and finally dead as a result of this action as was Christ Himself after His crucifixion. Of course, we must remember what this death means. There is no more a physical, or ontological, death than is our burial with Christ (vs.4) or our “dying to sin” (vs.2). Paul's language throughout is forensic, or positional; by God's act we have been placed in a new position. This position is real, for what exists in God's sight is surely (ultimately) real, and it carries definite consequences for daily living.” (Moo, p. 373)

Note the passive voice of the verb *“was crucified.”* This is not something that we could ever have done by ourselves. God had to do this and has done it for us.

“So that the body of sin might be rendered powerless...” - The purpose of our co-crucifixion is liberation from the domination of sin. The phrase ***“the body of sin”*** parallels the ***“old self”*** in the preceding phrase. The reference is not to the physical body in contrast to the soul, but to the whole person as a part of the fallen world, the

human being as a descendant of Adam in bondage to sin and death. The genitive “*of sin*” expresses the element which dominates the earth-oriented, natural human person. The verb “*rendered powerless*” (Greek - “*katargeo*”) means “*to be released from*” or “*to deprive something of its power, to paralyze.*” The point is that because of our participation in the crucifixion of Christ, we are no longer the helpless tools of sin. Our solidarity with and subservience to the legacy of Adam has been ended. We are no longer “*slaves to sin.*” Sin is a master which rules without challenge over natural man. We, however, have been liberated from our slavery to sin by our participation in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.



“Crucified With Christ” by Rudolf Schäfer

“Once for all the curse of this slavery has been broken since our old man has been crucified. The battle with sin is not completed in baptism but the decisive victory has been won. The sin is dethroned, the new man has taken the place of the old man in us, and now it is our task to prevent the sin from again usurping that throne.” (Lenski, p. 403)

“Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”
- The slave who dies can serve his master no longer. By death he has been set free

from his slavery. In the same way, our involvement in the death of Christ through baptism has broken the dominion of sin/death in our lives.

Verses 8-10

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer

has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died once to sin for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God.

“Now if we died with Christ...” - The death to sin which is the result of our involvement in the death of Christ marks the beginning of a new life in Him. That new life has already begun: ***“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, look, the new has come.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17) It will take on final, definitive form only when we live with the Lord in eternity, thus the future tense of the verb (***“we will also live”***) in this sentence. In this way, the whole of this life for the believer is suspended between Christ's death and Christ's resurrection.

“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead...” - Our faith is founded on facts. All true faith contains definite and explicit knowledge as in the classic definition faith = knowledge + assent + trust. The historical fact of the resurrection is the keystone of Christianity for as Paul contends in 1 Corinthians 15:17 - ***“If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.”*** Here, as previously, the resurrection is ascribed not to Christ Himself, but to God the Father who has triumphantly restored His beloved Son to life again (cf. 4:24; Philippians 2:9-11). The reality of the Christ's resurrection means that ***“he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”*** The resurrection of Jesus meant a final and decisive break with death and all of its fatal power - the end of His humiliation and the beginning of His exaltation. Having humbled Himself to the limitations of earthly existence and submitted to a humiliating death on the cross, Christ is exalted by the Father, and restored to glorious life once again. He is ***“the firstfruits of those that rise”*** (1 Corinthians 15:23) and His resurrection signals the beginning of the new era of forgiveness and life. Through sin death became the lord and master of mankind (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). By His resurrection, Jesus proves that death is can no longer exercise lordship (Greek - *“kurieuei”*) over Him. Death is His master no longer. ***“The death He died, He died to sin once for all...”*** - Christ assumed our sin. He took upon Himself the burden that was ours.

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). In His death He bore the penalty for the sins of humankind. Thus His death is ***“to sin”*** in the sense that it has a decisive effect upon sin. His death is a unique, definitive event. It can never be repeated. It need never be repeated. ***“He died to sin once for all”*** (Greek - *“hapax”*). That reality is demonstrated by Christ's return to life after His death.

Hence, as Fitzmyer suggests:
“Christ was raised from the dead not merely to publicize His good news or to confirm His messianic character, but to introduce human beings into freedom, a new mode of life with a new principle of human activity, the Spirit.”
 (Fitzmyer., p.438)



*“The Resurrection” 19th Century Bible Illustration
 by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

“But the life He lives, He lives to God.” - An irreversible transformation has taken place. We have passed from one era to the next and there is no going back. A reversion to the old condition is no longer possible.

The death of Christ is a single event with permanent relevance for all of humanity- (Note the aorist tense of the verbs in the preceding phrase). The life He now lives is a continuous, ongoing, unending reality (The Greek verb tense now shifts to the durative present, indicating indefinitely ongoing action). Having vanquished death, Jesus, the God/Man, now lives forever to the glory of God.

Verses 11-14

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

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin...” - These verses apply that which has been said of Christ to Christians. The comparison between the death and life of Christ and the attitude of the believer toward his own life is introduced with the phrase *“In the same way.”*

The powerful verb in this sentence is the Greek “*logizomai*” (to count or to be credited to) which figured so prominently in chapter 4's discussion of the justification of Abraham (cf. 4:3-12). Thus we are clearly reminded that the Christian's reckoning himself dead to sin and alive to God is the result of God's having reckoned him to be righteous. This is a strong word used to describe firm conviction that is to be consistently expressed in daily conduct. The language is not theoretical or abstract; it is real and practical. The verb is a present imperative, urging us to view ourselves in this way constantly, throughout our lives.

In 6:2 we were told that we were told that “*We died to sin.*” Now the argument concludes as the apostle recalls those words. We are to consider ourselves “*dead to sin but alive to God.*” Christ “*died to sin once for all*” (vs.10). We became participants in that death through baptism. The object of the imperative in this verse is that we must now continually take this death into account, take it seriously, in our own self-perception. Like Christ, we have died to sin, and as we become ever more aware of that union with Christ, and consciously oriented to Christ, the possibility of returning to the old way of sin's dominion will become ever more remote. This is much more than mere mimicry.

“It is not just that they (Christians) are to imitate Christ (because He has died to sin so you too); Christians are also to arm themselves with the mentality that they are dead to sin; for that is what has happened to them in the baptismal experience.”
(Fitzmyer, p.438)

To be “*dead to sin*” is only possible in union with Christ. Hence, to be “*dead to sin*” is to be “*alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” This phrase “*in Christ Jesus*” is St. Paul's characteristic way of describing the union of the believer with the Lord (cf. 8:1; 12:5; 16:3,7,9,10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Galatians 1:22; 2:4; 3:28; 5:6; 1 Corinthians 1:2,30; 4:10; 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 12:2; Philippians 1:1; 4:7; Philemon 23). Lenski describes it as “*a pregnant phrase which denotes a vital spiritual connection*” (Lenski, p.409). Christians, by faith, are united with the risen and living Lord through the Holy Spirit and thereby share in the vitality of His life in glory.

“*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies...*” - Such an admonition would be worthless and futile were it not for Christ and our participation in His death and resurrection. “*Now it would be useless to tell sinners not to let this powerful king, sin, reign over them, whether in their mortal bodies or in the rest of their being;*

sinners could not prevent sin reigning over them.” (Lenski, p. 411) One might just as well tell a drowning person simply to swim to shore as to tell a person who is under sin's mastery not to let allow sin to reign. St. Augustine's observation is sadly accurate, for the unregenerate man it is *“non posse non peccare”* (*“It is Not possible not to sin.”*) The Greek text literally says *“do not let sin hold sway or rule as a king”* (Greek - *“basileueto”*). That is, of course, not to say that Christians are no longer capable of sin and are required to live holy and sinless lives. The rule of the tyrant has been overthrown; his tyranny has been broken; but that does not prevent this overthrown tyrant from harassing those who have escaped his tyranny. The phrase *“in your mortal bodies”* is not merely a reference to the physical body in distinction to the soul. Rather the reference is to the whole person viewed as a part of the world and thus subject to the temptations of sin.



“Christ’s Victory Over Satan” by Albrecht Dürer, 1498

“The battle is a spiritual one, but it is fought, it is won and lost, in the daily decisions the believer makes about how to use his body. In characterizing the body as “mortal” Paul is reminding us that the same body that has been severed from its servitude to sin is nevertheless a body that still participates in the weakness, suffering, and dissolution of this age...This “mortal body” is, then, the believer’s form of existence in this world which still has a part in this age.” (Moo, p. 383)

“In order to obey its evil desires.” - The noun *“desires”* (Greek - *“epithumias”*) can be used positively (cf. Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17). However, in this context refers to desires that are in conflict with the will of God. The NIV is correct in supplying the negative adjective *“evil.”* Parallel phrases are: *“desires of the heart”*

(Romans 1:24), and ***“desires of the flesh”*** (Galatians 5:16). The reference is not merely physical or sexual desire but to man's craving for and dependency upon the satisfaction of all of his personal, earthly needs - physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc. The basic issue is mastery. Sin seeks to influence and control the sinner. Sin's goal is to achieve (actually to regain) the submission to its reign that results in obedience.

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin...” - ***“Do not offer”*** (Greek - *“mede parastanete”*) means *“to put at the disposal of.”* It is often used of the authority of a slave owner or of a military officer. The point of the verb is the acknowledgment of a superior power and authority to whom the only proper response is submission and obedience. It thus fits perfectly in this discussion of sin as the controlling power in a person's life. As in the preceding phrase, the verb is a present imperative, indicating a command with ongoing, continuous application. As ***“mortal body”*** in verse 12 does not refer merely to the physical, so ***“the parts of your body”*** here not simply mean limbs or physical body organs but rather man's natural capacities. *“Human faculties”* or *“human capabilities”* are alternate possible translations. ***“Instruments of wickedness”*** (Greek - *“hopla adikias”*) might better be translated as *“weapons of unrighteousness,”* given the conflict context of the phrase. ***“Wickedness”*** is a general term for all that stands in opposition to the righteousness of God. Those natural capacities and abilities that God has given us are weapons that must no longer be put in the service of the evil master from whom we have been set free.

“But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought...” - The verb (*“parastesate”*) is repeated in this contrasting phrase. Christians are to put themselves at God's disposal, to submit to His control and to acknowledge His lordship. As men and women who have a share in Christ's death and resurrection ***“we have been brought from death to life.”*** That reality becomes the basis for an actual transformation of who we are and how we live. We who were once dead in sin are now ***“alive to God in Christ Jesus”*** (vs. 11). The human faculties and capabilities which were not to be offered to sin as weapons of unrighteousness are instead to be dedicated to God as ***“instruments of righteousness.”*** The parallel language in these two phrases clearly emphasizes the contrast.

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” - The issue throughout this section is control - who is the lord of your life. This concluding phrase repeats that emphasis with the verb *“kyrieusei”* (*“to exercise*



“Jesus Christ Is Lord!” By Rudolf Schäfer

lordship or mastery”) from the noun “*kyrios*” which means “*lord*” or “*master*”. (As in the liturgical “*Kyrie Eleyson- Lord have mercy!*”). Fitzmyer aptly translates “*Sin is not to hold sway over you.*” Phillip Melancthon calls this bold declaration that the lordship of sin is ended “*dulcissima consolatio*” (Latin - “*the sweetest consolation of all*”). This promise is confirmed by the assurance - “***You are not under law but under grace.***” The reference is to the law as the governing principle in religion, the basis of our relationship with God. Any religious system based completely or in part on human effort is law religion no matter what denominational label it carries.

Legalism of any sort can never be the Lord of the Christian life. The law cannot free us from sin. Its demands and condemnations only intensify sin's dominion. The curse of the law upon man's imperfection brings death. Those who are ***“under law,”*** dependent upon that which they must do for themselves, will find no escape from damnation and doom. Sin is our master no longer only because of God's undeserved love in Christ. We are not ***“under law but under grace.”***

“Grace removes the curse of sin, breaks its dominion, joins us to Christ and God, fills us with spiritual power to trample unrighteousness under foot and to work righteousness...Being subjects to grace is pure blessedness for sinners, for while law comes with threatening demands which we are helpless to fulfill, grace showers upon us not only what we need, but all that it can possibly bestow, even the capacity to receive, and asks no merit or worthiness on our part.” (Lenski, p.418)

Verses 15-16

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

“What then? Shall we sin because...” - The question with which the chapter began is now restated in the context of law and grace. Since there is no legal restraint for conduct are we then free to do whatever we want? If you put grace alone in place of the law have you not removed the only barrier against sin and the only means of dealing with sin thereby opening the floodgates to a deluge of sinning? Absolutely not! The response is again most emphatically negative (cf. vs.1, p. 209f.)

“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves...” - The apostle uses the social institution of slavery to make his point. In the Mediterranean world of Paul's day many people sold themselves into slavery - either permanently or for a specified period of time - as a means of support or to avoid financial disaster. Paul reminds us that no human being is a free agent - either we are slaves to sin and self, or we are slaves to God in Christ. There are no other alternatives. The person who refuses God's lordship in his life does not thereby achieve independence, but becomes instead a slave to sin. That which masquerades as freedom in this world is actually bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Those who live only to gratify their own desires are slaves without recognizing their slavery. Their shackles are forged in the

compulsion and futility of their empty lives. The Satanic Father of the Lie has cleverly managed to convince his slaves that their bondage is freedom. The person who is a slave to God in Christ is truly free. But the freedom of the Christian is not freedom to do whatever you choose, but freedom to obey God - willingly, joyfully, naturally. The essence of slavery is the obligation of consistent obedience - ***“You are slaves to the one you obey.”*** If you consistently obey your sinful desires, then you are, in fact, a slave to sin, whether you recognize it or not.

The consequence of slavery to sin is ***“death”*** in time and in eternity. The consequence of slavery to godly obedience is ***“righteousness”*** - the divine verdict of justification which leads to life eternal.



“The Prodigal’s Return”
by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 17-18

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

“But thanks be to God...” - As Paul considers all that God has done to set His people free, he injects an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving to God which demonstrates the intensity of the feelings within the apostle's own heart on this subject. He knows from personal experience what it means to once have been lost and then be found. Every human being is by nature a slave to sin. The members of the congregation in Rome could easily recall the time when they lived beneath the brutal tyranny of sin. But, ***“Thanks be to God!”*** that time is past.

“Though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed...” - The bondage of sin, the cruel taskmaster, is now in the past for the Christians in Rome. It has been replaced with the joyful obedience of those who freely serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

The obedience of the Christian is “*wholehearted*” (Greek - “*ek kardias*” - literally “*from the heart*”). It indicates deeply felt and motivated action from the inmost being in contrast to obedience which is superficial, minimal, or coerced. This is the maximal grace response (How much can I do?) in contrast to the minimal law response (How much do I have to do?). The Christian's wholehearted obedience is attributed to “*the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.*” Most commentators agree that the reference is to a fixed catechetical formulation or creed used in connection with Holy Baptism already so well established and well known that Paul could refer to it without further explanation. The verb “*were entrusted*” (Greek - “*paradidomi*”) is frequently used in this way to describe the action of handing down or passing on traditional teaching. Note that this teaching did not come from the Christians in Rome. They did not devise or invent it. It came from God Himself and was merely entrusted to them as a legacy to preserve and pass along.



“The Baptism of Christ with the Revelation of the Divine Trinity” by Lucas Cranach the Younger (The City of Wittenberg is in the Background with Luther and the Family of the Elector John Frederick of Saxony Looking On)

“*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves...*” - There is no possible neutral ground; either you are a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness - no comfortable, compromising in between. Paul drives this point home with the assertion

that we have been set free so that we may be enslaved. Through Baptism in Christ Christians have been transferred from the dominion of sin to the dominion of righteousness. They are slaves who have changed ownership; slave who have a new master. This is the first reference to the liberation of the sinner from sin in Romans. This becomes an important theme through the balance of the Epistle (cf. 6:20,22; 7:3; 8:2,21). The Christian life is emancipation from the tyranny of sin. But Biblical freedom is not autonomy(Greek - "*self-law*") or self-direction in the modern sense of the term, which views every individual as free to do whatsoever he or she chooses to do. Biblical freedom is deliverance from the enslaving powers which sought to prevent the human being from becoming what the Creator God had intended him to be. Real freedom can only be experienced in harmonious relationship with the God who is our source (cf. John 8:31-36) "*The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love, and willing mind.*" (Moo, p. 402)

Verse 19

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

"I put this in human terms because you are weak..." - Paul apologizes for using the inadequate analogy of slavery to describe the believer's relationship to the Lord, but he wants to be sure that this crucial point is clearly understood. The use of examples and illustration from everyday life are a common feature of the apostolic teaching of the New Testament (cf. 3:5; Galatians 3:15; 1 Corinthians 3:1; 9:8). Analogy although helpful is never perfect. That is also true in this instance. Douglas Moo observes:

"Paul recognizes that his language could be interpreted to mean that Christian experience bears the same marks of degradation, fear, and confinement that were typical of secular slavery. But, while shorn of these characteristics, life in the new realm of righteousness and life does mean that a person is given over to a master who requires absolute and unquestioned obedience; and to make the point, the image of slavery is quite appropriate." (Moo, p.404)

The use of this analogy is explained by the fact that "***you are weak in your natural selves.***" The reference is not to a mental or moral weakness unique to the Roman congregation but rather the difficulty common to all sinful human beings in comprehending the truth of God. Sin has produced a weakness of understanding



“The Return of the Prodigal” by J. James Tissot

generally and an inherent resistance to spiritual truth particularly (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16). The NIV appropriately translates the Greek “*sarx*” (literally - “*flesh*”) as “*natural selves.*”

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body...” - The slavery analogy is used again as Paul urges his readers to serve their new master with the same single-minded dedication that they once served their former master. The language here closely resembles vs.13. Before coming the faith **“you used to offer the parts of your body to impurity and ever increasing wickedness.”** The two powerful nouns “**impurity**” (Greek - “*akatharsia*” - moral impurity and uncleanness, particularly sexual immorality) and “**wickedness**” (Greek - “*anomia*” - lawlessness and rebellion) combine to provide a comprehensive picture of the grim reality of sin. Lenski writes:

“All sin is filthiness even as all sin is lawlessness. We don not have a division of sin into two sections but two aspects of sin. Sin is abominable; it reeks and stinks as does filth; and at the same time it is rebellion, anarchy, a challenge to law. Imagine giving one's own bodily members as slaves to such a power! Too often we hide this horribleness from ourselves and shudder at it only when it reveals itself stark and naked in some fearful crime. Learn from Paul what this tyrant looks like so that you will not extend even a finger to him.” (Lenski, p. 431)

Note also the emphasis on the cumulative, progressive nature of sin as **“ever**

increasing wickedness.” The Greek text literally reads: “*you have yielded your members as slaves...to wickedness unto wickedness.*” Sin builds upon itself and reinforces itself. It is a downhill path that leads to destruction.

“So now offer them in slavery to righteousness, leading to holiness.” - The second segment of the contrast closely mirrors the first. Again the slave obediently offers the members of his body to his master without reservation or hesitation. But now instead of “*impurity*” the new master is “*righteousness leading to holiness.*” The “*righteousness*” in question is the right conduct which is demanded by God, the complete opposite of all “*impurity.*” The downhill slide of sin's progression is replaced by “*holiness*” (Greek - “*hagiasmos*” from “*hagios*” which means a saint, one who has been made holy). These words are used in the New Testament to designate one who has been singled out, separated from the world and consecrated to God. While the Christian is already holy, as the result of God's decree of justification, he remains a sinner nonetheless (“*simul justus et peccator*”) and thus “*holiness*” is also a way of life in conformity with the will and character of God toward which the Christian must constantly strive. Serve your new master, Paul urges, with the same single-minded dedication with which you once served you old master. Martin Franzmann summarizes the meaning of what he calls “*the slave imperative*” in the text in this way:

“The man in whom the flesh and the spirit are still at war with each other (cf. Romans 8:12-14; Galatians 5:17), the man who still recognizes in his heart the will of disobedient Adam, the man who still must fight off the claim of sin upon his mortal body - he needs to be told that sonship means obedience for all the sons of God. For this aspect of sonship there is no better or stronger term than “slavery.” And so Paul, after he has qualified his use of the image of the slave speaks of the slave imperative; Be good slaves now to righteousness, as singly and as totally devoted to your master as when you were slaves to sin. You devoted your members, all your powers of action, to that service; render that same full-time, whole man service now to righteousness. That former service was one that defiled you, and it exhausted itself in opposition to God; it was dominated by the Satanic will of sin, which is stupid, monstrous, pure negation of all that is divine.” (Franzmann, p.118)

This characteristic New Testament approach to Christian living is dramatically different than much of the quick fix, easy, multi-step solutions popular in much of the church today. God in Christ has already done it all. He has already provided everything that is necessary for us to live as devoted slaves of our Lord. If we fail to do so it is either because we do not recognize what God has already done or we are

simply too sinful and spiritually lazy to do what God has enabled us to do. The lifestyle of the Christian is the result of what God has caused you to be. James Montgomery Boice summarizes the substance of this New Testament approach to sanctification and the Christian life in these six propositions:



“Jesus and the Rich Young Man” by Eduard Gebhardt

“1. The teaching about sanctification in verse 19-20, like the teaching in verses 11-13, is an exhortation. In fact, it is a command. 2. Being an exhortation, the command to offer our bodies to God for His purposes is something we must do. Indeed, it is something we can do... We are now able to obey God, do good works, and live righteous lives. 3. The command to yield the parts of our bodies as instruments of righteousness is based upon something that has already happened to us. That is, something that has already happened, not something that may happen, or will yet happen to us. 4. The New Testament approach to sanctification is therefore to get us to realize our position and act accordingly. The New Testament does not tell us to be what we will become. Rather, it tells us to be what we are. 5. This demand is utterly reasonable. In fact, anything contrary to it is unreasonable.

Before we were saved, we served sin; that was consistent and reasonable. But now that we are converted, it is equally reasonable that we should serve God. 6. The failures we have in trying to live a holy life are due almost entirely to our failure to realize these truths or to our laziness or sin failing to apply them to our conduct.”
(Boice, pp.)

Verses 20-23

When you were slaves to sin you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“When you were slaves to sin...” - The factual reality which is the basis for the preceding command is here repeated. We can and must serve righteousness because God has freed us from sin and made us slaves to righteousness. If this were not true it would be impossible for us to offer the members of our body in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. Before we came to faith in Christ we were completely ***“free from the control of righteousness.”***

“The sinner merely disregards the righteousness, turns his nose up at it; he feels elated not to be compelled to do this or that but to be free to throw himself into the vile arms of sin just as he pleases. Well, that is freedom, if one wants to call it by so noble a name.” (Lenski, p.432)

As Jesus said, ***“No man can serve two masters.”*** (Matthew 6:24). These are mutually exclusive alternatives. As slaves to sin we recognized no obligation to the will and Word of God. We have defiantly chosen to go our own way instead. As slaves to sin we were deaf to God's righteous demands and incapable of responding to them if even we were to hear and respect them. The power to do right and turn from the wrong is simply not present within those who have become slaves to sin.

“What benefit did you reap at that time...” - Paul demonstrates the negative destructiveness of being ***“free from the control of righteousness”*** by showing the fruits which resulted from that freedom. The NIV translates the Greek *“karpos”* (literally - *“fruit”* often used in the sense of *“result”* or *“product”*) as *“benefit.”* The

translation expresses the sense of the apostle's question well as he urges the Romans to consider whether there were any positive results from their old way of life. The agrarian origin of the word is reflected in the verb "*reap*." From their new perspective as sons and daughters of God in Christ the things which they then did are now cause for shame. The devil has always promised liberation but those who yield to his seduction find only guilt and shame (cf. Genesis 3). The end result, the ultimate destination, the outcome (Greek - "*telos*") of those shameful things is death, and that not merely death in time, but death for all eternity.

"But now that you have been set free from sin..." - The contrast to the fraudulent freedom from righteousness is now set forth. This is not freedom from righteousness but freedom from sin. The fruit of freedom from righteousness was shameful action which leads to death. The fruit of freedom from sin is "***holiness***" the outcome of which is "***eternal life***." This climactic antithesis draws the contrast as clearly as it can be drawn.

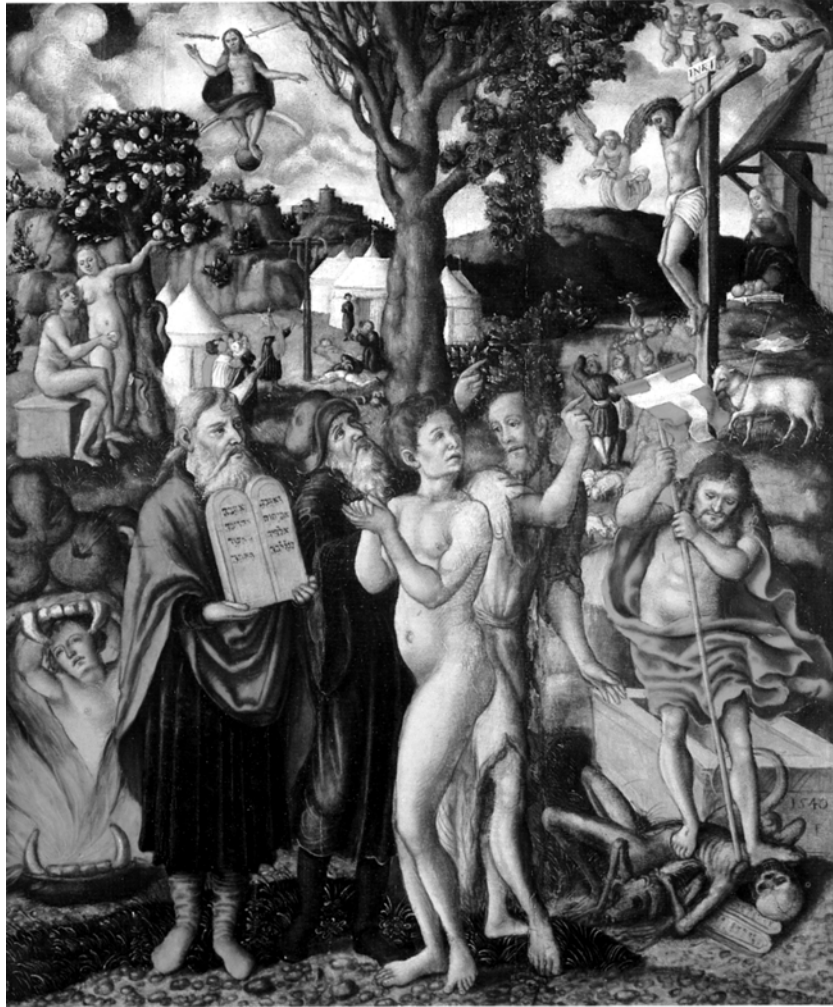
"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." - The chapter ends with this powerful summary statement which is one of the best known verses in the Bible. The verse contains three contrasts: 1. the master that is served - sin versus God; 2. the outcome of that service - death versus eternal life; and, 3. the means by which this outcome is attained - a wage earned versus a gift received. The "***death***" in the opening phrase is ultimately the eternal death and damnation of the impenitent sinner. However, the specific language of the text suggests more than this ultimate outcome. One who lives in bondage to sin need not wait for eternity to experience the deadly destructiveness of evil. The noun "***wages***" (Greek - "*opsonion*") originally referred not to the final mustering out bonus paid at the end of a victorious campaign, but to the ongoing daily food ration (literally - "*fish ration*") provided to a Roman soldier while on active duty. Thus, the "***death***" which is "***the wages of sin***" is not merely a future reality but also one which pertains to the individual's present state. This view is fully consistent Paul's earlier insistence that the wrath of God is now being poured out upon sinful rebellious mankind in the deadly downward spiral of sin's destructiveness. (cf. Romans 1:18-32). In his classic book *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Dr. Karl Menninger argues that sin is always destructive. He uses the historic "*seven deadly sins*" to demonstrate his point: pride destroys relationships; lust destroys one's personality as it weakens loyalty, undercuts trust, and destroys integrity; gluttony destroys the physical body whether it is overindulgence in food, drink or drugs; anger destroys others whether by actual

violence or words alone; sloth destroys opportunity and ambition; envy and greed destroy contentment and happiness in life. Sin pays its wages every day in misery, suffering, sorrow, and pain until the account is finally settled once and for all with eternal death. The other side of the contrast is completely different. God does not pay wages for services rendered. He offers a free gift of His undeserved love (Greek - “charisma”). This gift is given solely by grace, unearned and free. It has been bought and paid for “*in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”



“The Seven Deadly Sins” - An Illuminated Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien

Romans Chapter 7



“Law and Gospel” by Franz Timmermann - 1540

Introduction

*"Paul has drawn a hard line of division between the Gospel and the Law. The saving revelation of the righteousness of God is a revelation **"apart from law"** (3:21); a man is justified by the faith which the Gospel creates in him **"apart from works of law"** (3:28; cf. 3:20). The Law is not, as Paul's Jewish contemporaries believed and asserted, a power for salvation; its working and effect is negative and destructive, the very opposite of the working of the Gospel. The Law, far from saving the Jew, indicts him; it stops all mouths and makes all men accountable to God (3:19). Through the Law, sin becomes an experienced, full reality in the life of man (3:20). The Law, therefore, **"brings wrath"** (4:15). The Law cannot stop the trespass of Adam, which flood-like sweeps all acres of mankind; rather, the Law only increases the trespass (5:20). Every statement Paul makes concerning the actual working of the Law, its effect on the life and fate of man, is a negative one.*

This no to the Law comes to a climax in Chapter 6: "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law..." (6:14). Here liberation from sin and liberation from Law are put into the closest possible relationship; the one is not possible without the other. Now, the statement that a life lived to God in full and unbroken devotion is possible only if the dominion of sin over man be overcome is clear and understandable; there is an evident religious logic in it. But liberation from the Law seems to be quite another matter. Why must a man be liberated from the Law in order to become a new creature who does the will of God? For the Law has, for Paul, too, a high a positive content and a profound significance. Paul was not being ironic when he said that the Jew had in the Law "the embodiment of knowledge and truth" (2:20). According to Paul, the Jew is doomed because he has sinned "under the law" (2:12), and the Gentile is accountable before God because God has inscribed upon his heart "what the law requires" (2:15) "Doers of the law" will be justified on that day when God judges the secrets of men (2:13,16). The Law is a word of the living God, the revelation of His will. It therefore bears witness in its own way to the righteousness of God now manifested in Christ (3:21); and the proclaimers of the Gospel can say, "We uphold the Law" (3:31). To the original question, "Why must man be liberated from the Law?" - there is added the second question - "How can man be liberated from the Law, the express and uttered will of God? Who dares to set the Law aside?" Paul deals with these two questions in chapter 7." (Franzmann, pp. 119-121)

Verses 1 -3

Do you not know, brothers - for I am speaking to men who know the law - that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies,, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

"Do you not know, brothers..." - The apostle appeals to truth that is self-evident and familiar to his readers. The members of the congregation at Rome are here described for only the second time in the epistle (cf. 1:13) as "**brothers**" (Greek - "*adelphoi*") to emphasize his fraternal affection for them and his close relationship with them. Lenski notes: "*With "brethren," and then "my brethren" Paul puts his arm around the Roman Christians in order to draw as near to them as possible with the great assurance that the justified are indeed delivered from the law.*" (Lenski, p.443) The reference is not specifically to Jewish Christians, but to all of the members of the Roman congregation.

"For I am speaking to men who know the law." - The noun "**law**" ("*nomos*")

in the Greek does not include a definite article. Thus the reference is not specifically to the Mosaic Law but to law in general, to whatever is of the nature of law. The principle which is enunciated here applies in every legal system, not merely among the Jews. The NIV's translation is somewhat misleading. We might paraphrase the apostle's words: *"I am addressing people who understand law and how a legal system operates."*

"That the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives." - The rabbinic maxim, which Paul may have had specifically in mind in this verse, was *"That the law rules over a person only so long as he or she lives."* This principle, however, was clearly not unique to Judaism. *"Paul intends to use an ordinary example taken from the general field of law, and the point of this example is one that everyone who knows anything at all about law understands, namely, that all law and every law relinquishes its control at the time of death."* (Lenski, p.442) It is also significant to note that the verb used in this phrase ***"has authority"*** (Greek - *"kyrieuein"* - *"to be the lord of"* or *"to rule over"*) is the same word that was used in reference to the rule of sin (6:9) and the rule of death (6:14). Thus the law is associated with these other two dark lords and their baneful influence of fallen mankind and becomes a part of the threesome that tyrannizes human existence apart from Christ.

"For example, by law a married woman..." - Paul illustrates the general principle with a specific example from the law of Moses. Lenski notes the appropriateness of the chosen example:

"And from the countless examples that offer themselves Paul selects one that serves his purpose best, for it is itself so clear and matches so well the spiritual reality which he wants to put into the right light. Additional examples might also have been cited; one is, of course, enough. The only point to be noted is that the application which Paul wants to make requires an example in which the pertinent law concerns two closely connected persons, not merely one person; upon the death of one of these two persons who are bound together by law the control of that law automatically ends." (Lenski, p. 443)

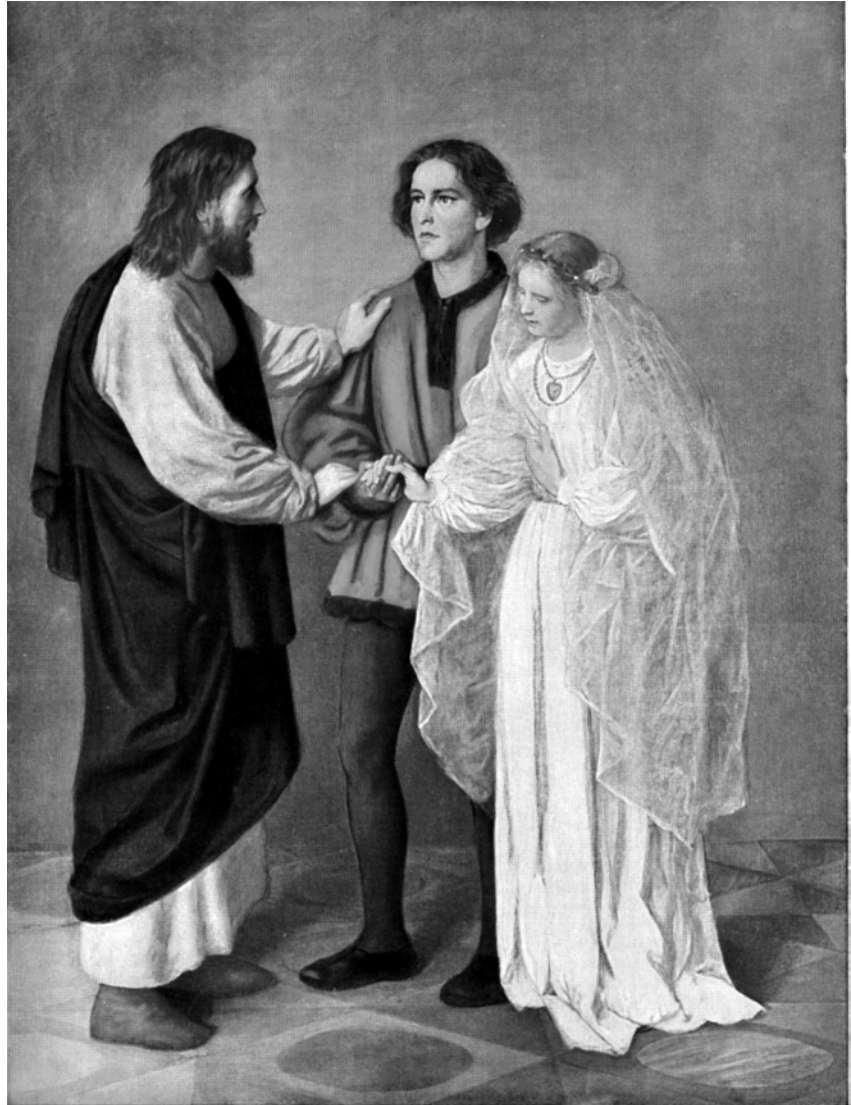
The Hebrew law of marriage does indeed provide an effective illustration of the point. The example of the ***"married woman"*** is used because the wife's situation illustrates the point more clearly. In Jewish society the rules of marriage strongly favored the husband. The wife was, in fact, more bound to her husband than he

was bound to her. It was possible for the husband to end the marriage by simply handing his wife a bill of divorcement. That alternative was not open to the woman. She was ***“bound to her husband as long as he is alive.”*** However, the death of the husband terminates that obligation. The Greek text literally says - *“she is separated from the law relating to her husband.”* Lenski suggests the helpful translation - *“she stands discharged from the law regarding the husband.”* His death sets her free from the legal obligation which applied as long as he remained alive. She is no longer bound by that law. As the result of death the wife is placed in an entirely new status in regard to the law. That is precisely the apostle's point; death terminates the obligation and force of law.

“So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive...”

- Verse 3 restates and sharpens the point. From the perspective of Hebrew law a wife belonged to her husband; she was his property. The NIV's translation, ***“if she marries another man,”*** is

correct although the Greek literally says *“if she becomes another man's”* (*“ginomai andri”*). This is typical Old Testament language and reflect's a property perspective on marriage. A woman who entered into a second bigamous marriage while her marriage to her first husband remained in effect would certainly be



“The Wedding at Cana” by Eduard Gebhardt, 1905

labeled “*an adulteress.*” As long as her husband remained alive she was subject to the law which bound her to him.

These verses are sometimes used to prove that remarriage after divorce is improper as long as the original spouse remains alive. That issue will have to be decided on the basis of other passages. This text does not refer to divorce in any way and thus does not address the question of remarriage after divorce.

“But if her husband dies, she is released from that law...” - All this is ended the moment the husband dies. The obligation of the law is annulled and she is free to marry again without stigma or criticism. Death terminates the obligation and the force of the law. The law has not been changed; it simply no longer applies to her.

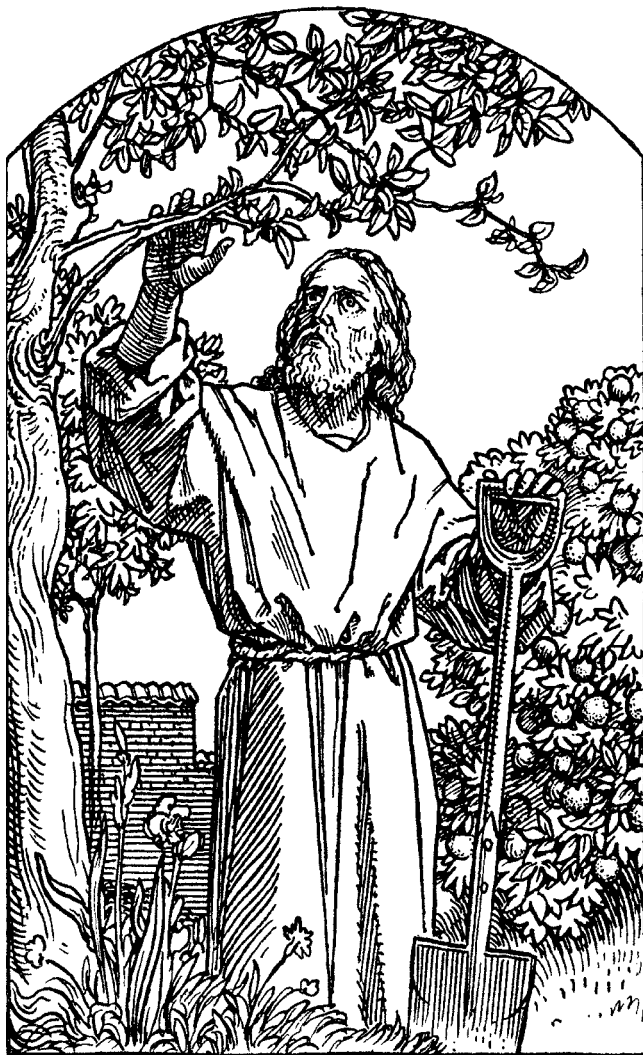
Verse 4

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

“So, my brothers, you also died...” - The transition to the application of Paul's illustration is signaled by the conjunction “**So**” (Greek - “*hote*” - literal - “*and so*”). The repetition of the fraternal “**my brothers**” serves to make the point more personal and powerful. In 6:14 Paul had asserted: “**You are not under law but under grace.**” God's people in Christ are no longer subject to the demands of the law and its threat of damnation. The necessity for us to attempt to earn our own salvation has been eliminated. Jesus satisfied the law's demands in our place. The apostle now returns to that central point through the use of his illustration. The death of the woman's husband freed her from the obligation of the law so that she could marry another. In the same way, we too have been set free by a death, namely the death of Christ on the cross, so that we might also “**belong to another,**” namely “**to him who was raised from the dead.**” John MacArthur summarizes:

“Salvation brings a complete change in spiritual relationship, just as remarriage after the death of a spouse brings a complete change in marital relationship. Believers are no longer married to the law, but are now married to Jesus Christ, the divine bridegroom of his church.” (MacArthur, p.361)

The verb *“you also died”* is aorist passive in the Greek. The aorist tense indicates the completion of the action in the past. The passive voice emphasizes that this is God's action on our behalf. It is not something the believer does for himself. We might translate the word *“you were made to die.”* Through our participation in the death of Christ (cf. 6:3-8) we were set free from the curse and damning power of the law. Although it is by His death that Christ sets us free, yet the Christ to whom we may now belong is not dead but alive. This is absolutely essential if we are to truly belong to Him. Thus the apostle's reference here to the resurrection - *“to him who was raised from the dead.”* The resurrection demonstrates the sufficiency of His redemptive death for the sins of the world. Lenski aptly notes:



“That We Might Bear Fruit to God”
by Rudolf Schäfer

“To a Christ who died and remained dead one could belong only ideally in memory, not actually and really; such a belonging would be like the widow's memory of her dead husband. But Christ was raised up and dies no more (vs.10) and to Him we belong in fullest actuality.” (Lenski, p.449)

“In order that we might bear fruit to God.” - There is divine purpose involved in all of this. We have been liberated from the law and live under grace so that we might now live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died and rose for us. *“No such life is possible under the law, for the law cannot transform our flesh. The Law cannot make sons of God out of sons of Adam.”* (Franzmann, p.123) This transformed life is always productive. It never fails *“to bear fruit to God.”* Paul's imagery shifts from marriage to agriculture. Douglas Moo notes: *“Our new relationship with Christ enables us - and requires us - to produce those character traits, thoughts, and actions that will be for God's glory.”*

(Moo, p.418) That which was coerced and compelled under the harsh dominion of law is now rendered freely and joyfully as the natural, inevitable result of what we have become in Christ.

Verses 5-6

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature...” - The contrast between what we once were apart from Christ and what we have now become by faith in Him serves to indicate the significance of having been set free from the Law. Paul characterizes the pre-Christian condition as being ***“controlled by the sinful nature.”*** The NIV offers a paraphrase at this point which, while basically accurate, goes somewhat beyond the original text. The Greek merely says *“when we were in the flesh”* (*“hote gar hemen en te sarki”*). Paul uses the term flesh (*“sarx”*) in a variety of ways. It can refer simply to that which is physical (2 Corinthians 4:11; Galatians 4:14; Colossians 2:1) and it sometimes carries the connotation of human weakness (Romans 7:18; 8:3). It is also used in a strongly negative way to describe the natural condition of sinful human beings in hostility and opposition to God (Romans 8:8,9; Philemon 16). James Dunn summarizes the usage of the term in this way:

“The precise weighting of the physical and moral meaning of the term “flesh” is dependent on the context. It always carries some negative overtone - sometimes stronger, sometimes less strong, flesh almost always denoting the weakness and corruptibility of the creature which distances him from the Creator.” (Dunn, p. 363)

Apart from Christ, the human being is dominated by ***“the sinful passions aroused by the law that were at work in our bodies.”*** The use of the noun ***“passions”*** (Greek - *“pathemata”*) is instructive. Most often the term refers to suffering or misfortune however it may also be used in the sense of emotion, feeling, or affection. The addition of the adjective ***“sinful”*** provides the negative connotation and emotion becomes passion (cf. Galatians 5:24). The unreliability and volatility of human emotion makes them susceptible to manipulation and temptation. *“A life ruled by or lived chiefly on the level of the emotions is almost certain to be a tool manipulated*

by sin." (Dunn, p. 364) The power of our emotions to move and motivate, sweeping aside all reason and restraint, will often necessarily lead to sin. These "*sinful passions*" are "*at work in our bodies.*" Fitzmyer explains the reference as "*the propensity to sin following upon strong sensory impressions.*" (Fitzmyer, p. 459) The law also plays a critical role here as it serves to "*arouse*" these "*sinful passions.*" Paul had earlier affirmed the close connection between sin and the law. The law reveals sin (Romans 3:20) and intensifies sin by turning it into transgression



"The Triumph of Death by Michael Wohlgemut - 1493

(Romans 5:20). But now the apostle goes even further as he indicates that the law actually produces sin itself. "*The law, in setting forth God's standard, arouses sins by stimulating human beings' innate rebelliousness against God.*" (Moo, p. 420) Lenski concurs: "*Set up the law over unregenerate men, and not only their lusts but also their passions, as it irritated thereby, become the more active. The law seems to stir the fire so as to make the flames flare up in the fagots.*" (Lenski, p.453)

"So that we bore fruit for death." - In Verse 4 we were told that we have died to the law "*in order that we might bear fruit to God.*" Those who remain under the law's dominion also bear fruit for their master, death. The noun "*death*"

appears in the Greek text with the definite article (“*to thanato*” - literally “*the death*”) to present death as a personification, a power ruling over man in this era. This grim figure stands parallel to and as the opposite of God. Lenski explains the stark contrast in this way: “*To bear fruit for God is to lay good works at His feet for His glory and His honor; to bear fruit for “the death,” e.g. for the power of eternal death, is to make this death our god in subservience to bring sins and crimes as offerings to him, to glorify this monster.*” (Lenski, p. 453)

“But now, by dying to what once bound us...” - The theme of liberation from the coercive power of the law now comes to the fore once again. Paul reiterates his argument from the opening verses of the chapter: by participating in the death of Christ we have been released from the law which once bound us, since the obligation of law is terminated by death. The language in this phrase closely follows the original statement of the position. The Greek text literally reads: “*But now we have been discharged from the law in having died to that in which we were being held fast.*” The tremendous change that occurs in the life of one who has come to faith in Jesus Christ is indicated with the two little words “**But now**” (Greek -“*nuni de*”). Leaving behind the kingdom of law and death we proceed on into the realm of grace and life. We have been set free for service - “**so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.**” This recalls the preceding chapter's insight that no human being is a free agent either we serve God in Christ or we serve sin, death, and the law. The language of the text is emphatic. The Greek verb “*douleuo*” does not describe the voluntary service of a hired worker who is able to refuse and order and look for another employer if he so desires. It refers exclusively to the service of a slave, whose sole purpose for existence is to obey the will of his master. This service is not optional. It is the necessary and inescapable result of faith in Christ. The contrast here is between serving “**in the new way of the Spirit**” and serving “**in the old way of the written code.**” This is the second time in the Epistle that Paul has contrasted between the Spirit and the letter of the law (cf. 2:27-29). The coerced minimum compliance of “**the old way of the written code**” is the exact opposite of “**the new way of the Spirit**” in which the believer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, joyfully and eagerly responds to the undeserved love of God in Christ. The Christian serves God and obeys His will not out of fear but out of love - not because he has to in order to avoid damnation, but because he wants to in grateful response to the salvation that God has given him as a free gift in Jesus Christ. The law which had been only a slavish master threatening death and hell now becomes the helpful guide which shows us the way our loving heavenly Father would have us live. The end result of this transformation is not lawlessness and chaos but willing obedience



"The Prophet Jeremiah"
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

that goes far beyond legalistic minimum compliance. As the prophet Jeremiah had promised centuries earlier:

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."(Jeremiah31:31-34)

Verses 7-8

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead.

"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?" - In the preceding verses Paul has drawn a close parallel between sin and the law. We died to sin, and we died to the law (6:2;7:4); we died to sin to enable us to walk in newness of life, and we died

to the law so that we might serve in the new life of the Spirit (6:4;7:6); death has set us free both from the claim of sin and the claim of the law (6:7;7:6). Sin and the law appear to be so closely interrelated that one might wonder whether they are in fact identical. Is the law, in itself, sinful and evil? Paul is well aware that this is exactly what his enemies have charged.

"Should Paul hold such a view, he would effectively destroy any continuity between the law and his gospel, between the OT and the NT, between Moses and Christ. Indeed, many Jews and Jewish Christians accused Paul of holding just such an opinion. Paul is undoubtedly aware that such charges against him have reached the ears of the Roman Christians; so, to prepare the way for his visit and the enlistment of the Romans in his missionary efforts, he seeks here to dispel any such apprehensions." (Moo, p. 432)

That concern is now addressed as Paul presents Scripture's clearest elaboration of the manner in which the law works. His immediate response to the question "***Is the law sin?***" is a most emphatic "***Certainly not!***" But a simple denial is not sufficient at this point; further explanation is needed.

"Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law." - Sin and the law are not identical, the law is a power absolutely opposed to sin. But the law is intimately related to sin and may, in fact, be the catalyst that brings sin about. While sin and the law are in opposition to one another, sin would not be what it is if the law did not exist. In 3:20 Paul had asserted: "***Through the law we become conscious of sin.***" (cf. also 4:15; 5:13) That assertion is now repeated and defined. The sentence begins with the Greek conjunction "*alla*" which the NIV translates as "***Indeed.***" The term is usually adversative and may be translated as "*but*" or "*on the contrary.*" In this instance, however, it is restrictive, and might be translated "*although it is true that.*" While Paul denies that sin and the law are the same thing, he is acknowledging that there is a close relationship between them. The apostle makes his point through the use of an illustration from his own personal experience.

"I would not have known..." Paul's words become a form of personal confession and yet they are much more than that for the apostle's experience is in no way unique. Instead, they are - as the great Lutheran theologian Heinrich Bornkamm notes - "*a confession in which the history of man and my way into lostness and death are portrayed.*" The law brings about knowledge of sin. It defines, identifies, and

unmasks sin as it reveals the righteous standards of the holy God. Of course, every human being has the natural law written in his heart and hears the witness of conscience (2:15). But the law reveals the full power and depravity of sin, and in the face of that revelation sin escalates into **“transgression”** which carries the added connotation of deliberate disobedience and rebellion to a specific command of God (cf. Romans 4:15).

"Paul does not mean that it is only through the law that a human being comes to know right and wrong; it is, rather, that the law brings it about that sin is unmasked as a transgression of the will of God. Sin would not have become the power that it is in human life, if it were not for the law and the knowledge of sin that it brought into being." (Fitzmyer, p.466)



“For I would not have known what it was to covet...” - Paul uses the climax of the Ten Commandments and its prohibition of coveting as his specific example (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Coveting, the sinful desire of the heart, is an apt example of the apostle's point. Every sinful action begins with sinful desire (cf. Matthew 15:18-20). King Ahab coveted his neighbor Naboth's vineyard. That sinful desire led to falsehood, conspiracy and murder (1 Kings 21). The deadly pattern always begins in the depths of man's sinful heart. Martin Franzmann summarizes the apostle's thought on this dimension of the role of the law very nicely.

"It was the law with its "You shall not covet." that was the occasion of his coveting. The prohibition set the object of his coveting sharp and clear and bright before the window of his soul. He then looked full upon forbidden fruit and saw that it was good; then he was led to the pit of the contorted self-seeking of his desire against the will of God."

“Thou Shalt Not Covet”
Catechism Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer - 1927 (Franzmann, p. 125)

“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment...” - The law itself is not sin but the law provides the occasion for sin. The word **“opportunity”** (Greek - **“aphormen”**) is used in a military context to describe a **“bridgehead”** or a **“base of operations”** from which the army may then proceed to operate. This may be a helpful way to understand the term in this context of our battle with sin. Sin seizes **“the opportunity afforded by the commandment,”** it uses the law as its own henchman to achieve its own purpose.



“Allegory of Law and Gospel” by Hans Holbein

Sinful man's inherent inclination to rebellion and defiance are enlisted as powerful motivations. *“The law is the footstep of God upon the grass that rouses the serpent sleeping there to life.”* (Franzmann, p. 125) **“Apart from the law, sin is dead,”** that is to say, the power of sin is relatively dormant and inactive until it is stirred to its full fury by the commands and prohibitions of the law. John Bunyan

illustrates the point effectively in his classic allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. He presents the human heart as a large, empty, dust-covered room. Christian enters the room and has no problem staying there until another man comes in with a broom, representing the law of God, and begins to sweep. The dust swirls up and fills the room making it impossible for Christian to breathe. That's just the way law works. It agitates and stirs up sin, but it cannot remove that sin. That can be accomplished by the Gospel alone.

Verses 9-11

Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life, actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me and through the commandment put me to death.

“Once I was alive apart from the law...” - The apostle now presents his own personal spiritual odyssey to illustrate his point about the role of the law. At the beginning, he says, ***“I was alive apart from the law.”*** The commentators argue endlessly as to what specific time in his life Paul has in mind in this phrase. Those who seek to identify a particular chronological sequence within Paul's biography have missed the point of the passage. In classic Lutheran theology, our dogmaticians distinguish between three different categories of personal response to the law, the state of security (*status securitas*), the state of being under the law (*status sub lege*), and the state of regeneration (*status regenerationis*). This is exactly the kind of distinction that Paul is making in this verse. Like most people, Paul began in the *status securitas*, comfortable and at ease with no awareness of his own sin and sinfulness. This false sense of security is often the result of ignorance of the law and its demands, or an acquiescence to worldly ideas of morality which hush the conscience. However, just as often, and this may well have been the case for Paul, this false sense of security is the result of hypocritical self-righteousness which finds its reassurance in the judgmental condemnation of the sins of others. At some undefined moment in Paul's life this false sense of security came crashing down beneath the thunder of the law. The text simply says ***“the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died.”*** His security, his confidence, his peace of mind were destroyed - he was in fatal bondage to death. The verb tenses are aorist indicating action fully completed in the past. Now the demands of the law relentlessly burdened Paul's conscience. Now he lived within the realm of death.



“The Chief Priests Conspire Together” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

He struggled to earn God's favor without success. He battled against temptation, and the harder he tried the more painfully aware of his own failure he became. As a devout adherent of Judaism, the irony of the situation was not lost to him. The very law which the rabbis exalted as Israel's greatest treasure had become a curse and a burden for him. Instead of the promise of life, it brought only despair and death - ***“I found that the very commandment which was intended to bring life actually brought death.”*** Paul's response to his predicament was like that of some many other conscientious legalists both before and after him. He tried harder and harder. His efforts to obey and earn God's favor became frantic and desperate. But try as he might, he could not escape from the realm of death. The fanatic dedication which he displayed in burning fervor to stamp out and destroy the new Christian religion are evidence of his plight (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1,3; 9:1-2). Sin is the servant of Satan, the Father of the Lie. It always uses deception and falsehood to achieve its ends. ***“For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.”*** The fruit becomes more attractive because it is forbidden. Sin's consequences are denied and concealed and only the

allure of the forbidden fruit remains. "You shall not die. Your eyes will be opened. You will be like God." the serpent hissed. It is a deception as old as Eden when the devil used God's command to separate mankind from God:

"The sin power still uses the commandment to deceive and to slay us when it stirs up lust, desire, and all manner of sin in us and destroys our false security...The commandment is lyingly made to appear as a disagreeable obstacle to the gratification of our desires, to our free self-expression, to living our own lives. Forbidden fruits are sweet, and the commandment which forbids them is thus used as an impetus by the sin power to make us reach out for these fruits just because they are forbidden. Hid from us by the lying deception are the consequences, that once tasted, these fruits turn to ashes in our mouth, or that we can escape the bitter results as little as all the millions that have tried it, or that we can atone for our passions by doing some good." (Lenski, p. 468)

Paul's "*status sub lege*" came to an abrupt end on the Damascus when Christ personally called him to be an apostle. The crushing burden of the law was lifted from his shoulders and he became the great apostle of grace. He had finally come to the "*status regenerationis*," the state of regeneration. Robert Murray McCheyne, a 19th century English Christian who came to Christ late in life, wrote an eloquent poem which described his own spiritual odyssey through these three states. He named the poem "*Jehovah Tsidkenu*," a Hebrew title for God which means "*the Lord our Righteousness*." (MacArthur, pp. 375-376)

*"I once was a stranger to grace and to God, I knew not my danger and felt not my load;
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree, Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.*

*I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage, Isaiah's wild measure and John's simple page;
But e'en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree, Jehovah Tsidkenu seemed nothing to me.*

*Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll, I wept when the waters went over His soul,
Yet thought not that my sins had nailed to the tree, Jehovah Tsidkenu - twas nothing to me.*

*When free grace awoke me with light from on high, then legal fears hook me, I trembled to die;
No refuge, no safety in self could I see - Jehovah Tsidkenu, my Savior must be.*

*My terrors all vanished before the sweet name; My guilty fear banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free - Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.*

*Jehovah Tsidkenu! My Treasure and Boast, Jehovah Tsidkenu, I ne'er can be lost;
In Thee shall I conquer by flood and by field - My Cable, my Anchor, my Breastplate, my Shield!*

*Even treading the valley, the shadow of death, This watchword shall rally my faltering breath;
For while from life's fever my God sets me free, Jehovah Tsidkenu my death song shall be."*

Verses 12-13

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

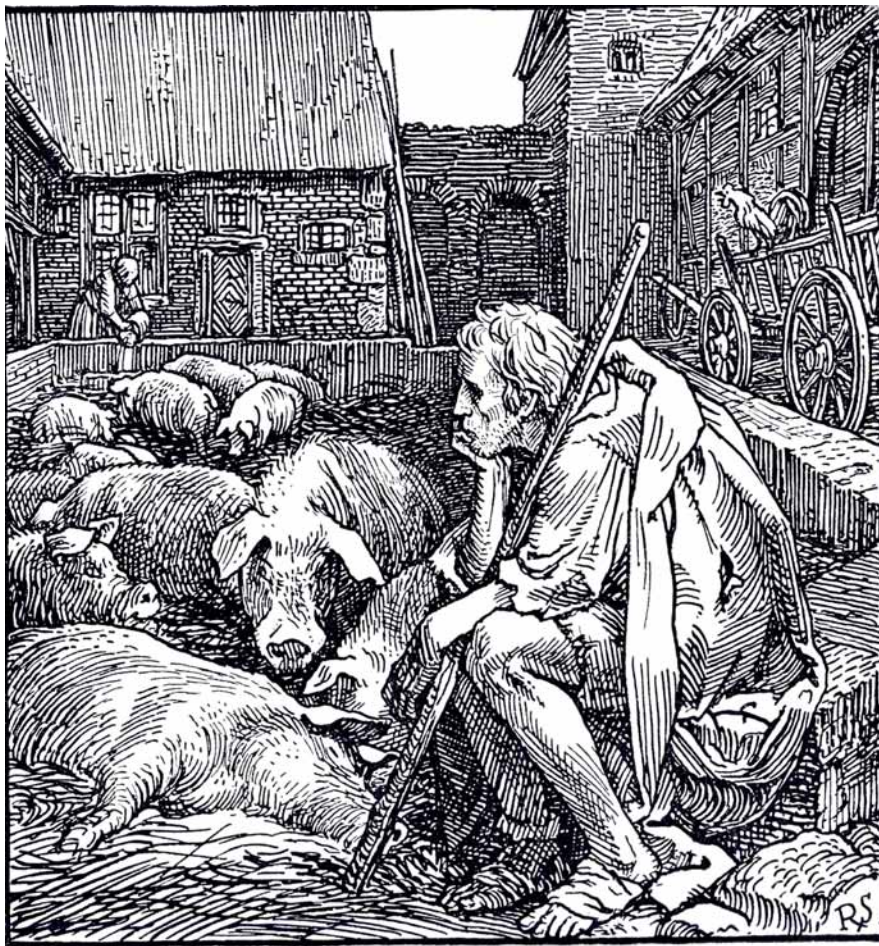
"So then, the law is holy..". - The Law of God remains ***"holy, righteous, and good"*** whatever unholy uses sin may put it to. The apostle now returns to his original question, ***"Is the law sin?"*** (vs. 7). The answer is still an emphatic "No!" The law is the divine revelation of God's holy will. As God is holy, so also His law must be holy. The law bears the imprint of its author. In and of itself the law is good. It has been perverted to serve as *"the innocent cat's paw of sin"* (Moo, p. 440) In his classic commentary on Romans D. Martin Lloyd-Jones lists nine ways that sin seeks to deceive us and distort the purpose of the law:

"1. Sin gets us to misuse the law, convincing us that as long as we have not sinned outwardly and visibly, we are all right, forgetting that with God the thoughts and intentions of the heart are all important. 2. Sometimes sin changes its tactics and tells us that everything is hopeless and we might as well keep on sinning. 3. Sin tells us that it does not matter whether or not we are holy. It says, Why don't you keep on sinning so that grace may abound? 4. Sin deceives us by making us angry at the law, feeling that God is against us if he prohibits anything. If he were for us, we think, he would let us do what we want to do and be happy. 5. Sin gets us to believe that the law is unreasonable, impossible, and unjust. 6. Sin makes us think very highly of ourselves. It makes us ask why we should be bound to any law at all. 7. Sin tells us that the law is oppressive, keeping us from developing the wonderful gifts and talents we have within us, all of which would emerge if only we were not being held back by God's commandments. 8. Sin makes righteousness look drab and unattractive. 9. Sin causes us to discount the consequences of willful disobedience...It says that the most preposterous idea in the whole world is hell, forgetting that the Lord Jesus spoke of hell more than anyone else in the Bible." (Boice, p. 745)

The list of potential abuses is certainly not exhaustive. But no matter how numerous the abuses may be the fact remains that the law of God is in itself ***"holy, righteous, and good."*** John Murray offers the following careful definition of the meaning of each of these three important adjectives:

"As "holy" the commandment reflects the transcendence and purity of God and demands of us the correspondent consecration and purity; as "righteous" it reflects the equity of God and exacts of us in its demand and sanction nothing but that which is equitable; as "good" it promotes man's highest well-being and thus expresses the goodness of God." (Murray, p. 253)

"Did that which is good, then, become death for me?" - The good law and the deadly power of sin seemed to coincide in the life of St. Paul. Was it, then, God's law that became the death-bringer? The denial of this blasphemous possibility is again most emphatic - **"By no means!"** Even as sin uses the law, the ultimate purpose of God is still being carried out. Although manipulated by sin, the law has not been removed from the power or purpose of God. **"But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful."** The law cannot save but it can uncover the grim reality of sin.



in man, sin is unmasked as what sin really is, as total opposition to the goodness of God, as utter negation of all that is divine, as the Satanically monstrous will that wills to ruin the creation of God..." (Franzmann, p. 127) The real culprit in the human predicament is not law but sin. The demands of the law force sin to show its real colors. The phrase **"utterly sinful"** (Greek - *"kath' hyperbolen"*) is a familiar idiom used to express excess or

"The Repentance of the Prodigal" by Rudolf Schäfer

extraordinary quality, to carry a concept to its absolute extreme. Our English word “*hyperbole*” which refers to extreme exaggeration comes from the same Greek word. Sin is to be revealed in all of its deadly ugliness, with every bit of its malignant destructiveness. The Devil is the great Deceiver, the lie, his stock in trade (cf. John 8:42-45; 2 Corinthians 11:14). It carefully conceals the reality of sin and its consequences beneath endless layers of deception and falsehood. The law strips away this meticulously constructed facade to uncover the festering monster as it truly is. In the Lutheran Confessions, Martin Luther sums up the proper use of the law and the most common abuses of the law in this way:

"Here we hold that the law was given by God, first, to restrain sin by threats and the dread of punishment, and by the promise and offer of grace and benefit. But all this miscarried on account of the wickedness which sin has wrought in man. For thereby a part were rendered worse, those, namely, who are hostile to the law, because it forbids what they like to do and enjoins what they do not like to do. Therefore, wherever they can escape punishment, they do more against the law than before. These, then, are the rude and wicked men who do evil wherever they have the opportunity. The rest become blind and arrogant, and conceive the opinion that they observe and can observe the law by their own powers, as has been said above concerning the scholastic theologians; thence come the hypocrites and false saints. But the chief office or force of the law is that it reveal original sin with all its fruits and show man how very low his nature has fallen and has become utterly corrupted; as the law must tell man that he has no God nor regards God, and worships other gods, a matter which before and without the law he would not have believed. In this way he become terrified, is humbled, desponds, despairs, and anxiously desires aid, but sees no escape; he begins to be an enemy of God and to murmur. This is what Paul says, Romans 4, 15; "The law worketh wrath." And Romans 5, 20; "Sin is increased by the law." (SA, III, II)

The law cannot save, but it plays a crucial role in salvation nonetheless. It makes man aware of his desperate need for a Savior and his absolute dependence upon the undeserved love of God. Charles Hodge correctly notes:

"Conviction of sin, that is, an adequate knowledge of its nature, and a sense of its power over us, is an indispensable part of evangelical religion. Before the Gospel can be embraced as a means of deliverance from sin, we must feel that we are involved in corruption and misery." (Hodge, p. 226)

Thus the law and the gospel are designed by God to work together and the proper distinction between them must be carefully maintained.

"Yet God sends his holy, righteous, and good law and reveals the sin power for what it is for an ultimate purpose of his own, the one connected with his gospel. He never sends the law alone but always in addition to the gospel in order that contrition may be wrought and with it faith and thereby the sinner be saved."
(Lenski, p.472)

Verses 14-20

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil that I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

"We know that the law is spiritual..." - Paul now probes the matter more deeply. The problem is not with the law, but with human beings themselves. The problem lies within the very makeup of what we have become as sinful men. Again, the apostle personalizes the argument by using his own personal experience as the example. This is an awkward text both for those who would minimize sin's corruption (Pelegians and Semi-pelegians) and for those who elevate sanctification over justification and hold out the possibility of moral perfection (Pietists). This passage is cited by Luther as the classic expression of the fact that every believer is a saint and a sinner at the same time (*"simul justus et peccator"*). It is quoted repeatedly in the Lutheran Confessions.

"And in Christians this repentance continues until death, because, through the entire life it contends with the sin remaining in the flesh, as Paul (Romans 7:14-25) testifies that he wars with the law in his members, etc.; and that, not by his own powers, but by the gift of the Holy Ghost that follows the remission of sins."
(SA, III, III, p.489)

"However, believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely; for although their sin is covered by the perfect obedience of Christ, so that it is not imputed to believers for condemnation, and also the mortification of the Old Adam and the renewal in the spirit of their mind is begun through the Holy Ghost, nevertheless,

the Old Adam clings to them still in their nature and all its internal and external powers. Of this the apostle has written in Romans 7:18ff.” (FCSD, V, p. 965)

“God's Word testifies that the intellect, heart, and will of the natural, unregenerate man in divine things are not only turned entirely away from God, but also turned and perverted against God to every evil; also that he is not only weak, incapable, unfit, and dead to good, but also is so lamentably perverted, infected, and corrupted by original sin, that he is entirely evil, perverse, and hostile to God by his disposition and nature, and that he is exceedingly strong, alive, and active with respect to everything that is displeasing to God. (Genesis 8:28; Jeremiah 17:9; and Galatians 5:17 are cited along with Romans 7:14,18,23) Now if in St. Paul and in other regenerate men, the natural or carnal free will even after regeneration strives against God's Law, it will be much more obstinate and hostile to God's Law and will before regeneration.” (FCSD, II, p. 887)



“The Restoration of the Prodigal” by Rudolf Schäfer

The struggle which Paul describes in these verses is the sum and substance of the Christian life, a daily process of contrition, repentance, and forgiveness, as our sinful nature strives against our new man. Should that struggle cease this side of heaven we may safely assume that it is not the old Adam which has surrendered and been destroyed. Dr. Herman Preus offers this insightful analysis of the crucial role of the “*simul justus et peccator*” concept in the theology of Martin Luther:

“Righteous, justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, I am still a sinner. But I am a forgiven sinner, a sinner clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Simul justus et peccator (at the same time righteous and a sinner) did not originate with Luther, but it has become one of the hallmarks of his pauline theology of the cross. Forgiveness is central here, as it is in the entire doctrine of justification. I am not righteous before God because I have attained to a sufficiently high moral standard of life, but because he has forgiven my sin and declared me righteous through faith in Christ which is also his gift...Simul justus et peccator is as basic to Luther's theology as the doctrine of justification itself. The Christian is righteous, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, whose righteousness, or perfect obedience is imputed to him (Romans 4:24). But he remains a sinner still, though his sin is covered through forgiveness in Christ. Original sin was not done away with in baptism. Its guilt was forgiven...This marks the struggle between the old man and the new man, the flesh and the spirit, which make up the whole man (totus homo). Parallel with man's justification, and simultaneous with it, is his regeneration. He is born again, born into the kingdom of God; he is a new man, and the Holy Spirit dwells in him. By adoption he is made a son of God. But here again, in this whole man the old nature persists, the old Adam, the flesh... This inner struggle of flesh and spirit is a paradox and a mystery. St. Paul says, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:15 RSV) For one and the same person is flesh and spirit; thus what the flesh does the whole man is said to do. And yet what resists is not the whole man, but is rightly called part of him. Both, then, are true; it is he that acts and yet it is not he. It is the mystery that our life is a life “in the midst of death.”... Luther's whole interpretation of Romans 7 thus moves in the frame of this concept of man as simul justus et peccator. It is not the old man who is sinner and the new man who is righteous. But the whole man is a sinner, yet he is wholly covered by the righteousness of Christ...Out of the whole argument emerges Luther's unique doctrine of simul justus et peccator, and here we encounter one of his best statements of the case. “The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the law and are not without sinful desires. They are like sick people in the care of a physician; they are really sick, but healthy only in hope and insofar as they begin to be better, healed, i.e., they will become healthy. Nothing can harm them as much as the presumption that they are in fact healthy, for it will cause a bad relapse.”...The



“Martin Luther” by Rudolf Schäfer

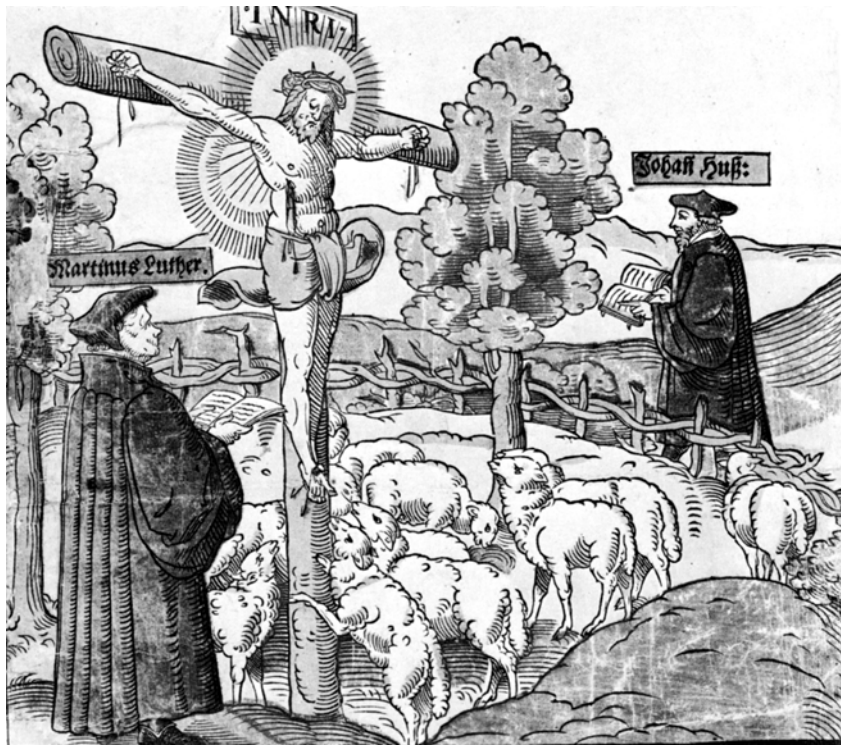
idea of imputation appears as central in the doctrine of simul justus et peccator, as it is central in the whole doctrine of justification. The Christian is a sinner, but the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him and thus covers his sin. So he is a sinner indeed, but a forgiven sinner, hence righteous by imputation. "For inasmuch as the saints are always aware of their sin and implore God for the merciful gift of his righteousness, they are for this very reason always reckoned righteous by God. Therefore, they are before themselves and in truth unrighteous,

but before God they are righteous because he reckons them so on account of this confession of their sin. By virtue of the reckoning of a merciful God they are righteous; they are knowingly righteous and knowingly unrighteous, sinners in fact but righteous in hope... Simul justus et peccator, the fact that a Christian is at the same time both sinner and righteous, is undoubtedly one of the brightest spots in Luther's theology. When a Christian really gets hold of this fact, he will find himself in possession of a theology on which and by which he can live day by day in what the psalmist calls "the joy of thy salvation." But there may be a need for a caveat at this point. Simul justus et peccator - this is no static doctrine. I find rest and comfort in it, but I do not go to sleep on it. God still calls me to Christian living, to the fruits of faith, to the works of love. The Spirit's work of sanctification must go on. Just because my good works do not merit the pleasure of God, this is no excuse for not doing them." (Preus, 108-116 passim)

The assertion that ***“the law is spiritual”*** is a reference to its divine origin and character. The Spirit in question is, of course, the Holy Spirit. This is consistent in Pauline usage. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 ***“spiritual words”*** are words taught by the Holy Spirit and in Verse 15 the ***“spiritual man”*** is a man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. ***“Spiritual songs”*** in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians are melodies composed by the Holy Spirit and in Colossians 1:9 ***“spiritual understanding”*** is an insight provided by God's Spirit Himself. (cf. also Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 3:1; 10:3,4; 12:1; 15:44,46; 1 Peter 2:5). This assertion is relevant in this context because of the contrast between the nature of the ***“spiritual”*** law and the ***“unspiritual”*** (Greek - *“sarkinos”* - literally *“of the flesh”*) man to whom that law is addressed. Lenski defines *“sarkinos”* in this way:

"It is the old man, the old nature, that is still in us after our conversion. As a Christian, Paul is not wholly rid of his flesh, and that is what causes this entire conflict with the spiritual law of God, which he would obey in all things, but finds himself hampered in obeying by the presence of his flesh. This is the daily experience of all of us." (Lenski, p.477)

Paul graphically describes his own natural condition as one ***“sold as a slave to sin.”*** The image here recalls 6:16-23, although it should be noted that in this instance Paul calls himself a slave to sin. In ancient times, consignment to slavery was most often the result of military conquest. The defeated soldiers and citizens of the vanquished nation were captured and sold as slaves. The image here is powerfully



“Luther and Hus as Faithful Shepherds Who Lead God’s Sheep to the Cross” - Anonymous Woodcut, 1535

appropriate. By nature, we too were defeated and taken captive by the victorious power of sin. By nature, we have been helplessly sold as slaves to a power beyond our own strength to resist.

“I do not understand what I do.” - To be sold as a slave does not imply abject unquestioning servitude, as the following verses clearly indicate. It is instead a form of *“slavery under protest, the frustrated impotence*

of one who has to live "in newness of spirit," while still "in the flesh." (Dunn, p. 389) As a new man in Christ, he desires to serve the Lord Jesus, but another power lays claim to him and unnaturally divides his loyalty. The NIV's translation of the verb **“understand”** (Greek - *“ginosko”*) lacks the focus of the original text. The word means *“to acknowledge”* or *“to recognize as my own.”* Jesus uses the same term in Matthew 7:23, **“Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you! Away from Me you evildoers!"** and in John 10:14,15 - **“I know My sheep and My sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”** The implication here is that Paul the Christian disowns his own sinful actions, even as he admits knowledge of them and responsibility for them. This is not an attempt to evade guilt but to describe the battle of wills that is raging within him. In the unregenerate man there is not struggle, no such duality. He may regret the painful consequences of sin, or may squirm before the accusations of his conscience, but his evil deeds are truly his own, an accurate expression of what he truly is. Thus the lament of the classical Roman poet Ovid, *“I perceive what is better and approve of it, but I pursue what is worse,”* although superficially similar to Paul's language, expresses an entirely different reality. Lenski defines the difference in this way:

"Sin and flesh are not found only in the physical body. In the unregenerate they are in the will and fill and dominate this completely. In the regenerate, the spirit and not the flesh dominates the will, but not perfectly, not wholly. It is the spirit that wills the good and that hates any sin. But the remnant of the old flesh that is still present ever and again interferes with the will, and it is this that makes the Christian sin in one way and another to his own grief and dismay." (Lenski, p. 478)

The classic Lutheran chorale "*Rise My Soul to Watch and Pray*" (TLH #446) by Johann Freistein expresses the tension well in its admonition:

*"Watch against thyself, my soul,
Lest with grace thou trifle;
Let not self thy thoughts control
Nor God's mercy stifle,
Pride and sin lurk within
All thy hopes to scatter
Heed not when they flatter."*

The language grows more intense in the phrase which follows. Not only does he disown these sinful actions - he hates, abhors, and detests what he is doing. ***"For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."*** To use the language of modern psychology, Paul's lament is that his moral aspiration and actual performance are not coordinated or integrated. In the case of the Christian, however, the bitter regret is all the more profound because these evil actions are a contradiction of what we have become by grace through faith in Christ. A Christian cannot be indifferent to sin, his own, or his neighbor's. The Puritan writer Thomas Watson has correctly observed: *"One of the certain signs of sanctification is an antipathy against sin... A hypocrite may leave sin, yet love it; as a serpent casts its coat but keeps its sting; but a sanctified person can say that he not only leaves sin, but loathes it."* (MacArthur, p. 380)

"And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good." - Paul clearly acknowledges the just demands of God's law. The problem is not the law; the problem is Paul's own sinful nature - ***"it is sin living in me."*** ***"The law is good"*** (Greek - *"kalos"*), that is, morally and spiritually excellent. This is a repetition of Paul's affirmation of the law in vss. 12 and 14a. Unbelievers often seek to excuse this sinfulness by attacking and rejecting the law and its moral authority. This should never be the case with the believer. John MacArthur correctly presents the spiritual dynamic at work here:

"Every true Christian has in his heart a sense of the moral excellence of God's Law. And the more mature he becomes in Christ, the more fully he perceives and lauds the law's goodness, holiness, and glory. The more profoundly he is committed to the direction of the Holy Spirit in his life, the deeper his love for the Lord Jesus becomes, the deeper his sense of God's holiness and majesty becomes, and the greater will be his longing to fulfill God's law." (MacArthur, p. 385)

"As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." - The source of the dissonance is that sin is ***"living in me."*** This is the sinful nature, the old Adam which remains even after its guilt has been cleansed in the washing of Baptism. Once this sinful nature ruled without rival but now he has been cast down from his throne. *"Driven out of the capital, this usurper maintains himself in the outlying territory and does his damage. He would like to become complete master again and exercise unrestricted tyranny but cannot as long as a man is controlled by the Spirit."* (Lenski, p.481)

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature..." - Paul clearly recognizes the strange dualism that characterizes his personality. He is no longer deceived by the pretense and the falsehood of the enemy. He is fully and painfully aware of his inability to bring about a righteousness of his own. He is unable to perfectly fulfill the demands of the law, and therefore he continues to stand condemned before the law. There is no righteousness inherent in him; that which is good is totally lacking in his sinful nature. This is clearly evidenced by his inability to



"The Repentance of the Prodigal" by Cornelius Anthonisz 1525 Woodcut

implement his desire for good - ***“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”*** The verb in this phrase, ***“I cannot carry it out”*** (Greek - *“katergazesthai”*) literally means to bring something to completed action.

“For what I do is not the good I want to do...” - This verse is basically a repetition of Paul's earlier statement in Verse 15 - ***“For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do.”*** The repetition serves to highlight the ongoing contradiction between the regenerate will and the sinful nature.

“Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it...” - This is further restatement for emphasis as in Verse 17 the apostle has already asserted: ***“As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.”*** As Martin Franzmann notes: *“There is an apparently hopeless cleavage or contradiction between his essential “I” and “indwelling sin.”* (Franzmann, p. 130)

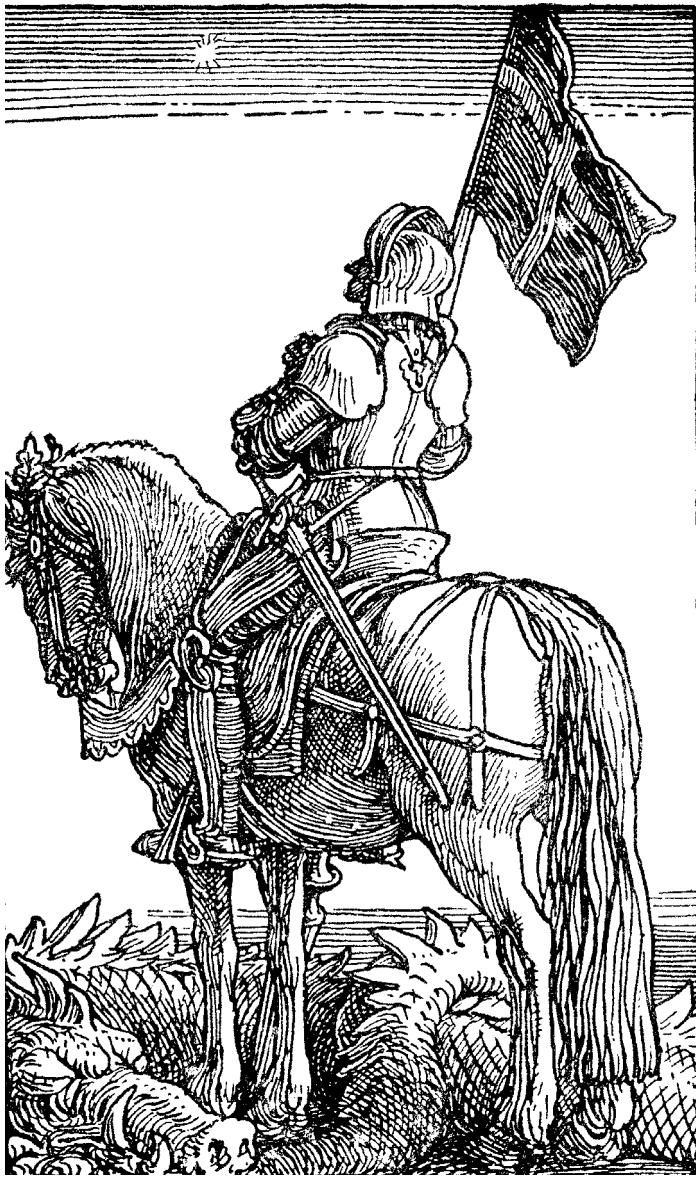
Verses 21-25

So I find this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself, in my mind, am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

“So I find this law at work:...” - Paul now summarizes and reiterates the entire dilemma once more. The Greek text of Verse 21 is somewhat awkward, almost as though the language becomes choppy and abrupt in a dramatic expression of the apostle's frustration. The result has been a variety of translations. The text literally says: *“So then I find the law: when I desire to do what is good, what is evil lies ready at my hand.”* Martin Franzmann's excellent paraphrase clarifies the thought: *“This is what my experience with the law comes to; when I desire to do the good which it enjoins, the evil which the law forbids lies always ready to my hand.”* (Franzmann, p. 131)

“For in my inner being I delight in God's law...” - Paul, like every believer, is a

new man in Christ. Now, within his *“inner being,”* that is within the deepest recesses of his redeemed person, he loves and affirms the law of God. The language is similar to 2 Corinthians 4: 16 - (*“Therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*) and Ephesians 3:16 - (*“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in you inner being.”*) Thus the *“inner being”* is the new creature, the man who is already tasting the powers of the world to come. Within the core of who he truly is, Paul, the believer, no longer stands on the side



“Lead Us Not Into Temptation” by Rudolf Schäfer

of sin. He now *“delight's in God's law.”* The phrase recalls Psalm 119, the Bible's longest chapter, an extended song of praise and thanksgiving to God for His law. *“I shall delight in Thy commandments which I love.”* (Verse 47); *“Thy law is my delight.”* (Verse 77); and *“Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* (Verse 105), and *“Thy Word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it.”* (Verse 140).

“But I see another law at work in the members of my body...” - In this striking Verse Paul speaks from the perspective of a spectator overlooking a battlefield. There is another law to contend with a *“law that is at work within the members of my body.”* These two opposite forces are locked in conflict with one another, *“the law at work in the members of my body,”* and *“the law of my mind.”* *“The law at work in the members of my body”* is *“another law”* (Greek - *“heteron*

nomon”). This law is both the opposite of and in opposition to the will of God. It is further defined later in this verse as **“the law of sin at work within my members.”** This is original sin, man's sinful nature, the inherent propensity of every natural born descendant of Adam to sin. The other law, **“the law of sin”** is described as being **“at work in the members of my body.”** The contrast here is not between the physical and the spiritual but between the Old Adam and the new man. The sinful nature once held undisputed sway, but no longer. Now **“God's Law”** is **“the law of my mind.”** The mind (Greek - *nous*) is the sense of power to think and to apprehend moral and spiritual things. This corresponds to the **“inner being”** of Verse 22. The inevitable result of these two opposite principles at work within me is war. **“The law at work in the members of my body is waging war against the law of my mind.”** The Greek verb in this phrase (*antistrateuomenon*) is a technical military term which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. All too often, the result of the warfare is a decisive victory for the sinful nature which is **“making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”** The military metaphor continues as Paul literally describes himself as a **“prisoner of war,”** **“a captive taken in battle.”**

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” - Having confessed the depth of his depravity and sin, the apostle now cries out for deliverance. No human being who recognizes the enormity of his sin could ever maintain the illusion of possible self-deliverance. Paul cries out for a deliverer because he is painfully aware that he cannot deliver himself. These words are a desperate cry to God for help. The exclamation uses one of the strongest negative adjectives possible. The term (Greek - *talaiporos*) means **“miserable,”** **“distressed;”** it is an expression of extreme anguish or despair. Caught between life and death, the apostle cries out in an agony of frustration and anguish. The **“rescue”** for which he pleads is deliverance from the ongoing conflict and tension of this ongoing contradiction. The Greek word *rhuomai* carries the basic connotation of rescuing from danger and was used of a soldier going to a wounded comrade on a battlefield and carrying him to safety. The application here is evident, in the midst of the battle, Paul cries out for someone to carry him away from the field of conflict to a place of peace and safety. John MacArthur reports a particularly gruesome practice which may have conditioned Paul's language in this instance:

“It is reported that near Tarsus, where Paul was born (Acts 22:3), a certain ancient tribe sentenced convicted murderers to an especially gruesome execution. The corpse

*of the slain person was lashed tightly to the body of the murderer and remained there until the murderer himself died. In a few days, which doubtless seemed an eternity to the convicted man, the decay of the person he had slain infected and killed him. Perhaps Paul had such a torture in mind when he expressed his yearning to be freed from **the body of this death.**" (MacArthur, p. 392)*

The emphasis is eschatological, that is, it points toward the end of time, as Paul longs for the triumphant return of the Lord which will abolish the reign of sin and death forever. As the classic hymn affirms:

*"And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again and hearts are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!"*

("For All the Saints Who From Their Labors Rest") TLH # 463



"The Return of the Lost Son" by Eduard Gebhardt

The deliverance in question is **“from this body of death.”** The language parallels the earlier **“body of sin”** (6:6) and **“this mortal body”** (6:12). Paul is not longing to be free of his physical body. The deliverance for which he prays is deliverance from the bondage of sin.

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” - Paul's response to his own cry of distress is immediate and decisive. Now there is struggle, frustration, and defeat, but the victory has already been won for us in Christ. Locked in deadly combat with the old Adam, the new man eagerly anticipates the day of final deliverance and rejoices that God loves him and hears his prayer.

"The man sold under sin, the desperate and wretched man, even he, does not cry out in vain. Paul's prayer, he knows is heard; and he gives thanks to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Through Him we have peace with God and have access to the grace in which we stand (5:1-2). Through Him we have received reconciliation and shall be saved through Him from the wrath to come (5:9,11). Through Him we shall reign in life, for through His righteous deed and His obedience we shall be justified (5:17-19). Through His body we have died to the law (7:4). In the midst of our struggles and failures He remains our Lord; through Him we desperate and embattled men can give thanks to God. The lowering sky above our battlefield has suddenly grown bright." (Franzmann, p. 133)

The full formal designation of Jesus as Mediator and Savior is used to emphasize the identity of the deliverer. He is **“Jesus”** (His person); **“Christ”** (His office); **“our Lord”** (His relationship to Christians). (cf. also 1:4 and 5:1) Jesus has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves. He has made the payment that none of us could ever have paid. He made that payment in His own precious blood - shed in our place on the cross, so that we too might sing, **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law....” - The essential argument is restated once more at the conclusion of the chapter. For the seventh and eighth times in this segment Paul uses the first person personal pronoun. The dichotomy is between the **“mind”** which serves **“God's law”** and the **“sinful nature”** which is **“a slave to the law of sin.”** This conflict with sin must be the source of profound torment for every sincere child of God. In fact, this struggle intensifies and grows more painful as the Christian becomes more mature in the faith and grows closer to Christ.

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)



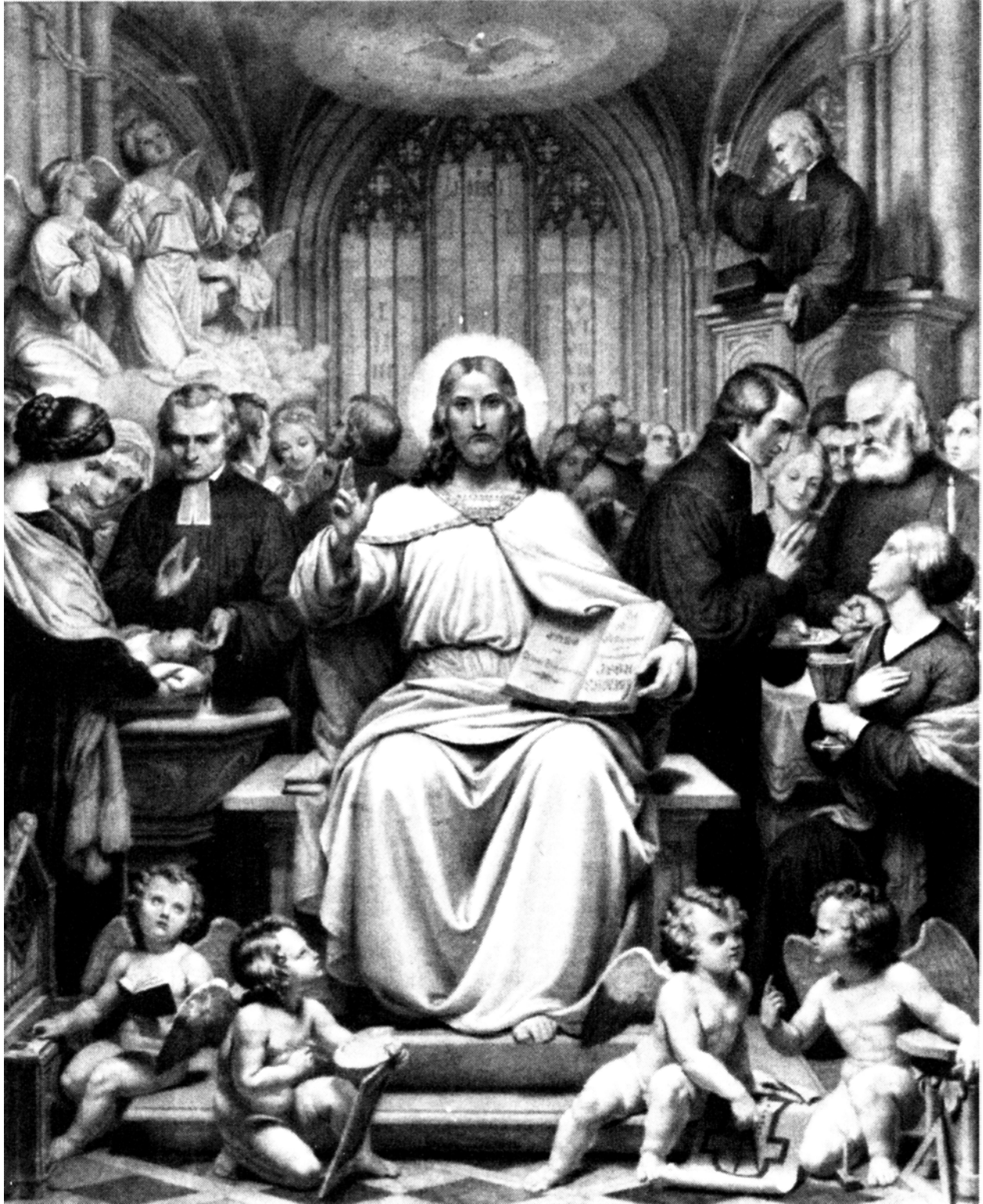
"The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit" by Rudolf Schäfer

"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), endowed 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

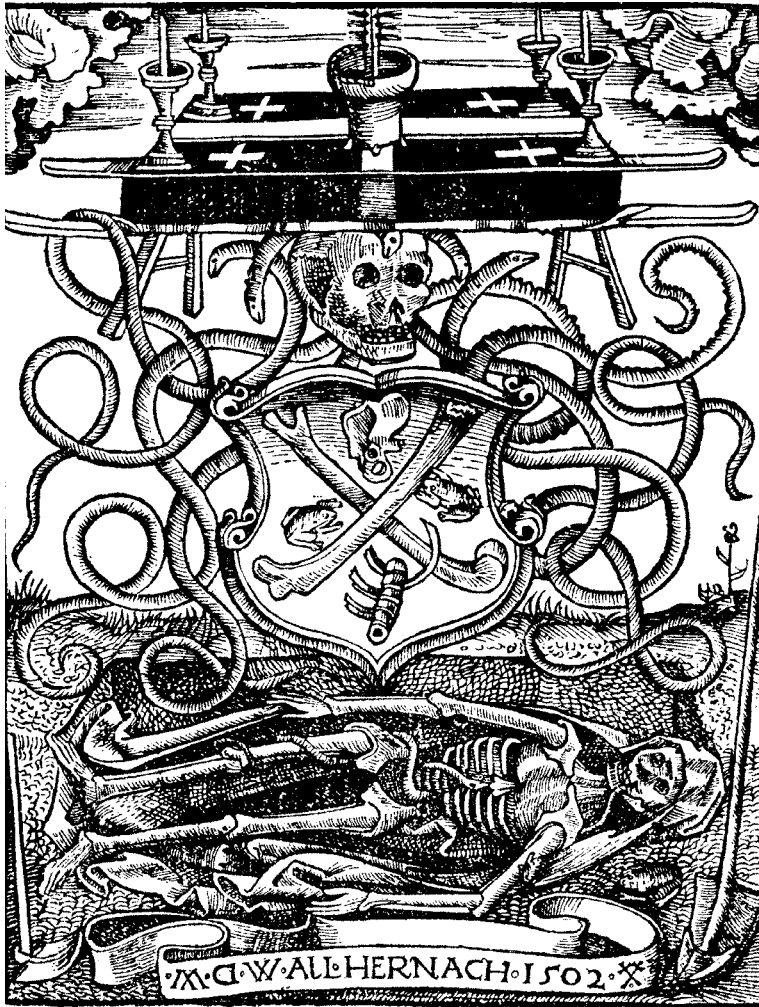


“The Descent of the Holy Spirit Upon the Disciples”

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

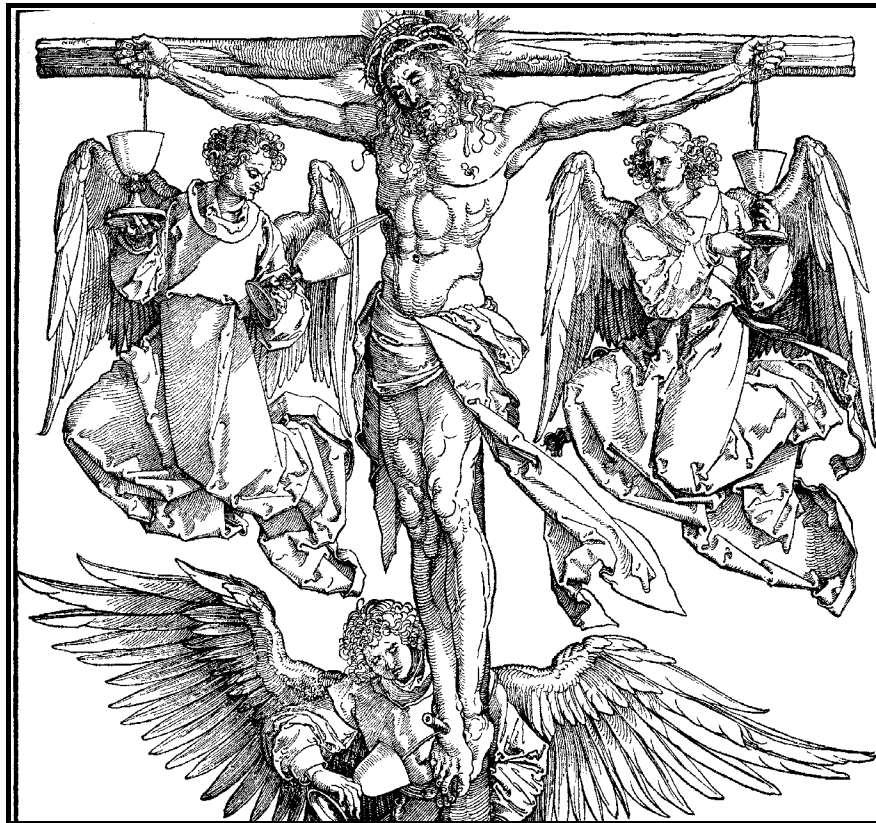
For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according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



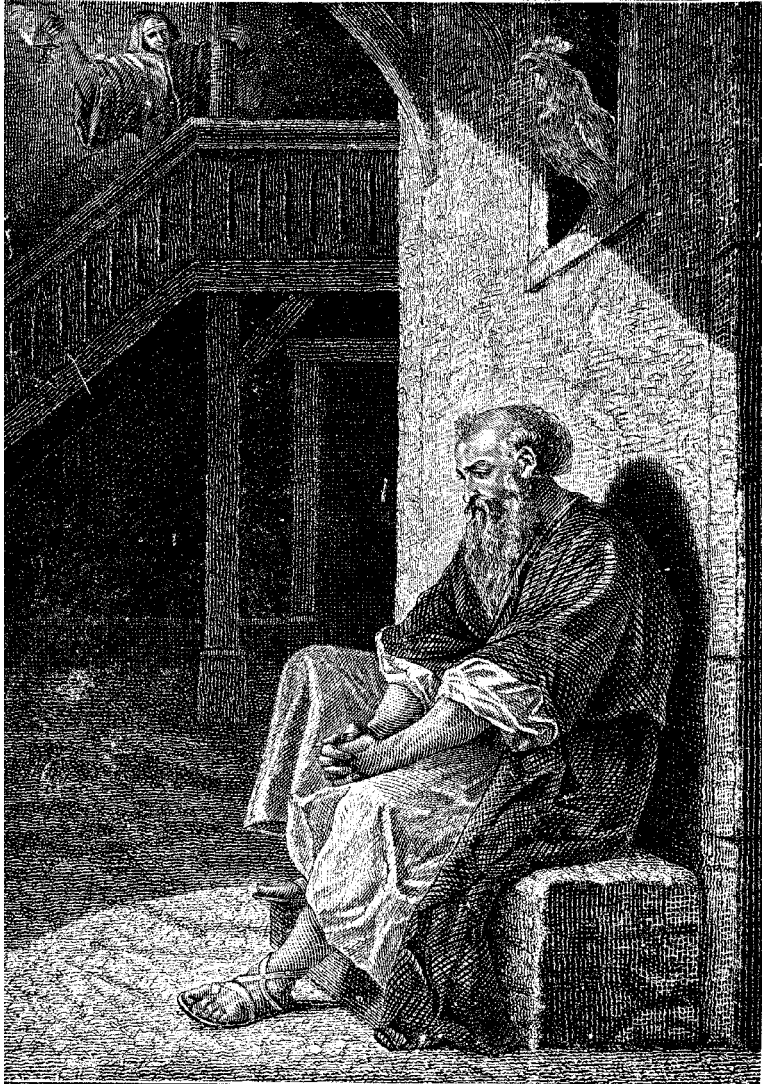
“Peter Betrays Christ”

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)

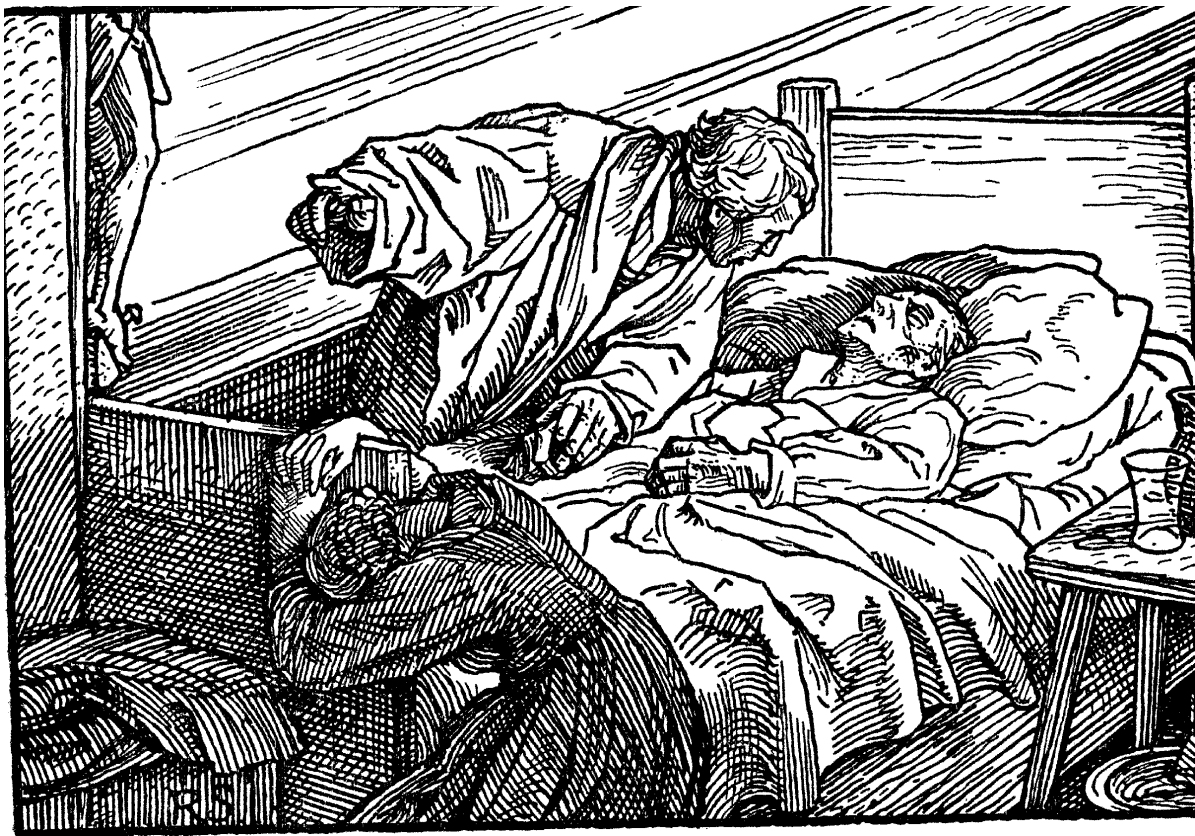
“But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?” - The contrast between that which is seen and that which is unseen becomes the basis for this explanation of the nature of hope. Hope obviously anticipates that which is to come. It is the element of expectation which defines 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 Schäfer

“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 *hyper* 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)

Romans Chapter 9

Nach dem der herr vnd almechtig gott die zehen gebott alle inn der liebe gottes vnd des nechsten beschloffen hat dar zhalles das die geseyn lernen vnd propheeten sagen. Sammh solndie inn deinem herzen vns ver geylich nagen. Welche die vnden inn zweien tafeln mit ir bedingung sind begoffen. vnd durch zehen wort roter farb bezeichent.



“Moses with the Tablets of the Law”
 Woodcut by Thomas Anshelm, 1505

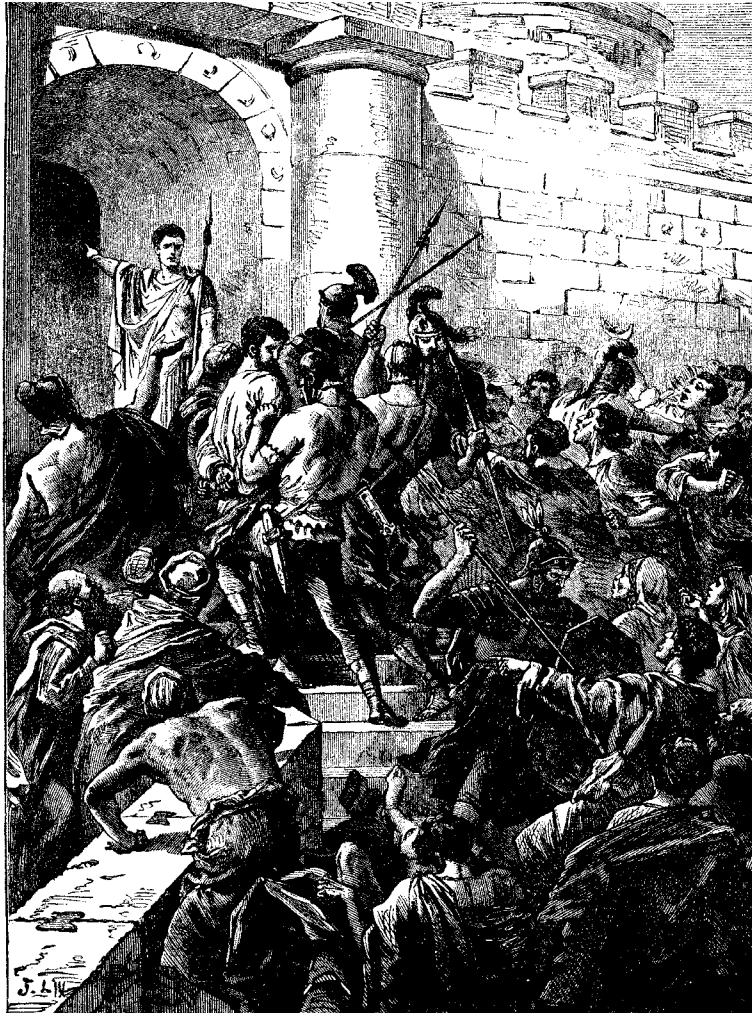
Verses 1-3

I speak the truth in Christ - I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

“I speak the truth in Christ...” - The text begins with an impassioned assertion of Paul’s truthfulness in this matter. His affirmation of sincerity is intensely personal.

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



“Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem” by J. James Tissot

“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...” 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

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*

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:

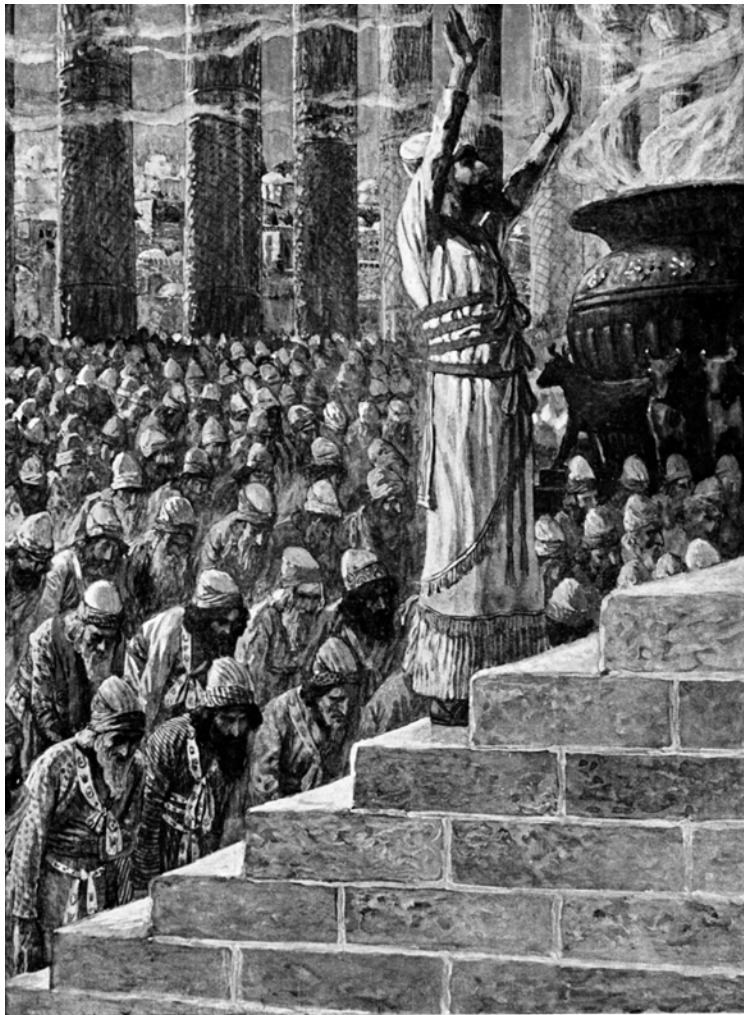
“See, I have taught you the statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say; ‘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.”

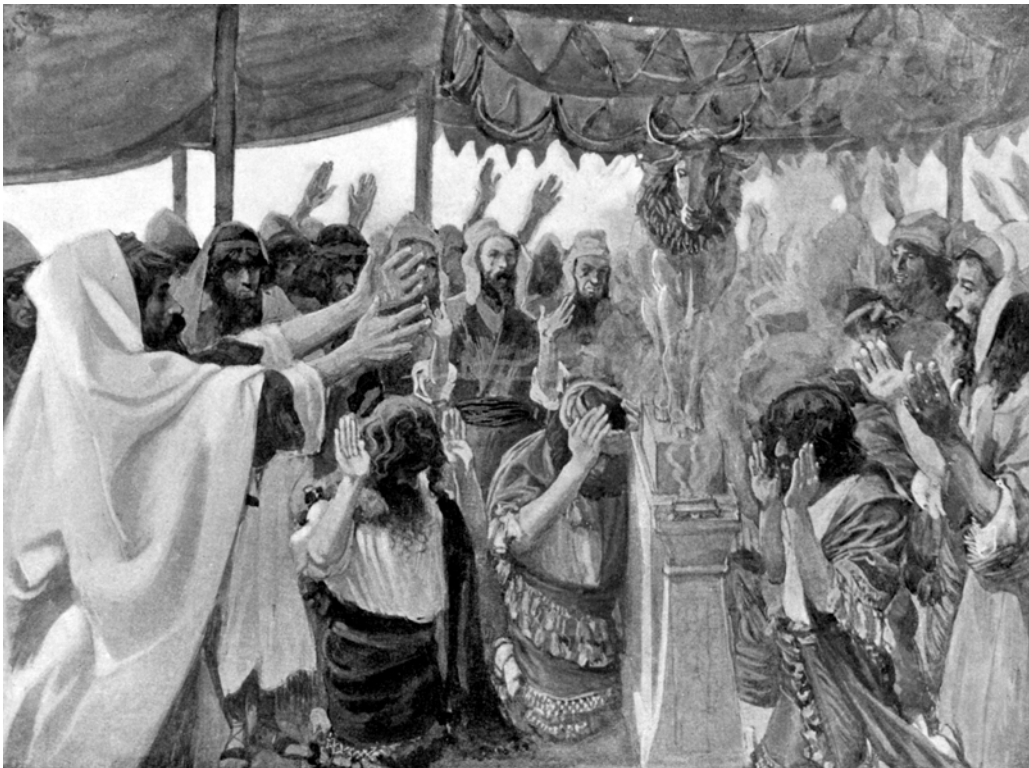
It is evident in the Malachi text that the primary reference is not to Jacob and Esau as specific individuals, but as the personification of the respective nations, Israel and Edom, which come from them. Nor is the thrust of the passage eternity, but history. *“Malachi is speaking of the fate of Jacob 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.



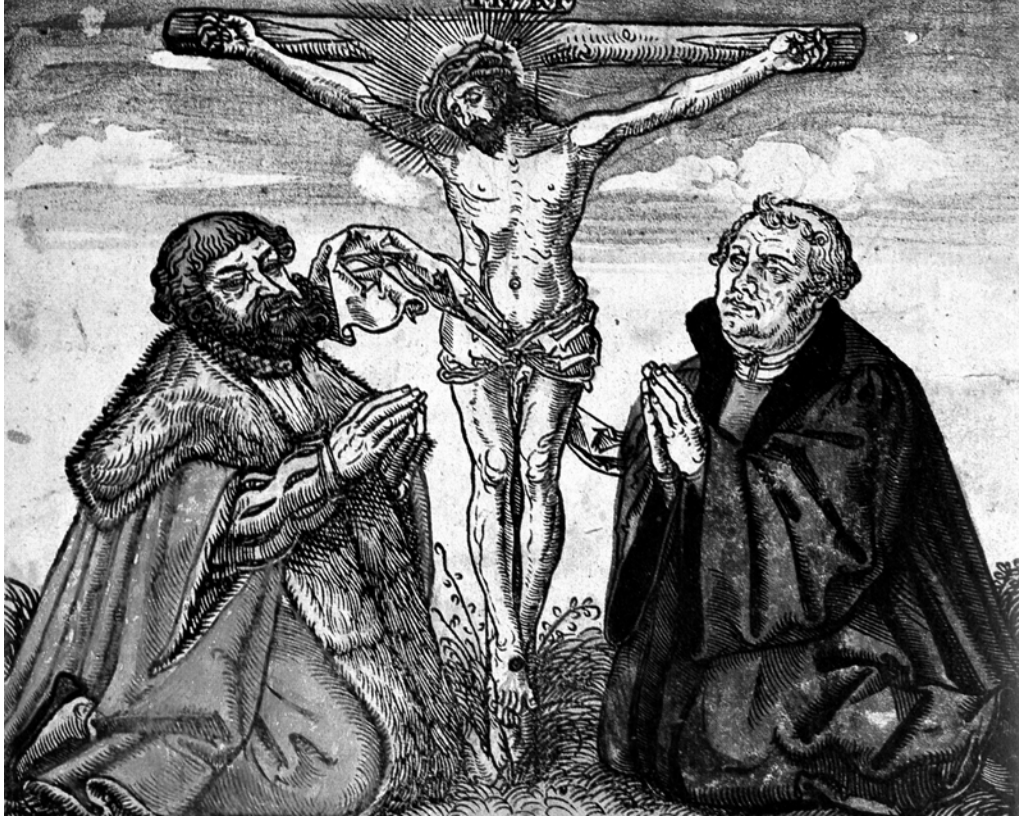
“Israel Worships the Golden Calf” by J. James Tissot

“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)

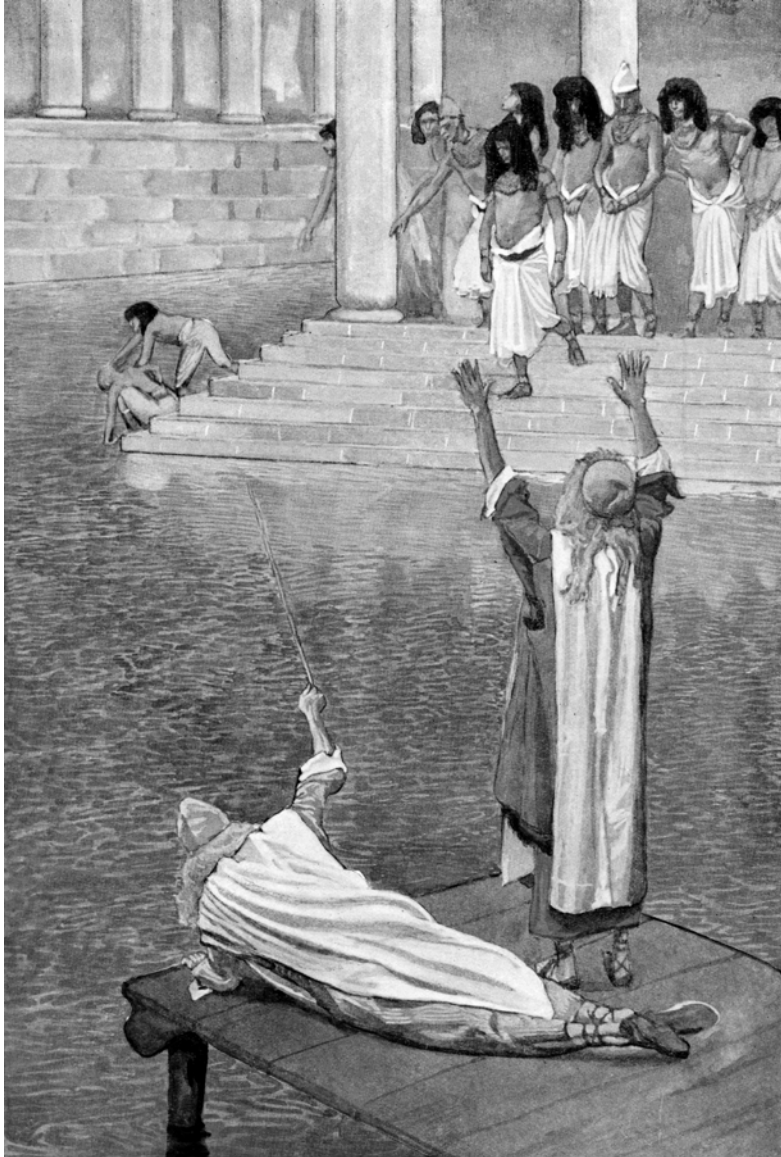
Verses 17-18

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:

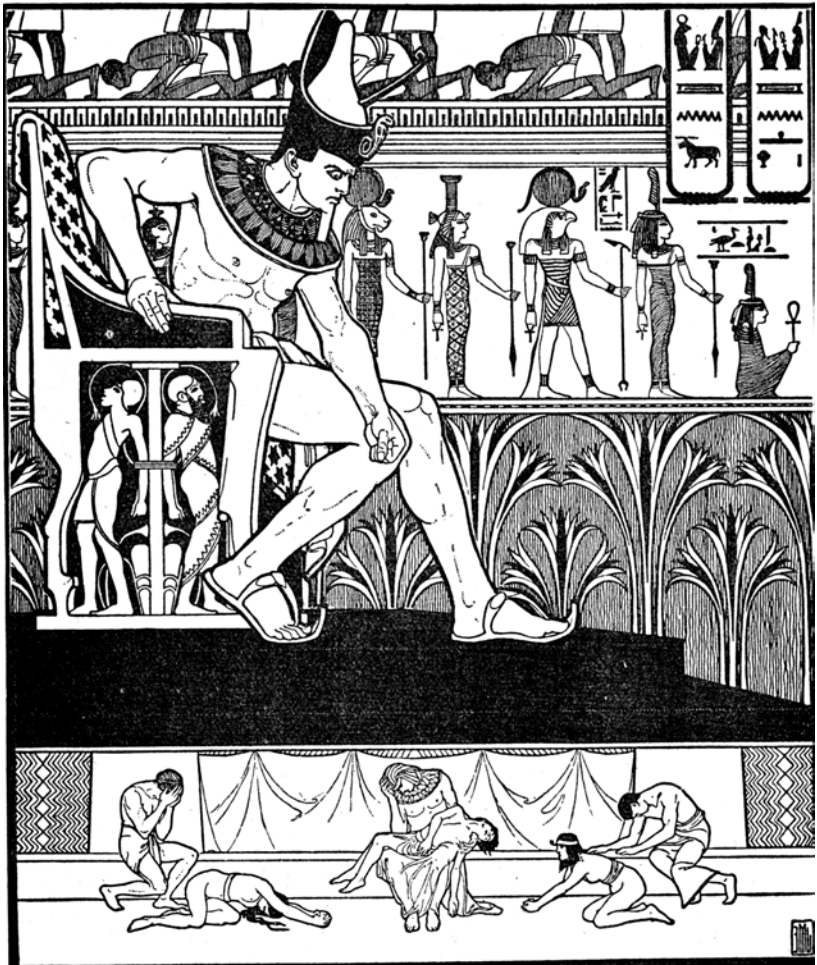
"Therefore, with regard to the motive there is a difference between divine mercy and obduracy that God inflicts. If God has mercy on someone, calls and converts a sinner and in this way saves him, that in no way depends upon man's effort, desire, and conduct, but rests alone in God, in His grace and 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

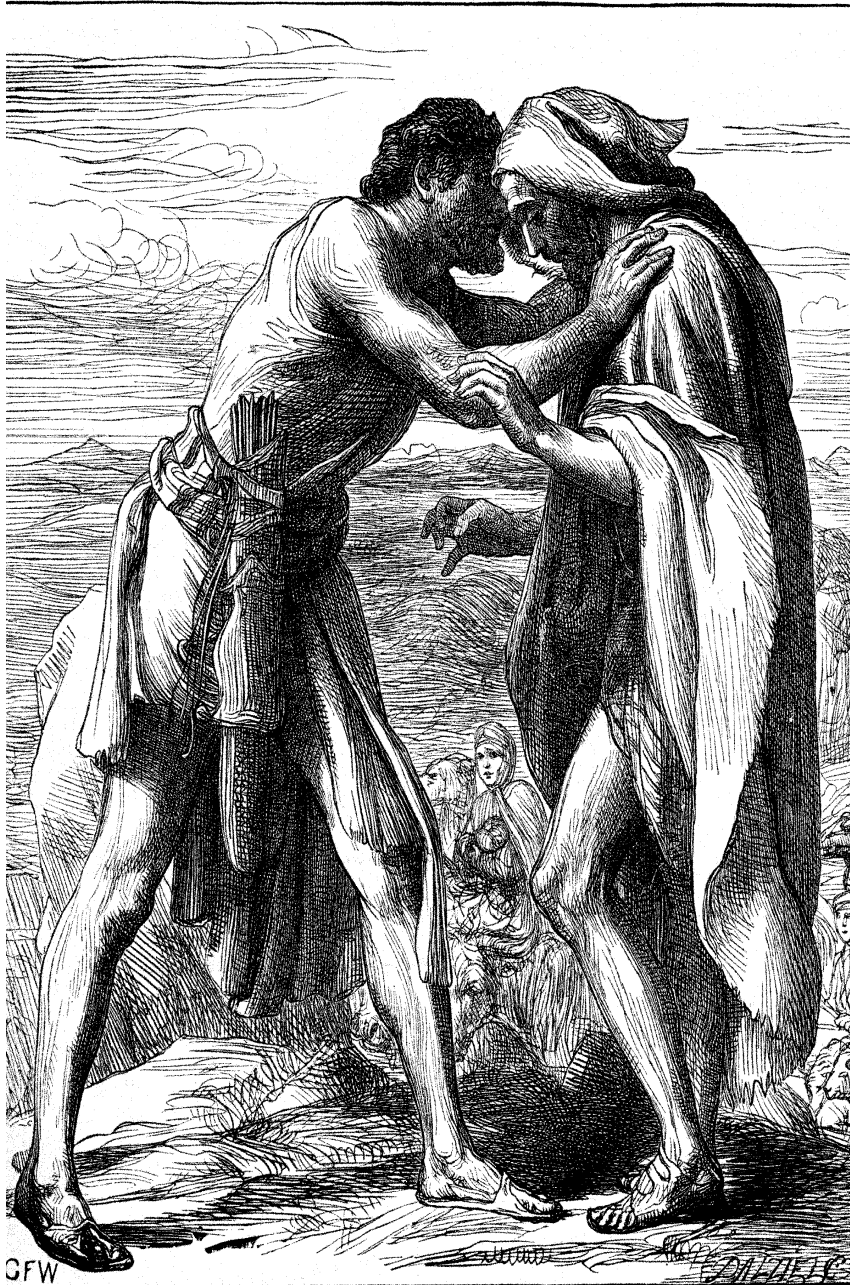
It is from the standpoint of this miracle that the Lutheran faith must be comprehended...We should say, in reply to Calvin, that it is not our task to reconcile these Scripture passages in such a way as to resolve the contradiction between the God of wrath and the God of mercy, between the Judge and 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

graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgement to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time, the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest it to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.

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.*”

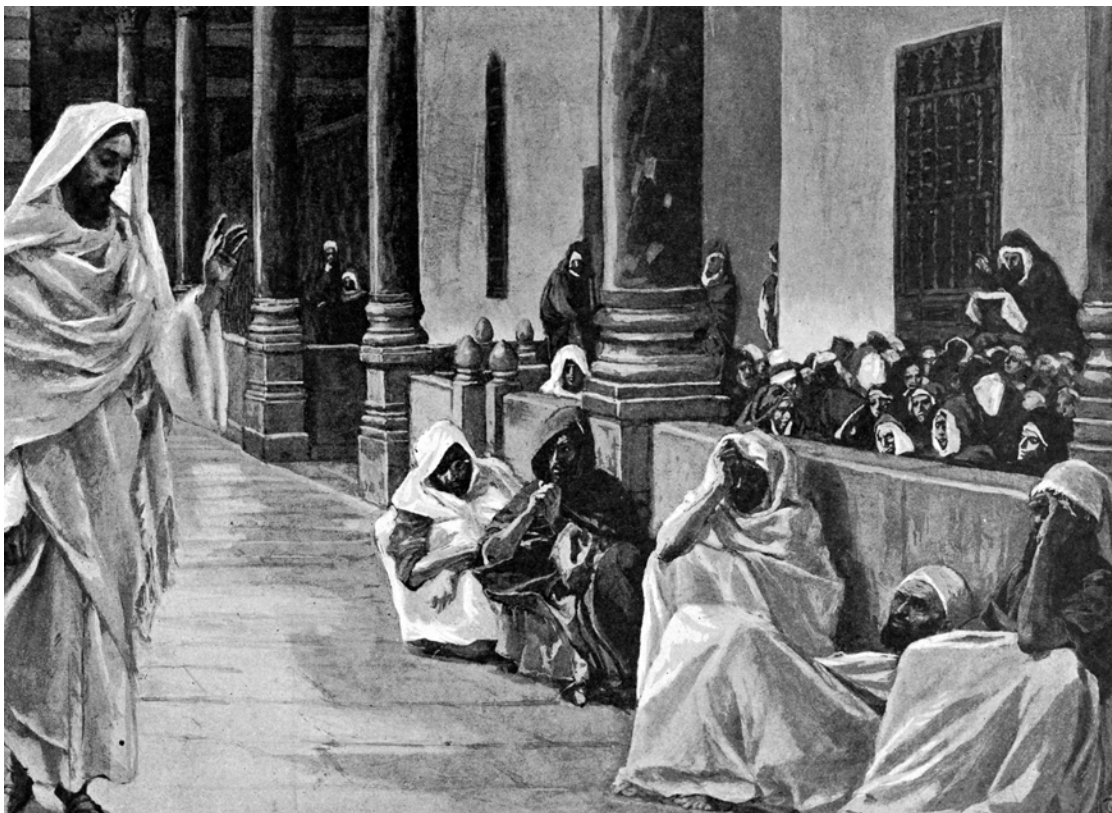


“*Modern Jews Praying at the Wailing Wall*” by E.M.Lilien

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.

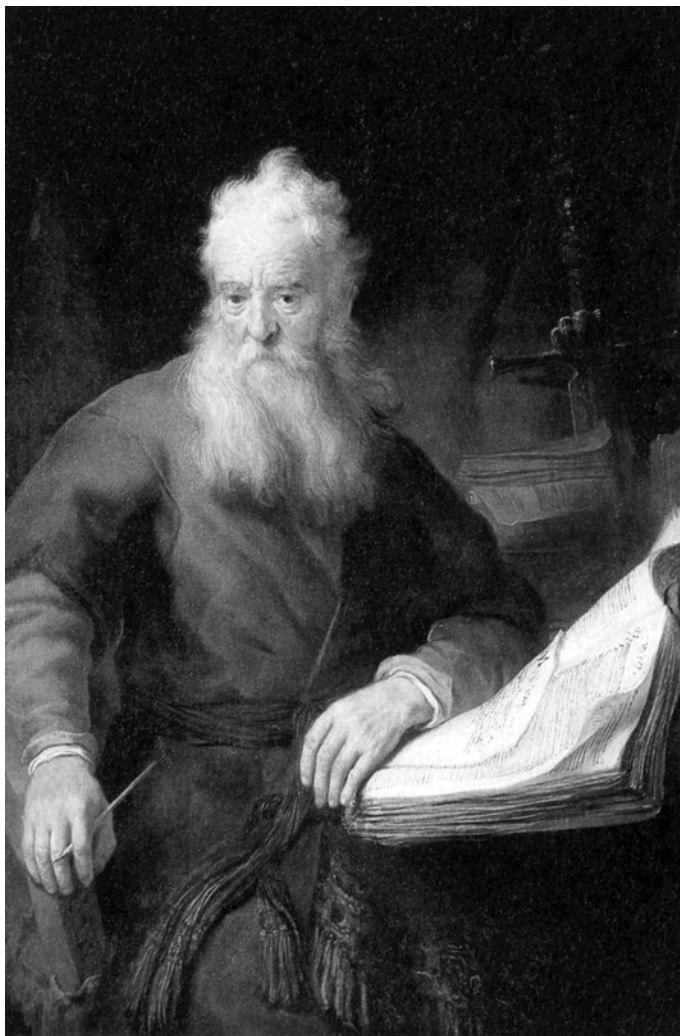
“Christ is the end of the law...” - The Greek text includes the conjunction “*gar*” (“*for*”) indicating that this verse is the summary explanation of that which has preceded. The verse constitutes one of the most famous of all of Paul’s theological affirmations.

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)

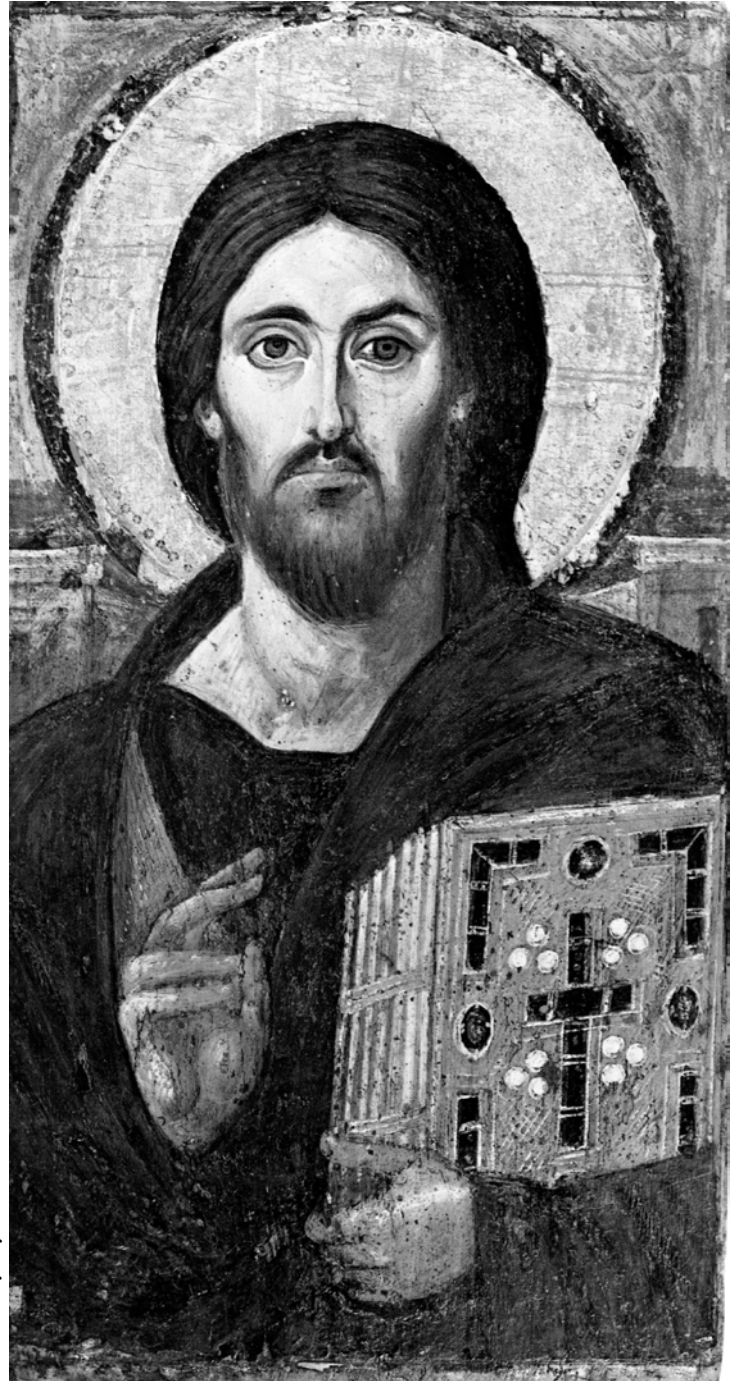
“*That is, the Word of faith we are proclaiming.*” - How can it be that this mighty word of salvation is available and accessible to men? It is because “*the word of faith,*” that is, the word which is preached, is a means through which personal justifying faith (Objective Genitive) is created. That 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)

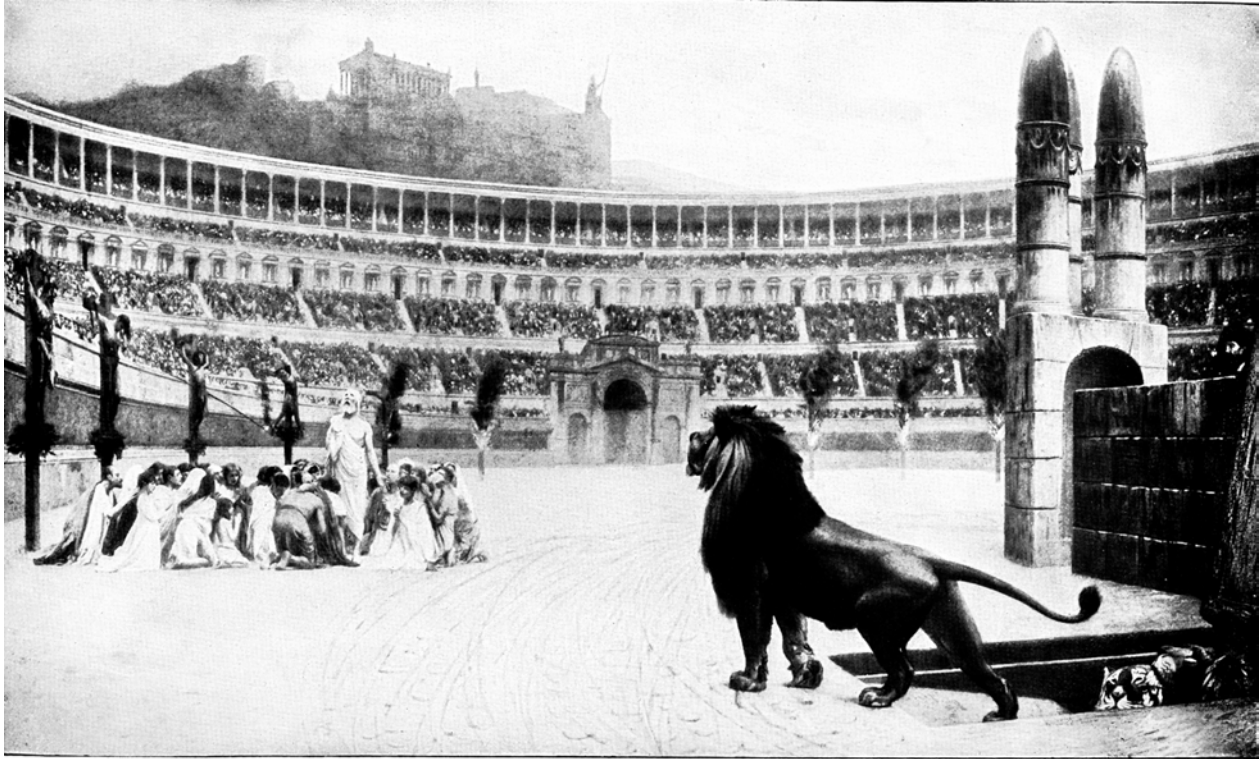
“Yet, at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12:42-43)

“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)



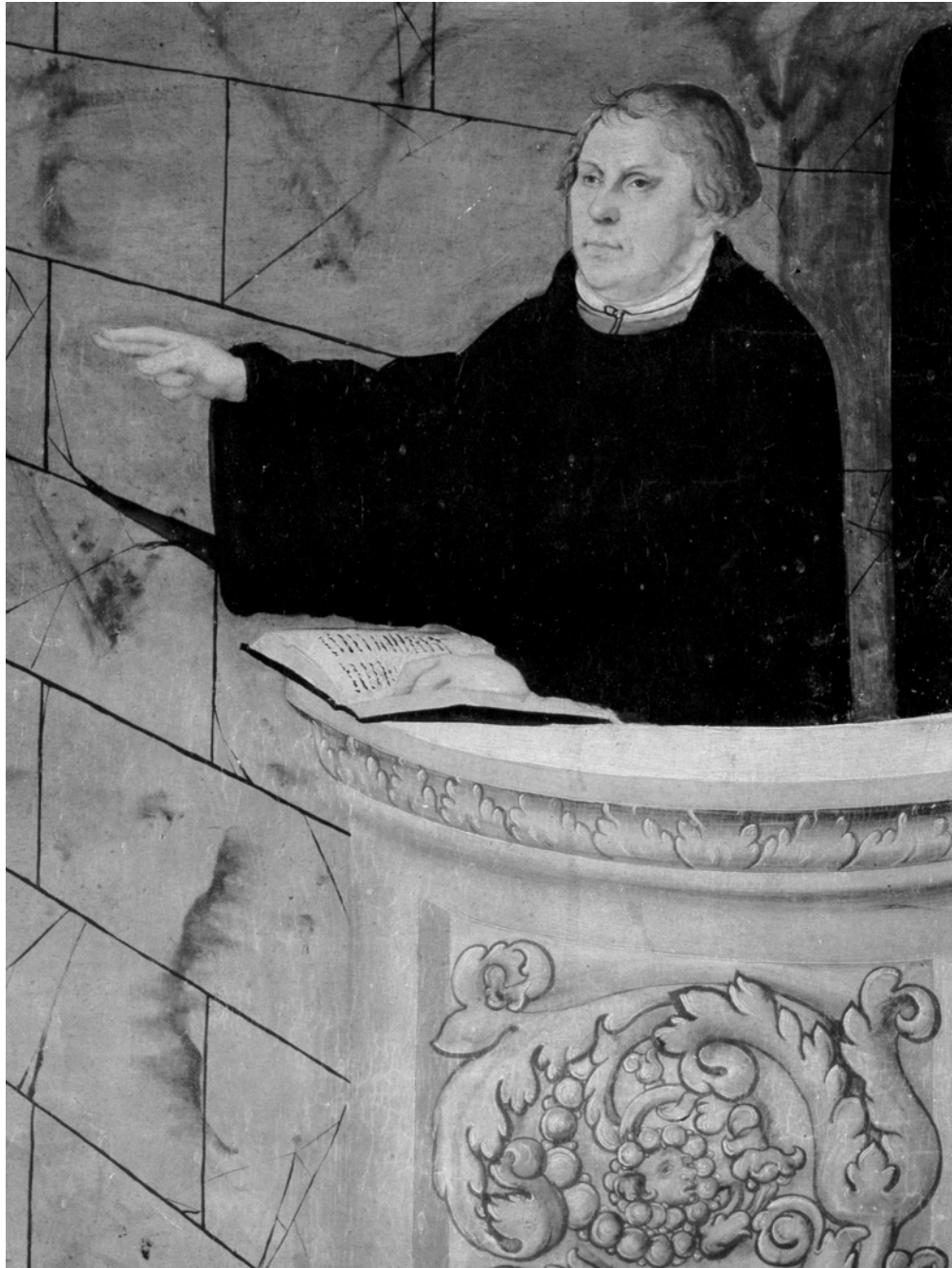
“O Give Thanks to the Lord; Call Upon His Name” by Rudolf Schäfer

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?”***



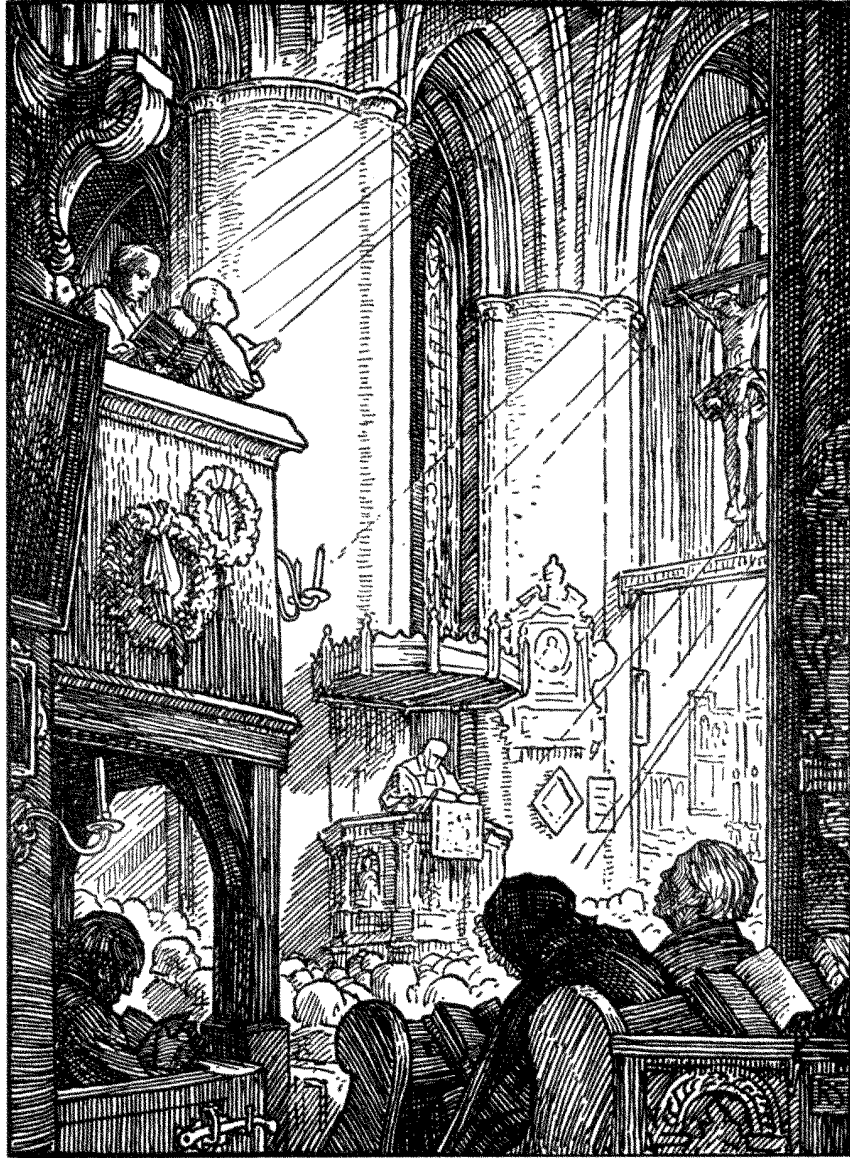
***“Martin Luther Preaching at Torgau” by Lucas Cranach the Elder
From the Altar Predella of the City Church in Wittenberg***

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)

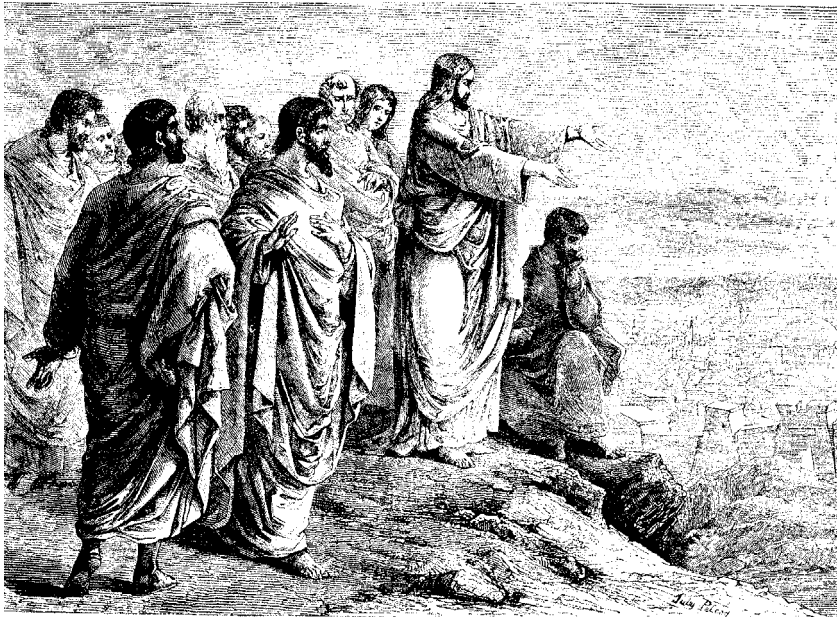


“The Lost Son” by Eugene Burnand

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***

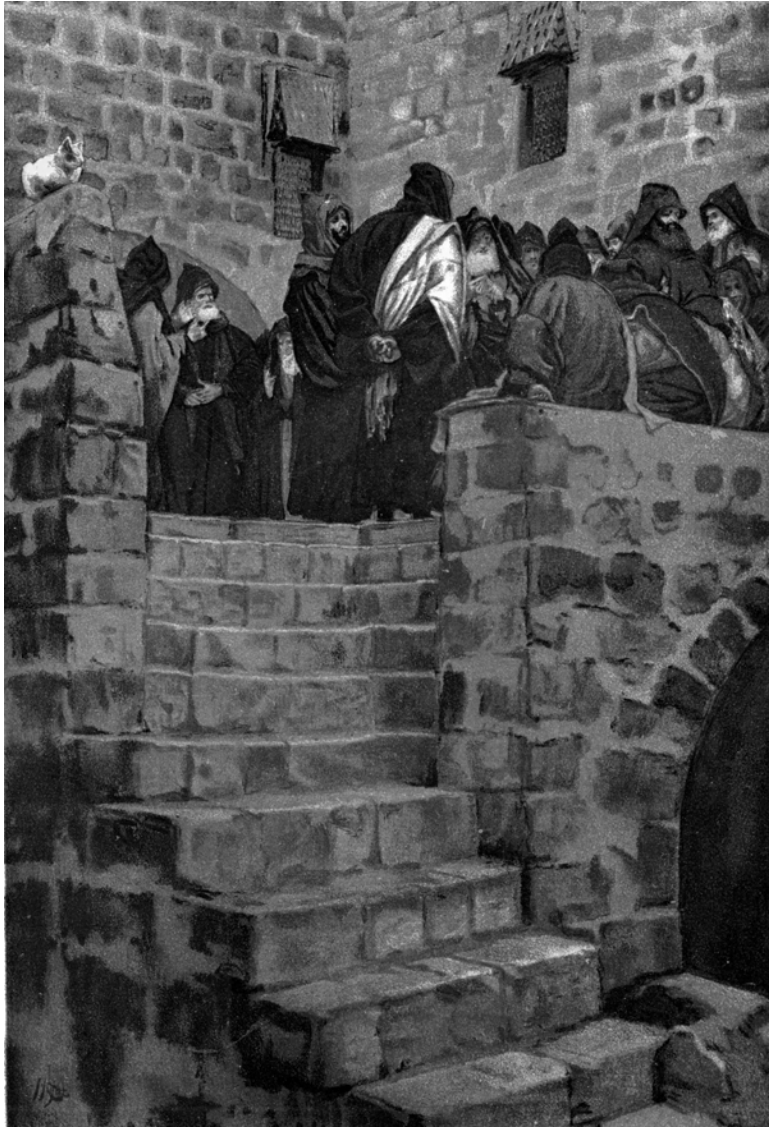
and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.” (Matthew 23:37-38) The fathers of the early church did not hesitate to see in the image of God’s outstretched 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)

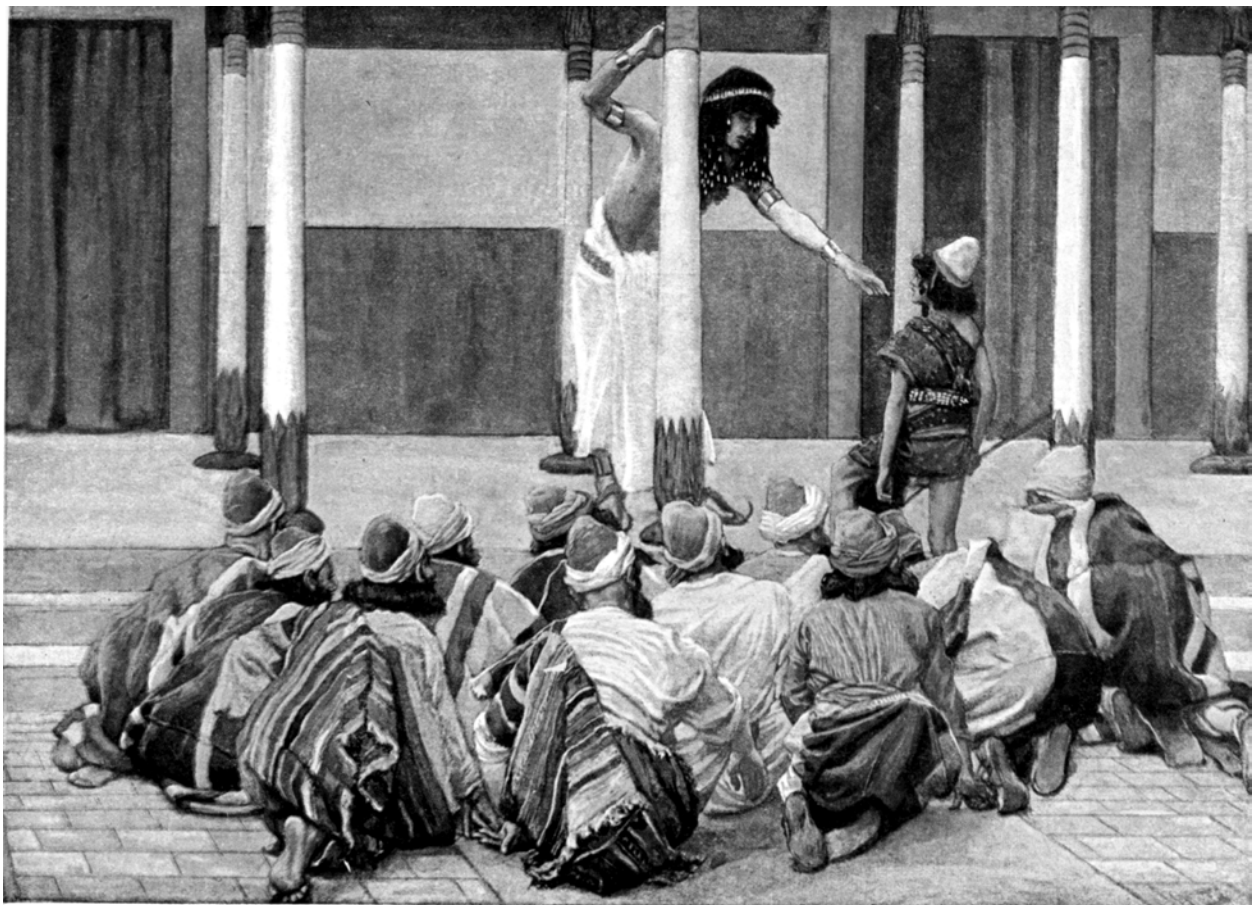
The identification of **“His people”** with believers is further reinforced by the phrase **“His people whom He foreknew”** in the Verse which follows. God’s plan of salvation was never about blood descent or national identity, but about the preservation of a faithful remnant made up of Jew and Gentile 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.

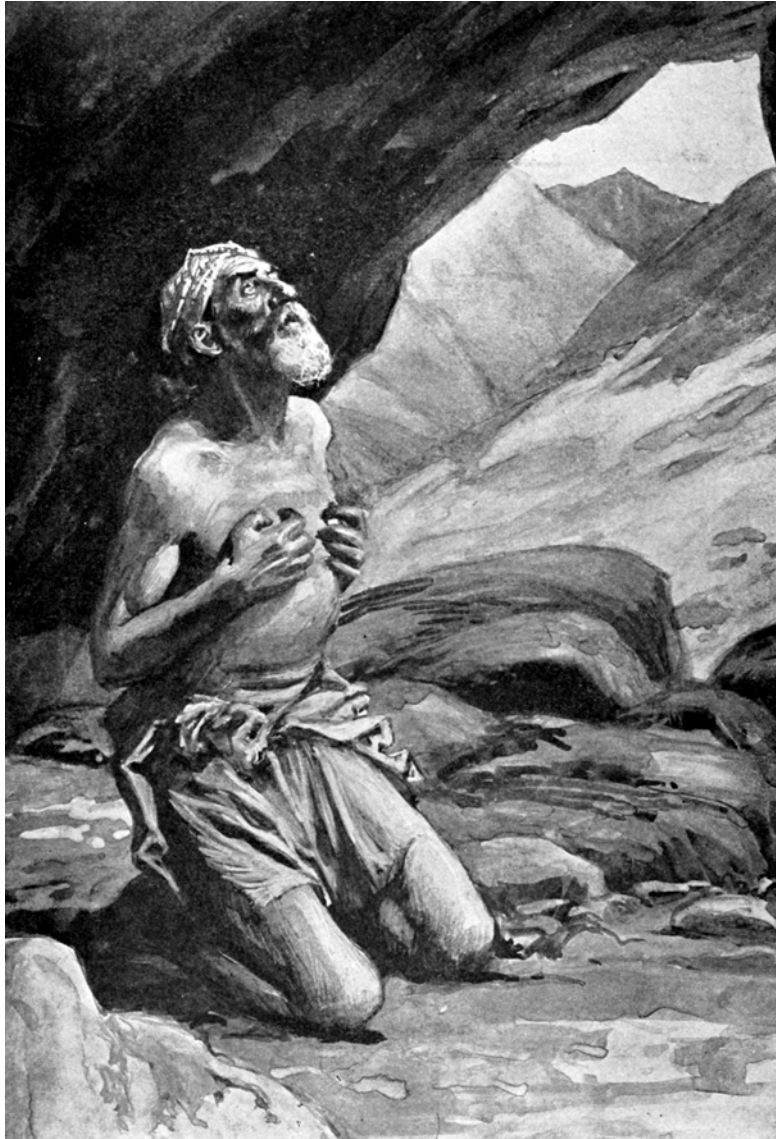
Verses 3-6

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)

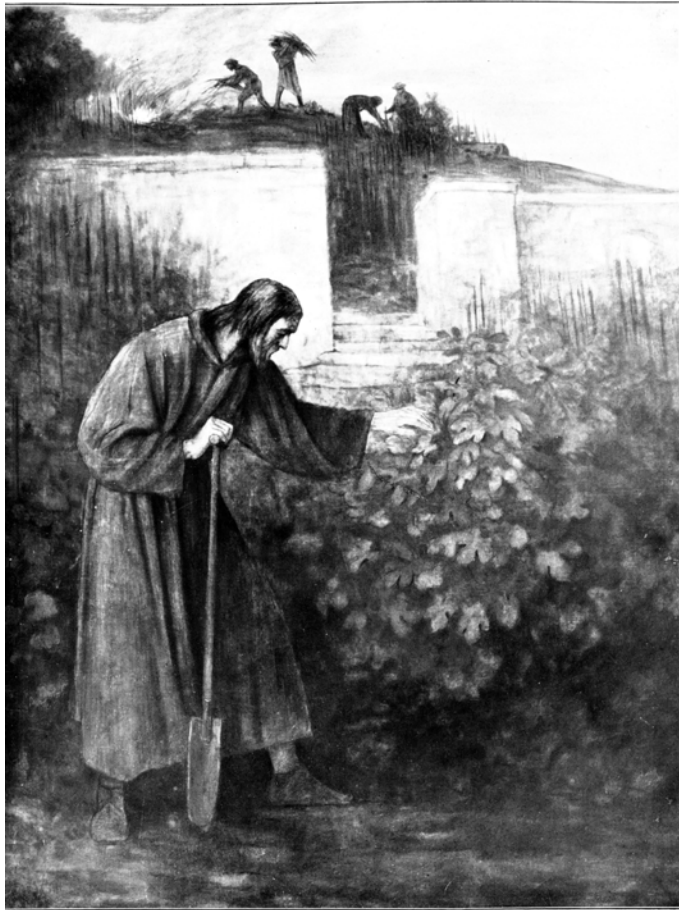
Our indolent and apathetic churches would do well to ponder the lesson of this pattern within the history of God’s people.

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

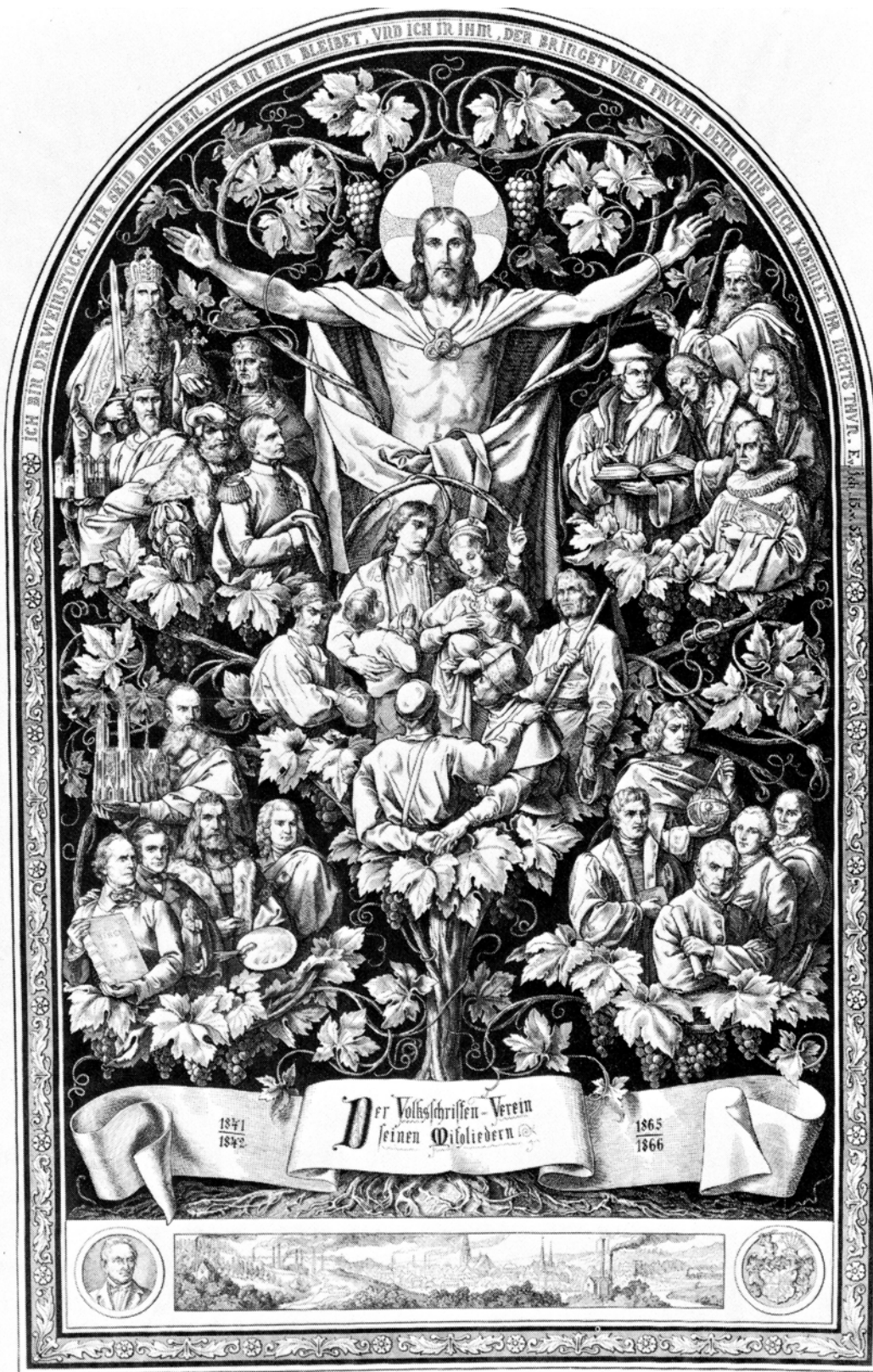
Jews and Gentiles are in the same position by nature in helpless bondage to the power of sin (2:1-3:20) and in need of God’s gift of faith to be saved (3:21-4:25). Yet salvation comes only to those who are *“of Abraham’s seed”* and thus the people of God are one, and that people has both a Jewish root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

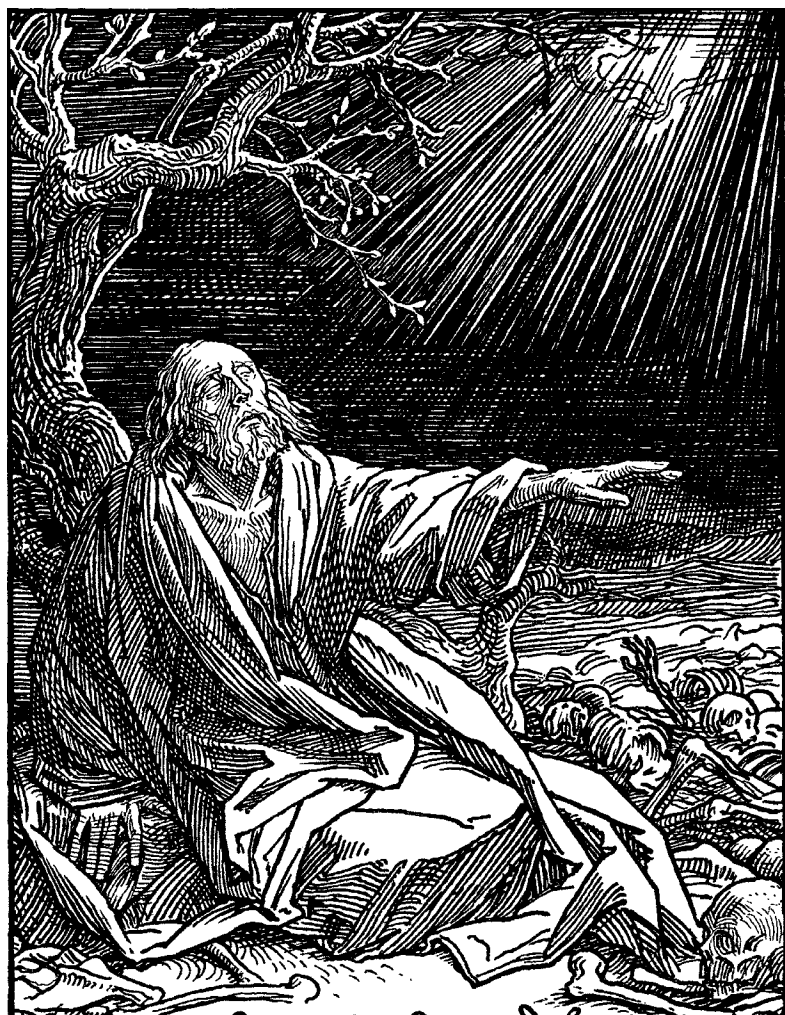
“Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.” - Thoughts of self-satisfaction, superiority and pride must give way to reverent awe before the mighty God. This is the fear of God which is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). ***“Only 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)

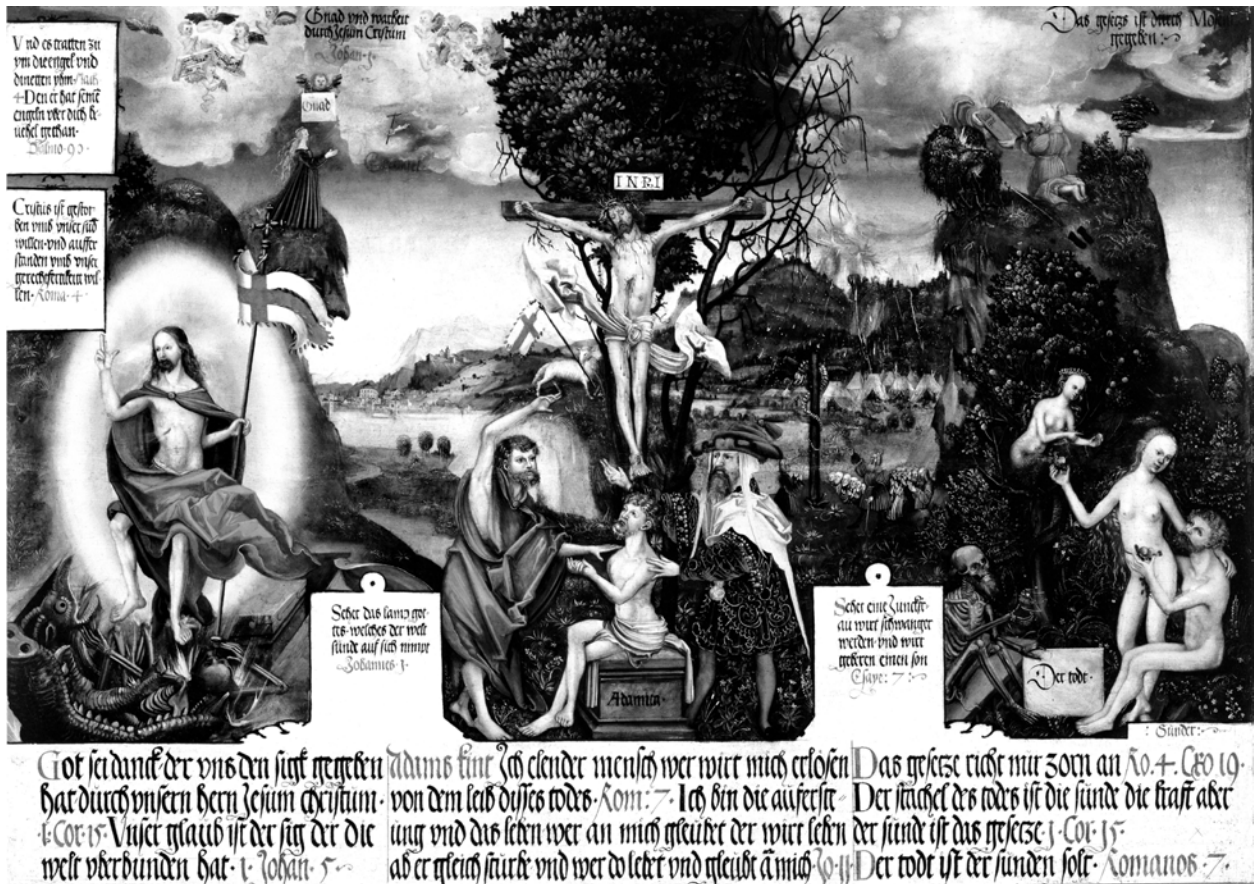
Verses 1-2

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.

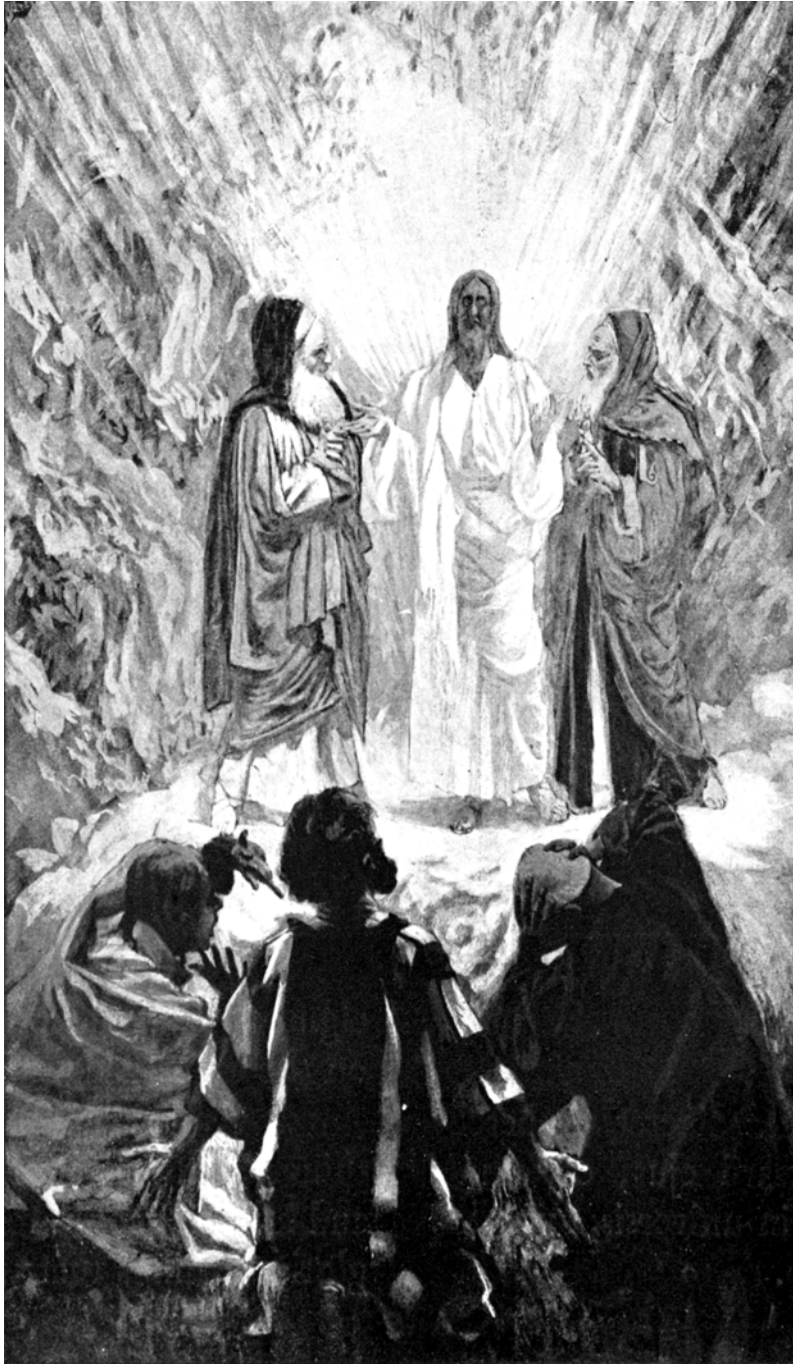
“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” - Verse 2 provides an explanation and an amplification of the sweeping exhortation provided in the opening verse of the chapter. This link is expressed in the original text by the conjunction “*kai*” (“*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)

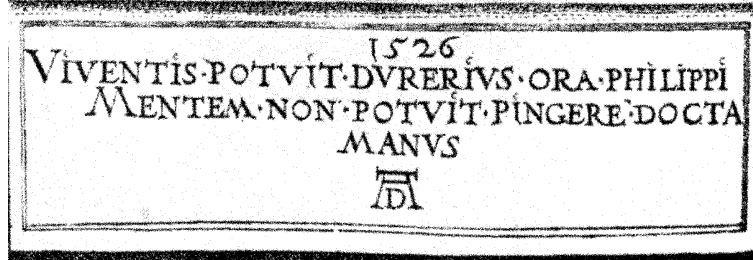
The term ***“renewing”*** (Greek - *“anakainosei”*) carries on the *“age”* (Greek - *“aion”*) language of the preceding phrase. Thus Paul indicates that transformation by the renewal of the mind involves the penetration of the coming new age into this present evil age. Origen, the great Bible teacher 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)

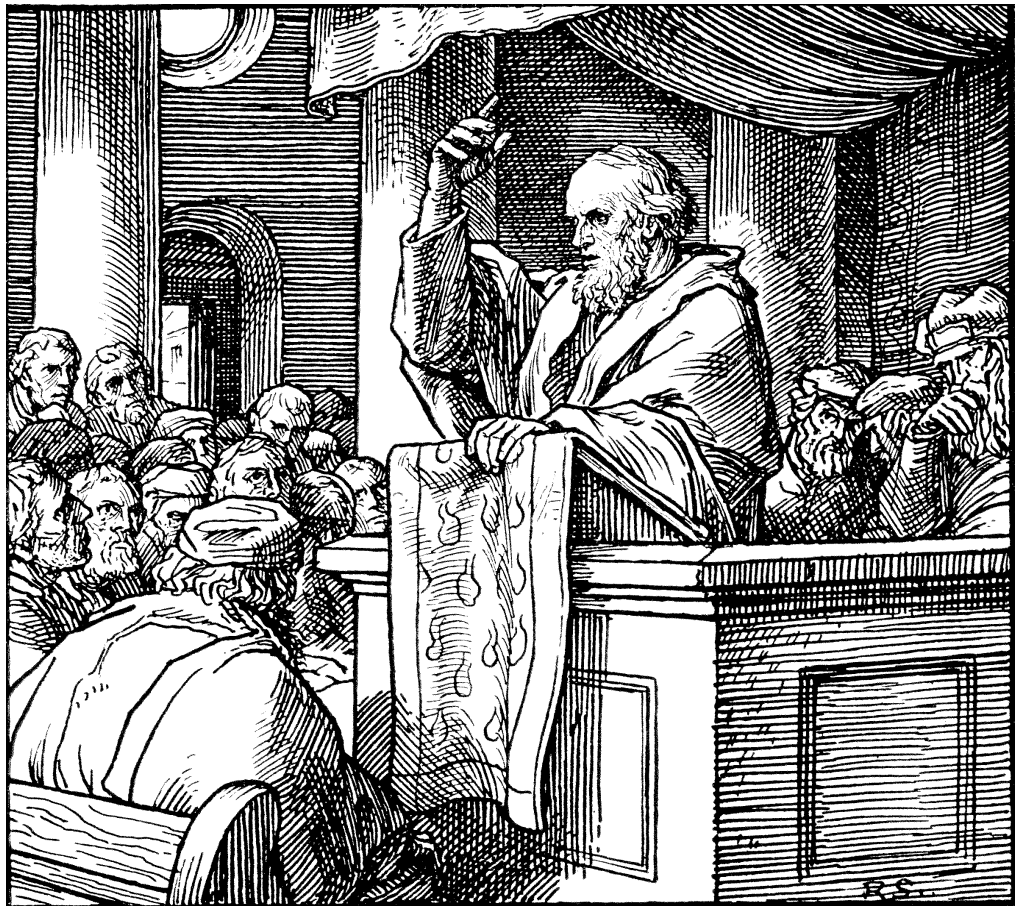
The key word in this phrase is the Greek verb “*phroneo*” which means “*to think*” or “*to make an accurate assessment.*” This word does not refer so much to the act of thinking in itself, but to the direction of one’s thinking, the way in which a person considers or thinks about something. The verb 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

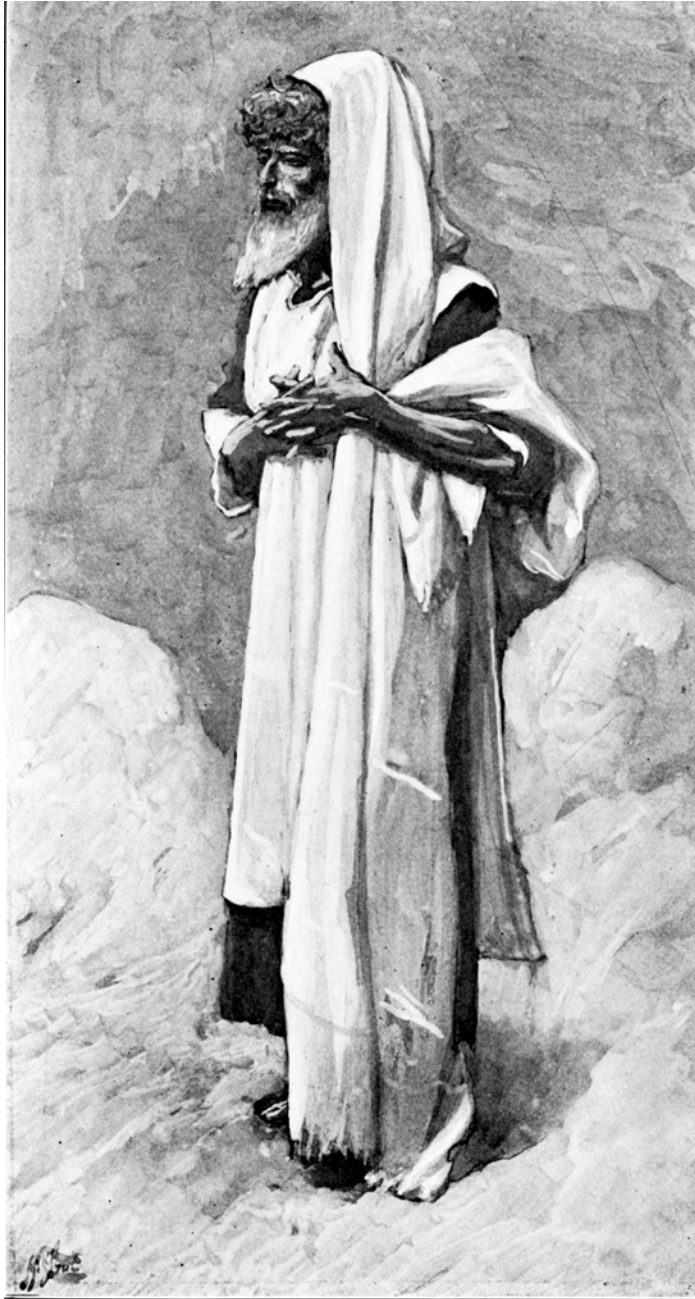
Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

“*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

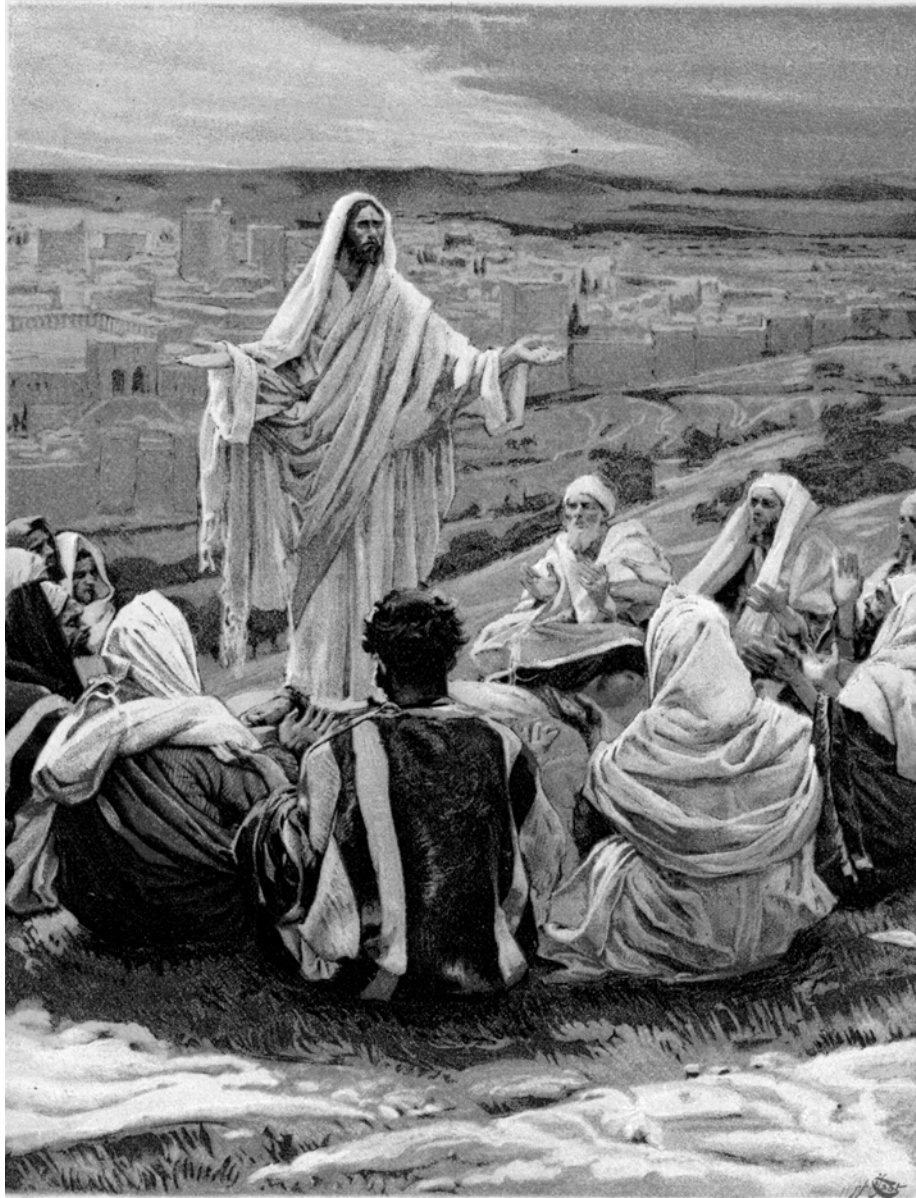
which Paul has in mind here. The Christian is one whose no longer possesses an independent will. He is completely subject to the will of the Lord as that divine will is expressed in the Word of God. The terminology reflects the typical language of the master slave relationship in the ancient times (“*kurios*” - “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)

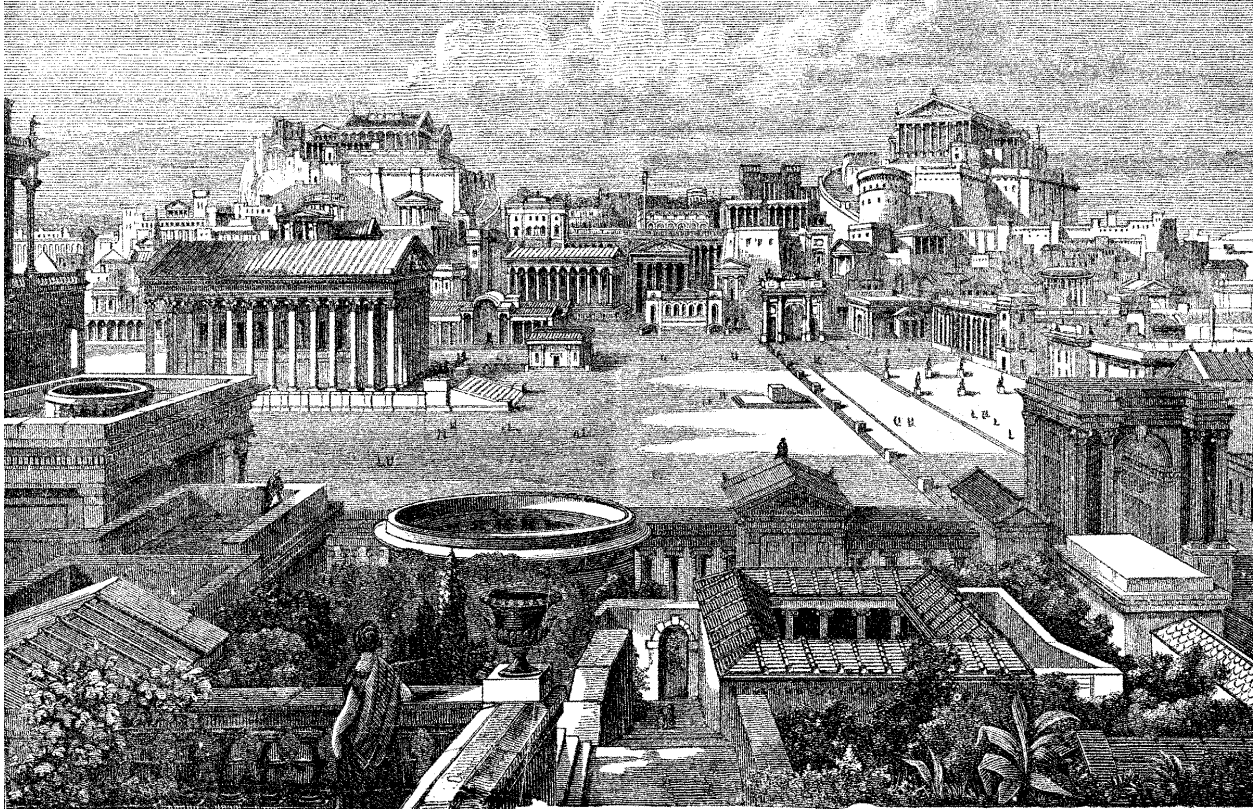
“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” - This broad summary statement concludes Paul’s series of ethical imperatives. To live by the ways of the world in anger, self-assertion, and retribution, is to have been defeated by the world. To live by the ways of Christ in patient endurance, 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)

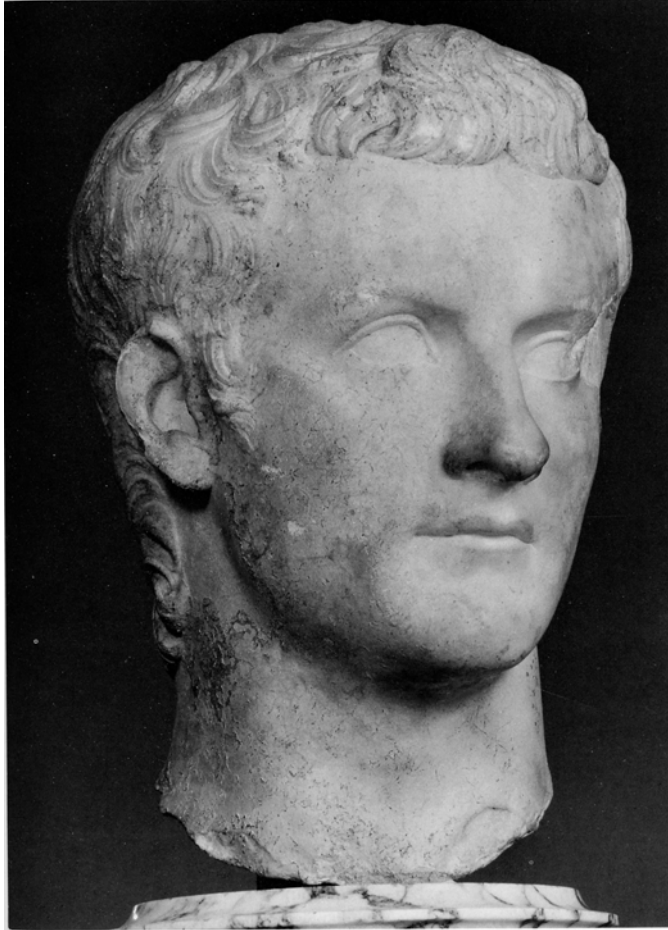
Verse 1

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

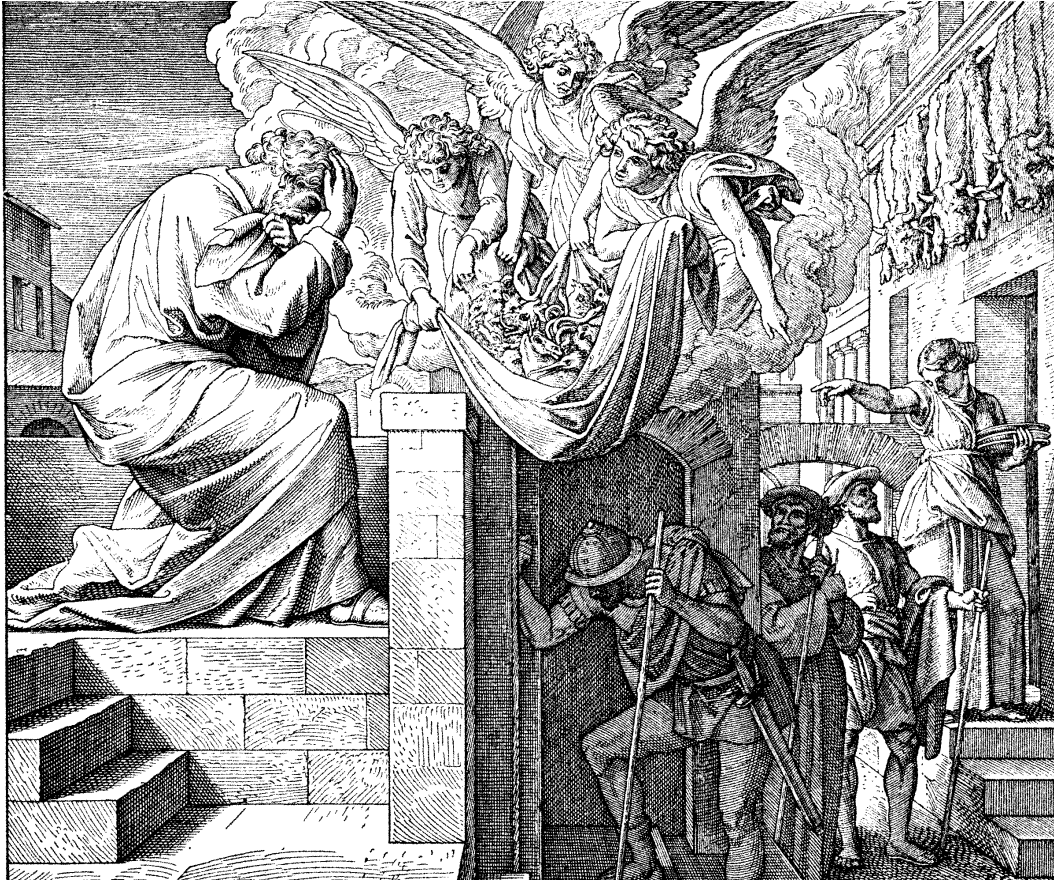
much as excessive drinking.” (Bray, p. 335)

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 overcome 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.

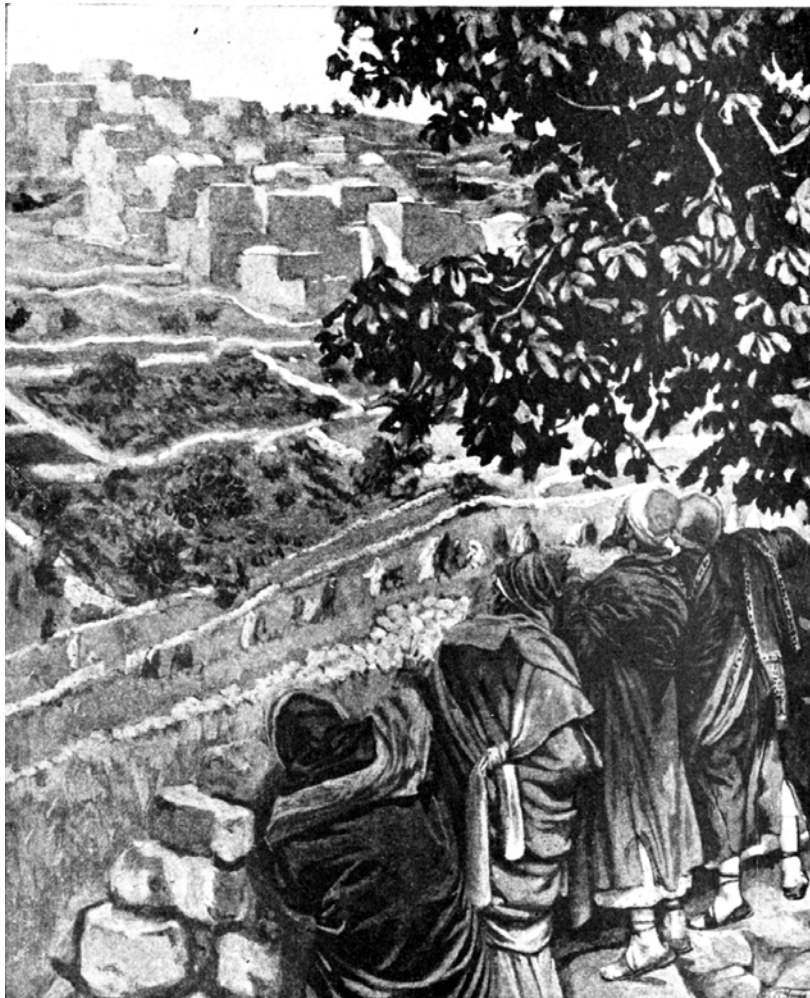


*“Peter’s Vision and the Baptism of the Roman Centurian Cornelius”
Bible Engraving by Matthäus Merian - 1630*

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.”*

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)

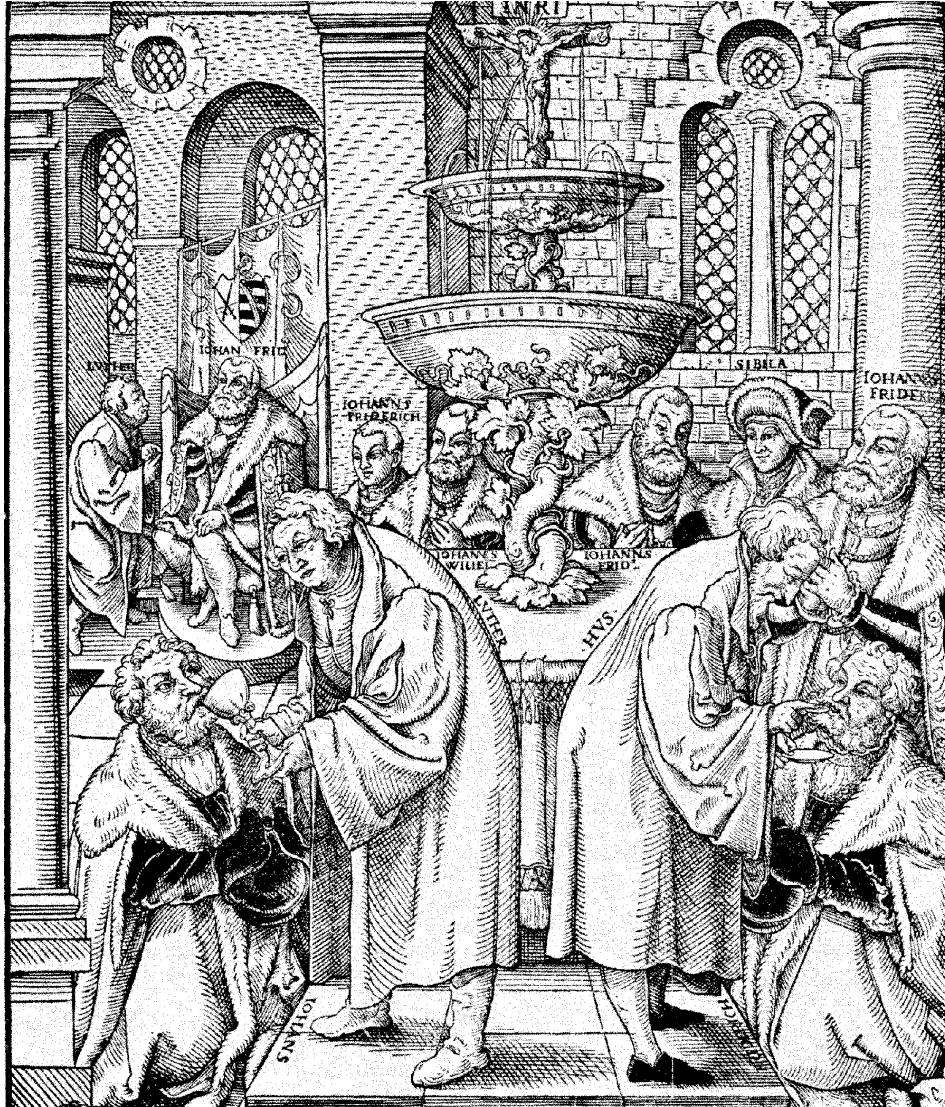
The attempt by the strong to compel the weak to recognize and practice their liberty in these matters trapped the weak believer, with his erring conscience, between two sinful alternatives. Luther categorizes the problem in this way:

“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 Schüpfelin - 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)

+ + +

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)

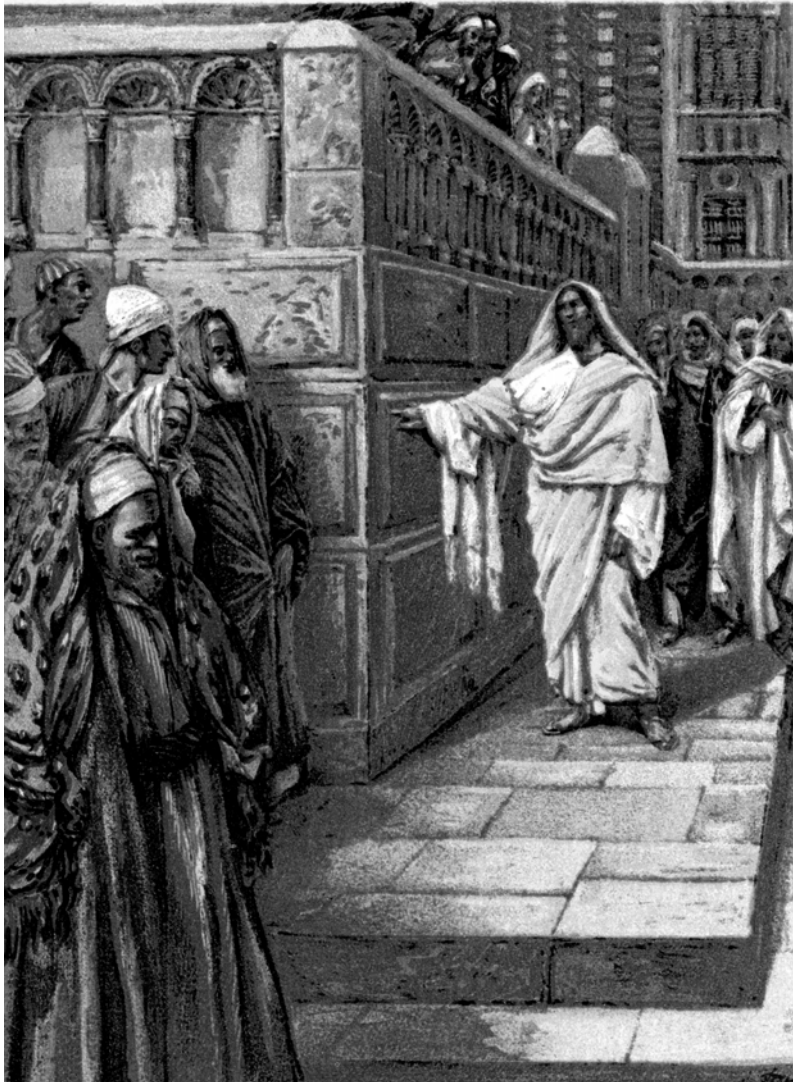
BIBLICAL USAGE -

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.

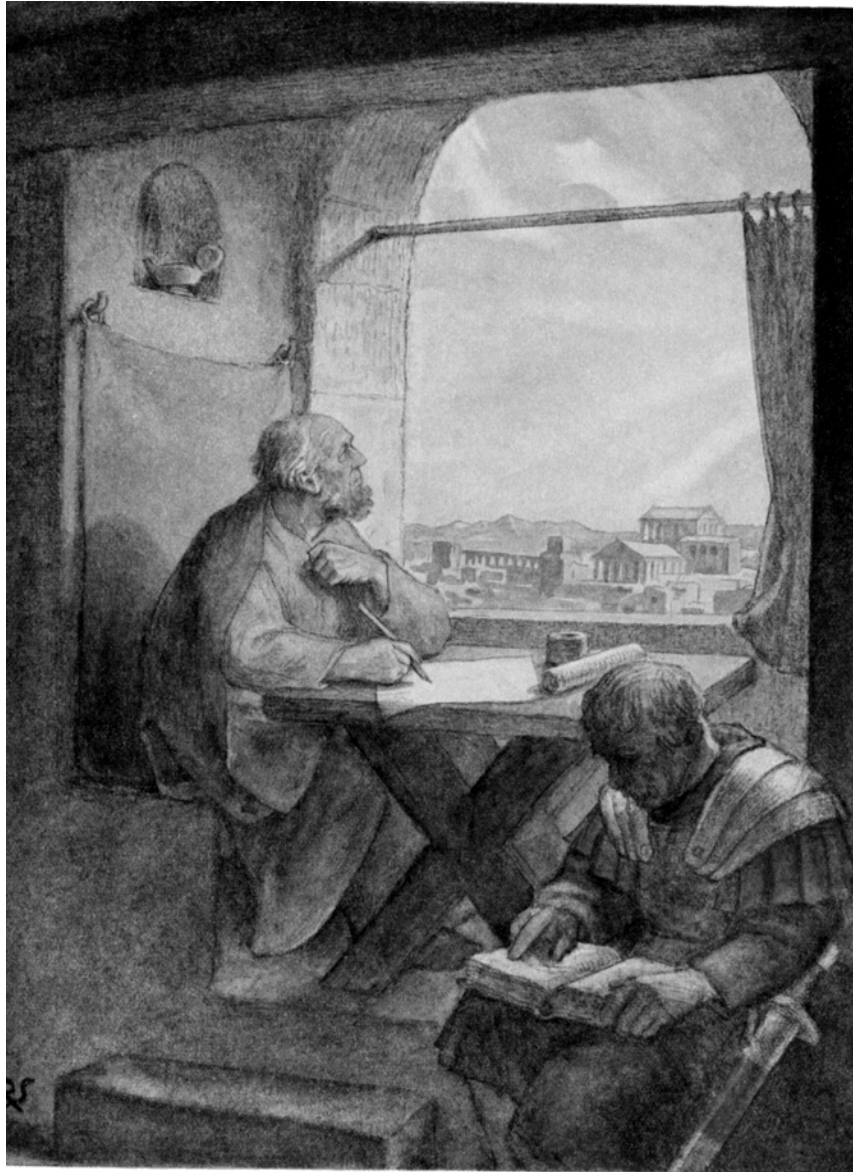
2. Consideration for those members of the congregation who struggle with a drinking problem or are alcoholic must be taken into account. Would the serving of beer or wine at specifically designated church functions lead them into temptation, place a stumbling block in their way, and possibly cause them 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)

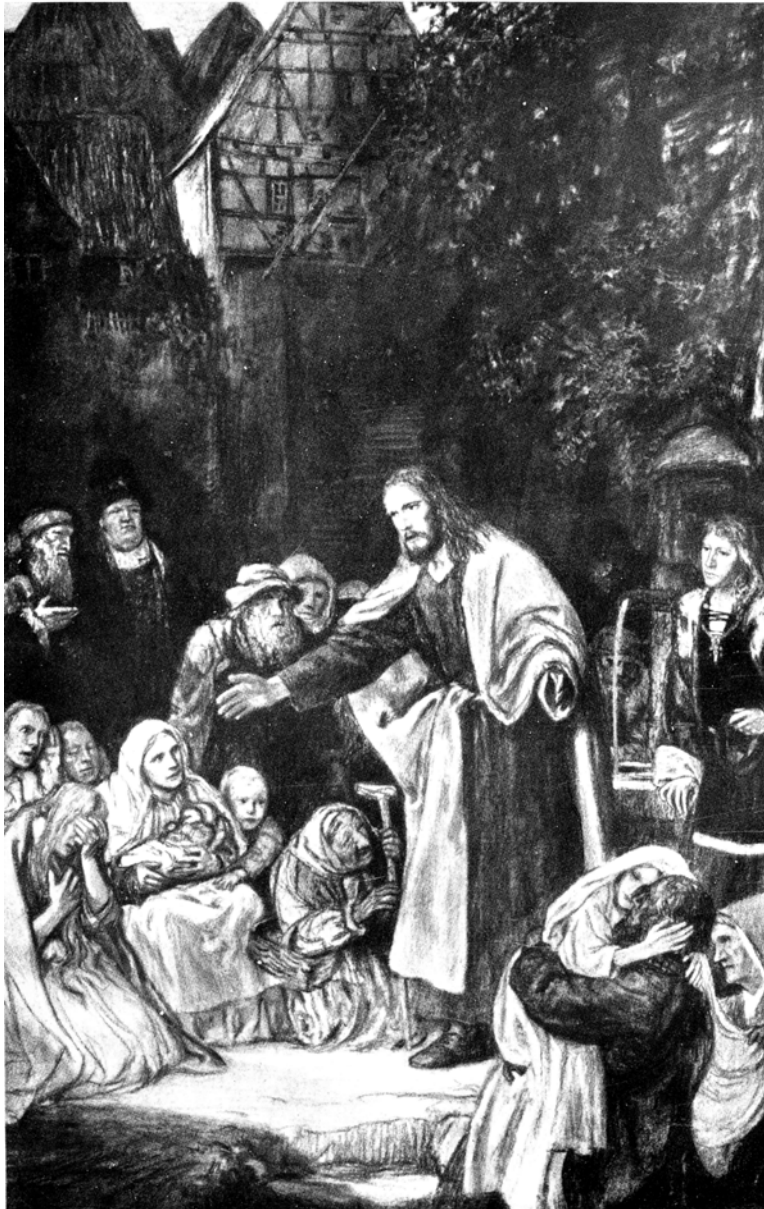
"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us..." - Paul explains the pertinence of the precedent by reminding his readers of the didactic purpose of Scripture. The Old Testament continues to play a crucial role in the life of the people of God in accordance with God's plan and 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

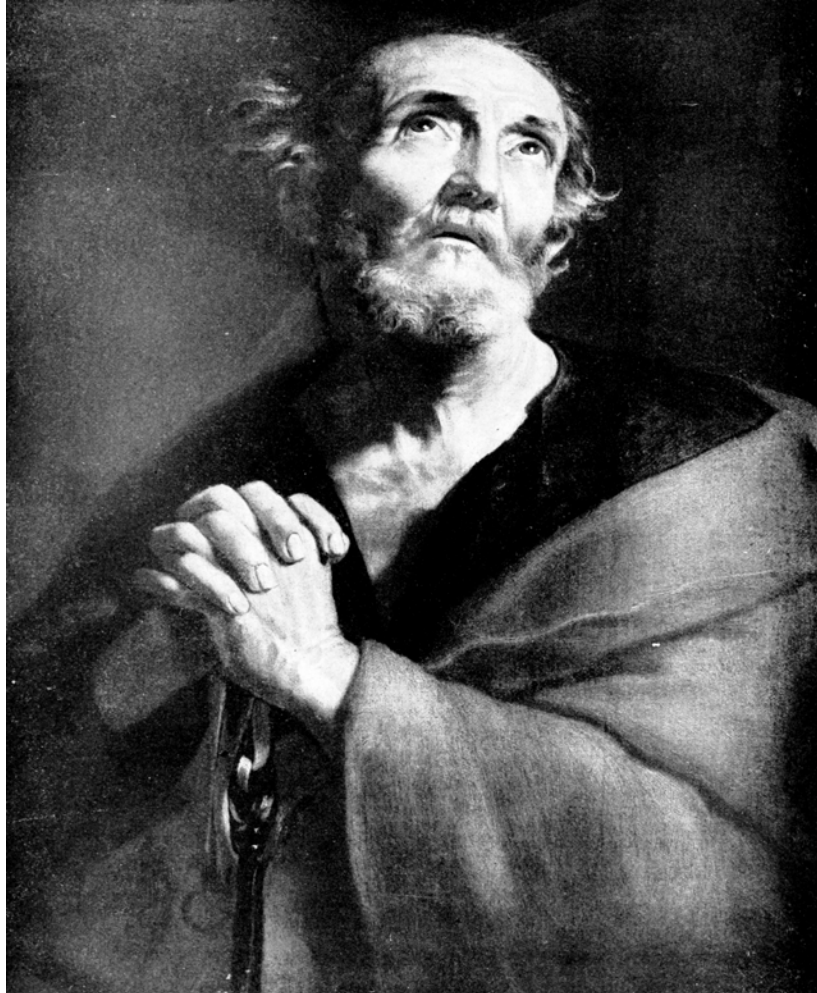
It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, "Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from 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 a 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.

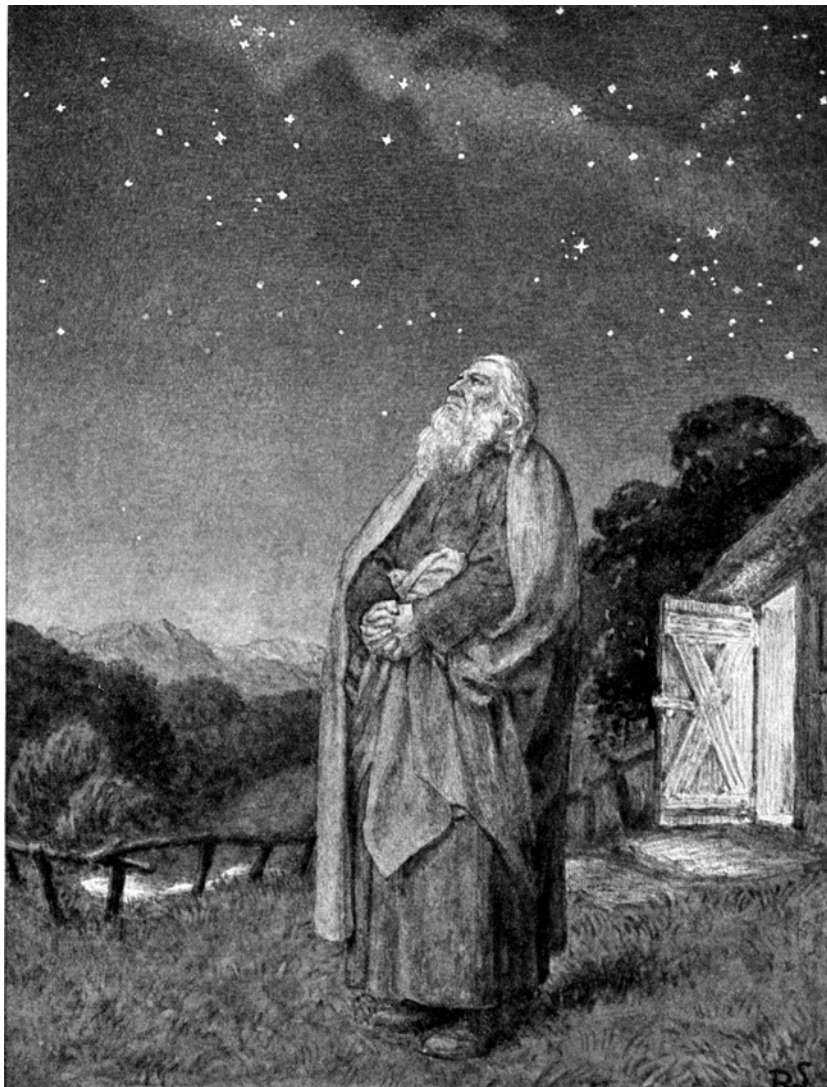
The preeminence of the Roman Church within Christendom, particularly Western Christendom, by the Third Century is the result of a combination of historical and theological factors. Duffy notes:

“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

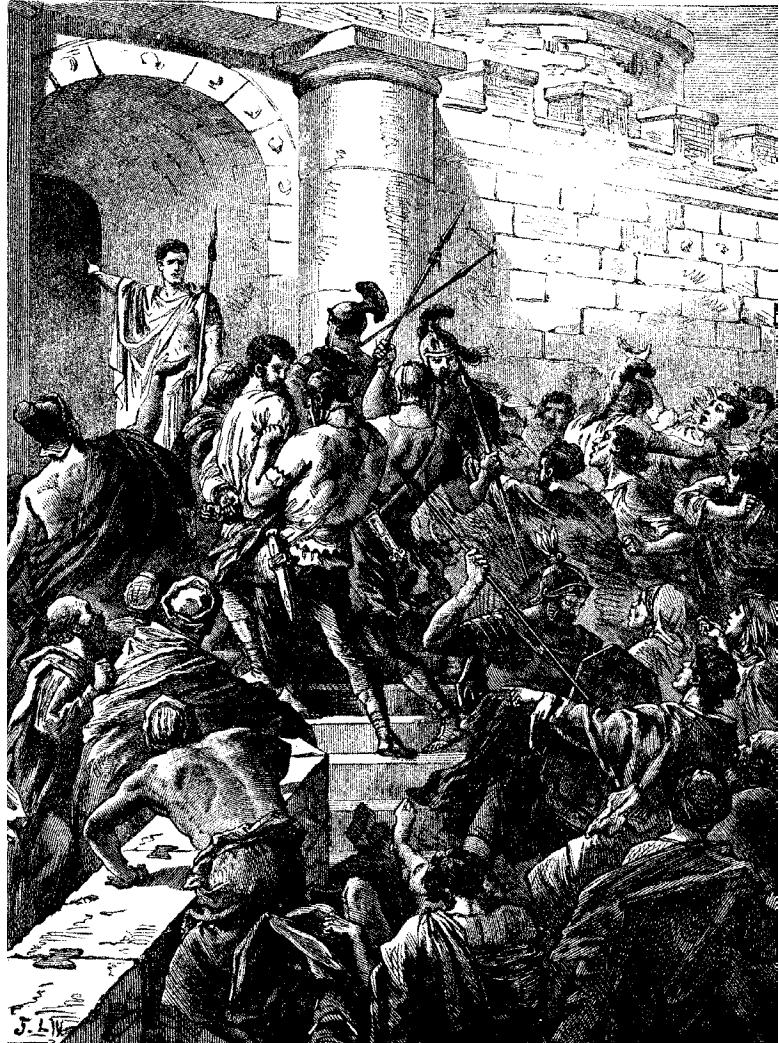
But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

“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.

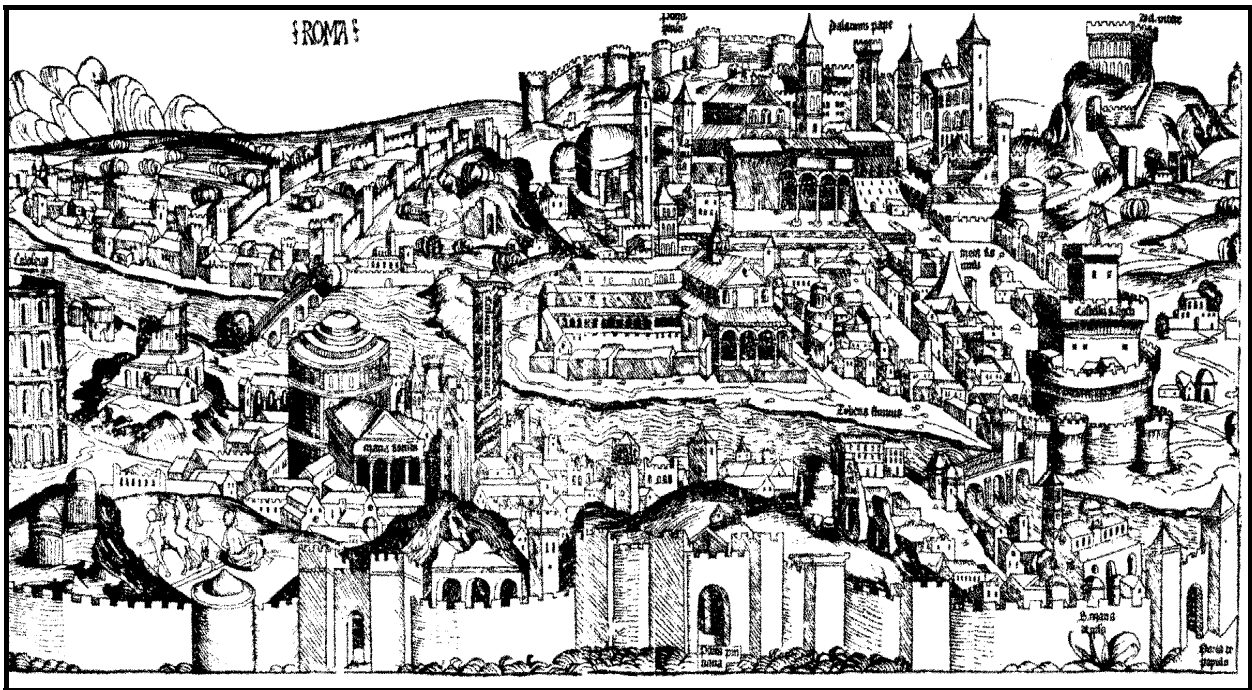


***“Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem”
19th Century Bible Engraving***

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.

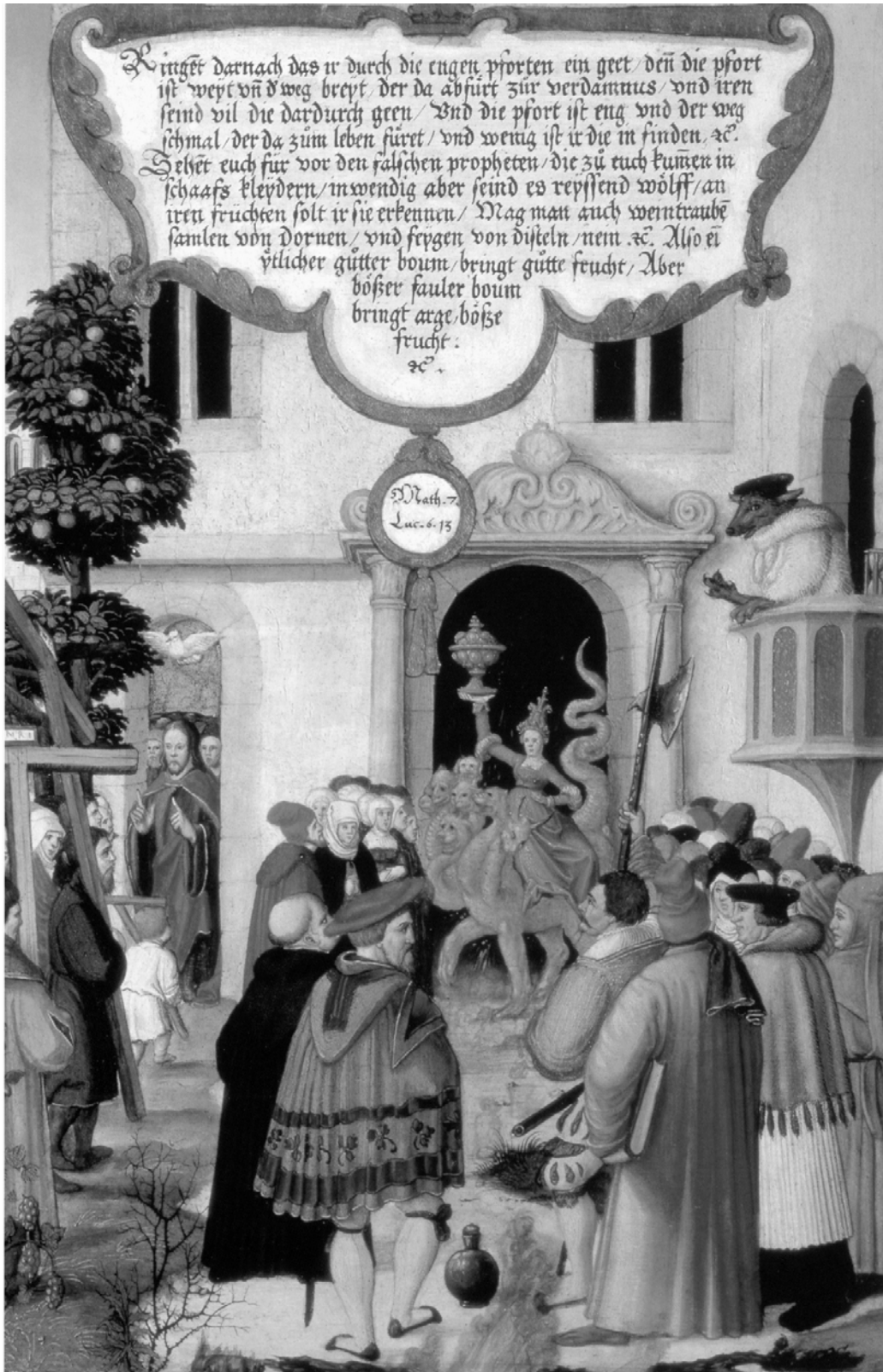
"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for...." - In the context of that most compelling demonstration of Christian unity, the apostle issues a stern warning against the danger of false doctrine and false teachers. The opening phrase, *"I urge you, brothers,"* stresses both the urgency of the issue and 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.

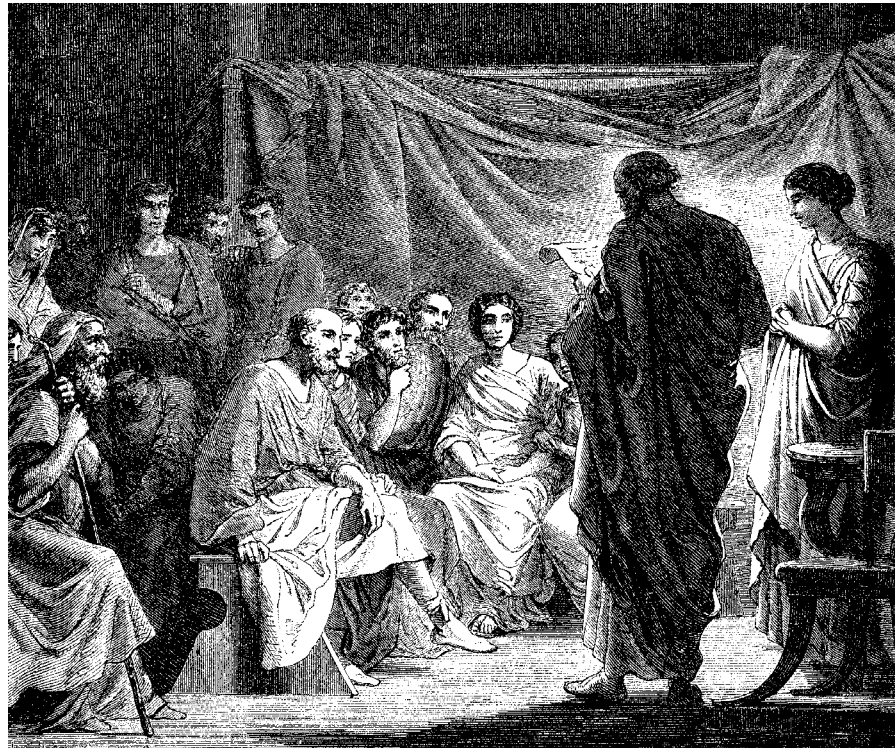
“*Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you...*” - The inclusion of greetings from Paul’s fellow workers is, again, characteristic of his New Testament letters. Foremost on the list is Timothy, considered by many to be Paul’s closest associate in ministry. Timothy was a native of Lystra in 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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